

BORN CATHOLICS

Assembled by
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Jean Charlot

Jean Charlot was born in Paris in 1898, of French and Mexican ancestry, served as artillery lieutenant in first World War. He came to Mexico in 1921, played part as maker of murals in the artistic revolution, studied Mayan art with many Carnegie expeditions in Yucatan. He is named in James Lane's Masters in Modern Art as one of the nine most prominent modern painters. He has painted murals in Atlanta, the University of Iowa and New Jersey. He is now teaching at the University of Hawaii. For Sheed and Ward he has written Art from the Mayans to Disney and Art-Making from Mexico to China. He married Zohmah Day in 1943. They have four children.



I am an artist, liable to receive impressions, moods, ratiocinations, even stray spiritual impulses, mostly through a specialized channel of sensuous reactions—the stock-in-trade of the maker of Fine Arts. Also it has been my lot to experience the Church with its attribute of catholicity underlined: my traffic among its grand-plays and road-stands encompasses a substantial spherical segment of our globe. All in all, it is perhaps the spectacle displayed, the stage sets—naive, sumptuous, pompous or comical—the hazards of taste entailed in the visit to every church, or chapel or churchman, that bind me irretrievably to the militant Church.

This does not mean that along with this sensuous intercourse no flavour of spirituality intrudes. My usual ways of learning and my professional vocabulary as well remain banked within the limits of visual and tactile happenings, concerned mostly with an appreciation of colours, textures and forms. I lack means of expressing from where it is that the path branches away from the well-known sights towards the invisible and the untouchable. Perhaps, anyhow, as is my earnest hope, at the end of this superior road the eye will again come into its own. One reads, of course, in the lives of saints, of their visions. Such happenings, even though they would prove vocationally pat, have not been the lot of my small virtue. There remains the collective promise of unitive vision as the end, not to be disconnected from that other promise of the resurrection of the body, including both resurrected eyeballs. Up there, we may perhaps delight again in contrasts and affinities of colours, rhythms, lights and shapes. I suspect that, even while on this earth, the good painter El Greco could hardly keep his specialized painter's knowledge from intruding on his visions, as he coolly notes that "angels are like candle-flames, that look big at a distance but small as they come near."

As a corollary to my profession, after twenty years of working from the model and teaching life-class, in what unkindly souls would describe as a Peeping Tom career, I have seen more women stripped than even Casanova, and as many nude men as a shower attendant. I have come, in so doing, to the unoriginal conclusion that the body is more important than the clothes, and for me people have ceased to be heads sticking out of clothing, and recapture, clothed or clothesless, the quality of purity that nudity was at first meant to convey. Having lost for people their sense of shame, I am mildly impatient that some aim to keep it, and even glory in it. Decency seems indeed a transitory affair,

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a mean compromise brought about by the original accident, to be dismissed in eternity. A jingle runs in my head that I wrote in my twenties about the sights that await us in Heaven, when

*ayant délaissé l'oripeau,
Le costume des bienheureux sera la peau.*

I should add that, when I chose art as my career, I eschewed other, more substantial, pursuits. The kind of art that I make and my doggedness in making it just so, hardly constitute a paying proposition. Money is needed indeed when one has a wife and four small children. What money has happened my way has come sidewise, as it were. It would be impertinent to mention holy poverty in connection with rather narrow circumstances, especially if these are perfectly cut to taste. We always had enough, even something left over daily expenses for an additional and ironical burden: to pay storage on paintings that I know must be preserved for posterity.

The point I want to make is that, given this personalized, ostracized pattern of life, religion can never be for me the prop that it is for the white-collar worker, or the aura that fringes the pate of the real estate man, or the social cement that binds together baptized joiners under the paradoxical patronage of Columbus, uncanonized saint who learned ineffably to be alone. For the same reason that I am to an extent unworldly, I fail to be impressed by the overlapping of Church and World. When a Church chums too closely with a government, neither better nor worse than another, or when a churchman carves for himself fame as a radio orator or a best-seller, I wonder which one of the two incompatible systems, or which of the two incompatible ethics, has been intruded upon by the other. An artist is expected to be a romantic. True to type, I probably romance

when I believe catacombs to be fit places for the faithful to worship in, and lack indignation when Church dignitaries are thrown into jail. Rather it appears to me as if it were some kind of return to normalcy.

Born and raised in France, despite sundry exotic ancestors, I practised in my religion what was then the norm for a little Frenchman of circa 1905, dolled in Fauntleroy suits, who could hardly squeeze far enough to kiss an aunt through the pillowed hurdles of bosom, boas, and plumed hat. Mother's piety was always alive. As the world she had known and its pomps gradually left her, this piety deepened to a hue of valid mysticism, but that phase came later on, towards the end. Father was a freethinker and, when not busy at his office, dreamed of a global anarchy to come that would prove a freethinker's heaven on earth, *le Grand Soir*. Mother's sweet proddings churchwise and father's caustic, amused disapproval proved an unmatched combination for devotion. I could thus simultaneously obey and rebel, be docile and choose a path of my own.

Here should come the recital of my conversion, or of what takes its place in the case of the born Catholic. Unlike plants, and perhaps animals, all buoyant or burdened with heredity, man has to accept or reject, once at least as an individual, the soil, or habitat, he grew in. Baptized when he was only a bawling baby, a Catholic will take a look at his ticket for Heaven, and weigh in terms of self, if not the implied destination, at least the pre-mapped itinerary. This happened to me so early in life that I remember with what pride, on that Sunday morning, I clung to the hand of my older cousin, subject to the draft, which would make him all of twenty years old. It was summer, so that the church was in the country, in Poissy, the same sturdy pile of quarried stones, more Romanesque than Gothic, where St. Louis of France with his mother Blanche had worshipped.

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Kitty-corner from the church was the town square with its chestnut trees, and, as a bronze premonition of the pitfalls of my vocation, there rose in its centre a statue of Meissonier, glorious native son, his bifurcated, frizzled beard sweeping awry a square palette that, in turn, seemed to drip its load of pigment over the velvet pants of the artist.

Once in church we knelt sideways and close to the altar, following Mass through the open woodwork of the chancel. Casually the priest, preparatory to preaching, took off his chasuble and appeared in his white alb. Monsieur le Curé was neither beautiful nor thin. His skin, sweating off the summer heat, gleamed with the deep veinous red of a florid complexion. It was already through the eye that I thought, and this spectacle of the ecclesiastic in his nightshirt, as it seemed, bibulous with *vin ordinaire*, his pug nose tipped with a blue highlight, loomed unbearably grotesque. How could a Faith represented by such a symbol have any truth in it? I should get up and go, never to come back. Physically, the opposite happened. My muscles reacted in place of a distracted mind. My elbows dug a little deeper into the arm-rest of the *prie-dieu* and my knees into its cushion. As swiftly as the vision and revulsion had come, they went, and the matter of faith was settled, for some forty years to date, and, let us hope, for as long as Time.

The Parisian priests who taught us Catechism had lucid heads, good enough for the Sorbonne of St. Thomas, and, together with the grain of Gallicanism in their make-up, there was instilled in the boy a deep devotion for their priestly powers, and an independence towards them that amounted to comradeship, regardless of the difference in age. My single attempt at servility went unrewarded: as we passed our final examination on doctrine before First Communion, I was asked what I would do if, in a conversation,

the Holy Father explained to me a point of doctrine. Well, I wished for a good grade and the Pope was the boss of my inquisitor; of course, in such a situation as described, I said, I should agree with the Holy Father. This proved an incorrect answer: I was coolly treated to the distinction between a private opinion and a proclamation *urbi et orbi*. It was the first, and probably the last, time that I ever fawned on the clergy.

As I grew up, the making of liturgical art became the common ground between my devotion and my vocation. In my teens I was already one of a group that called itself *Guilde Notre-Dame*, made up of sculptors, stained-glass makers, embroiderers, decorators. The workshop atmosphere and approach to aesthetics through crafts served me well later on when, a world war having elapsed, I found myself in Mexico as a member of another group, made up this time of fearful fellows who made the bourgeois cringe, and shook the walls they painted on. They had this in common with me and the pious French friends I had left behind, that they too were humble craftsmen, good at their trade, which is a kind of virtue.

My career as a French liturgical artist was cut short when, with the priest's approval and working from blue-prints he had furnished, I planned the mural decorations of a new church in a Paris suburb. Weeks later, my exultant note stating that the sketches were at last finished was coolly answered: there had been a change of plans and murals were out. This, the first of many heartaches that I came to experience in my career as a mural painter, was one of the factors that sent me to Mexico.

Before leaving France, I should mention the authors who helped me to a realization of my personal attitude in matters that it would be exaggerated to call philosophical: at most, this consisted in a sweeping out of sight, hardly

further than under the rug, of the film of dust that interfered with the focus one needs on the outside before action may begin. At my most adolescent, at my pimples stage, Joris Karl Huysmans fascinated me. His attitude was thoroughly artistic; he consistently rated long words over short ones; he disguised with a sauce of obscure adjectives the clear taste of clichés. It was not long before an aestheticism so thick repulsed the maker of art in me, the joiner of art, so rarely troubled by the mental scruples of the art appreciator.

Paul Claudel struck deeper. In his work, beauty mingled fearlessly with a kind of grossness that he himself sees as a link with farmer ancestors bent for a lifetime under a hod-load of dung. There was bigness in that grossness, and Claudel's *Processional* taught me a decisive lesson in mural composition, as generous and lasting as a visit to Assisi.

Léon Bloy furnished me with ready-made answers to problems outside art-matters that I had neither the ability nor the patience to tackle. I saw him as full of tenderness and pity. To this day, I understand his admirers, but not at all his apologists or his extenuators. Bloy believed in a world peopled by gruesome puppets. More often than not, his Guignol, with red hooked nose and carnal leer, and humps back and front, and much strident-mouthed nonsense, wears the black gown of the ecclesiastic or, fancier still, a bishop's mitre. It did not bother me any more than had the cathedrals' Last Judgments or Dances of Death, that were hardly ever more polite. At the heart of the matter there remains the fact that Bloy was in love with sanctity. Having told in his *Last Columns of the Church* of his disillusion with men whose profession should have been holiness, this Catholic Diogenes with his lantern sank to the chin in the sewers of Paris and haunted its bordellos in a ceaseless

hunt for a living contemporary saint. He never thought of looking where we now know for a fact that a certified saint sat—during eleven years of that search—namely, on the throne of St. Peter.

I adopted Bloy's concept of society in all its crude black-and-white, home-made theology, as angular as were the block books and pilgrims' penny sheets of the Middle Ages. Bloy's flair as a puppeteer delighted the boy in me, who had sat in knee-pants only a while before at similar performances, in the open under the *frondages* of the Champs-Élysées. In Bloy's playlets, the rich man was always all evil and, doubly leaded by sin and by the weight of a massive gold coffin, his body at the Resurrection would sink plumb to hell. Contrariwise, his interlocutor, the poor man, was all holy, and his mangled remains at the end of time, from whatever garbage heap the rich man had ordered them thrown onto, would reunite and rise unhampered and white to glory. Getting very much into the spirit of the play, I too longed to see the camel squirm and wish he was a snake, forever trying and forever beaten at his sport of squeezing through the needle's eye. I remember laughing aloud at an ecclesiastical footnote in a New Testament, meant to comfort, pseudo-archeological and very nineteenth-century: it mentioned for a fact how, in biblical Jerusalem, one of the lesser outer gates was called "The Needle's Eye" because camel drivers feared this bottle-neck to fast caravan traffic.

My life in France was on the whole rational, national, obeying this often heard dictum that a Frenchman is a man who ignores geography. There were though, simultaneously, un-French elements at work. Russian, *sephardim*, Aztec ancestors, warmed my blood to adventure. In art, I accepted as part of my patrimony the monstrous chubby forms of Indian idols, the squatty masked heroes of Mexican cos-

mogony, without letting go a whit of those other models, Poussin's "Eliezer and Rebecca," and Ingres' "Apotheosis of Homer."

For those ingrown exotic elements, Mexico furnished an outlet. My first Mexican priest, seen at landing, at Mass in the cathedral of Vera-Cruz, happened to be a genuine *Indio verde*, and all through the Consecration I watched lovingly the nape of dark green skin between the fringes of white hair and the gold galloon of the Sunday vestments. I was at last to see alive and rooted in its own soil what I had apprehended in Paris only from fragments, pressed between the pages of manuscripts dry as herbariums, or embalmed in museums' glass cases. For a while, I would be nothing but eyes, taking in this new face of the Church. I can only hope that, as in the case of the juggler somersaulting his devotions before Our Lady, there was a certain prayerful residue in my looking, or else I must confess to total distraction.

In France the visage of the Church had been not unlike the art of Maurice Denis, like a maypole dance in May, or a provincial out-door procession of Corpus Christi: little boys in blue satin and little girls in pink organdy holding beribboned baskets filled with rose petals to strew on the passage of the Host. In Mexico, the climate of the Church was reminiscent of late Fall, red leaves decaying underfoot or heaped for burning. It also looked like the art of Zurbaran: a black battleground strewn with the guts of martyrs and of heretics.

United States Catholics, if they think at all of the Inquisition, profess it to be a sort of Guy Fawkes propped high by disputing Protestants to embarrass us. In Mexico, over two hundred manuscript volumes filed in the National Archives tell its detailed local story since the sixteenth century. The stench of human flesh roasted for religious reasons still hangs on the air. Indians came to the Church so readily

because it mirrored features of their old faith. The burning of heretics, with whatever zeal it was pursued in colonial times, remained a petty affair compared to the rate of human sacrifice of the pagan past; twenty thousand slain in one day at the dedication of Mexico's main temple. The Church turned towards the Indians a terrifying face, one that France had not seen since the thirteenth century and the Albigenses. Indians recognized and liked what they saw. Barring the technicality of giving over the culprit to the secular arm, a gesture as swift as any sleight of hand, it was the Church that garbed the lapsed and the relapsed in yellow robes and conical clownish hats and saw them to the stake. In their turn, heretics did not mind overmuch, as no man will readily slight his own role as a menace to Church and State.

There is no modern unwillingness to go on with such fiery sport: when American Shriners innocently held their convention south of the Rio Grande, they were barred by popular wrath—that grew nearly to the size of an insurrection—from visiting the Basilica of Guadalupe, lest an Heaven-sent earthquake rip it in two.

In the nineteenth century, when the freethinkers came to power, they retaliated. By the 1920's it was the Catholic who had become the hunted and the killed. The persecution of the Church that I witnessed in Mexico makes gory reading, and made not a few true martyrs. So, why gloss over a past as brutal as was that present? Perhaps, instead of hiding the past, we should rekindle a feeling of horror in the presence of heresy. In a world become Caesar's own, today's active horror is confined to economic communism. There are no defenders of the antiquated dream of the Inquisitor, that of preserving Christendom whole, though it is the greater aim and immeasurably the purer passion.

The Mexican Church of today reminds me incongruously of these stores I have seen in mining ghost towns that are

adobe shacks with false fronts. It is at an uneasy transitional stage, with a highly groomed group of priests trained in United States seminaries, ready to give Mexico the blessings of what they have learned North—one could say the latest models of spiritual plumbing. But it is still the body of low church men, the country priests, missionaries in their own tropics, fluent at Indian tongues and as poor as Indians, that ministers to the great bulk of souls. As did the sixteenth-century priests, and at a scarcely slackened pace, they butt full-force against a pagan world in which there is more than an overtone of Satanism. In each village, as a matter of fact, the priest's white magic is pitted against the magic of the witch. I can swear to these men's zeal and to their squalor. I cannot swear in all cases to their scholasticism, or their sobriety. I cannot swear to their grasp of the meaning of social justice: the priest who lives on a big plantation, mans the owner's private chapel, is accepted as little better than an overseer, the difference being that his job is to keep the workers in line with the Host, instead of with a whip. But what immeasurably compensates for the shortcomings born of living in a feudal order is the fact that no Mexican preacher will ever bore, ever fail to exalt or to edify. The public admission of the average United States priest that he too is a sinner seems made with a thin-lipped mental reservation. The length to which the Mexican priest will go to publicly prove that he is a sinner, his display of heart and organs and his tearful gesticulations, leave no doubt as to both his repentance and his frailty. Carried over by the redundancy of the Spanish language, fortified by the clipped sounds of the *nahuatl* tongue, the country priest is an instinctive mystic, apt at creating images as fragrant as those of a John of the Cross. He will work himself hoarse as he describes the beauties of the spiration within the Trinity; he will well nigh fall off his perch as the rope tightens

around Judas's neck and his cursed innards spill over on the frightened congregation.

I also liked what I saw of the last sliver of aristocratic Spain embedded in the neck of the Mexican Church like a fire *banderilla* in the neck of a bull. I watched the impoverished Marques de . . . , impervious to twenty years of revolution, who walked, draped in his cloak of Knight of the Holy Sepulchre, to church and his reserved stall, practically upon the altar, every morning at six. There, with the nonchalance born of long usage of his lordly privileges, unmindful of the plebeian congregation, he fiddled with his missal, picked his teeth, plucked at his nose and ears, fell asleep and awoke with a start to receive Communion. Perhaps, all that time, he was dreaming of *palomino* horses and pedigreed bulls, for the old Marquis is also the king of *charros*.

When I left Mexico for the United States, my devotions had become a more or less integrated blend of three racial attitudes—French, Spanish and Indian—and I talked to God in a number of languages. My piety paralleled the mixed aesthetics of the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, robed in tints so light and so dark of skin, dressed in the insignia of an Aztec princess, impressed by Heaven on a lowly palm mat, but with a clarity of statement worthy of a Poussin.

I was reluctant to add to my pious mixed hoard of churchly manners still another mode in another country. At first contact, the United States Church proved a riddle: the radical change of palette, to use a painter's term, puzzled me. Perhaps it was Anglo-Saxon cleanliness, the repeated scrubbing of white skins until they turn piggy-pink, that proved the tallest optical hurdle. I did not know then that most American priests are provided with microscopic salaries, under those of the meanest manual labourers, and that

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their outward emulation of the mannerisms of successful business men is but sheer mimetism. At first sight, I felt confronted by what seemed to be an army of salesmen in cassocks.

Merchandizing and packaging, two arts I had missed in my far-flung search for art, were met everywhere within the American Church, not unnaturally influenced by American business mores. To this day, despite much pulpit talk, I understand less about the mystery of duplex envelopes than I do about that of the Trinity. At a New York mission, I watched in awe how Dominican Fathers, inventing a kind of perpetual movement, sold us candles that were put upon the altar but not lighted, before being returned to the pile from which they were sold again, and this ad infinitum. Too many preachers will spill over the mute congregation that of which their hearts are full, usually disturbed dreams of a balanced parish ledger. I remember how, in a sermon on the multiplication of the fishes and loaves, the priest emphasized the fact that seven baskets of foodstuff were gathered after the crowd had eaten its fill: thus the point of the miracle was thrift. It was in the Coolidge era, and to me, so shortly removed from John of the Cross, something seemed amiss.

Catholic congregations, socked from above by the preacher and licked underfoot by the flames of hell, must appear to a publicity agent as the ideal captive audience, into which soap and deodorants and breakfast foods may be funnelled with only a token resistance. For the priest also, the temptation must be great to sell his lambs on something else besides doctrine and morals, at least to suggest a boycott, or a voting ticket, or the right kind of pressure on a Congressman. There is a frightening power in the agglutination of personalities into a mob, be it a pious mob. I shrink even from such justifiable events as the "optional" oath of

the Legion of Decency, now performed at Mass, once a year, with Prussian unanimity.

Another lesser stumbling-block, but one never far from my poor marching toes, is the matter of Irishness. Neither France nor Mexico had me prepared for the billing of Ireland as the star of Catholic nations. On arrival in New York, I was genuinely at a loss when a monsignor, lifting his voice and his arms to a jellied pitch of fake emotion, mentioned without naming it a certain little green island known as the navel of the world and its beacon of peace. I knew Manhattan to be an island, but it hardly could be called green.

I learned to mend my suspiciously foreign ways the hard way. Entering St. Patrick's one afternoon, I slid unobtrusively for prayer behind a column, closing my eyes to visual distractions. Not long after, I was rudely shaken to awareness by a beadle as tough as any bouncer: "No sleeping in church allowed." Despite this assault, I returned to St. Patrick's to pray at the shrine of the Little Flower and, finding the altar rail grill open, knelt close to her statue until another beadle, as manly mannered as the first, expelled me threateningly. Later on, as I mulled over the cause of his violence, I realized that I had also been kneeling near the money-box.

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness"; this counsel of mediocrity and similar proverbs from hell jar when they intrude on the thinking of a Church that offers for our veneration Job in his filth and Benedict Joseph Labre the lousy. Attempts at sanitary holy water distributors, dripping one germless drop of the sacramental in the palm of each of the faithful, have failed, but perhaps not for long. The public kissing of relics and of Christ's wounds on good Friday is accompanied by the queer rite of scrubbing the reliquary or crucifix clean after each of the faithful has piously polluted it. Our Lord Himself did not shy from mixing His Sacred

Spit with dust and using the resulting mud to cure the dumb and the blind. The Mexican priest, at a baptism, uses his own saliva for a sacramental purpose with the abandon of a tobacco-chewing hillbilly. Here we know better. "Spit is a horrid word"; though this cigar-selling slogan is hardly part of Holy Scripture, we let it influence the form of the sacrament: the original rite of "Ephpheta" has here become optional.

Now that the initial shock is over, I recognize many admirable traits of the American Church. It was only Spanish prejudice, modelling its code of ethics after that of the cadaverous hidalgos of El Greco, that made me find fault with a Church for being in the pink of its physical condition. It also took me a while to unravel, from under the maze of practical endeavours proper to the parish priest, more than one unborn contemplative. I truly love the simplicity and common sense with which American monastic orders have streamlined monasticism without hurting its essence. Standards of social and racial justice heroically upheld in the face of prejudice have dispelled my early fear of a clerical bourgeoisie. It is logical that the United States Church, unburdened with the glorious ancient architectures of its European sisters, should be first to link itself again, on a large scale, with the live art of living artists. I trust that when the seminarians I know have grown to positions of authority, they will roundly shed overboard from the ship of St. Peter its Satanic cargo of plaster junk, saints à la mode, polychromed in all flavours of ice cream.

I now live in Hawaii. Missionaries sent to the islands could take but small comfort in the only recorded precedent to their task, that of St. Anthony the Hermit baptizing an Egyptian centaur. After all, is not the Great God Pan, in his extrovert animality, an equally likely convert, and a much

more eligible one, than the close-lipped Mammon that reigns in less luxuriant climates?

Hawaiians revel in a physicality that clothes somehow fail to divert, hide or sublimate. In the islands, beauty and bulk have ever been synonymous and enormous fatness a privilege of royalty. Within this bulk is paradoxically embedded Hogarth's own spiral of Beauty, a serpentine law that mocks other, thinner, bodies which wear, hanging from their centre of gravity, a sense of weight as straight as the drop of a plumbline. The Hawaiian female may be shapeless in terms of a sculptural form and quite unlike the stable beauty of a marble Venus, but so is the swimming octopus. Arms that seem as boneless and untiring in their motion as tentacles taper delicately towards the agitated feelers of ever swaying fingers. Hawaiian bodies are most alive at the hips. For Hawaiians, the seat of noble sentiments is not the heart but the intestines. To prove that he is, as we say, of good heart, a man will not put his hand to the cage of the ribs, but heartily slap his belly, thus proclaiming that he is of *na'au ao*, a man with intestines made of light: he will refer to a schemer as a *na'au po*, one whose intestines are compounded of darkness. Thus it is fitting that history and religion be perpetuated by the motions of the hula, or belly dance. When the ladies of a sodality close in around the Holy Sacrament and march in procession, fearlessly clothed in Van Gogh yellow, how the gingerbread bodies sway, hard put not to reproduce the dancing prayer of King David before the Arch. In Mexico, Rome wisely allows ancient rites to mingle with Christian ones: squadrons of men masked as devils will dance their devotion before the altar. In Hawaii, there is no need and no desire for masks, as it is the body as such, and not as a symbol, that is a prayer in motion. Even though the full-blown hula is not performed in church it is an expected ingredient of church bazaars, and

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some of the best were danced by a girl who soon after became a Trappistine. I hope that, as St. Theresa of Avila kept her Sisters well provided with tambourines for the times when their Spanish feet itched for a dance, Trappistines will see their way to making allowance for the hula, or their Hawaiian sister may feel rusty when her turn comes to dance it again in Heaven.

In Hawaii also I experienced, though this time vicariously, the feel of the Church in China. My friendship with Dr. John C. H. Wu, then on the faculty of the University, made me witness a present identical with that past in which St. Jerome, minus the mythical lion, minus the authority of future Councils that would call his work blessed, braving even the expressed wrath of God and his threatened chastisements, laboured doggedly to bind together forever his two heritages, pagan literature and Christian thought. John Wu's translation of the Bible will doubtless become the Vulgate of China. Besides being the Oriental Jerome, Wu wishes also to emulate St. Thomas, who baptized Aristotle posthumously. It is John's prideful boast that he will drag by the hair into the company of the Blessed his own thought-fathers, Buddha and Lao-Tse. Even though these two shaped to their resemblance, however diluted, the major part of the earth, John wishes for them a superior glory, that of patriarchs who, thirsting for truth, met face to face on this earth the Unitive Vision.

This pageant of the Church that I relate as I saw it will seem to some perhaps too much like a pageant: a parade, colourful and motley, seen from a sidewalk where the spectator stands and cranes his neck, entranced but lacking the urge to join and take part. Perhaps I have stressed the role of the eye unduly. There is a still deeper contact with the Church wherein all geographical and racial dissimilarities become reconciled, a common denominator or nucleus that

binds together laymen and clerics all around the earth. This closest contact is again not particularly metaphysical but the tested exercise of another sense than vision. At those scattered moments in which I stop gaping at the show and mean business, the work of the eye is replaced by tactile experience. Physically the eye closes, while the finger-tips, tongue and skin make contact with the Church at its border in the sacraments. All the pomp, colour and rhythms of the liturgy do not match in efficiency the sacramental contact, from the dipping of the hand in holy water to the taste and texture of the Host at the palate, to, let us hope, the final massaging of feet and hands, ears and lids with the holy chrism of Extreme Unction. Sensuous to the last, my special field of devotion leans towards the physical matter without which sacramentals and sacraments could not happen. The one optional service that I rarely fail to attend is that of Holy Saturday, where fire and water and candle wax receive their blessing. Twenty years of teaching life-class have taught me that people are also matter, organic matter powerfully invaded by the Spirit, as are these other forms of matter on that Saturday morning. There is for me no deeper incentive to meditation than the fact that human bodies are pledged to resurrection together with the exercise of their senses. Perhaps Heaven, unlike the fluffy floating of clouds transpierced by light rays depicted in pious images, will surpass in its concreteness even this concrete world of today that it has been my vocation to observe and to paint.