

**Prophets and Mystics: A Reflection on Teaching**

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ABSTRACT

Some confusions are more distressing than others. Those which impinge on my teaching rank among the more serious. Among these, one stands out from the rest. I have repeatedly noted but never made sense of what seems to me an odd if widely held perception within the mainline churches—I include Catholicism under this designation—of an essential opposition between prophetic witness and intense religious experience.

In the course of writing this reflection, I decided to return to the work of George Albert Coe in search of an explanation for the origins of this odd antipathy. Coe is considered, with John Dewey, one of the founders of the progressive religious education movement, of which I consider myself a latter-day adherent.

My expectations were not disappointed. Coe posits a radical opposition between the prophetic witness of the churches and what he considers the reactionary character of both the Catholic mystical tradition and evangelical Christianity, which tends to place undue emphasis, from his perspective, on what he calls “mystical conversion experiences.”

Before engaging Coe’s thoughts on the matter, I will briefly review what four other authors -- Joseph Epstein, Paul Fussell, Leo Tolstoy, and William James -- have to say on the same subject, this in order to frame Coe’s thoughts in a wider social context and to provide several counter-positions to Coe’s that will help me better frame my own.

The animating pedagogical preoccupation of this reflection is the religious formation of young men and women.

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*Epstein and Fussell*

Literary critic Joseph Epstein exhibits a fascination with the possibility that Christian mystical experience might hold the key, if only there were such a key, to challenging, even transcending, the need to celebrate invidious distinctions at the expense of others.

Central to Epstein's essay is a summary and interpretation of the poet W. H. Auden's experience of a profound religious experience and its ultimate failure to aid the great poet in transcending his own tendency to "invidious distinctions":

W. H. Auden, who thought himself a Christian, claims one warm June evening in 1933 to have been sitting with three colleagues—fellow teachers at a boys' school, two women and a man—and for the first time in his life he "knew exactly—because thanks to the power, I was doing it—what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself." No alcohol was involved, and no sexual interest among any of the four people. Auden recounts at that moment he "recalled with shame the many occasions on which I had been spiteful, snobbish, selfish, but the immediate joy was greater than shame, for I knew that, so long as I was possessed by this spirit, it would be literally impossible for me deliberately to injure another human being." The heightened feeling, he says, continued for roughly two hours, and lasted, in diminishing force, for two more days. "The memory of the experience has not prevented me from making use of others, grossly and often, but it has made it much more difficult for me to deceive myself about what I am up to when I do."<sup>1</sup>

"What Auden apparently had undergone," Epstein continues, "is the experience, or vision of *agape*, or Christian love feast, in which one feels a purity of love for all human beings, without invidious distinctions of any kind, the powerfully certain feeling that one's fellows are worthy of the same respect, sympathy, and consideration as one pays oneself. . . . how glorious it must have been to undergo—and, as Auden was too honest not to add, all but impossible to maintain."

Epstein's essay, while granting a guarded compliment to Christianity, or at least a particular kind of experience he calls "agape love," as providing a momentary respite from snobbery, ultimately despairs of the ability of such experience to inspire long-term transformation. "Live and let live," Epstein continues, "remains the most sensible of mottos, and so much less demanding than the Golden Rule. Time for me to adopt it as my own. What I should prefer is to go through the rest of my life snobbery free, looking neither up nor down but calmly off into the distance. I should like to spend the rest of my days without anger or bad feeling and with a fine social indifference, cultivating a kind of objectivity that Schopenhauer thought constituted genius."

By way of conclusion, Epstein provides insight into his own sense of why mystical experience cannot finally challenge the social and psychological utility of embracing snobbery:

Snobbery will die on the day when none of us needs reassurance of his or her worth, when society is so well balanced as to eliminate every variety of injustice, when fairness rules, and kindness and generosity, courage and honor are all rightly revered. But until that precise day arrives—please, don't mark your calendar just yet—snobbery appears here to stay.

Unlike Epstein, Paul Fussell, in his *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*, allows for the possibility of transcending snobbery by opting out of the class system entirely.<sup>2</sup> Fussell's advice on this matter is, in my opinion, undermined by his tone, often disdainful and petty. Fussell seems to bear a particular antipathy to working-class sensibilities. There is, also, if I am not mistaken, an undercurrent of angst—Fussell's own, I suspect—permeating the text. When Fussell asks, "What class are we in and what do we think about our entrapment there?" I think he might do better using the first person singular.

Fussell's antipathy toward the working class is disguised by occasional quips at the expense of the middle and upper-middle classes, pointing out their own anxieties about their relative positions within society and their pretentious if unsuccessful attempts to mimic "upper-class" tastes and sensibilities. Here and there, Fussell also chides the upper classes themselves, whom he sees as intellectually lazy and without drive or curiosity.

But Fussell is most cruel when about the business of bursting the bubble of those, for instance, who might think earning a college degree is their ticket out of the working class and into middle-class respectability: "Having a degree from Amherst or Williams or Harvard or Yale should never be confused with having one from Eastern Kentucky University, or Hawaii Pacific College, or Arkansas State, or Bob Jones."

All in all, Fussell paints a picture of class structure within American society, which while allowing for all kinds of fantasies of social mobility, really permits very little. How you dress, where you are from, whether or not you attend church, how you decorate your home or apartment—all these are indicators of who you are and most likely who you will remain for the rest of your life.

In the final chapter, his final essay in what reads like a collection of essays, Fussell attempts to provide a way out. He describes what amounts to an emergent ideal-type, one not captured by or stuck in any single class. These men and women, "X people," as he calls them, tend, when deciding where to live, to eschew notions of propriety and prestige and choose to live near a delicatessen or a good wine shop instead. The decor of their living space could not be scored on Fussell's own social quiz chart, since the X person's home furnishings may in fact be what Fussell calls a "parody display." Where in upper-middle-class or even upper-class homes you might expect to see copies of *The New Yorker* or *Vanity Fair*, in an X's residence you are more likely to find *Mother Jones* or *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*.

There are a couple of problems with Fussell's proposal for escaping the manacles of social stratification. First of all, as David Brooks's book *Bobos in Paradise*<sup>3</sup> attests, the recent emergence of a similar social strategy of melding bourgeois comfort with bohemian tastes is not a collective strategy that stands outside the class structure but, rather, the latest manifestation of middle- and upper-middle-class pretension.

More seriously, and harkening back to Epstein's claim that snobbery and class distinctions are, at a deeper level, a subspecies of the human tendency toward making invidious distinctions at the expense of others, Fussell's X people certainly have a long way to go. "When an X person, male

or female,” Fussell says, “meets a member of an identifiable class, the costume . . . conveys the message ‘I am freer and less terrified than you are.’”<sup>4</sup>

As for religious faith—Christianity in particular—Fussell, unlike Epstein, not only dismisses, by implication, the possibility that faith could have any role in transcending the deterministic structures of social class, but disqualifies faith entirely from having any place in his idealized image of the X people:

Although they may know a great deal about European ecclesiastical architecture and even about the niceties of fifteen centuries of liturgical usage, X people never go to church, except for the odd wedding or funeral. Furthermore, they don’t know anyone who does go, and the whole idea would strike them as embarrassing.<sup>5</sup>

What is it, then, about these X people that allows them to escape from the social constraints that so limit and define the rest of us? Having turned their backs on faith and class interest, the X strategy is based on superior intelligence, skill, and force of personality. They are smarter than the rest of us, who remain caught in the social structures we were born to, and they are stronger, too. People like that, it’s easy to understand, need only attend church for the odd wedding or funeral.

In summary: Paul Fussell and Joseph Epstein agree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to escape the gravitational pull of classism, that is, of defining one’s own personhood with reference to what Epstein calls “invidious distinctions,” distinctions that inevitably lead to various manifestations of “snobbery.” Both essayists also have opinions, strong ones, on how religious faith may or may not aid in attempts to extricate ourselves from the near deterministic power of social competition.

For Epstein, it is perhaps only intense religious experience that has a chance of challenging the ethos of social stratification, though ultimately the transformative power of such experience proves ephemeral. For Fussell, however, the transformative power of religious experience vis-à-vis the social structure is—given his disdainful dismissal of all things religious, save elements of aesthetic and historical significance—left unaddressed.

### ***James and Tolstoy***

I freely admit that the next essays, Leo Tolstoy’s *Confessions* and William James’s *What Makes Life Significant*, are more to my liking. Both challenge Epstein’s dismissal of the relation between intense religious experience and personal transformation, each presenting, in my judgment, a more credible account of the possibility of breaking through the fetters of class consciousness than that represented by Fussell’s depiction of the X character ideal.

Epstein and Fussell address similar issues, but neither one cites, or to my knowledge is influenced by, the other. The case of James and Tolstoy is different. William James was fascinated with Tolstoy’s writing and cites his novels and essays in numerous places. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, for instance, Tolstoy becomes the very archetype of James’s “twice born” soul.

James's sense of identification with Tolstoy's religious trials and triumphs is indicated by the fact that James places his own experience of panic-fear, and near despair next to Tolstoy's own within *Varieties*. Concealing his own experience by attributing it to "a melancholy Frenchman," apparently in order to hide the depths of his own struggles from his readers, James relates the following incident from his own life. The immediate context of James's account is his reaction to seeing a patient in a mental ward in an institution outside of Boston:

He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. . . . *That shape am I*, I felt, potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. . . . I mean that the fear was so invasive and powerful that if I had not clung to scripture texts like "The eternal God is my refuge, etc.," "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy burdened, etc.," "I am the resurrection and the life, etc.," I think that I should have grown really insane.<sup>6</sup>

James's words in this passage only hint at his own "deliverance," his own "twice-bornness," if in fact it is fair to characterize the eminent pragmatist in this way, but speak volumes of his own fears and doubts and why, other than out of mere intellectual curiosity, he finds Tolstoy's post-conversion writings, especially his autobiographical essays, so compelling.

What James selects from Tolstoy's own account of his conversion in *Varieties* is instructive, in that it tells us something about James's sense of Tolstoy's linking of radical religious experience with social transformation and informs his more or less friendly criticism of Tolstoy in "What Makes Life Significant":

"I remember," he says, "one day in early spring, I was alone in the forest, lending my ear to its mysterious noises. I listened, and my thought went back to what for these three years it always was busy with—the quest of God. But the idea of him, I said, how did I ever come by the idea?"

"And again there arose in me, with this thought, glad aspirations towards life. Everything in me awoke and received a meaning. . . . Why do I look farther? a voice within me asked. He is there: he, without whom one cannot live. To acknowledge God and to live are one and the same thing. God is what life is. Well, then! live, seek God, and there will be no life without him. . . ."

"After this, things cleared up within me and about me better than ever, and the light has never wholly died away."<sup>7</sup>

Next, James quotes Tolstoy to establish the link between his radical conversion experience and his dismissal of the significance of social distinctions: "I gave up this life of the conventional world, recognizing it to be no life, but a parody of life, which its superfluities simply keep us from comprehending." James adds that "Tolstoy thereupon embraced the life of the peasants and has felt right and happy, or at least relatively so, ever since."<sup>8</sup>

It is important to add to James's account that Tolstoy did not attempt to embrace the life of

voluntary poverty and emulate the simple faith of the peasants simply as a result of his conversion experience. The influence of Russian peasants on Tolstoy's religious life pre-dated his conversion. It is also instructive, looking at Tolstoy's post-conversion writing, to note the role that an Augustine-like illuminative experience provoked by Tolstoy's reading of Matthew 5:38–45 played in his growing commitment to social transformation. A sentence from the fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, repeated almost incessantly, mantra-like, by Tolstoy in *My Religion*, is "resist not evil." Indeed Tolstoy's celebrated notion of "non-violent resistance" itself owes much to his reflections on this one sentence.<sup>9</sup>

William James's essay "What Makes Life Significant,"<sup>10</sup> fittingly enough for our context, appears in his collection of essays *Talks to Teachers*. James's essay is in large part an affirmation of Tolstoy's vision of the relation of radical conversion to social transformation, though it does also contain a gentle but telling criticism of Tolstoy's perspective, one that I think has implications for theological education.

James's essay begins with an interesting sense of his disaffection for his own social class as symbolized by a description of his brief visit to one of the famous Chautauqua retreats in upstate New York. He speaks of these Chautauqua gatherings as "serious and studious," as resembling "a first class college in full blast," and featuring both "a seven hundred voice chorus" and a bevy of "distinguished lecturers." But upon leaving Chautauqua, James is surprised by his own reaction "when emerging into . . . the dark wicked world again." Rather than feeling a sense of loss or nostalgia for Chautauqua and all it stands for, James finds himself saying, "What a relief."

Later in "What Makes Life Significant," James issues a forthright confession of his own blindness, and the blindness of his social class, to what he has since come to regard as the considerable virtues of the working class. He also relates an incident, a kind of epiphanal revelation that changed his mind, even as it moved his heart to compassion, if not identification. The epiphany occurred as James rode a train through Buffalo, New York, and witnessed laborers moving intrepidly on a skyscraper then under construction: "As I awoke to all this unidealized heroic life around me, the scales seemed to fall off my eyes and a wave of sympathy greater than anything I had ever before felt, with the common life of common men began to fill my soul."

Having related his own milder conversion experience, he turns to Tolstoy, expressing empathy for Tolstoy's radical conversion and praising the fruit it bore in his disinvestment from class privilege and his embrace of voluntary poverty, suggesting as he does that America could well use a prophet of Tolstoy's stature and power.

James, however, soon qualifies his praise, contending that Tolstoy's conversion experience has convinced Tolstoy that all social distinctions and pursuits, all achievements and differences of status are meaningless. James for his own part refuses to go that far, commandeering nothing less than the full force of "the common sense of the West" to his cause. James argues that although "the inner joys and virtues are the essential part of life's business" (as Tolstoy believes they are), "some positive part is played by the adjuncts to the show." Tolstoy's vision of life, derived from his mysti-



cal deliverance, has, from James's perspective, a serious flaw. For Tolstoy, "the whole phenomenal world and its facts" are "a cunning fraud." "But instinctively," James adds, again speaking of the Western sense of things, "we make a combination of two things in judging the total significance of the human being . . . inner virtue and outer place."

It is interesting that James criticizes Tolstoy in this way within the essay, since in *Varieties* and elsewhere he finds himself more often the defender of the importance of immediate religious experience, what he calls "immediate luminousness," as a legitimate criterion by which we decide the truth and value of religious belief. Two other criteria, "moral helpfulness," best understood as akin to what we now call "empowerment,"<sup>11</sup> especially psychological empowerment, and "philosophical reasonableness,"<sup>12</sup> akin to what Gadamer calls "pre-understanding" and exemplified by James's appeal to "the common sense of the West," also come into play. These three elements together constitute the "full fact" of consciousness for James.

Keeping these three criteria in mind, Tolstoy's error, from James's perspective, is an error of inattentiveness: Tolstoy has allowed the power of his mystical vision to annul, to cast a veto, as it were, over the other legitimate voices, those of tradition, manifest in his notion of shared common sense, and empowerment.

It is instructive, in this context, to note that like many who have experienced radical conversion, Tolstoy distrusts, perhaps unnecessarily, apparently harmless or even virtuous elements of his former life, particularly his former "pursuit of intellectual excellence" and his stated intention to "strengthen his own will," as if these personal projects were now rendered meaningless as well.

James's criticism of Tolstoy represents an indirect indictment of Epstein and Fussell also, though for differing reasons. For Epstein, as with Tolstoy, the expectation is that the leveling of social distinctions and the living out, over time, of this transformed perspective could be the product of intense religious experience alone.<sup>13</sup> Recall that once Epstein saw that Auden's experience of agape love soon faded and, with it, his momentary deliverance from snobbery and the calculus of "invidious distinction," Epstein quickly turned his back altogether on religion and religious experience as playing a role in the transformation of class consciousness.

Fussell, unlike Epstein, but oddly similar to the pre-conversion Tolstoy, also relies on the exercise of a keen intellect, as well as on force of personality, to escape the pull of social class, while dismissing the power of faith and religious experience as unworthy of consideration.

Still, I have to wonder if James's more inclusive approach, based on his three criteria, is really a corrective to Tolstoy's more single-minded vision. Especially from a pragmatic view of things—and after all, William James all but invented pragmatism—Tolstoy's mystical vision of nonviolent resistance (despite what would appear to be its tendency to invite disempowerment with its uncritical championing of self-sacrifice and surrender of the will and his sometimes patronizing view of the peasants he sought to emulate) has, nonetheless, through his spiritual heirs, especially Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others as well, proved itself to be of unique historical significance.

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### ***George Albert Coe and Progressive Religious Education***

Both James and Tolstoy, though in differing ways, hold that conversion experiences can and often do play a central role in challenging class distinctions. Epstein, for his part, at least considers the prospect that such experience might blunt the power of invidious social distinctions, though he finally despairs of the notion. Only Fussell ignores the issue altogether, holding instead that resistance to the social scripts ascendant within society is the provenance of acuity of intellect and force of personality alone.

I include Fussell, in part, because, curiously, from my perspective at least, it is Fussell's radically antireligious perspective that most closely approximates that of George Albert Coe on the subject. For Coe, as we shall see, the capacity for scientific detachment and strength of character forged through adherence to Christian values are key to the prophetic witness of the churches.

Conveniently, for the sake of our discussion, George Albert Coe refers to William James at the outset of his criticism of mystical experiences, applying the term, as James does, though more loosely, to both Catholic mystical and Protestant evangelical traditions. Coe, however, draws a markedly negative conclusion from James's largely descriptive designation of the "ineffability" of mystical experience.

Before reviewing Coe's critique of mystical experience, I would like first to stress this esteemed and influential Christian religious educator's unflagging commitment to educating believers, particularly the young, to resist the unjust social structures associated with American capitalism. Coe not only exhorts resistance but also champions social analysis. Nor does he spare the Church itself once he gets under way, as we see in the following passage from *What is Christian Education?*:

Church members as a class are within the industrial system as an unprotesting part of it; they share upon equal terms with others, its denial of the supreme value of persons. Moreover, church organizations, in their capacity as employers, buyers, and sellers, have not achieved any moral distinction by their way of adjusting the economic relations of persons to one another.<sup>14</sup>

Coe's critique of Catholic and evangelical mystical tendencies reads more like a checklist than a sustained argument. Building on James, Coe first notes that if mystical experience and radical conversion experiences are "ineffable," they must also be "educationally sterile," since, by definition, they merely restate the beliefs and opinions that precede and inform them. In a related criticism, Coe claims that mysticism and radical conversion experiences perpetuate the opposition of sacred and profane, at the very moment "theology has begun the twentieth century committed to the doctrine of the immanence of God." Coe next questions the origins of the Catholic mystical tradition, suggesting that it derives from Neoplatonism and Eastern religions, sources he regards as antagonistic to his vision of orthodox Christianity. Finally, ignoring his own caveat regarding intellectual influences extrinsic to Christianity, he argues that modern psychology has revealed mystical experience to amount to little more than "self-hypnosis."



Coe's arguments, though availing themselves of James's notion of the "ineffability" of mystical experience, are in fact antithetical to James's perspective on the matter. For James, in the absence of radical conversion experience, or the more sublimated expressions of religious experience associated with the Catholic mystics, the commitment to the prophetic witness of liberal Christianity is likely to devolve into a form of mere "healthy-mindedness" that James associates with what others have called "muscular Christianity." Healthy-minded Christianity, while affirming the necessity of the virtue of "social helpfulness"—James's term for prophetic witness—cannot maintain its own vaunted "moral mood" over time. "The merely moral mood," James contends, "must give way, a native hardness must break down and liquefy." Indeed, James goes so far as to say—this in stark contrast to Coe—that the capacity or incapacity for such experiential transformation is what divides the religious from the merely moralistic character.<sup>15</sup>

Keeping James's notion of "the merely moralistic character" in mind and making no effort to hide my own biases in the matter, allow me to conclude this segment by briefly summarizing Coe's ideal image of the Christian youth, an image that I find both distressing and sadly prescient. If you hear echoes of Max Weber's own ideal types associated with his famous metaphor of the "iron cage"—especially those linking worldly efficacy, impersonality, and the rationalized manipulation of bureaucracies, as well as the more daunting adumbrations of "the polar night of icy darkness"—you are not alone.

Coe's description of three ideal types of "non-conformist" youth is arranged in ascending order. All three types represent a marked improvement, in his view, over conformist youth, who, like the vast majority of their elders, repeat the platitudes of faith regarding the equality of all people, while living in more or less uncritical adherence to the status quo.

"The attackers," the first and least effective of youthful non-conformists, tend to turn things upside down, to criticize, and to be very emotional about the whole thing and for this reason are relegated to a kind of honorable mention among their more worthy peers.

Next come the "appliers." The appliers prove somewhat "more patient" than the attackers and "endeavor to go the whole length with some approved principle, as, for example, Jesus' injunction to treat all men as brothers." While largely in control of their emotions, the appliers nonetheless lack the thorough "distancing" from emotion and bias characteristic of the scientific method in their application of Christian rules concerning the absolute value of persons.

Only the third type, "the investigator," goes behind the appearance of things through the mediation of intellectual processes "that sometimes have all the coolness of science."<sup>16</sup> It is above all this third ideal type, "the investigator"—constituted by the young men and women who evenhandedly and unemotionally apply Christian values to the social situation with the studied distance of the scientist, unimpeded by strong emotion, mystical or otherwise—that Coe champions and heralds as "one of the most solidly hope-giving aspects of the entire youth situation."<sup>17</sup>

Though Coe adverts to James favorably, it is doubtful that the compliment would have been returned. In the first place, the saint, James's ideal character type, is, generally speaking, both deeply

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emotional and intellectually gifted. For this reason reformers like Luther, Ignatius of Loyola, and Tolstoy himself are given places of honor in James's communion of saints. Further, though Coe is correct in suggesting that James considered "ineffability" a trait of mystical experience, he is wrong to imply that James suggests that this trait renders mystical experience redundant and therefore "educationally sterile." In fact, it is not through adding knowledge that mystical experience exercises its transformative power for James. It is rather by empowering beliefs already held but not as yet at "the center of consciousness" that mystical experience intensifies commitment to a life centered in service and compassion.

### **Conclusion**

Were I to conclude this essay with a brief theological reflection, I would expand on my Weber-inspired hunch about the "elective affinity" between Coe's thought and elements of the radically truncated religious world view Weber associated with the ascendancy of the Protestant work ethic, seconding Gregory Baum's contention that the moral pronouncements delivered from on high by Weber's "emissary prophet" must be balanced and extended by the contemplative-ascetic witness of the "exemplary prophet."<sup>18</sup>

But this is a reflection on teaching. A primary concern of mine, as a theological educator, is simply how we read texts with the students who find their way into our classrooms. I speak, given the context of this reflection, especially of those texts, often texts describing conversion experiences, that appear to inspire in those who read them what Bernard McGinn has described as a sense of "mediated immediacy"<sup>19</sup>—not an infrequent classroom occurrence in my experience.

It is surely proper, as theological educators, to teach students to extract propositional assertions from such texts and judge them on the basis of their cognitive warrants and compatibility with scripture and tradition. Similarly, it is not only legitimate but essential to read texts with an eye to whether they are likely to empower or disempower students, especially with reference to issues of race, gender, and class. But what of intense religious experience?

Every so often you see a work of scholarship that seems to hold together the elements of intellectual excellence, prophetic witness, and openness to the radical transformative power of religious experience in a manner that invites students and scholars alike to a rich variety of readings of the same texts. One such work is Benedicta Ward's *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*.<sup>20</sup> Ward combines historical acumen and feminist scholarship with an engaging writing style and an uncompromising insistence that the texts she evaluates be permitted to communicate the transformative emotional power embedded within the written page.

After calling attention to the fact that St. Augustine's conversion was an experience that brought him to tears, Sr. Ward notes that news of Augustine's conversion also elicited tears of joy from his good friend Ponticianus and, through Ponticianus, from his and Augustine's friends; and finally, of course, news of St. Augustine's conversion brought tears of joy to St. Monica, Augustine's mother,

who had prayed so long for her son's deliverance, for his salvation. In the quotation that follows, I italicize the words that speak directly to the classroom situation I have been describing:

When anyone discusses the healing fountains of conversion, it is in some way, through the gift of other people, and the waters of life thus received overflow in their turn into the lives of others, to fructify the deserts of human experience; *it becomes a chain reaction not only for those who have them but for those who read about the event.*<sup>21</sup>

Let me confess to you, by way of conclusion, that whatever else I do in teaching, whatever my tacit and explicit theological presuppositions, whatever I have to say and embody about the importance of upholding intellectual standards or resisting injustice in its multifarious forms, I do not ever wish to find myself counted among those, however well meaning, however well trained, who interrupt the "chain reaction" of tears and transformation Sr. Ward so powerfully portrays.

### Notes

**1** References to Epstein's essay are from Joseph Epstein, *Snobbery: The American Version* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), pp. 241–251.

**2** Paul Fussell *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System* (New York: Summit Books, 1983).

**3** David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

**4** Fussell, 181.

**5** Fussell, 185.

**6** William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1982), pp. 160–161.

**7** James, *Varieties*, p. 185.

**8** James, *Varieties*, p. 185.

**9** Leo Tolstoy, "My Religion," in *The Novels and Other Works of Lyof N. Tolstoi: My Confession, My Religion, The Gospel in Brief* (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1923), see especially pp. 83–87.

**10** William James, "What Makes Life Significant," in *Talks to Teachers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958).

**11** James's notion of "moral helpfulness" represents an element of his thought that both anticipates and influences Erik Erikson's notion of identity formation. Erikson details his debt to James in the prologue to *Identity, Youth and Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968).

**12** See James, *Varieties*, p. 18 and following.

**13** Though, as I have already indicated, James may not be, probably isn't, fair to Tolstoy on this count.

14 George A. Coe, *What Is Christian Education?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), pp. 269–270.

15 James, *Varieties*, pp. 105–111.

16 George A. Coe, *The Motives of Men* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), pp. 203–204.

17 Coe, *The Motives of Men*, p. 205.

18 Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2006); see especially pp. 156–162.

19 See “Theological Approaches to Mysticism,” the first section of the appendix to Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004).

20 See Benedicta Ward, S.L.G., *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1987), pp. 1–9.

21 Ward; italics mine.