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Les folios

En passant la souris sur une vignette, le titre de l'image apparaît.

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OF COMPASSION AND CIVILITY

May, 1963, 14 words at four words
per word length.

Shakespeare (almost)

On May 12, 1963, The New York Times ran a full page ad :
"A College President Takes a Stand on Campus Chores." Two-fifths
of the page showed three blow-up faces presumably owned by as
many S.S.S. carrying between them a placard with the single word
"amnesty" on it. Since the ad was sponsored by that virtue-
breathing, Bible-burping institution known as the Reader's
Digest, it is safe to assume that the picture had been duly
X-rayed and its high protein content carefully computerized
prior to being briefed to the Times' consumers. Cut out of a
far less odious shot, the greatly enlarged grinning long-haired
fist-clenching fang-sporting trio was meant to open one's in-
nocent eyes to the graphic evidence that "our" campuses are
besieged with dean-and-president-eating cannibals. As for
the placard, what could be more illuminating? Who, pray, who
indeed but past, present or future cons would ever think of
agitating for amnesty? In fact, no perfectly premeditated was
the picture that no caption was called for : even a cursory
glance told one that the Republic was ripe and ready to go to
~~the~~ pot. Still, take heart, men of good will : luckily, not all
college heads are edible material. First there were Professor
Mayakawa and his cops, now comes Father Mobergh and his civility.
That's what the ad was all about - Father Mobergh's civility
spread out over a "message" he wrote to the University of Notre

Some students and faculty, and which the Reader's Digest felt
happily bound to display beneath those most amiable faces.

Now, were it not for that civility business, I would have no
particular quarrel with the Reverend. To judge, from his prose,
he is no more pedestrian than any self-respecting college presi-
dent can any bump into nowadays. Like any one of them, he has
been lately quite dissent-conscious and dialogue-prone. Never
short of an historical utterance, he says with Olan that "Youth...
has much to offer - idealism, generosity, dedication, service."
His is the liberal's liberal sob about "our often non-glorious
civilization", "our world's wrongs", the "burning issues of our
society" and other such clichés - saying our without further ado,
saying it in the possessive form, thus attending youth's solid-
arity with a real youth discipline, a realm of which youth is
the universal virtue if only because the Reverend and his peers
do their holy best to sold it in their own likeness. But let us
be fair. Whereas it takes his peers scores of unpalatable books
to peddle their restorative pap, the Reverend took it upon him-
self to squeeze into one yucky message the sum total of the
intellectual and moral warps, twists, quirks and sophistries
proper to his cast. Such an impressive deed was quite naturally
destined to reach the kitchen entrance of Olympus, so much so
that Zeus-Minn had the author explain his recipe to chef Agnes.
There must have been a most civil confrontation : no use of
force was reported.

Beneath Father Beesburgh's voice of academic resonance, for the
shop can hear, the growl of the established under. Himself a

learned leader in pedantic generalities, he says "laws of the land", "open society", "moral operations", "legitimate means", "academic communities", etc., as if these were pure and sacred entities forever sewed into the fabric of life. And, last but not least, he speaks of civility: just let youth be civil enough and he will kindly ~~listen~~^{listen} to their grievances. Somehow it does not dawn on him that this brand of bureaucratic kindness is precisely what today's youth least wants; that American or French, German or Japanese, youth have no moral lessons to receive from one whose main function, whatever the rationalizations, is to studiously supply the ideological addictions for the blood-spattered bomb-glutted mess in which we live; that it is sheer impudence to demand civility in the profane sense of urbanity while 11.5 million people are on the verge of starvation in a country bursting with private and corporate profits; that it is a sinister joke to demand civility in the theological sense of natural goodness while the campuses are open to rapist merchants and military academies bent on debauching confused youngsters into becoming educated killers. Somehow it does not dawn on him that the students' incivility - whatever that means - is not aimed at college presidents and faculty as such, but at the repressive mystifications they embody.

"Complicated social mechanisms out of joint", offers the Reverend, "are not adjusted with sledge hammers." No sir. Not since last Sunday's sermon. That's why, to mention only a few places, Vietnam is being adjusted back into joint with valleys of American bubble gum, and Czechoslovakia with Bolshoi Theatre ballerinas, and Africa with Egyptian-imported raddant. In Greece,

Spain, China, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, you name it, wherever "normal operations" go very strange business are out and vitality is in. Except in Stutenland. There foul-mouthed young men and women spit, burn, rip and rape, while armed with bioregional spray and lollipop sticks amiable cops can rationalize about civil tears of attrition. You see, it isn't as if they did not "recognize the validity - sometimes even the necessity - of protest regarding the current burning issues of our society." They do, they do. Their educational philosophy may be about as exciting as Mortimer Adler's and their social thought about as fresh as Jeremy Bentham's, but they do allow for protest - well, yes, quite readily as since there it is with or without their recognition. After all, less cocky than celluloid Governors, they understand the need for safety valves: Discordia fit maior concordia. Not all their Latin was lost on the dome. Pleasant, they reckon, is the absence of consent, and discord makes concord more valuable. In fact, with the schools as attuned to "our world's wrongs" as a bishop's mitre to a burro's rump, and more young men joining the 40,000 G.I.s already slaughtered in Vietnam, and the truly brave ones being crazed and cracked in the military stockades, and millions of dark-skinned people rotting away in the ghettos, there better be some legitimate steam-letting - "assured, expended and protected".

Where does self-righteousness stop and corruption begin? Or is it plain paternalistic nincompoopery? - "assured, expended and protected..." Merle Ainslie as a scholar ^{and} in the Judeo-Christian tradition of civility would say. Overseeing their domains with the mental make-up of factory foreman, superintending them

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in the overt and avowed interests of the establishment, now university presidents piously propose to rule the students' unruliness as well. But - why not, indeed? If multi-million dollar corporations can be ~~not~~ ^{well} swallowed up by smart operators, why shouldn't well-read Doctors be able to manipulate hot-tempered youngsters? There is nothing fundamentally improper ~~with~~ ^{about} anger and rebelliousness if properly managed; granted the right planning, promoters and professors, it could even become a collegiate sport like football, hurdle racing or ~~some~~ ^{some} such cultural leapfrogging. Courses in accurate popcorn sniping, four-letter words phonetics, love-ins and other ~~gauche~~ ^{gauche} tactics could be taught; then once or twice a year the safety valves would be opened, time-honored saturnalia revived, sock deans and presidents chosen by lot from among Black Power and G.O.P. activists, and such a gush of pink steam released into the ionosphere through U.S. inspected coils that everyone with a new sense of duty toward higher education Dixie Senators would filibuster against compulsory haircuts in the armed forces and the S.A.R. applaud till their dentures fell out. Yes, there is no saying the ~~university~~ ^{university} of understanding university presidents could master if only the students were ever so little amenable to civility.

But what if they aren't? What if those "storm troopers" - Harvard's dean Ford dixit¹ - refuse, nay, spurn Wendell's modest proposal to assume, expand and protect² for them their own dissent? Well, any model university president will evidence with

1. See Harvard Today. Special issue, Spring 1969.
2. A civil albeit standard formula with sovereign States and sufficient mauling in on your territory. (Strictly for the record. No offense intended.)

the master of charts and diagrams that academic communities thrive on pure idea and knowledge; that unbiased verities and absolute Truth are their sole pursuit; and that though as a rule scholars are only human beings, so ingrained is their objectivity that never do they give us the sack for giving them the lie. But debunking an academic is utterly different ^{from} challenging academic. One thing is to hold that some particular man is a fraud, another that the whole institution stinks. In the first case one may be quite wrong and hence forgiven, in the second case one may be quite right and hence unforgivable. When the latter happens, exit Dr. Jekyll and enter Mr. Hydeakew. Sporting with relish and prosperity he grabs the bullhorn, calls in the bullies. "Those of you who want trouble, stay there; the police will see that you get it."³ They will, they will. And with an exquisite display of manners, too. How about a vignette for civility acclots to gargle with? Protested a brutal arrest, a faculty member "was thrown down, ~~he~~ ^{he} scuffed, led away with a riot stick pressed to his throat. An officer squinted once in his eyes. Another came from behind - 'How do you like this, you fancy-pants professor?' - and cut his head open with a blow from a riot stick that knocked him cold."⁴ Or that student whose camera was snatched, the film ~~snatched~~ ^{defused}, and while one cop said, "'No one's looking' (they) fractured his ribs, damaged a lung, thrust a riot stick under his genitals and hoisted up and down", in pursuance of which "they charged the boy with attempted murder."⁵ These were but two of the many facts

3. Leo LITWAK, Associate Professor of English: "We Need a Revolution", Look Magazine, May 27, 1969.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

performed by six hundred cops eager to outdo each other in the scholarly task of setting right one college gone left. Harder, they said. Not a single man was physically harmed by the students on all the campuses taken together, whereas scores of students have been maimed and a few killed by the cops. "No one's looking..." It seems that for once "the law" was mistaken. There was Dr. Jekyll's alter ego, and, ^{and} cocky he : "This has been the most exciting day since my tenth birthday, when I rode a roller coaster for the first time."⁶ So be it. Which brings one back to the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh.

To all appearances the Reverend is not a two-sword wearing samurai. "Compassion", he says, "has a quiet way of service." Thus one feels a sense of loss that he didn't witness "the law" in action at San Francisco State College. A great protester in his own right against brutality, he might have had the good fortune of being rewarded for his compassion with the fancy-pants-professor treatment - and O the rejoicing in Heaven where true Knights of ~~the~~ Faith are rather scanty these days. For he would have taken a stand against campus chaos - crocking heads, breaking ribs, damaging lungs, he who queries with sorrow, "Must it be so? Must universities be subjected, willy-nilly, to such intimidation and victimization whatever their good will in the matter?"

Or would he? ~~have~~ Looking more closely at the Reverend's tearful question one realizes with a start that the intimidators and victimizers are none other than the students who, having found "a cause - any cause, silly or not.... get a few determined people to force a confrontation at any cost of boorishness or ineptitude."

6. LEO LITVAK, ibid.

All right, suppose there* is the sub : does it warrant surrendering the campuses to the police? Or is there more to it than just boorishness and incivility - more than picketing the administration, disrupting a lecture or two, taking over a building, let's not be stingy - for deans and presidents to summon the cops, which they know is tantamount to smashing heads and ribs and lungs?

The answer, as it were, is spelled out in the Reverend's message : "If someone invades your home, do you begin a dialogue, or do you call the law?" The object of this rhetorical question, don't you see, is to state the humble fact that a college or a university is the president's and faculty's - not the student's - home. True, the students may be admitted on the premises, they may even become "members of the community"; but beyond that they are basically homeless there, seasonal squatters at best, and should they make a show of vanity like infringing on the proprietor's entrenched privileges, then... then... If that kind of trouble comes to the Reverend's homestead - and he "personally hope(s) it never does" - then... then the offenders "will be given 15 minutes of meditation to cease and desist." 15 minutes. To the second. Given - O Notre Dame. With fear and trembling. To each heart an inward meditation with itself alone. Pascal-like. 15 minutes. On the dot. Cease and desist. Marche au crève. Those who do not, "let them carry the blame and the penalty."⁷ Some will be suspended, others "charged with trespassing and disturbing the peace on private property and treated accordingly by the law." Meaning by the cops. Meaning broken skulls, broken limbs, broken teeth. Upon which "the university as we have known

7. Father Hesburgh's emphasis.

and loved it" will be adjusted back into its old/good joints, and
with it, fair enough, the incivility of the young ruffians cleansed
in their own cup of blood.

"Compassion has a quiet way of service" : Father Desburch's
niche is all set in Mr. Haykema's club.

Jean Malaquais