The Market's Lesser Deities

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I. PARADISE (TO BE) REGAINED

AROUND 1830 a book was published in Pennsylvania with the imposing title: **The Paradise within the Reach of all Men, without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery: An Address to all intelligent Men.** It was one of a spate of utopian schemes at the time, but noteworthy because the author, J. A. Etzler, did not concern himself with an isolated, ideal, rural community. This was to be for all the world. Also, it was not intended to be science fiction, but a prediction of achievable actuality.

> Fellow-men! I promise to show the means of creating a paradise within ten years, where everything desirable for human life may be had by every man in superabundance, without labor, and without pay; where the whole face of nature shall be changed into the most beautiful forms, and man may live in the most magnificent palaces, in all imaginable refinements of luxury, and in the most delightful gardens; where he may accomplish, without labor, in one year, more than hitherto could be done in thousands of years; may level mountains, sink valleys, create lakes, drain lakes and swamps, and intersect the land everywhere with beautiful canals, and roads for transporting heavy loads of many thousand tons, and for traveling floating islands movable in any desired direction with immense power and celerity, in perfect security, and with all comforts and luxuries, bearing gardens and palaces, with thousands of families, and provided with rivulets of sweet water; may explore the interior of the globe, and travel from pole to pole in a fortnight; provide himself with means, unheard of yet, for increasing his knowledge of the world, and so his intelligence; lead a life of continual happiness, of enjoyments yet unknown; free himself from almost all the evils that afflict mankind, except death, and even put death far beyond the common period of human life, and finally render it less afflicting. Mankind may thus live in and enjoy a new world, far superior to the present, and raise themselves far higher in the scale of being.

Etzler was somewhat optimistic about the amount of time all this would require. A decade later none of these things had come to pass, but his book came out in a London edition in 1842. Etzler was otherwise not as foolhardy as many of his contemporaries thought. We now have at least some development of water resources and reclamation, although there is a long way to go before the earth approximates the garden it might be, and mankind, we must admit, is not rushing such development. Compared with the dwellings of 1830, we do live in palaces, and we have large housing projects, some, indeed, with lovely gardens. We have "floating islands" which can go in the chosen direction. We have so far surpassed Etzler's predictions of speed of travel that the vision of a thousand miles in twenty-four hours and pole to pole in a fortnight is unimpressive.

Just how bold Etzler's vision was may be underscored by remembering that the first Atlantic cable—a very simple undertaking by comparison with these other things, and yet a great accomplishment at the time—was not laid until 1858. At that it worked for less than a month, having been a labor of many years in accomplishment, and undertaken against the advice of some learned experts. Sir George Airy, England's astronomer royal, asserted that it was "a mathematical impossibility" to submerge a cable safely to the proposed depth and that even if this

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were done, "no signals could be transmitted through so great a length."[1]

The above quotation by no means exhausts Etzler's foresight. He wrote of what we would call mechanized agriculture. A great machine is to remove trees and stones and plane the hills and valleys. The same machine, "with some other little alterations," is to supply fertile soil from other places and then, "with a little addition," is to reap and process the crop. Something akin to plastics is suggested in this passage:

> We may bake large masses of any size and form, into stone and vitrified substance of the greatest durability, lasting even thousands of years.

And automation—or something like it —is envisioned, as the cooking, for instance, would need only to be superintended, and when done transmitted to private dwellings "by a slight motion of the hand at some crank." Thus most mechanization is to be controlled.

Etzler's book is remembered today, because it had the good fortune to be the subject of a devastating review by Henry Thoreau, when the second edition was published in 1842.[2] Thoreau pointed out, as we would expect from his pen, that man's problems are not limited to improvement of technology. "Our panaceas cure but few ails." The real obstacle is "to persuade men to use that which is already offered them." Granting that physical power beyond imagining may become available, "even a greater than this physical power must be brought to bear upon that moral power." And, of course, Thoreau was much amused by Etzler's assumption that pointing out the eventual possibility of such marvels was equivalent to solving the technological details. There are a few mechanical details to be worked out, such as the invention of the necessary machines and the effective persuasion of all men to turn forthwith to the task of this constructive transformation.

Today we have much of this technology. As Thoreau suggested, it is not too readily called Paradise. The greater problem is man himself, "Let us not obstruct ourselves, for that is the greatest friction." "We slander the hyena; man is the fiercest and cruellest animal." These little cranks—we would say push-buttons—of Etzler's are not nearly as difficult to work out as what Thoreau calls "the crank within," by which he does not mean human contrariness, but "a certain divine energy in every man, but sparingly employed as yet." Thus getting man in good working order is the thing which Thoreau fears "will prolong the ten years (to achieve Etzler's utopia) to ten thousand at least."

It is in order to probe further into Thoreau's pessimism. Before doing that, however, it must be made clear that he was neither antagonistic to technological advance as such nor disinterested in it. Plainly, he regarded Etzler's book as containing much foolishness and resting upon preposterous assumptions. Even so, he found the vision of technological possibilities interesting. The book, he says, "did expand us a little." Men might, with means already available, do a much better job of stewardship of the earth.

> This fair homestead has fallen to us, and how little have we done to improve it, how little have we cleared and hedged and ditched! We are too inclined to go hence to a "better land," without lifting a finger, as our farmers are moving to the Ohio soil.[3]

Indeed, Thoreau suggested that one might very well go far beyond Etzler's Paradise in envisioning man's technological possibilities. The passage is one of the most remarkable anticipations of the "space age," considering its date, in American literature.

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[1] Arthur Charles Clarke, *Voices Across the Sea,* New York: Harper, 1958, tells the full story.

[2] "Paradise (To Be) Regained," included in Thoreau's *Miscellanies,* Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1863.

[3] *Ibid.,* 41.

> Who knows but by accumulating the power until the end of the present century, using meanwhile only the smallest allowance, reserving all that blows, all that shines, all that ebbs and flows, all that dashes, we may have got such a reserved accumulated power as to run the earth off its track into a new orbit, some summer, and so change the tedious vicissitude of the seasons? Or, perchance, coming generations will not abide the dissolution of the globe, but, availing themselves of future inventions in aerial locomotion, and the navigation of space, the entire race may migrate from the earth, to settle some vacant and more western planet, it may be still healthy, perchance unearthy, not composed of dirt and stones, whose primary strata only are strewn, and where no weeds are sown. It took but little art, a simple application of natural laws, a canoe, a paddle, and a sail of matting, to people the isles of the Pacific, and a little more will people the shining isles of space. Do we not see in the firmament the lights carried along the shore by night, as Columbus did? Let us not despair nor mutiny.[4]

Such thoughts do not come from a man lacking vision as to scientific possibilities. It was not that machines are evil—although he considered most of them toys at best—but that preoccupation with them may become so. Even more, it was that some other things are so much more important. He did on occasion, for instance, use the railroad for travel—usually when he considered the journey unimportant—,but he avoided the train, because walking was so important to him. Once invited to share his walk with some others, he declined because "there was nothing so important to him as his walk; he had no walks to throw away on company."[5] This must be included among the habits which Emerson found "a little chilling to the social affections." But the point remains: it was because Thoreau found other things even more important.

This has led to considerable misunderstanding of Thoreau by more recent writers. In the book on the Atlantic cable, previously mentioned, the author cites as evidence that Thoreau was not as keen on progress as he might have been the famous passage from **Walden.** "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate."[6] Thoreau simply declined to call this progress; it was "improved means to an unimproved end." This is not to say that ends may not be improved, but that improved techniques do not necessarily and inevitably improve the ends, as in the case of one message sent over the first, short-lived Atlantic cable: "Where are the keys of the glass cases and drawers in the apparatus room?" This was from William Thomson, one imagines with some desperation, directed to one of his assistants on the other side of the Atlantic. The reply which came back was: "Don't recollect."

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF VALUE PRIORITY

Returning to Etzler's technological utopia, we must understand that Thoreau was not belittling such possibilities, but insisting that they are not the most important thing in the world. In other words, we must recognize that all attributions of "importance" entail or presuppose notions of priority, Which values shall we give prior claim? Of several "important" things, which are we asserting as of greater, and which of lesser, importance? Thus it is, as Thoreau says, "All expression of truth does at length take this deep ethical form." For ethics is precisely the critique of assertions of relative importance. The subject is but scratched when one has pronounced of something: this is good. The door to ethical inquiry is opened when one says, of these two things which are good, which is better? Or,

[4] *Ibid.,* 53f.

[5] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Biographical Sketch" (of Thoreau).

[6] H. D. Thoreau, *Walden,* 1854, Chapter 1.

admittedly these two things are important, but which is the more important? For the painful fact is that as we place our valuation upon desired ends, it very commonly happens that we cannot achieve or possess both equally soon. Not infrequently the two desired ends are mutually exclusive, as in Augustine's prayer: "Give me chastity and continency, only not yet."[7] It is not to be supposed that he did not sincerely value these virtues, but merely that he valued other things more. Men do not lack normative judgment, necessarily, who do not recognize that relative evaluations of comparative importance are utilized in their decisions and choices, but they are thereby disabled in the exercise of critical review of their valuations. Meanwhile they are doubtless using some system of values, but it is an unexamined system. For valuations come to clear focus not as we affirm many good things good, but as we make painful choices in specific situations and proceed to implement desired goals or not to implement them.

It does not follow that whatever a man puts his hand and energy to, in any given moment, is automatically of prior value in his scheme of things. He may devote some time to frivolity, without asserting in such a choice that frivolity is the summum bonum. He may in good faith give immediate attention to some matter of trivial detail, without thus asserting that this is what he really believes important. Or, he may face a situation in which he must give direct attention to something of lesser importance, because other things of greater importance require this performance for their later realization. These provisions are obvious and need only to be listed. But what is often obscured in the multiplicities of values that clamor or beckon for our devotion is that in the pattern of life, over a stretch of time, choices do elicit a scheme of value priority. And, of course, no lofty end can be regarded as authentically important, which consistently receives postponement or but token implementation.

An example or two will indicate how crucial this elementary matter becomes in actual life situations. In the budget of the federal government armaments receive the lion's share. Just how much it is may be reckoned in various ways. A large share of what is called "foreign aid," for example, goes for military installations. The total in any case is well above forty billion. A great deal is said about technical aid to underdeveloped nations. The present budget calls for two billions for this and similar activities.[8] Now this says a great deal about what we consider of prior importance, all the more eloquently when one takes into account the contrasting ease and difficulty in getting Congress to appropriate respectively for arms and for foreign aid. As everyone knows, there are several different views current for the justification or criticism of this proportion. It is not now our task to consider those views. What is to the point here is that in view of this porportionate outlay, regardless of one's judgment of it, our nation would be well advised to indulge in less vocalization on the subject of our altruism. To be sure, proclamations about one's own generosity or that of one's own group are listened to at any time with something less than unrelieved appreciation by the recipient, but the point involves more than that. As leaders of underdeveloped nations attempt to weigh purposes and effective valuations of the dominant nations, exaggerated claims of sacrifice and human concern create doubt and cynicism with refer-

[7] *Confessions of St. Augustine,* VIII, 17.

[8] Technical assistance, strictly speaking, was set at $171,500,000. I have added the Development Loan Fund, UN programs and U. S. relief programs. Even so, some of the two billion—for which figures are not available—goes for military expenditures. Barbara Ward puts foreign aid to emergent territories at less than $1 billion.

ence to the United States, rather than trust and understanding. The verbalized claims must be commensurate with the relative **proportion** of investment to communicate, first, that we believe what we say and, second, that we are not simply fooling ourselves.

One of the hazards of an age which places great stress on advertising is that the sponsor of the advertising becomes the one most taken in by his own propaganda. I have used the example of relations with underdeveloped nations, because this is of overwhelming importance at the present time. It is a very complex subject, in which there are no easy or quick solutions, and it is an area in which we have not been conspiciously successful, by and large. Among the factors absolutely necessary for more effective foreign relations is an understanding of this principle: that others interpret our authentic purposes less in terms of proclamation than by examination of the priority of values operative. It is not merely, then, that deeds speak louder than words, it is that the pattern of choices made reveals levels of importance. "Where your treasure is, there will be your heart be also" is the principle by which everyone reads the value priority scheme of others. The ethically mature and insightful man (or nation) is one who uses this same principle to understand himself. Nor does he make plans without recognizing this principle. Senator Fulbright's statement (August 6, 1958) put the matter plainly:

> One of the key questions we must ask ourselves is, What do we want the world to look like, five, ten, twenty-five years from now? And in answering that question we must hard-headedly distinguish between what are really vital national interests and what would be nice if we could have it.

Another example may be drawn from personal life. Where does one invest that portion of time and energy which permits alternative choices? The answer reveals an individual's value priorities. Those good goals and pursuits which are perpetually postponed are clearly recognized, whatever the individual himself thinks about it, as belonging low on the scale of relative importance. This, I believe, would be almost universally admitted. However, the significant aspect of the commonplace principle lies in utilization in making painful choices and interpreting one's pattern of value priorities. There is the well known study of ministers' use of time by Professor Blizzard.[9] I am exceedingly skeptical of the statistics gathered, but I see no reason to doubt the resulting conclusions, namely that ministers tend to rate preaching high in importance, while congregational leaders tend to rate it low; that ministers devote most time to organizational affairs, which they rate lowest in importance. Many unasked questions need to be raised. Do lay leaders represent the general thinking of the congregation? It would seem unlikely that they would; on the contrary it would be natural for them to rate highest those aspects of a church program with which they have most direct personal contact, responsibility, and recognition. To what extent are they simply using the principle of value priority recognition? Looking at the pattern of where the greater amount of work is spent, and even more revealing, what receives emphasis in the optional areas and new enterprises, they conclude, not unreasonably, that such matters must be most important in the protestant ministry.

On the other hand, the ministers' responses require interpretation. When they rate institutional leadership low in importance, are they giving an account of their operative valuations or are they saying what they think ought to be said? In the very nature of the

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[9] Samuel W. Blizzard, "The Parish Minister's Self-Image of His Master Role," *Pastoral Psychology*, IX (December, 1958), No. 89, pp. 25-32.

case most pressure on the minister will come from institutional affairs, but it is particularly in decisions made under pressure—choices made from among several desirable goals, where not all can be chosen—that value priority is indicated. As the study points out, this direct contradiction between what is verbalized as important and what receives emphasis can do a job on the personality thus divided. If our principle is workable, it would appear that this problem cannot move toward solution until a minister recognizes that it is not what he says that is important, not what he thinks he ought to think important, but what he voluntarily chooses to give emphasis and priority that reaveals what his actual valuation scheme is, at least at this present time. This is based on the supposition, which I believe is valid, that most ministers, while admittedly having little choice about some aspects of their work, do have considerable choice about other aspects, and in particular in developing new directions and emphasis in the church program. One has only to compare the character of different churches to see that the minister has, over a period of a few years, a clearly determinative effect among the various forces that shape a church. The use of the principle of determining value priority by observing where the investments are made might very well be disillusioning. It usually does turn out that way. But it eliminates the psychological rending of the self and the illusion of being wholly driven against one's will. And if the resulting conclusion is unsatisfactory, it gives a basis from which to work to change the pattern.

III. BEYOND PESSIMISM AND OPTIMISM

We are now in a position to return to the subject of Thoreau's "pessimism," as it might be called. That is to say that Thoreau was not particularly optimistic about what men are doing with the possibilities of their lives, nor as to what they are likely to do with extended technology and increased power. As one recalls his later essays, numerous passages come to mind in which he speaks of what we sometimes call the darker side of human nature, and which Thoreau was more wont to call our meanness. It is interesting to note that he did not identify this with any one function of the psyche, such as, unconscious factors, instinct, will, intellect, pride, or sociability. In this respect he strikes me as somewhat more observant than those who tend to make such an identification. For any aspect of the psyche or of group relationships can on occasion be turned to evil and destructive ends. And is.

It is therefore ironic that the charge of naive optimism should be leveled at the American philosophical tradition of what we might call "quasi-naturalism" or what I should prefer to call "Neo-Stoicism," by which I mean the tradition of Jefferson through Emerson and Thoreau, on down through James, Whitehead, and Dewey, to give a rough designative indication. We run across repeated charges of "effeminate liberalism," "modern optimism," "liberalism as the idolatry of man," "fails to appreciate . . . the complexity of the problem of evil in him."[10] If Thoreau be included in the group of thinkers so charged, the charge is inaccurate to say the least. Just in passing we might call attention to similar passages in Emerson, which give the lie to the charge of naive optimism about man. It is not in some out of the way footnote, but in his most celebrated essay, "Self-Reliance," read by every schoolboy, that Emerson wrote:

> All men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves. Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it

[10] These are selected at random from a lengthy list. The last comes from Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man,* the others from David Wesley Soper, *Major Voices in American Theology,* vol. I.

> gains on the other. Its progress is only apparent like the workers of a treadmill. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For everything that is given, something is taken. Society acquires new arts and loses old instincts. . . . The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet.

The charge of naive optimistic belief in inevitable progress turns out to be slightly silly when the writings themselves are examined.

What, then, is Thoreau's "optimism?" Certainly it is no foolish assertion that man's goodness is basic and determinative, while his evil is a temporary and superficial thwarting of that good will. Nor is it the case that man's meanness is all conquering and inescapable. His view was that man could and can redeem the times, improve himself and his society. This is not about to happen to any remarkable extent, and there are numerous factors and forces which work against its happening at all. But there is no built-in reason that it cannot happen to a greater degree than is usual. Thus this is, strictly speaking, neither optimism nor pessimism, as such, but the insistence that there are optimum possibilities. Thoreau seems to me to have said, in effect: "Doubtless men will continue to make a mess of things, but it need not be as badly botched-up a job as has been the rule. And from time to time men here and there, and societies here and there, have exerted themselves intelligently and morally so as to give us a glimpse of what life might be." This is neither boot-strap religion nor hopelessness. It is rather aimed at the flimsiness of some of the excuses in which we indulge, not a few of which hide behind the honorific title of "realism."

The clew to utilization of the optimum side of man's possibilities is found in examination of value priority. Thus Thoreau's chief criticism of Etzler's utopia is that "it aims to secure the greatest degree of gross comfort and pleasure merely. It paints a Mahometan's heaven." It is as if, given a preview of the marvels of the technological age, Thoreau finds something of Orwell's **1984** in it. This is the crux of his criticism: "He who is conversant with the supernal powers will not worship these inferior deities"; these inferior deities, that is, of merely physical force and convenience. It was this sentence which called to mind a phrase of Aeschylus' **Agamemnon**, "the market's lesser deities." In each case the inferior and the lesser deities were not thus meant to be disparaged, but recognized, given their due, and withal kept in proper place and perspective: useful, to be sure, but not supreme.

IV. SOME CONTEMPORARY LESSER DEITIES

One important task of the religious leader is that of criticism of contemporary forms of exaggerated importance, that is, of half-gods which are treated as gods and displace the loyalty which belongs to things of much greater importance. What are some of the present day lesser deities of the market place? There are the more obvious ones: success, efficiency, prestige, conformity. It is not necessary to repeat the frequent denunciations of them. If I read our current scene correctly, it would seem rather more necessary to point out that each of these has a proper, if limited and often exaggerated, function, and that denunciation uninformed by awareness of that proper function merely adds to the confusion. Success, for example, is transparently phony when cast as a god, as William James once remarked in one of his unforgettable phrases. Nevertheless, the doing of a job well is important, both to the doer and society. Neither a school nor a business, neither a church nor a government, can operate in today's world without giving recognition to the importance of achieving measurable goals and differentiating between effective and ineffective achievement. To de-

nounce success out of hand, while at the same time placing importance on, say, the gaining of church members and raising a budget—in a word, success as the market means the word—can only confuse and probably raise the suspicion of hypocrisy. To recognize the legitimate and limited importance of success—or efficiency, prestige, and conformity—is by no means to condone worship of it.

There are other lesser leities of the market, however, which may not be as widely recognized. I shall deal briefly with three by way of indicating the nature of the task of criticism.

First I would suggest **Fancy Packaging.** Here is an enterprise by which our society sets great store. With an abundance of consumer goods, sales are increasingly determined by the way the article is packaged. The packaging industry in the United States is estimated as amounting to between $12 and $16 billion a year.[11] Not long ago Philip Morris spent $250,000 on developing a new box. Such designs are tested for visual acuity, peripheral vision, light and shadow, and many other esoteric things. No change in contents, just packaging. This was not idle whimsy, in view of Marlboro's 5,000 per cent sales increase in eight months, due to the celebrated achievement of the flip-top box. These are but illustrative of the great amount of attention being given these days to packaging in all marketing.

My concern is less with disproportionate value given to packaging of consumer goods than in the way a very similar phenomenon occurs in spiritual and intellectual affairs. In religion it seems to me that often more attention is devoted to wrappings than content. A lot of it is the same old mishmash, superstitution, and run-around, dressed in fancy garb. As an example of packaging, there is this item, which ran last year in the **Irish Christian Advocate.** The layman, it said, asks four things of his preacher. "1. At all times preach the truth. This is an age not having much use for the conventional phrase, the pious platitude, the meaningless word when uttered at the expense of truth. 2. At all times preach the truth as you yourself have found it. 3. Preach only the truth that now lives in your heart." All this is packaging, for the last point states: "4. Preach Jesus and the Resurrection," and proceeds to spell out just how this is to be done and in what terms. In the light of the fourth point, which states substance and form of what is to be preached, it is all too evident that the writer of this advice did not really mean what was said earlier about avoiding the conventional phrase or preaching the truth as the speaker himself has found it and which he finds most vital at the time. Thus what this amounts to is an insistence that a certain message constitute the content, but this be wrapped in claims and labels of independent thought and personal conviction.

I would certainly not insist that all religious content should be new. However, the wrapping and decoration and external features ought to have some bearing on the content, some consistency with it. And it would seem reasonable to insist that the content is deserving of more concern than the wrapping. I suggest that there are many ways in which the "packaging revolution" is at work in intellectual and spiritual life. It is not that attractive and efficient packaging is bad; it is a poor substitute for good content.

A second inferior deity is **Complex Contrivance.** I have in mind "Parkinson's Law."[12] Work expands, according to Parkinson, "so as to fill the time

[11] The figures here and the material immediately following are taken from Robert Bendiner, "It's All in How You Wrap It," *The Reporter,* April 17, 1958. This article provides an excellent analysis as well as a wealth of information.

[12] C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law, and Other Studies in Administration,* Boston Houghton, Mifflin, 1957.

available." Or, we may say, more hands make more work for each other. Parkinson develops the involved subtleties and ramifications of this phenomenon by examples drawn from government and business. I think that the elementary point, however, can be more clearly illustrated by a less lofty example. Let us say that the objective at hand is to build a sand castle in a very limited space at the seashore. One child can do this fairly easily and quickly. He is soon joined by two other children, one of whom inadvertently steps on the rising castle and the other pours water in the footprint under the impression that it is the moat. This leads to a discussion about the objectives of the project and appropriate methodologies pertaining thereto. This requires clarification of leadership responsibilities and there follows a dynamic group re-structuring in an effort to firm up this phase of the enterprise.

With this example in mind, let us consider the operation of such committees as all of us find ourselves working in. By "committees" I mean to include boards and organizational structures of every kind, whose interlocking lines constitute a bureaucratic institution. If, as in the case of the sand castle, the result is of no importance, then the more confusion the better. Time is consumed and energy given an outlet. A pile of sand can be taken from one place and put in another; memoranda and questionnaires can be marked, tabulated, and shifted from one drawer to another. As Parkinson points out, more players can then be drawn into the game, and, indeed, more games can be started. There is no end to the possibilities of expansion of the elaborate contrivance.

Contrivances require equipment, and this extends the far reaching "potential." In some churches, for instance, which are truly up to date, there is a telephone in the pulpit connecting with the intercommunications system as well as the outside world. The possibilities opened up by this are most exciting. The minister need not waste any time in meditation or esthetic contemplation during the anthem; he can "keep in touch" with the machinery throughout the building. In place of the seventh century Leonine prayer, "Dispel for this hour, O Lord, the manifold distractions of the world; that we may be able with quiet minds to receive the promptings of thy still small voice," he can check with the boiler room, the counting house, and the weather bureau.

Now the answer would be very simple if we could dismiss all bureaucracy and proliferation of equipment as evil, as surely it must occasionally appear to be to any rational man. But the fact is that committees and their ground rules, equipment and its tenacula, are as necessary to get work done in our present world as the trellis is to the vine. We owe a debt to Parkinson for pointing out, however, how uncritically the expansion of elaborate contrivances is accepted as unequivocally good in itself, to the point where it parasitically destroys such authentic purpose as once justified the contrivances. It would take a brave soul to deny that churches and schools have no need of being alert to the dangers of elevating the lesser deity of contrivance to supremity in the pantheon. We have in the main come to the place in library management where it is understood that the books are primarily there to be used, and that rules and systems are justified only as they facilitate that purpose. It is interesting to observe that Thoreau, when denied books by Harvard College, informed the President (which in New England means always "of Harvard College") that he, Thoreau, and not the librarian, was the proper custodian of such books as he needed. Furthermore, we note that Thoreau did not hesitate to use the existence of the railroad as an argument that the "ten mile limit" on borrowers was no longer sensible. In most of our institutional structures the danger of measuring progress by complexity of contrivance has not been as plainly recognized.

A third inferior deity is **Experience.** Understand, I am an empiricist. Everybody, one way or another, thinks himself an empiricist. The supposition of the market is that if a man has had direct personal experience, he knows. He says, "you can't tell me anything about that, I've had experience with it," which, alas, is just how the matter stands. Somehow, perhaps out of pioneer days, we have got the impression that direct experience guarantees accurate understanding. It is one of our most characteristic types of anti-intellectualism. All experience, however, is received through an interpretative framework. Repetition of experience, if we are mistaken, simply deepens our prejudice and error, as the river wears its old channel ever deeper.

Gunnar Myrdal found that the white people who live closest to the great concentration of Negro population are worse informed and believe more demonstrably untrue things about Negroes than those who live at some distance from any Negroes. To have had "experience," that is, physical proximity, merely solidified the hold of rigid fictions. Again, one state, which attempted to improve its correctional institutions, found that in general men who had spent their lives in correctional work were the ones least able to understand the minds and needs of prisoners. Experience had been a bulwark against learning. So it was that the men who most resisted Columbus were sailors and navigators; after all, they knew, they had had experience in these things.

If the church in its various manifestations exists in part to clarify life, it must give some attention to keeping in proper perspective the presumptuous tendencies of the market's lesser deities. As for experience, the task would be to throw the light of information and understanding and place the pointers of relationship and relative importance on the data of experience. The church is especially well endowed, if its leaders are so inclined, to contribute to a climate of acceptance of personal differences and diversity of view. In such a climate there is less necessity for one's own experience to be a defensive bulwark instead of ground to be explored, traversed, and informed. In this capacity the church is to remind us that we have minds as well as nerve endings and imagination as well as memory. The church is one place where we should be able to examine, critically and patiently, the lesser deities of the market, which in other context so often become sacrosanct, and where exposure becomes so often the signal for all manner of defense against "irresponsible" attack on civilization. The continual critique of misplaced importance and the studied re-examination of our value priorities are indispensable for the health of civilization.

V. Vetera Extollimus Recentium Incuriosi

The phrase is from Tacitus: "Neglectful of recent events, we praise what is old." I have had much praise to offer on behalf of Thoreau. Now I must point to a considerable limitation. You will remember that he was much amused at the way Etzler talked about machines to do this and that, as if there were nothing difficult about the immediate invention of such machines. Thoreau, for his part, was well aware that in suggesting that earthmen might one day migrate to another planet there were a few technological details to be worked out, and that his venturing such a suggestion was no great accomplishment.

He was less aware that in pointing to the possibility of moral progress he was accomplishing little more. As in mechanics, so in morals, there are not a few technological details to be worked out. I think it is not unfair to say that Emerson and Thoreau—and a good many ethicists since—were strongly under the impression that to sketch what the good life in a good society might be they had provided the major necessity for that goal. To a large extent they were doing just what Etzler did.

"Here is the goal: every man under his own vine and fig tree, and none afraid; we may leave it to others to work out the unimportant details as to how we get there."

In this respect more recent writers in social ethics present in some cases a significant advance, for they have recognized the involved and complex difficulties to be dealt with. Christian ethics, it is true, very easily gets off into lofty generalization, but in most cases it is related to social ethics, where the interest is less in portraying an ideal commonwealth than in analyzing what can be done to improve an actual commonwealth in its racial troubles, its erosion, its urban decay, and its custodial institutions. There are still many voices on behalf of "keeping the church out of politics," but as far as the disciplines of social ethics have had influence, it is more and more recognized that these voices are actually counseling avoidance of any application or implementation of Christian ethics.

Thus the temple, like the marketplace, has its lesser deities. One of these is the illusion of unrelated ideals: the supposition, for example, that it is Christian to praise peace but unchristion to deal with the specific questions and problems of international relations. We may draw some encouragement, I believe, from the increasing tendency to move beyond mere idealistic pronouncement, which, like packaging, serves a useful and even important purpose if its limitations are understood. On this score we need not neglect recent events; they are more to be praised than what is old.