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Memory and Love: Literature and Liberal Learning

If we wish to understand the connections between Christianity, scholarship, and the arts, the nineteenth century is the place to begin. It is there that we discover Christianity facing several distinct challenges whose personal and theological consequences still reverberate today, and when we examine specifically the final decades of the century, we see emerging the ideal of liberal learning as we now define, practice, and defend it. What makes this century so vital to the task of understanding the connections among theology, learning, and the arts is the fact that the challenge and the emergence are not coincidental but correlative. In the form that we know them, that is, liberal learning and the modern ideal of the humanities were cultivated at that the close of the nineteenth century as a kind of healing balm for the wounds inflicted upon Christian belief over the course of that century.

It seems fitting that in a book that has explored the contemporary world through repeated returns to the nineteenth century, our final chapter will focus on the force that drives all efforts of return and renewal – memory. “Now I arrive in the field and vast mansions of memory,” writes St. Augustine, as he approaches the climax of his incomparable *Confessions*, and as he arrives there, he is ready at last to “mount by stages toward him who made me” (X, 8, 12).¹ There, in the “immense court,” the “measureless

¹ Citations are from the recent translation by Maria Boulding, O. S. B., and the parenthetical references will be given in the standard form for *The Confessions*: Book, Chapter, and numbered paragraph.

plains and vaults and caves” of the memory, he is ready to confront his identity and his God (X, 8, 14; X 17, 26). There, also, through the means of our memory of the nineteenth century, we will have an opportunity to knit together the various strands of our argument about Christianity, the arts, and the nineteenth century.

The Right Place for Love

In focusing upon questions of history here, we are once again going against type. Reflections upon Christianity, the arts, and liberal learning usually focus upon themes and ideals rather than narratives of the past. The stated theme or chosen ideal stands apart from our reality and is meant to clarify it by bringing it into focus under the light of critical scrutiny. In many respects, that is how things should be, for rituals of critical contemplation and revisioning can be central to the renewal of cultural life. These rituals set us at a distance from our daily labors and provide a refreshing perspective on our sometimes-wearying activities. They are to us what the climbing of trees is to the “swinger of birches” in Robert Frost’s remarkable poem. The speaker in “Birches” reports that as a boy he liked to climb those branches “Toward heaven.” And so, he says:

I dream of going back to be.
It’s when I’m weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig’s having lashed across it open.
I’d like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over. (118)

Like the branch itself jammed into the eye – the “twig’s having lashed across it open” – the stresses of these lines speak of our need at times to pull back, so that we may be healed and renewed.

The speaker in Frost's poem has his trees to climb to gain his fresh vantage point, while we as his readers have the poem to read and our discussions to enjoy, so that we may renew our vision for the work we have before us. Yet as the speaker of Frost's poem reminds us, we must climb down from the treetops of reflection and return to the earth, which is the scene of our labor and love.² "May no fate willfully misunderstand me," he pleads:

And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better. (118)

Love and memory are the twin themes of this final chapter. If earth is the right place for love, there may be no better way of returning to it for thinking about the intersection of Christianity, liberal learning, and the arts, than through the offices of memory and the work of history. For my account of this history, I am especially indebted to James Turner, whose work on the rise of unbelief we have already discussed and whose study of the growth of the humanities in the nineteenth century will provide the framework for my in this chapter. At the heart of this history will be nineteenth-century poets, novelists, and

² In many ways, contemporary American philosophy and literary theory make a case for the virtue of never coming down from those branches. They do so through the promotion of the ideal of liberal learning, cultural creation, and intellectual endeavor as all being part of an endless conversation. Not surprisingly, the life of the university has supplied key metaphors this conception of the cultural task. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, for instance, Rorty promotes philosophy as a conversation without origin or end. The continuation of that conversation – subsidized by ample university salaries and foundation grants – becomes the point of thinking and talking alike. "The only point on which I would insist," Rorty wrote in the final sentence of that book, "is that philosophers' moral concern should be with continuing the conversation of the West, rather than with insisting upon a place for the traditional problems of modern philosophy within that conversation" (394).

This admittedly sounds appealing, but what Rorty and the other contemporary pragmatists miss in their passion for the metaphor of conversation is what Frost says in this poem, and what thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur and Michael Oakeshott have reiterated repeatedly – and that is that the point of a conversation, in the end, is to say something about reality and to arrive at a point of understanding, agreement, even truth.

essayists. Each wrote profoundly on memory as well as love, and each speaks to that have been central to our discussion to this point.

We begin with Wordsworth at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The passage I have in mind comes at the end of *The Prelude*. After having documented scrupulously and movingly everything from the French Revolution to the development of his own “poetic mind,” Wordsworth links memory, love, and learning with the poet’s calling. He does so to salvage what he can from the disappointments of his youth and the failures of the revolution he had heralded at that time. He writes of “forwarding a day/ Of firmer trust” of the “deliverance, surely yet to come” and speaks of the work of love that remains to be done: “what we have loved,/ Others will love, and we will teach them how” (*Prelude* [1850] XIV: 440-41, 446-47).

As it stands, this seems a remarkably concise representation of a Christian or Jewish understanding of the art of teaching and the heart of learning. These are enterprises of cultural memory and transmission, after all, and there would be no such thing as the Christian tradition or the Christian church, for that matter. For without that act of “handing on what we in turn had received,” to paraphrase St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, there would be no continuity, no memory, no identity beyond the immediacy of current experience and the pressing moment. In using the present perfect tense – “what we have loved” – Wordsworth speaks here of the passing nature of all experience and implies that we have a need, indeed a duty, to pass on what we learned and experienced.

We will teach them, Wordsworth appears to say, about the objects of our affection, with the goal of having them share the love that we hold. It is not a technique for having affections, however, that we will impart; rather, we will teach them to love the proper persons, things, and beings. “He lives in justice and sanctity who is an unprejudiced

assessor of the intrinsic value of things,” writes St. Augustine. “He is a man who has an ordinate love: he neither loves what should not be loved nor fails to love what should be loved.” Sinners are not to be loved for their own sake, and all women and men are to be “loved for the sake of God, and God should be loved for His own sake” (*Christian Doctrine* 23).

While Wordsworth grounds teaching in the act of transmitting the past, he also speaks confidently of what is to come in the future: “what we have loved,/ Others will love.” He delivers this statement as an assertion that takes on the character of a promise, having connected in two lines of poetry past, present, and future in a narrative of memory and anticipation.

This sounds good, but if we step back and scan the longer passage in which these lines are couched, a somewhat different picture emerges. Wordsworth imagines his age and nation sinking to “servitude, ignominy, and shame” (XIV: 432-34). Still he hopes we may yet be “labourers in a work ... of redemption.” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the other person forming the “we” in these passages.) We will stand as “Prophets of Nature,” Wordsworth asserts, and “speak/ A lasting inspiration.” Then follows the “what we have loved passage,” after which *The Prelude* moves quickly to its conclusion: We will “Instruct them how the mind of man becomes/ A thousand times more beautiful than the earth/ On which it dwells.” The mind dwells above the world, for it is “Of substance and of fabric more divine.” (XIV: 438-52).³

³ Richard Holmes describes how Coleridge proposed to Wordsworth an “overwhelming and epoch-making task which the age itself imperiously demanded.

My dear friend ... I wish you would write a poem in blank verse, address to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean

Written at the dawn of the nineteenth century, *The Prelude* marks a point at which the arcs of two radically different intellectual trajectories cross. The descending line traces the path of a conception of the cosmos deeply etched in western consciousness. This view has many sources, including the Logos philosophy of the Greeks, the incarnational theology of John's gospel, and medieval Catholicism's Aristotelian theology of nature. It entails the conviction that the universe is saturated with a worded significance. Ideas and values are located in the world and not exclusively in human consciousness; they inhere in the nature of things and are not merely ascribed to objects by subjects. In Charles Taylor's words, in this view of reality "the order of things embodies an ontic logos," and "correct human knowledge and valuation comes from our connecting ourselves rightly to the significance things already have" (*Sources* 186).

To support his argument, Taylor refers briefly to Walter Ong's book on Ramus. There Ong cites the history of the words honor and praise, which we think of as qualities applied to objects by persons, but to Ramus and his classical and Christian predecessors, "object[s] somehow emanate honor and praise, in this way performing a kind of personal role" (Ramus 278). When we praise God, this line of thinking holds, we respond in a secondary fashion to the praise that flowed from its primary source in God; ours is not a work of creative attribution but one of dependent participation. Ong refers to the Merchant of Venice – "How many things by season season'd are/ To their right praise and true perfection" [V,v, 108-9] – and other works to illustrate his conclusion: "For the sixteenth-

selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles to domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*. (*Early Visions* 242)
The Prelude would eventually be the result of this request.

and seventeenth-century mind, the value in the object and the praise elicited by the object tend to be viewed as one whole" (*Ramus* 279).

This way of thinking is on a descending trajectory by the time Wordsworth writes *The Prelude*. In his lifetime, from 1770-1850 - the era of the English Romantic poets and German philosophical idealists - it intersects with a rising belief in the primacy of the mind, consciousness, or imagination. In certain respects, the history of nineteenth-century intellectual life involves mapping that intersection and following the ascending life of consciousness and the descending arc of nature up to the century's close.

Wordsworth intended *The Prelude* to be what the title implies, that is, a fairly brief introduction to a longer epic that he never finished. He did, however, complete a "Prospectus" to that proposed work. It is a work of haunting beauty whose blank verse has a Miltonic ring to it. As we saw in our opening chapter, the "Prospectus" makes audacious claims on behalf of the mind which is "A thousand times more beautiful than the earth. The "Prospectus" piles image upon image to affirm that nothing - not "Jehovah - with his thunder," nor his "choir of shouting angels," nor the pits of hell itself can "breed such fear and awe/ As fall upon us often when we look/ Into our Minds" (qtd. in Abrams, *Natural* 467).

The brief prospectus then becomes a wedding verse celebrating the union of "the intellect of Man" and "this goodly universe." Abrams rightly emphasizes in *Natural Supernaturalism* the dependency of the Romantic movement on the imagery of marriage to depict the relationship between the human mind and the natural world from which the philosophy and science of the previous two centuries had alienated it. This is the story of Hegel as much as it is the reality of the poetry of Wordsworth and his contemporaries. In

“love and holy passion” the “great consummation,” as Wordsworth so terms it, shall make nothing less than Paradise “A simple produce of the common day”:

my voice proclaims
 How exquisitely the individual Mind
 (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
 Of the whole species) to the external World
 Is fitted: - and how exquisitely, too,
 Theme this but little heard of among Men,
 The external world is fitted to the Mind;
 And the creation (by no lower name
 Can it be called) which they with blended might
 Accomplish: - this is our high argument.

(qtd. in Abrams, *Natural* 467-68)

This was to be the “high argument” of many of the greatest English-language writers of the first half of the nineteenth century – including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau – and the marriage it celebrated seemed at that point to be an indissoluble union.

It remains important, however, to make a distinction between view of the mind celebrated here by Wordsworth and the understanding of reality described by Ong and Taylor. *Then*, that is, in the countless centuries leading up to the modern era, the “value in the object and the praise elicited by” it were both, in a fashion, dependents of God; subject and object were equal children of the divine, not identical twins yet nonetheless bearers of the same familial DNA. *Now*, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the human person as subject is one thing, the natural world as object, another; they are exquisitely fitted, like husband and wife, to each other, and it is their offspring that will become the restored paradise, the longed-for kingdom that God has yet failed to bring into being. As

Wordsworth’s fellow poet, Robert Southey wrote of their era, “Old things seemed passing

away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race” (qtd. in Abrams, *Natural* 54).

In short, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, many looked for the end of history as we had known it since we began wandering east of Eden. The vision of the new order sprang from the mind of human beings whose task it was, in Emerson’s words, to effect “the transformation of genius into practical power (*Essays* 492). In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth confesses that at the height of the French revolution, the earth had appeared to him as an “inheritance, new-fallen” appears to one who comes to make his home in it. He “moulds it and remoulds,/ And is half pleased with things that are amiss,/ ‘Twill be such joy to see them disappear” (X: 730, 732-34). The joy of liberation here is palpable, as Jehovah, his choir of angels, and the sordid history over which they have ruled appear about to vanish.

But if Wordsworth’s “Mind of Man” was to triumph, if consciousness was to play ascendant husband to nature’s submissive wife, memory had to be subdued and chastened, for it threatened to cripple that consciousness. Emerson and Nietzsche are key figures here. In the 1830s, having traded his Unitarian pulpit for a lyceum lectern and the sermon for the lecture, Emerson traced the contours of a cultural life to be established beyond the Christian creeds, the scriptures, and the Triune God. In a series of dazzling essays, he sought to obliterate the distinction between God and human consciousness, for “God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of the world” (*Essays* 80). The incarnation is an exercise in self-development and self-expansion, and God assumes his new and only residence within: “That which shows God in me, fortifies me. That which show God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen” (*Essays* 81).

For Emerson, no force has a greater power to “show God out of me” than memory. It makes us foolishly concerned about the consistency of our acts and the continuity of our identity; it trains our minds on the dead letter of the past rather than the quick spirit of the present; and it imposes on life’s freely flowing forces a pattern our experience neither seeks nor requires. Emerson’s disdain for memory is visceral and relentless. The problem with preaching is that it is rooted in tradition and “comes out of the memory, and not out of the soul” (86); “when we have new perception,” he writes, we are able at last to discard the “old rubbish” of “memory” (271); we are burdened not by our sins but by the “monstrous corpse of memory” under whose weight we stagger; and God protects us from our past by drawing behind us an “impenetrable screen of purest sky. ‘You will not remember,’ he seems to say, ‘and you will not expect.... All good conversation, manners, and action come from a spontaneity which forgets usages, and makes the moment great” (483). Simply put, “The miracle of life, which will not be expounded, but will remain a miracle, introduces a new element.... Life has no memory” (484).⁴

Not surprisingly, this assault on memory is accompanied by a sharp critique of the art of teaching and the work of the American college. As records of past experiences, Emerson writes, books “are for nothing but to inspire.” They are for the “scholar’s idle times,” because when he or she can “read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men’s transcripts of their readings” (57-58). The truth, he told the Harvard Divinity School students in 1838, “cannot be received at second hand,” for “truly speaking, it is not

⁴ Emerson was one of the few writers who escaped Nietzsche’s wrath and earned his unqualified admiration. The latter’s 1874 essay, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” condemns memory, because it makes us unable to live as the animals do, “*unhistorically*” (*Untimely* 61). “Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting” (62).

instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul” (79). The person thus provoked is “the word made flesh, born to shed healing to the nations,” and he or she is ready to begin “tossing the laws, the books, idolatries, and customs out of the window” (275). Having been a lackluster student at Harvard, Emerson saw little of value in the cloistered life of higher education. After all, “life is our dictionary,” he declared. “Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made” (63).

The Recovery of Memory

In the seventh decade of the nineteenth century, that language of the American field and work-yard was to take on a bloody coloring and acquire violent resonances. It is here that our story turns, for as Andrew Delbanco has written, “the Civil War was the great divide between a culture of faith and a culture of doubt.... Before the war, Americans spoke of providence. After it, they spoke of luck” (138). For many in the war’s aftermath, both the long-standing orthodoxies of Christianity and the more recently minted pieties of the Romantic and Transcendental faiths seemed brittle and hollow. Oliver Wendell Holmes, for example, survived his wounds from the bloody battle of the Wilderness in the spring of 1864 but never recovered from the spiritual shocks of those dreadful years. He went on to a distinguished career as a Supreme Court justice, but “he never forgot what he lost. ‘He told me,’ [Albert] Einstein reported, ‘that after the Civil War the world never seemed quite right again’” (Menand 69).

Ruled by a God of Battles so ruthless, efficient, and indifferent that he had no name but force, the Civil War particularly confirmed what some writers and thinkers of the day had already begun to fear generally. For these poets, novelists, and philosophers, the early nineteenth century joys of liberation were being transformed into the terrors of abandonment. This is the point of the dreadful yet gleeful passage on the death of God

in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* – “We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers” (*Gay Science* 181) – as it is no doubt also one of the reasons for the fascination of the nineteenth-century American and English novel with the figure of the orphan. Take the orphans out of the novels of Dickens, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot, and what do you have left? What would *Great Expectations* be, if Pip had parents? What is *The Scarlet Letter*, but the story of a daughter's search to find the father who has abandoned her? Who is Huckleberry Finn if not another orphan drifting down the lazy river of aimless American time?

As the nineteenth century moved into its final decades, then, mind and nature appeared to be in the final stages of a divorce proceeding brought on by irreconcilable differences, and their abandoned children were the orphans of a brave new world. It is this world that prompts Melville's Captain Ahab to ask, “Where is the foundling's father hidden?” and to compare our souls to “those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it” (373). Or as Emily Dickinson was to write in 1863, the loss of belief is like the loss of one's heritage and spiritual estate, indeed of one's God (“Being” in what follows):

To lose One's faith – surpass
 The Loss of an Estate –
 Because Estates can be
 Replenished – faith cannot –
 Inherited with Life –
 Belief – but once – can be –
 Annihilate a single clause –
 And Being's – Beggary – [#632]

For Melville and Dickinson, with the awareness of loss and the terror of abandonment came a corresponding quest to revivify memory. It was to them no longer a corpse

threatening to smother the identity of a people emerging from the clutches of history. Instead, memory became the resonant core, the vital body of that identity. Melville's wrenching account of slavery, race, and the ironies of identity, *Benito Cereno*, concludes with the forward-looking American Amasa Delano admonishing the broken-hearted Cereno: "But the past is passed; why moralize upon it? Forget it." The sun has forgotten it, "and the blue sea, and the blue sky; these have turned over new leaves." They have done so, Benito Cereno "dejectedly replied," "because they have no memory; because they are not human" (*Melville's Short Novels* 101).

In a study of nineteenth-century American fiction, William Spengemann sets Melville's views of memory in the context of the larger drama whose unfolding we have examined throughout this book. As the background to that discussion, Spengemann first describes the slow but certain growth of subjectivism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North American culture. What he calls the "liberalization of dogma" and the rising power of "scientific empiricism" in the eighteenth century coincided with a decline in scriptural authority and an ever-increasing reliance upon nature as a source of authority (199).

In the story as Spengemann tells it, the scientific restructuring of the universe made necessary that "gradual relocation" – the Taylor and Ong argument in modified form – "of the absolute, from the mind of God to the human mind." In the nineteenth century, that increasingly left men and women without a dependable standard by means of which they could test their interpretations of nature and experience, and eventually "one man's interpretation came to possess as much authority as any other's" (199-200). Eventually, nature "lost the power to verify experience. Experience became the sole ground of knowledge" (200).

The Romantic answer to this predicament was to try to ground the truth in a transcendent intuition or rational faculty; Emerson thought it possible for the liberated, illuminated individual to discover the truth independently from scripture and all social and historical authority. Melville, however, found this wanting. In Spengemann's words, Emerson and his Enlightenment forebears had lived off the capital of Christian tradition and Christian belief without "ever feeling the need to replenish it. By the time writers like Hawthorne and Melville came to take their share, there was practically nothing left" (200). And in those circumstances, the freedom that Wordsworth and Emerson had championed as a new, firm foundation now seemed like a frail bridge suspended and swaying over the soundless void. In this unstable and uncertain world, memory seemed to be one of the few secure sources of identity, as the likes of Dickinson and Melville found themselves "revis[ing] old literary forms and devis[ing] new one in a continuing attempt to satisfy both their disbelief and their need to believe" (200-1).

So it proved to be the case that as the Wordsworthian and Emersonian faith in the transforming force of consciousness waned, the passion for memory as a resurrection power waxed more strongly. "I cannot tell how Eternity seems. It sweeps around me like a sea," Emily Dickinson wrote to her cousins only days after her mother had died in late 1882. Yet "thank you for remembering me. Remembrance – mighty word. "Thou gavest it to me from the foundation of the world" (*Letters* 3: 750). Several weeks later, she wrote, again in reference to her mother's death: "Memory is a strange Bell – Jubilee, and Knell" (*Letters* 3: 745-55). It was "Jubilee" because it brought the dead to life and lodged them securely in the mansion of the mind. "My Hazel Eye/ Has periods of shutting -/ But no lid has Memory," Dickinson claimed, for "Memory like Melody,/ Is pink eternally-" (#869, #1618).

Yet at the same time, memory also sounds the death “Knell,” tolling the loss of ones she had loved. “Remorse – is Memory – awake,” and the mind that raises dead must also acknowledge that “The Grave – was finished – but the Spade/ Remained in Memory-” (#781, #886). For Dickinson, memory’s power was without equal as a human capacity, and life without its consolations was unthinkable. “Dear friend,” she wrote to a neighbor in 1879, “I think Heaven will not be as good as earth, unless it bring with that sweet power to remember, which is the Staple of Heaven - here. How can we thank each other, when omnipotent” (*Letters 2*: 651)?

It was not a coincidence that in the same decades during which Melville and Dickinson were meditating on memory and the loss of God – from the 1850s through the 1880s – the modern ideal of liberal learning was took form and then took hold of American higher education. “Development may be forecast; revolution cannot,” James Turner writes in the opening sentence of his section of a recent book on the origins of modern higher education. No one could have predicted in 1850 the dramatic new “shapes into which academic knowledge would shift by 1900” (*Sacred 75*). In that half-century, a new constellation of subjects, known as the humanities, took shape and quickly displaced the Greek and Latin –centered curriculum that had governed the liberal arts for centuries.

This “rise of the humanities was intimately linked to embarrassments consequent upon secularization,” Turner claims (76). Those embarrassments had to do with the weakening of what the late nineteenth-century Princeton physicist Joseph Henry spoke of as that belief which should animate all research and teaching in the modern university: “all the phenomena of the external universe, and perhaps all those of the spiritual, [may be] reduced to the operation of a single and simple law of the Divine will” (91). According to Turner, this assumption was undermined by the passing of the moral philosophy that

had unified college curricula from the Revolution to the Civil War; by the increasingly specialized work of researchers who had neither the need nor the desire “to invoke the creator of any larger matrix of knowledge”; by the influence of graduate training in Germany but where ties between Christianity and higher learning “had frayed if not snapped”; by the small, growing cadre of agnostics who appeared in universities after the Civil War; and, finally, by the methodological consequences of Darwin and his system’s “shaking of epistemological certainty” (91).

With a few exceptions, late nineteenth-century American universities and colleges moved with what Turner terms “a buoyant zeal to bring Christian learning up to date” and subdue “the threat of disciplinary specialization and of intellectual secularization more broadly” (92). As they fought this good fight, educators of that era deployed the humanities as the main weapon in their arsenal, hoping through the offices of liberal arts education to restore coherence to an increasingly fragmented array of disciplines and to sustain the religious character of learning, even as their schools and curricula shed their allegiances to any particular Christian confession, authority, or creed. This indifference to historic Christianity should not surprise us, for the most vocal proponents of the humanities and the ideal of liberal learning – such as Charles Eliot Norton on this side of the Atlantic and Matthew Arnold across the sea – were Protestants who were not necessarily Christians. And within a matter of years their vision was to make the American and British university a safe haven for what George Marsden has memorably phrased “liberal Protestantism without Protestantism” (408-28).

At mid-century, however, others had set out not just to recover the ethos of a remembered past but to recuperate the living faith that had once animated its long history. For some, like John Henry Newman and Orestes Brownson, this meant a return to the

Catholic church from which their ancestors had separated centuries before. Other like John W. Nevin and Charles Hodge, were, as Mark Noll felicitously puts it, “far less convinced that the deliverances of consciousness did as much for theological formation as their American counterparts claimed” (249); members of this group sought to counter the vapidities of liberalism through a renewal of creedal Protestantism.

Yet in the main, the scholars and leaders who shaped the American revival of liberal learning in the late nineteenth century had little desire to resist the shift in knowledge that Walter Ong and Charles Taylor have outlined for us. To most of these hesitantly Christian humanists, the world was a domain of objects without qualities faced by an array of human subjects who invented and ascribed to these objects what values they could. In most cases, those educators, whom Taylor calls “our Victorian contemporaries,” longed to believe that an increasingly nebulous and ineffable mind of God held these objects and subjects together within a single purpose, a single law, a single destiny.

Nevertheless, as Taylor points out, the Victorian humanists also found it ever more difficult to hold together the “split-screen vision of nature” they bequeathed to us. On one side of the screen we view the vast universe of modern science, “huge and in some ways baffling... indifferent to us and strangely other, though full of unexpected beauty and inspiring awe.” On the other side we scan what Taylor calls our “inexhaustible inner domain”; from it flow the values that give our life meaning and the visions that drive us to goals beyond the needs of the moment. How the inner world is to relate to the outer one is, in Taylor’s words, “deeply problematical.” This makes our “cultural predicament utterly different from what existed before the eighteenth century, where the scientific explanation of the natural order was [still] closely aligned with its moral

meaning.... For us, the two have drifted apart, and it is not clear how we can hope to relate them” (*Sources* 416-17).

What Turner discusses in the context of the nascent American university is a variation upon the theme we have had in sight since the opening chapters of this book. In both the chapter on history and the one on science, we saw how oppositional thinking – poetry vs. science, the imagination vs. reason, and the like – has dogged Western intellectual life, especially since the early nineteenth century.

How the Catholic and Protestant institutions that make up the Lilly Fellows network have gone about the task of “relating” these disparate pictures for the past century is another story, and in general it is a narrative with clearer visions and brighter prospects than Charles Taylor may have considered possible. But it is by any standard, a story with many diverse and distinctive strands. No single Christian tradition, let alone a solitary Christian observer could possibly comprehend the whole on this question. In this room, we are Baptists and Catholics, Lutherans and Mennonites, Methodists and Christian Reformed, members of the Churches of Christ and adherents to the Free church and independent church traditions. If Tertullian puzzled over what Athens had to do with Jerusalem, it perhaps should not surprise us, if we struggle at times to determine precisely what Dordt has to do with Eastern Mennonite, or Wheaton with Wittenberg, for that matter.

So, rather than attempt a quick synthesis of the best elements of our many different traditions of higher education, I want to round off these remarks with a brief meditation on something we all share in which memory, love, and learning come together in extraordinary ways. I refer to the sacrament that has many names – the Lord’s Supper, Eucharist, or Communion - but one object, one subject, and one Lord.

And here I will call again on the poets. Near the end of his life, W. H. Auden wrote of what he called “the significance of the Mass.” “As biological organisms,” he observed, “we must all, irrespective of sex, age, intelligence, character, creed, assimilate other lives in order to live.” And in his words, “as conscious beings, the same holds true [for us] on the intellectual level: all learning is assimilation.” Because we are children of God who are made in God’s image, Auden concludes, “we are required in turn voluntarily to surrender ourselves to being assimilated by our neighbors according to their needs. The slogan of Hell: Eat or be eaten. The slogan of Heaven: Eat and be eaten” (Commonplace 134).

This idea of “surrendering ourselves to being assimilated by our neighbors according to their needs” has always struck me as a wise and deft definition of teaching. We give ourselves up in the service of the texts, formulas, theories, scores, and narratives that have nourished us, and, in turn, we surrender ourselves to our students so that they may make use of us according to their needs. Yet at the same time, is it not often the case that we as teachers assimilate some remarkable things from our students? This was the case for me in my first year of college teaching. We had gotten to Dickinson, and as I worked my way through the material somewhat stiffly, we came to a poem that had me stumped. It begins:

A Clover’s simple Fame
Remembered of the Cow
Is sweeter than enameled Realms
Of notoriety – [#1256]

I uttered something unmemorable about the idea of memory, but what one student said I have never forgotten. He brought us back to the imagery of the poem and implored us to think simply of how a cow turns clover into milk. He urged us to think of “remembered” not just in the sense of “being brought back to mind,” but of something

being “re-membered” in the sense of its having been broken, its having died, and its having been transformed.

It was the brokenness of Jesus the Son that drew Dickinson to him, even as she shunned the sovereign serenity of God the Father. Late in life she wrote to a neighbor that “when Jesus tells about his Father, we distrust him,” just as “when he shows us his Home, we turn away, but when he confides to us that he is ‘acquainted with Grief,’ we listen, for that also is an Acquaintance of our own” (Letters 3:837). As one of her several powerful and moving poems about Christ phrases it, his “acquaintance” with death “justifies Him” and makes him that “Tender Pioneer” who leads and guides us every step of the often difficult human way. Here in the life and death of this one “acquainted with Grief” Dickinson the subject found an object whose qualities she could praise, honor, love, and grasp. As she wrote to a friend as they both grieved the death of a man they honored and loved, “the crucifix requires no glove.”

In writing about the tensions marking modernity, between love and knowledge, between memory and hope, Charles Taylor notes, “Augustine holds that in relation to God, love has to precede knowledge. With the right direction of love, things become evident which are hidden otherwise” (Sources 449). As we consider the connections between Christianity and liberal learning, are we not asking how our love of God and God’s world might guide both our pursuit of knowledge and our teaching and thereby make evident so many things otherwise hidden?

As Christian scholars and teachers, we most effectively uncover and disclose those truths by remembering in our thoughts as Christian scholars and re-membering through our deeds as worshipers in the body of Christ that “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” In the incarnation, mind and body, God and man, subject and object come

together as one through the sacrificial freedom of a creative, long-suffering God. In the light shed by the incarnation, we can see new ways of looking at ourselves as subjects, as well fresh ways of perceiving the loveliness of objects, even those objects we once found most unlovely.

Only a month after her mother died, Emily Dickinson confessed to a friend, “we were never intimate Mother and Children while she was our Mother – but Mines in the same Ground meet by tunneling and when she became our Child, the Affection came” (Letters 3:754-55). As we strive to teach others to love what we have loved, we do well to remember that the connections between Christ and the life of the mind may be more readily discovered in Emily Dickinson’s tunnels rather than they are to be glimpsed from Robert Frost’s treetops. As he dreamed of heaven and thought of his own art at his life’s close, William Butler Yeats concluded, “I must lie down where all the ladders start/ In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart’ (Yeats 199). Or as one of his own earlier poems asserted, “Love has pitched his mansion in/ The place of excrement;/ For nothing can be sole or whole/ That has not been rent’” (Yeats 149). So we begin at that point at which our own affection, our own love came – with our memory of that child who became a man and whose body was rent, broken out of love, first, so that it might be re-membered by us and, then, so that we might live with the hope of that day when God will re-member us wholly, body, mind, and soul, for eternity. That is a love worth teaching. That is a truth worth remembering.