

quite remember — and so they crucified him. This does not read like the formula for a contemporary success story. As the world measures victory, this was a colossal defeat. But out of this defeat came the Church.

The Church, basically, is a company of seekers, a band of men and women who seek to become fitter instruments for the accomplishment of God's purposes. This is perhaps the ideal Church; and if the actual Church were this and nothing else, there wouldn't be much of a problem. The actual Church in every age has come under the spell of secular movements and enthusiasms, to the detriment of spiritual religion. Churchmen, in every age, have dreamed of a large, wealthy, and powerful ecclesiastical organization, both for the sake of organization itself and for the sake of the political power such an organization might wield. Temptations of this latter sort have always beset the Church, and they are peculiarly strong in our time when, for the first time in history, governments have been able to trick a lot of people into believing that popular welfare is now the goal of politics. It was difficult enough to keep Church and state separate when the state's image was that of a warlord or a policeman; but now that the state has succeeded in projecting the

image of a guardian angel the churches are more than ever tempted to politicalize their faith in order to get on the side of that angel! This we must resist, for the Church's sake and also for the sake of the state.

"The Good News of Damnation"

A New England Puritan of the seventeenth century left a journal. In it he wrote: "My heart leaps for joy every time I hear the good news of damnation." Even if we were inclined to accept the Puritan's grim theology, which we are not, we'd want to challenge his idea that the news of damnation is good. Why speak of future punishment as a cause of rejoicing? It was along these lines that I used to poke fun at the Puritan mentality, even while acknowledging that it did produce some sturdy and admirable characters. This old Puritan is no longer around to tell us what he had in mind; thus we are free to speculate. Keeping in mind that his map of the universe is not the same as ours, what was he trying to say about man and man's relation to God? Let us start with his conclusion and unravel it till we reach the premises on which it is founded.

This old doctrine says, first of all, that Something or Somebody in the universe cares for us indi-

vidually, one by one. This is the basic implication of any system of rewards and punishments based on merit or demerit. The conviction that this is a universe where, in the long run, we do get our just desserts implies that we have a responsibility for our lives; that nobody really gets away with anything.

No one is properly held responsible for an outcome which his actions did not affect one way or the other. Responsibility implies freedom. To say that man is a responsible being is to say that his freely made choices do cause things to happen this way rather than that. Life's alternate possibilities of reward and punishment imply that men *must* choose. And because the universe does not jest, it has not given man the freedom to make a choice as to how he will commit his life without at the same time equipping that choice with power to affect the ultimate outcome. This is the core of the doctrine of Election, which a hillbilly preacher explained to his flock in this fashion: "The Lord votes for you; the Devil votes against you. It's the way *you* vote that decides the election." Even if you do nothing, your very inaction becomes a form of action, affecting the eventual outcome.

In other words, our lives do count for one thing or another,

and we can make them count on the side of the right and the good. The individual soul is a battleground where real issues are fought out and decided. The Power behind the universe has so much confidence in man that it has made him a free and responsible being. These are the basic premises of the Puritan faith. This is part of our heritage, but each generation has to earn its heritage anew before we can make it our own.

Obstacles Can Be Stepping-Stones to Progress

It is obvious that a creature of such vast potential as man is not designed to float with the current; he is designed to go against the stream and he enhances his powers by so doing. We didn't volunteer for this business of living; we were — you might say — drafted into life, and for life. We're here to learn, and to grow. The moment we rest on our oars and begin to think we've got it made, at that moment we start to come unglued. Biologically speaking, we are embarked upon a lost cause. But when we truly participate in life, we discover other dimensions than the merely biological. Life becomes a cosmic adventure, an adventure in destiny; a new kind and quality of life begins to evolve in us, and we come face to face with the eternal mysteries.