ARTICLES

The Wayfarer

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Throughout human history, a recurrent motif in the written documents of the human spirit has been that of man as the wayfarer: man on a journey, man in pilgrimage, man voyaging. Images of man as a physical traveller have often blended closely into related images of spiritual man, in the broadest sense of "spiritual," and authors both known and unknown have written of man questing or man searching. Records of actual travel across the terrain of earth have stirred the imagination and provided substance for the continuing metaphor of human experience as a journey. From the archetypal narrative of Abram's journey out of Ur of the Chaldees into Canaan to contemporary popular songs, man has seen himself as travelling.

Any anthropologist, any historian, any student of literature can find interest in observing the recurrence of the journey motif in song and saga. If one is interested in mankind, he finds it noteworthy to observe this patterning in what man has recorded about himself. To anyone who studies the religions of the world, there is a further and deeper interest in noticing representations of man as the perennial wayfarer; man journeying—in legend, in fiction, in biographical fact—has very often been a symbol for Man Journeying, for the heart in pilgrimage, for the wayfarer toward a Celestial City which is to be attained at the end of long miles traversed. To the Christian scholar, who believes most profoundly that he has found and is finding that One Whom all men seek, all parallel and cognate representations of man questing are useful reminders of Man Questing. The Christian recognizes that other urges have helped to propel men in their scurryings across and out from the planet earth—economic urges; the burning curiosities of the explorer; the mobility of political aspirations. Yet he can ask whether every journey ever taken, literal or imagined, is not in some sense

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also a symbol representing the greatest journey of all. Does a short ride on any commuters' train somehow typify the continuing journey of the soul's long quest? Has that quest been adumbrated by Magellan and Marco Polo, by the astronauts, by buckskin-clad men marching beside their ox teams, by families driving in a late model station wagon to the nearest beach, by Galahad and Parsifal as well as by Frodo and Childe Roland?

Whether he thinks of wayfaring as such an inclusive and primal symbol or not, one must observe that within recorded literature the explicit image of the journey as a representation of the human situation has appeared in many different centuries and many different cultures. Medieval romances were full of it, with their accounts of the search for the Holy Grail. A century ago, Tennyson revived the Grail legends in his *Idylls of the King;* Tennyson also turned to the old Greek tales of Odysseus the wanderer. In his descriptive poem entitled "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," Tennyson's great contemporary, Robert Browning, wrote a most memorable account–almost surrealist in its emotional power–of a questing knight who is also an "Everyman." Through the cantos of *The Faerie Queene,* Shakespeare's contemporary Edmund Spenser sent his various allegorical knights–Sir Calidore, Sir Artegal, the Red Cross Knight, and the others–on their respective journeys of derring-do and virtue. Some eight centuries earlier, recorded English poetry had its beginnings with "The Wanderer" and "The Sea-Farer." "Many a lonely man at last comes to honor,/ Merits God's mercy," begins the former,

> though much he endured
> On wintry seas, with woe in his heart,
> Dragging his oar through drenching-cold brine,
> Homeless and houseless and hunted by Wyrd.
>
> These are the words of a way-faring wanderer,
> This is his song of the sorrow of life.

With other moods in another era, Lord Byron wrote of wanderers: Childe Harold, Manfred, Don Juan. With all the differences, each had his family resemblance to the Anglo-Saxon wanderer.

For their special narrative purposes, Chaucer described his pilgrims travelling to Canterbury and his Italian predecessor Dante Alighieri invented a grim and awesome imaginary journey through concentric descending circles of Hell. For other special narrative purposes, Jonathan Swift sent his fictitious Lemuel Gulliver out from eighteenth century England to other imaginary journeys: to Lilliput, to Brobdingnag, to a land of noble horse-beings, the Houyhnhnms. And in the seventeenth century, John Bunyan wrote the classic of classics in imaginative literature of the journey with his *Pilgrim's Progress.* For thirty decades and in many countries, readers have travelled vicariously in watching Bunyan's Christian from his tumble into the Slough of Despond until he marches into the Celestial City escorted by Shining Ones. Bunyan made very explicit what other writers

have left latent within their work, or not even known to be latent; what other human beings have left latent within their own lives, or not even known to be latent: man journeys; man journeys toward Immortal Meaning.

To remind oneself of the journey/search/quest motif as recurrent throughout the archives of the human spirit is to become more alert to the same motif as recurrent within contemporary writing. And to notice journey/search/quest images within contemporary literature can give useful insights–insights about oneself; about contemporary society; about contemporary authors; about the dimensions of the spirit of this perennial nomad called Man. For the Christian scholar, even brief attention to the journey/search/quest motif can give valuable insights both about the intellectual world he lives in (and wishes to evangelize) and about the uses of the imagination which he himself can make.

Some of the books on any shelf of recent "literature of the journey" would be actual travel books of a sort which might be termed essentially a-Christian in identity, although in the largest sense each is a symbol of questing man. In mundane experience, a trip to Hawaii or to the Antarctic is not in itself a good or evil deed, yet it speaks of and to man's human capacities to do, to seek, to explore, to record, just as did the travel documents of other eras. Beyond all that, it implies yet more, of man the perennial Seeker. As I think in these terms of contemporary travel books, I turn to my bookshelves and leaf through the oldest book which I happen to own. By William Dampier, printed "at the Crown in St Pauls Churchyard" in the year "MDCXCVII," it bears this fascinating sesquipedalian title: *A New Voyage Round the World. Describing Particularly, The Isthmus of America, Several Coasts and Islands in the West Indies, the Isles of Cape Verd, the Passage by Terra del Fuego, the South Sea Coasts of Chili, Peru, and Mexico: the Isle of Guam One of the Ladrones, Mindanao, and Other Philippine and East-India Islands near Cambodia, China, Formosa, Luconia, Celebes, &c. New Holland, Sumatra, Nicobar Isles; the Cape of Good Hope, and Santa Hellena. Their Soil, Rivers, Harbours, Plants, Fruits, Animals, and Inhabitants. Their Customs, Religion, Government, Trade, &c.* Obviously Dampier's inclusive report could be considered factual, expository, a-Christian by category. Yet the resonances of his title are almost like another stanza for Psalm 8.

Turning from the seventeenth century to our own, we find examples of travel literature to be neither sparse nor dull. Among moderately recent travel reports one might turn, for instance, with a genuine aesthetic pleasure in its descriptive power and reportorial detail, to D.H. Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia* (1921). Here is Lawrence leaving Palermo, Sicily:

> . . .there is something in the long, slow life of the ship, and her long, slow slide forwards which makes my heart beat with joy. It is the motion of freedom. To feel her come up–then

> slide slowly forward, with the sound of the smashing of waters, is like the magic gallop of the sky, the magic gallop of elemental space.

Or, to savor words and scenes and pungent humor in a recent account of man the perennial nomad, one might join the multitudes who have already savored John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* (1962). With more than twenty printings in paperback, Steinbeck's garrulous narrative has had a popularity which seems to say that the deep human emotions and yearnings satisfied vicariously by hearing a good travelogue in the time of the *Odyssey* are still tumbling around in the human marrow. Steinbeck spoke for many readers as well as for himself in his preface: "Four hoarse blasts of a ship's whistle still raise the hair on my neck and set my feet to tapping. The sound of a jet, an engine warming up, even the clopping of shod hooves on pavement brings on the ancient shudder, the dry mouth and the vacant eye, the hot palms and the churn of stomach high up under the rib cage."

To Lawrence and Steinbeck, to any issue of *The National Geographic,* one could add all of the detailed reports on Apollo moonshot ventures and all of the lure of exotic lands as described in missionary materials. Or one could read Adrien Stoutenbert's award-winning volume of poems, *Heroes, Advise Us* (1964), with its long section on Captain Scott's exploration party, which went to the South Pole in 1912.

From expositions of physical travel, fascinating and human as they may be, one turns with another sort of interest to books that avowedly chronicle the inward journey; to the language of definite "quest" metaphors; to the more overt literature of the inner journey, the spiritual pilgrimage. As one index to the prevalence of such a motif in contemporary writing, it may be noted that in their collection entitled *Poems of Doubt and Belief* (1964), editors Tom F. Driver and Robert Pack devoted one major section to "Meditation and Spiritual Journey." Twenty-six poets are represented in this section, with some thirty-nine poems. Chronologically ordered by birthdates, the poets represented are these: Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Butler Yeats, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, James Stephens, William Carlos Williams, Robinson Jeffers, Edwin Muir, Marianne Moore, Conrad Aiden, e. e. cummings, Hart Crane, Allen Tate, Richard Eberhart, Robert Penn Warren, W.H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Elizabeth Bishop, Delmore Schwartz, Cecil Hemley, Howard Nemerov, Richard Wilbur, Gene Baro, Elizabeth Jennings, Galway Kinnell, W.S. Merwin. Obviously other editors would have chosen other poems, and obviously another anthology might have selected passages from fiction and drama as well as from poetry.

One of the "Wayfarer" books which has had wide circulation among readers with many kinds and degrees of religious apprehension is Dag Hammarskjold's posthumous *Markings* (1964), translated from Swedish by Leif Sjöberg and the poet W. H. Auden. As Auden notes in his prefatory comments, the title word *(Vägmärken* in Swedish) might more literally have

been translated as *Trail Marks* or *Guideposts,* but those journey-oriented words were rejected because each "conjures up in a British or American reader an image of a Boy Scout . . . " The whole book suggests George Herbert's description of prayer: "God's breath in man returning to his birth,/The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage." Metaphors of starting, going, climbing, travelling pervade the journal paragraphs and the verse fragments of Hammarskjöld's book. The very first entry, from a few fragments dated 1925-1930, introduces such a metaphor:

> I am being driven forward
> Into an unknown land.
> The pass grows steeper,
> The air colder and sharper.
> A wind from my unknown goal
> Stirs the strings
> Of expectation.

In 1951, Hammarskjöld wrote (surely with John 14 in mind),

> Night. The road stretches ahead. Behind me it winds up in curves towards the house, a gleam in the darkness under the dense trees of the park. I know that, shrouded in the dark out there, people are moving, that all around me, life is a-quiver. I know that something is waiting for me in the house. Out of the darkness of the park comes the call of a solitary bird: and I go—up there.

On July, 1961:

> On the paths of the others
> Are resting places,
> Places in the sun
> Where they can meet.
> But this
> Is your path,
> And it is now,
> Now, that you must not fail.
>
> Weep
> If you can,
> Weep,
> But do not complain.
> The way chose you—
> And you must be thankful.

Among the aphorisms, affirmations, and fragmentary paragraphs of Hammarskjöld's thought, the reader finds various allusions to the New Testament, various hintings that "the Way" as a phrase from New Testament language was a part of Hammarskjöld's use of the language of the journey. For example (p. 91), "He who has surrendered himself to it knows that

the Way ends on the Cross–even when it is leading him through the jubilation of Gennesaret or the triumphal entry into Jerusalem." Or, p. 120, "It is not we who seek the Way, but the Way which seeks us."

A little like *Markings* but with a great difference, Thomas Howard's *Christ the Tiger* is another significant recent book delineating one man's spiritual odyssey. Howard speaks more for himself and less for Everyman than Hammarskjöld spoke; beside Hammarskjöld's spare sentences, Howard's prose sounds more arty, more self-counscious, more sophomoric. Written as they were for himself and not for a reading public, Hammarskjöld's posthumous paragraphs held a dry, laconic ruthlessness with himself, an agonized honesty which surely has seldom been matched in devotional literature; young Howard, in comparison, was naturally writing to impress a reading audience–and consequently left less of an impression. In his autobiographical retrospections, Howard chose to use fewer explicit metaphors of the pilgrim path than Hammarskjöld used. For his purposes and in his prose style such metaphors would perhaps have been hard to use without sounding trite; yet the journey/search/quest is implicit throughout *Christ the Tiger,* as Howard describes his own personal search for meaning. At one point when a "quest" image becomes more explicit, Howard uses words that are reminiscent of Francis Thompsons' great poem, "The Hound of Heaven." Here Christ is represented as addressing modern man:

> Your mad pursuit is for freedom and intensity and bliss. It is natural. But, by a wry irony at work in the world, the pursuit leads you into a prison where your agony is to become more and more insistent that things shall be as you wish, and less and less able to cope with denial . . .

When *Christ the Tiger* appeared in 1967, it was widely discussed among the American Protestants who read such magazines as *Christianity Today* and *His.* Perhaps not many of the same readers were talking about a little book that moved into paperback (in Doubleday's Image Books) in 1968 after a 1962 publication date; *We Neurotics: A Handbook for the Half-Mad,* by Bernard Basset, S.J., is, nevertheless, an interesting volume to put on the same shelf. Basset was also writing, though in a semi-fictional framework, of the journey, search, and quest. Like Howard and like Hammarskjöld, Basset wrote of man as journeying toward Deity. "Despite an alarming title, this is a soothing book," begins Chapter 1. "Amateurish and inconsequential, it matches the moods of the solitary pilgrim who set out from a London suburb to find peace of soul." The "solitary pilgrim" is a self-deprecating Roman Catholic layman, Mr. Dawes, who tells with quiet candor of the counsellings toward Grace which he has been receiving. Not all readers who respond to *Markings* to or *Christ the Tiger* will be attracted to *We Neurotics.* Each of its qualities–its quiet humor, discursiveness, anecdotal style, and Roman Catholic "local color"–will deflect some readers who are also suburban pilgrims setting out to find peace of soul.

Appropriate to the same shelf would be Keith Miller's books; although Miller did not use many explicit allusions to journeying, he wrote so autobiographically of his own spiritual quest in *The Taste of New Wine* (1965) and *A Second Touch* that one senses a proximity to such books of pilgrimage as *Markings* and *Christ the Tiger* and *We Neurotics.* As Miller reported on what happened in his own life when he opened it to candor, explicit honesty, love, and responsiveness, he was making his own contribution to the literature of the wayfarer. Incidentally, one of the most significant "journey" passages in *The Taste of New Wine* is not Miller's own, but a quotation from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: " . . . Only Jesus Christ who bids us follow Him, knows the journey's end. But we do know that it will be a road of boundless mercy. Discipleship means joy." (Page 86.)

Not quite so recent but widely read since it appeared (in 1955) and widely influential is Eugenia Price's effervescent account of her conversion, *The Burden Is Light!* Like her various devotional books, Miss Price's autobiography is very colloquial, very subjective, very readable; it has provided inspiration and direction for many readers.

From a different genre and a different milieu, a recent major poet left lines that will certainly come to be recognized as among the most poignant and most memorable documents of the quest in recent literature. When Theodore Roethke's last book of poetry, *The Far Field,* appeared posthumously in 1964 and again when that volume was incorporated into Roethke's *Collected Poems* (1966), critics found themselves reaching for comparisons with George Herbert and John Donne; like the 17th century Metaphysicals, Roethke wrote of his own quest with acrid and smoldering force. His cryptic lines, such as those in his poem entitled "The Marrow," will haunt and speak for many another seeker:

> . . . Brooding on God, I may become a man.
> Pain wanders through my bones like a lost fire;
> What burns me now? Desire, desire, desire.
>
> . . . Lord, hear me out, and hear me out this day:
> From me to Thee's a long and terrible way.
>
> I was flung back from suffering and love
> When light divided on a storm-tossed tree.
> Yea, I have slain my will, and still I live;
> I would be near; I shut my eyes to see;
> I bleed my bones, their marrow to bestow
> Upon that God who knows what I would know.

From autobiography to fiction, from the first person ("I journey") to the third person ("He journeys") may be a very small step. Yet in third person narratives, the reader may have to be more patient and more perceptive to recognize that marrow bones are bleeding, as Roethke put it, in the Godward quest. Perhaps, indeed, essentially all imaginative literature

is, in a sense, the documentation of man's searching, and ultimately, then, of man's searching after God—the very God Whom man still repudiates and denies and seeks by flight. Great quantities of contemporary literature could be called exceedingly detailed glosses upon the adjective "restless" in St. Augustine's classic sentence: "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart it restless, until it repose in Thee." In his pornographic trivia, in his Theater of the Absurd, in his most chaotic maunderings, modern man continues to demonstrate obliquely how very "restless" he is.

In some recent fiction, of course, the motif of a journey is overt and dominant—a major part of the plot line and of the narrative substance. Such a book is Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* (1958), in which tempestuous Gene Henderson is driven to Africa, and to very strange adventures, by the din inside himself. Says millionaire Henderson, "I have a voice within me repeating, *I want,* raving and demanding, making a chaos, desiring, desiring, and disappointed continually, which drove me forth as beaters drive game." Eventually Henderson's hegira brings him to strange African instruction in humility and nobility; during such instruction, he is required to roar like a lion, and the practice becomes the bizarre litany of an anguished Wayfarer: "But what the King called pathos was actually (I couldn't help myself) a cry which summarized my entire course on this earth, from birth to Africa; and certain words crept into my roars, like 'God,' 'Help,' 'Lord have mercy,' only they came out 'Hooolp!' 'Moooorcy!' It's funny what words sprang forth. 'Au secours', which was 'Secooooooooor' and also 'De profooooondis,' plus snatches from the 'Messiah' (He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, etcetera). . "

The eccentric garrulous Henderson is very individual—and yet he is also in some measure an Everyman. So, in another measure, is the wayfarer Santiago in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea.* And so, in another measure, is the wayfarer George Brush in Thornton Wilder's picaresque *Heaven's My Destination* (1935). As George Brush—textbook agent, Baptist, Quixote-like dreamer and doer—journeys from one Midwestern hotel to another, he is a singular combination of brashness, idealism, earnestness, innocence, bumbling, and *sang froid.* Singular, and yet universal, he is a close relative of Galahad and Parsifal, of Billy Budd, of Shakespeare's wise fools, of Everyman. The quiet final sentence of the book is epic in its reverberations: "He was released and continued on his journey."

In addition to books which overtly say "journey," several pieces of recent fiction have attempted to chronicle some aspects of a particular journey toward Deity, and of arrival. Notable among these is John Updike's brilliant short story, "Pigeon Feathers." Such a story makes one wonder just what Updike could do if he would turn his remarkable abilities in narration to a fullscale study of experiential faith. Thus far Updike's novels have specialized rather in the tawdriness of those people who illustrate and explicate in grossest detail St. Augustine's adjective "restless." Rabbit Angstrom in *Rabbit, Run* is a representative of the quest motif in

reverse as he takes flight after flight: from responsibility, from marriage, from parenthood, from Deity, from himself. Piet Hanema and his sex-obsessed associates in Updike's *Couples* are novel-length amplifications of Romans 1.

In Catherine Marshall's warm-hearted popular novel *Christy,* the title character moves, and not alone, toward "arrival" of a sort that Updike's characters ought to hear about, Hank Gavin in Adela Rogers St. Johns' best-selling *Tell No Man* comes to an arrival: " . . .I'm trying to tell you there is light beyond and beyond, so much farther beyond—no words, I have no words at all! I had one instant just at first of saying Watch it, Hank, *watch it* and then I was in it. Just as it had done away with the blackness and damp air outside, the darkness and despair and *hopelessness* and all the bitter questions *inside* me were gone. I was—*new.* The *joy*—I can't tell you—the joy was as much beyond any joy I've ever dreamed could be as the light was beyond and *more* than any light I'd ever seen . . ." Horace Gould in Eugenia Price's *New Moon Rising* comes to an "arrival" of a sort, but one that is regrettably vague and thin of substance—and it comes, actually, as a rather ineffective postscript to a novel which is oddly lacking in attention to the dimension of religious experience in human affairs; from the author of *The Burden Is Light!,* one would have expected fiction with more depth and adequacy in depicting God-man relationships.

Of quite another sort from any other book just mentioned is Rumer Godden's *In This House of Brede* (1969), the fictional account of one Philippa Talbot, who comes from a London office where she has wielded power, efficiency, and authority to enter a Benedictine monastery. Although Rumer Godden does more with one segment of religious sociology —*i. e.,* with Brede Abbey as a community and the impingement of life upon life within it—than with "waymarkings" upon Philipps's interior terrain, yet it is a strong piece of writing, and the focus is upon a group of people who are all journeying, journeying, journeying, in their respective pilgrimages of Grace.

Along with the autobiographies, the fictional records of restless men, and the studies of religious experience which find their place in the literature of the wayfarer, recent publishing history has known another significant development within *belles-lettres*—significant, and even epochal. This is "journey" literature of mythic sorts.

J.R.R. Tolkien's famous fantasy trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings,* has captivated readers of all ages on both sides of the Atlantic and is surely one of the greatest pieces of "journey" literature ever written. With incomparable imagination, Tolkien describes Frodo the Hobbit and his associates as they travel with a mustic Ring back to the fire that will destroy its power for evil. A sense of evil battling against good in mortal combat permeates Tolkien's chapters. So does a sense of valor and of beauty beyond believing.

That the magnificent mind of C.S. Lewis turned often to journey/search/quest themes is exceedingly well known to literate readers of the present generation. Christian theology, logic, fantasy, and descriptive power all combined in Lewis's hands to produce greatness after successive greatness. *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933) drew brilliantly upon Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and even more brilliantly upon all that Lewis was thinking about the pagan intellectual currents of then-contemporary England. The "Mappa Mundi" which he supplied was a visual evidence of his creativity and humor. The wanderings and predicaments of Lewis's character John in *The Pilgrim's Regress* obviously mean more to students of philosophy and theology than to the general reader, but *The Great Divorce* (1946) is accessible to all. The journey of hell-hearted citizens by omnibus to the shining realities of heaven has become one of the classics of religious literature.

Similarly, Lewis's science fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra,* and *That Hideous Strength* provide a marvelous compendium of fantasy, imagination, and Christian theology. Theology, of course, is implicit within narratives rather than being presented through exposition or argumentation, but it is a very important ingredient. Readers who are professionally trained in theology exclaim about the deep insights accessible to them in Lewis's fiction, which the lay reader probably would not observe. With these novels, the "journey" motif becomes that of the space ship and other worlds explored; a posthumous collection of Lewis's essays and stories appeared in 1966 under the title *Of Other Worlds,* a title which might have served as a collective title for the trilogy. In all of Lewis's fiction, the level of imagination displayed and of descriptive power at work is very great. Where in all of English writing is there anything quite to compare with the descriptive passage in *Perelandra* in which the scientist Ransom first experiences the sensory perceptions available to him on the planet Perelandra?

Of the same genre as Lewis's science fiction and Tolkien's myth fiction is a less known but splendid piece of writing, *A Wrinkle in Time by* Madeleine L'Engle (1962). Although designated for junior readers, *A Wrinkle in Time* is a delight to imaginative adult readers also. As does the Tolkien trilogy, it deals with the desperate struggle of good against evil; as with Tolkien, it is parable as well as fantasy. The "journey" is interplanetary, and is described with superb narrative skills.

Less unified and less distinguished but moderately interesting is a more recent volume, *No Man in Eden,* by H.L. Myra (1969). The admirable deftness in narrative pace and narrative devices of *A Wrinkle in Time* are far from equalled here.

C.S. Lewis repeatedly acknowledged his indebtedness to George MacDonald. Since *Phantastes* was published in 1858 and *Lilith* in 1895, MacDonald is not exactly to be grouped with "contemporary" writers. Yet his work is contemporary to readers; Lewis published *George MacDonald:*

An Anthology in 1946 and the American paperback edition of *Phantastes and Lilith* (two books, printed together by William B. Eerdmans) is as recent as 1964. In *Phantastes* the pilgrim-wanderer, Anodos, is granted an opportunity to wander through Fairy Land, where he has a series of parable-fraught experiences. He returns wondering: "Could I translate the experiences of my travels there, into common life?" Any reader who has walked in Fairy Land with Anodos will ask himself a parallel question.

And the question of Anodos to himself is an appropriate question for any reader of any literary work in the whole of the journey/search/quest tradition.