

THE FUTURE OF MAN



PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

*Translated from the French
by Norman Denny*

Faith in Man (1947)

IMAGE BOOKS
DOUBLEDAY
*New York London Toronto
Sydney Auckland*

change occurred, even in his most primitive state have experienced the vital urge to grasp all things and transcend himself?

Mythology and folklore (we shall come back to this) are, in fact, filled with symbols and fables expressing the deeply rooted resolve of Earth to find its way to Heaven, from which it follows that we may in a perfectly legitimate sense accept the fact that a generalized, implicit faith of Man in Man is older than all civilization, and that it is this, finally, which constitutes the basic impulse informing all our past history.

But is there not another and even truer sense in which we must affirm that this faith, in the explicit, collective form of our definition, represents a specific new attitude in the world and therefore calls for our particular attention?

I believe that this is so, on the following grounds.

A major problem posed by the fact, of which we are henceforth assured, that the Universe is in a state of psychic evolution, is the question of how far its evolutionary course is likely to affect our future power of thought. Whatever the eventual answer may be, two things are undeniable: first, that at certain moments in the past, human consciousness—however unchanging in its essential framework—has risen to the perception of new dimensions and values; and secondly that the age in which we are living is precisely such a moment of awakening and transformation. In the course of a few generations, almost without our realizing it, our view of the world has been profoundly altered. Under the combined influence of Science and History and of social developments, the twofold sense of duration and collectivity has pervaded and reordered the entire field of our experience; with the twofold result that the future, hitherto a vague succession of monotonous years awaiting an unimportant number of scattered individual lives, is now seen to be a period of positive becoming and maturing—but one in which we can advance and shape ourselves only in solidarity.

CHAPTER II

FAITH IN MAN

1. *Definition and Novelty*

BY "FAITH IN Man" we mean here the more or less active and fervent conviction that Mankind as an organic and organized whole possesses a future: a future consisting not merely of successive years but of higher states to be achieved by struggle. Not merely survival, let us be clear, but some form of higher life or superlife.

Considered in its deepest origins this human trend toward a state of higher being is as old and universal as the world itself. As far back as we can trace it, and even in its humblest manifestations, the advance of Life, however spurred on by the sheer, hard necessity of continuing to exist, has always been inspired by an expectation of something greater. Are not Nature's countless experiments all variants of a single act of faith, an obstinate feeling of the way toward an outlet leading forward and ever higher? Above all, at that critical point where instinct turned reflexively to thought, and awareness of the future became an accomplished fact on earth, must not Man, in whom this radical

Thus we have the simultaneous growth in our minds of two essentially modern concepts, those of collectivity and of an organic future: a double development precisely engendering the deep-rooted change of heart that was required to bring about the direct transformation of a childlike and instinctive faith in Man into its rational, adult state of constructive, militant faith in Mankind!

A spiritual crisis was inevitable: it has not been slow in coming. But let us look with open minds at the new world being born around us amid the convulsions of war. Disregarding the superficial chaos which prevents us from seeing clearly, probing beneath the unspeakable disorders that so dismay us, let us try to take the pulse and temperature of Earth. If we have any power to diagnose we are bound to recognize that the so-called ills which so afflict us are above all growing pains. What looks like no more than a hunger for material well-being is in reality a hunger for higher being: it is the spirit of Mankind suddenly alive with the sense of all that remains to be done if it is to achieve the fulfillment of its powers and possibilities.

2. *Power and Ambiguity*

IT WOULD BE criminal or insane to attempt to resist the great explosion of the inner forces of the Earth that is now beginning. Like the collectivization which accompanies it, this upsurge of human faith which we are witnessing is a life-bearing phenomenon, and therefore irresistible. But that does not mean that we should let ourselves be borne passively and indiscriminately on the tide. The more youthful and forceful the energy, the more misguided and dangerous may be its ebullience. We see this all too clearly in the present-day world.

We sincerely believe that in itself, and in its only legitimate and enduring form, faith in Man does not exclude but must on the con-

trary include the worship of Another—One who is higher than Man. To grow in stature and strength so as to be able to give more of oneself and clasp in a tighter embrace (as in the Bible story of Jacob wrestling with the Angel; and as happens on an everyday level in every passionate union), this is the true and noble manner of interpreting and canalizing the impulse which urges us upward.

But, as the facts prove only too well, this first way of believing in Man goes hand in hand with another way, more elementary, immediate and simple, and therefore more alluring. Correctly interpreted, I repeat, faith in Man can and indeed must cast us at the feet and into the arms of One who is greater than ourselves. But, it can be argued, why after all should we not conceive this One who is greater than ourselves as being in fact identical with ourselves? Given the power he possesses, why should Man look for a God outside himself? Man, self-sufficient¹ and wholly autonomous, sole master and disposer of his destiny and the world's—is not this an even nobler concept?

Here we have the modern version of the heroic temptation of all time, that of the Titans, of Prometheus, of Babel and of Faust; that of Christ on the mountain; a temptation as old as Earth itself, as old as the first reflective awakening of Life to the awareness of its powers. But it is a temptation which is only now entering its critical phase, now that Man has raised himself to the point of being able to measure both the immensity of the Time that lies before him and the almost limitless powers made available to him by his concerted efforts to seize hold of the material springs of the world.

Is the dilemma insoluble or (as we would rather believe) only a temporary one, destined to vanish like so many others when we have reached a higher level of spiritual evolution? We may be in two minds about this.

¹ Teilhard uses the English word.

The fact remains that at the present time a fundamental inner impulse, newly born in our hearts, is tending to find a dual, and divergent, expression in two apparently incompatible spiritual forms; on the one hand, the spirit (let us call it "Christian") of sacrifice and of union centered in the expectation of a Vision in the future; and on the other hand the Promethean or Faustian spirit of self-worship based on the material organization of the earth. The ambiguity is there. And because (always by virtue of a rhythm which may be reversed tomorrow) it is the material and tangible aspect which at this moment of world history seems to hold the initiative in the advance of Life, the struggle is proceeding in a way which suggests that the Promethean faith is the only valid one, or at least the more active. We see no other in the service of the world, or we run the risk of seeing no other: Hence the tendency (which is also as old as the world) of the defenders of the Spirit to regard as diabolical, and to reject as being among the most formidable manifestations of pride, the irrepresible desire for growth and conquest, the unshakable sense of power and progress, which at present fills the human breast.

But we must not leap to conclusions. Since by definition ambiguity is not perversity but only the danger of perversion, which after all is not the same thing, let us seek to place ourselves psychologically at a level below the point where the dilemma seems to be resolving itself in two irreconcilable forms. In other words, let us try to understand what faith in Man signifies in its undifferentiated state (pre-Promethean or pre-Christian); what it looks for and what it offers us.

3. *The Uniting Force*

PRESENT-DAY MANKIND, as it becomes increasingly aware of its unity—not only past unity in the blood, but future unity in

progress—is experiencing a vital need to close in upon itself. A tendency toward unification is everywhere manifest, and especially in the different branches of religion. We are looking for something that will draw us together, below or above the level of that which divides. It may be said, in the aftermath of the war, that this need is spontaneously and unanimously arising on every hand. But where are we to discover the mysterious principle of *rapprochement*? Are we to look downward or upward—to our common interest or our common faith?

We must by no means underestimate the force of common interest in a matter of this sort. The visible success of communal undertakings in which the material well-being of the individual becomes essentially dependent on the functioning of the association as a whole; more still, on the world scale, the example of the last war, in which a common danger for a time welded together large sections of the world—all this decidedly proves that physical necessity, when it happens to coincide, is a synthesizing factor between human particles. But this kind of synthesis, we must note, remains fragile in two respects: firstly, because the coincidence which brought it about is in the nature of things temporary and accidental; secondly, and above all, because elements brought together under the compulsion of necessity or fear cohere only outwardly and on the surface. When the wave of fear or common interest has passed, the union dissolves without having given birth to a soul. Not through external pressure but only from an inward impulse can the unity of Mankind endure and grow.

And this, it seems, is where the major, "providential" role reserved by the future for what we have called "faith in Man" displays itself. A profound common aspiration arising out of the very shape of the modern world—is not this specifically what is most to be desired, what we most need to offset the growing forces of dissolution and dispersal at work among us?

But here we must be on our guard.

Recently, and in particular through the sympathetic pen of Aldous Huxley, an effort has been made to formulate and crystallize, in a series of abstract propositions, the basis of a common philosophy on which all men of goodwill can agree in order that the world may continue to progress. We believe this to be helpful, and moreover we are persuaded that gradually, in religious thought as in the sciences, a core of universal truth will form and slowly grow, to be accepted by everyone. Can there be any true spiritual evolution without it? But shall we not be misled by this formulation of a common view of the world, infinitely precious in itself, if we consider it simply in terms of its application and result, without looking for the principle and fecundating act of a genuine union? Any abstract scheme tends of its nature to resolve in an arbitrary fashion, and perhaps prematurely for the whole, the ambiguity of the future. There is the risk that it will restrict the movement to a given direction, whereas it is out of the movement as such that the desired effect of unification must come.

But at the youthful stage in which we are at present considering it, Faith in Man proceeds and operates in a quite different fashion.

It is true that at the outset it presupposes a certain fundamental concept of the place of Man in Nature. But as it rises above this rationalized common platform it becomes charged with a thousand differing potentialities, elastic and even fluid—indivisible, one might say, by the expressions of hostility to which Thought, in its groupings, may temporarily subject it. Indivisible and even triumphant: for despite all seeming divisions (this is what matters) it continues unassailably to draw together and even to reconcile everything that it pervades. Take the two extremes confronting us at this moment, the Marxist and the Christian, each a convinced believer in his own particular doctrine, but each, we must suppose,

fundamentally inspired with an equal faith in Man. Is it not incontestable, a matter of everyday experience, that each of these, to the extent that he believes (and sees the other believe) in the future of the world, feels a basic human sympathy for the other—not for any sentimental reason, but arising out of the obscure recognition that both are going the same way, and that despite all ideological differences they will eventually, in some manner, come together on the same summit? No doubt each in his own fashion, following his separate path, believes that he has once and for all solved the riddle of the world's future. But the divergence between them is in reality neither complete nor final, unless we suppose that by some inconceivable and even contradictory feat of exclusion (contradictory because nothing would remain of his faith) the Marxist, for example, were to eliminate from his materialistic doctrine every upward surge toward the spirit. Followed to their conclusion the two paths must certainly end by coming together: for in the nature of things everything that is faith must rise, and everything that rises must converge.

In short we may say that faith in Man, by the combined effect of its universality and its elemental quality, shows itself upon examination to be the general atmosphere in which the higher, more elaborated forms of faith which we all hold in one way or another may best (indeed *can only*) grow and come together. It is not a *formula*, it is the *environment* of union.

No one can doubt that we are all more or less affected by this elementary, primordial faith. Should we otherwise truly belong to our time? And if, through the very force of our spiritual aspirations, we have been inclined to mistrust it, even to feel that we are immune from it, we must look more closely into our own hearts. I have said that the soul has only one summit. But it has also only one foundation. Let us look well and we shall find that our Faith in

God, detached as it may be, sublimates in us a rising tide of human aspirations. It is to this original sap that we must return if we wish to communicate with the brothers with whom we seek to be united.

ADDRESS TO THE WORLD CONGRESS OF FAITHS
(FRENCH SECTION), MARCH 8, 1947.

Franklin D'Anver

MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Novelist and Believer

Novelist and Believer

your ideas of what religion is and of how the religious need may be expressed in the art of our time; but there is always the danger that in trying to enlarge the ideas of students, we will evaporate them instead, and I think nothing in this world lends itself to quick vaporization so much as the religious concern.

As a novelist, the major part of my task is to make everything, even an ultimate concern, as solid, as concrete, as specific as possible. The novelist begins his work where human knowledge begins—with the senses; he works through the limitations of matter, and unless he is writing fantasy, he has to stay within the concrete possibilities of his culture. He is bound by his particular past and by those institutions and traditions that this past has left to his society. The Judeo-Christian tradition has formed us in the west; we are bound to it by ties which may often be invisible, but which are there nevertheless. It has formed the shape of our secularism; it has formed even the shape of modern atheism. For my part, I shall have to remain well within the Judeo-Christian tradition. I shall have to speak, without apology, of the Church, even when the Church is absent; of Christ, even when Christ is not recognized.

If one spoke as a scientist, I believe it would be possible to disregard large parts of the personality and speak simply as a scientist, but when one speaks

BEING A NOVELIST AND NOT A PHILOSOPHER OR theologian, I shall have to enter this discussion at a much lower level and proceed along a much narrower course than that held up to us here as desirable. It has been suggested that for the purposes of this symposium, * we conceive religion broadly as an expression of man's ultimate concern rather than identify it with institutional Judaism or Christianity or with "going to church."

I see the utility of this. It's an attempt to enlarge

* At Sweetbriar College, Virginia, in March, 1963.

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

as a novelist, he must speak as he writes—with the whole personality. Many contend that the job of the novelist is to show us how man feels, and they say that this is an operation in which his own commitments intrude not at all. The novelist, we are told, is looking for a symbol to express feeling, and whether he be Jew or Christian or Buddhist or whatever makes no difference to the aptness of the symbol. Pain is pain, joy is joy, love is love, and these human emotions are stronger than any mere religious belief; they are what they are and the novelist shows them as they are. This is all well and good so far as it goes, but it just does not go as far as the novel goes. Great fiction involves the whole range of human judgment; it is not simply an imitation of feeling. The good novelist not only finds a symbol for feeling, he finds a symbol and a way of lodging it which tells the intelligent reader whether this feeling is adequate or inadequate, whether it is moral or immoral, whether it is good or evil. And his theology, even in its most remote reaches, will have a direct bearing on this.

It makes a great difference to the look of a novel whether its author believes that the world came late into being and continues to come by a creative act of God, or whether he believes that the world and ourselves are the product of a cosmic accident. It makes a great difference to his novel whether he believes that

[156]

Novelist and Believer

we are created in God's image, or whether he believes we create God in our own. It makes a great difference whether he believes that our wills are free, or bound like those of the other animals.

St. Augustine wrote that the things of the world pour forth from God in a double way: intellectually into the minds of the angels and physically into the world of things. To the person who believes this—as the western world did up until a few centuries ago—this physical, sensible world is good because it proceeds from a divine source. The artist usually knows this by instinct; his senses, which are used to penetrating the concrete, tell him so. When Conrad said that his aim as an artist was to render the highest possible justice to the visible universe, he was speaking with the novelist's surest instinct. The artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality. This in no way hinders his perception of evil but rather sharpens it, for only when the natural world is seen as good does evil become intelligible as a destructive force and a necessary result of our freedom. For the last few centuries we have lived in a world which has been increasingly convinced that the reaches of reality end very close to the surface, that there is no ultimate divine source, that the things of the world do not pour forth from God in a double

[157]

way, or at all. For nearly two centuries the popular spirit of each succeeding generation has tended more and more to the view that the mysteries of life will eventually fall before the mind of man. Many modern novelists have been more concerned with the processes of consciousness than with the objective world outside the mind. In twentieth-century fiction it increasingly happens that a meaningless, absurd world impinges upon the sacred consciousness of author or character; author and character seldom now go out to explore and penetrate a world in which the sacred is reflected.

Nevertheless, the novelist always has to create a world and a believable one. The virtues of art, like the virtues of faith, are such that they reach beyond the limitations of the intellect, beyond any mere theory that a writer may entertain. If the novelist is doing what as an artist he is bound to do, he will inevitably suggest that image of ultimate reality as it can be glimpsed in some aspect of the human situation. In this sense, art reveals, and the theologian has learned that he can't ignore it. In many universities, you will find departments of theology vigorously courting departments of English. The theologian is interested specifically in the modern novel because there he sees reflected the man of our time, the unbeliever, who is nevertheless grappling in a desperate and usually honest way with intense problems of the spirit.

We live in an unbelieving age but one which is markedly and lopsidedly spiritual. There is one type of modern man who recognizes spirit in himself but who fails to recognize a being outside himself whom he can adore as Creator and Lord; consequently he has become his own ultimate concern. He says with Swinburne, "Glory to man in the highest, for he is the master of things," or with Steinbeck, "In the end was the word and the word was with men." For him, man has his own natural spirit of courage and dignity and pride and must consider it a point of honor to be satisfied with this.

There is another type of modern man who recognizes a divine being not himself, but who does not believe that this being can be known anagogically or defined dogmatically or received sacramentally. Spirit and matter are separated for him. Man wanders about, caught in a maze of guilt he can't identify, trying to reach a God he can't approach, a God powerless to approach him.

And there is another type of modern man who can neither believe nor contain himself in unbelief and who searches desperately, feeling about in all experience for the lost God.

At its best our age is an age of searchers and discoverers, and at its worst, an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily. The fiction which celebrates this last state will be the least

likely to transcend its limitations, for when the religious need is banished successfully, it usually atrophies, even in the novelist. The sense of mystery vanishes. A kind of reverse evolution takes place, and the whole range of feeling is dulled.

The searchers are another matter. Pascal wrote in his notebook, "If I had not known you, I would not have found you." These unbelieving searchers have their effect even upon those of us who do believe. We begin to examine our own religious notions, to sound them for genuineness, to purify them in the heat of our unbelieving neighbor's anguish. What Christian novelist could compare his concern to Camus'? We have to look in much of the fiction of our time for a kind of sub-religion which expresses its ultimate concern in images that have not yet broken through to show any recognition of a God who has revealed himself. As great as much of this fiction is, as much as it reveals a wholehearted effort to find the only true ultimate concern, as much as in many cases it represents religious values of a high order, I do not believe that it can adequately represent in fiction the central religious experience. That, after all, concerns a relationship with a supreme being recognized through faith. It is the experience of an encounter, of a kind of knowledge which affects the believer's every action. It is Pascal's experience after his conversion and not before.

What I say here would be much more in line with the spirit of our times if I could speak to you about the experience of such novelists as Hemingway and Kafka and Gide and Camus, but all my own experience has been that of the writer who believes, again in Pascal's words, in the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and not of the philosophers and scholars." This is an unlimited God and one who has revealed himself specifically. It is one who became man and rose from the dead. It is one who confounds the senses and the sensibilities, one known early on as a stumbling block. There is no way to gloss over this specification or to make it more acceptable to modern thought. This God is the object of ultimate concern and he has a name.

The problem of the novelist who wishes to write about a man's encounter with this God is how he shall make the experience—which is both natural and supernatural—understandable, and credible, to his reader. In any age this would be a problem, but in our own, it is a well-nigh insurmountable one. Today's audience is one in which religious feeling has become, if not atrophied, at least vaporous and sentimental. When Emerson decided, in 1832, that he could no longer celebrate the Lord's Supper unless the bread and wine were removed, an important step in the vaporization of religion in America was taken, and the spirit of that step has continued apace. When

the physical fact is separated from the spiritual reality, the dissolution of belief is eventually inevitable.

The novelist doesn't write to express himself, he doesn't write simply to render a vision he believes true, rather he renders his vision so that it can be transferred, as nearly whole as possible, to his reader. You can safely ignore the reader's taste, but you can't ignore his nature, you can't ignore his limited patience. Your problem is going to be difficult in direct proportion as your beliefs depart from his.

When I write a novel in which the central action is a baptism, I am very well aware that for a majority of my readers, baptism is a meaningless rite, and so in my novel I have to see that this baptism carries enough awe and mystery to jar the reader into some kind of emotional recognition of its significance. To this end I have to bend the whole novel—its language, its structure, its action. I have to make the reader feel, in his bones if nowhere else, that something is going on here that counts. Distortion in this case is an instrument; exaggeration has a purpose, and the whole structure of the story or novel has been made what it is because of belief. This is not the kind of distortion that destroys; it is the kind that reveals, or should reveal.

Students often have the idea that the process at work here is one which hinders honesty. They think that inevitably the writer, instead of seeing what is,

will see only what he believes. It is perfectly possible, of course, that this will happen. Ever since there have been such things as novels, the world has been flooded with bad fiction for which the religious impulse has been responsible. The sorry religious novel comes about when the writer supposes that because of his belief, he is somehow dispensed from the obligation to penetrate concrete reality. He will think that the eyes of the Church or of the Bible or of his particular theology have already done the seeing for him, and that his business is to rearrange this essential vision into satisfying patterns, getting himself as little dirty in the process as possible. His feeling about this may have been made more definite by one of those Manichean-type theologies which sees the natural world as unworthy of penetration. But the real novelist, the one with an instinct for what he is about, knows that he cannot approach the infinite directly, that he must penetrate the natural human world as it is. The more sacramental his theology, the more encouragement he will get from it to do just that.

The supernatural is an embarrassment today even to many of the churches. The naturalistic bias has so well saturated our society that the reader doesn't realize that he has to shift his sights to read fiction which treats of an encounter with God. Let me leave the novelist and talk for a moment about his reader.

This reader has first to get rid of a purely sociolog-

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

ical point of view. In the thirties we passed through a period in American letters when social criticism and social realism were considered by many to be the most important aspects of fiction. We still suffer with a hangover from that period. I launched a character, Hazel Motes, whose presiding passion was to rid himself of a conviction that Jesus had redeemed him. Southern degeneracy never entered my head, but Hazel said "I seen" and "I taken" and he was from East Tennessee, and so the general reader's explanation for him was that he must represent some social problem peculiar to that part of the benighted South.

Ten years, however, have made some difference in our attitude toward fiction. The sociological tendency has abated in that particular form and survived in another just as bad. This is the notion that the fiction writer is after the typical. I don't know how many letters I have received telling me that the South is not at all the way I depict it; some tell me that Protestantism in the South is not at all the way I portray it, that a Southern Protestant would never be concerned, as Hazel Motes is, with penitential practices. Of course, as a novelist I've never wanted to characterize the typical South or typical Protestantism. The South and the religion found there are extremely fluid and offer enough variety to give the novelist the widest range of possibilities imaginable, for the novelist is bound

164]

Novelist and Believer

by the reasonable possibilities, not the probabilities, of his culture.

There is an even worse bias than these two, and that is the clinical bias, the prejudice that sees everything strange as a case study in the abnormal. Freud brought to light many truths, but his psychology is not an adequate instrument for understanding the religious encounter or the fiction that describes it. Any psychological or cultural or economic determination may be useful up to a point; indeed, such facts can't be ignored, but the novelist will be interested in them only as he is able to go through them to give us a sense of something beyond them. The more we learn about ourselves, the deeper into the unknown we push the frontiers of fiction.

I have observed that most of the best religious fiction of our time is most shocking precisely to those readers who claim to have an intense interest in finding more "spiritual purpose"—as they like to put it—in modern novels than they can at present detect in them. Today's reader, if he believes in grace at all, sees it as something which can be separated from nature and served to him raw as Instant Uplift. This reader's favorite word is compassion. I don't wish to defame the word. There is a better sense in which it can be used but seldom is—the sense of being in travail with and for creation in its subjection to vanity.

[165

This is a sense which implies a recognition of sin; this is a suffering-with, but one which blunts no edges and makes no excuses. When infused into novels, it is often forbidding. Our age doesn't go for it.

I have said a great deal about the religious sense that the modern audience lacks, and by way of objection to this, you may point out to me that there is a real return of intellectuals in our time to an interest in and a respect for religion. I believe that this is true. What this interest in religion will result in for the future remains to be seen. It may, together with the new spirit of ecumenism that we see everywhere around us, herald a new religious age, or it may simply be that religion will suffer the ultimate degradation and become, for a little time, fashionable. Whatever it means for the future, I don't believe that our present society is one whose basic beliefs are religious, except in the South. In any case, you can't have effective allegory in times when people are swept this way and that by momentary convictions, because everyone will read it differently. You can't indicate moral values when morality changes with what is being done, because there is no accepted basis of judgment. And you cannot show the operation of grace when grace is cut off from nature or when the very possibility of grace is denied, because no one will have the least idea of what you are about.

The serious writer has always taken the flaw in human nature for his starting point, usually the flaw in an otherwise admirable character. Drama usually bases itself on the bedrock of original sin, whether the writer thinks in theological terms or not. Then, too, any character in a serious novel is supposed to carry a burden of meaning larger than himself. The novelist doesn't write about people in a vacuum; he writes about people in a world where something is obviously lacking, where there is the general mystery of incompleteness and the particular tragedy of our own times to be demonstrated, and the novelist tries to give you, within the form of the book, a total experience of human nature at any time. For this reason the greatest dramas naturally involve the salvation or loss of the soul. Where there is no belief in the soul, there is very little drama. The Christian novelist is distinguished from his pagan colleagues by recognizing sin as sin. According to his heritage he sees it not as sickness or an accident of environment, but as a responsible choice of offense against God which involves his eternal future. Either one is serious about salvation or one is not. And it is well to realize that the maximum amount of seriousness admits the maximum amount of comedy. Only if we are secure in our beliefs can we see the comical side of the universe. One reason a great deal of our contemporary fiction is

FLANNERY O'CONNOR

humorless is because so many of these writers are relativists and have to be continually justifying the actions of their characters on a sliding scale of values.

Our salvation is a drama played out with the devil, a devil who is not simply generalized evil, but an evil intelligence determined on its own supremacy. I think that if writers with a religious view of the world excel these days in the depiction of evil, it is because they have to make its nature unmistakable to their particular audience.

The novelist and the believer, when they are not the same man, yet have many traits in common—a distrust of the abstract, a respect for boundaries, a desire to penetrate the surface of reality and to find in each thing the spirit which makes it itself and holds the world together. But I don't believe that we shall have great religious fiction until we have again that happy combination of believing artist and believing society. Until that time, the novelist will have to do the best he can in travail with the world he has. He may find in the end that instead of reflecting the image at the heart of things, he has only reflected our broken condition and, through it, the face of the devil we are possessed by. This is a modest achievement, but perhaps a necessary one.