of travellers shows the stomach to start over. Yet, a concern for spirituality faces even a third alternative--a double-minded hesitation between the world and God where, so far from trying to go beyond where it has not yet begun, is wanting in the courage to begin at all. Irony itself appears more often seductive than the object which it bears on. Who has not tarried so long with it as to avoid tempting himself into the position that the Gospel is, after all, a paradox? Whereupon with intellect freshly tittilated he must by all means suspend both personal piety and duty toward neighbor until he gets clearer, paradoxically, on the paradox. So much for the third alternative and, for that matter any and all alternatives. Let us rather try to begin at the beginning and do that by distinguishing, first, the beginning.

A genuine and Christian concern for Christian spirituality must see that its object is twofold: 1) spirituality as such and 2) spirituality distinguished by its Christian character. Spirituality, a quality of the devoted life, is shared in by all sorts and conditions of men, Christian and non-Christian, regardless of culture. Their devotion is qualified by a certain response to the fact of human finitude. It is not practiced in response to an awareness of this fact. Thus it is free of subjectivism or any debased experimentalism. Such men and women face human nature's radical limit as being simply the case and not a matter for explanation or manipulation. These persons are not seduced into pride of intellect by following theories of human nature or history which obscure, explain away or deny the case. Nor are they wasting energies on magical or technical efforts to alter the case.

They face the case and consent to it. And this consent is the first and basically spiritual act in the life of man. That comparatively few effect it

is attested by the classic Scriptures of all great cultures in that these documents exhort to an end no majority of men pursues singlemindedly, let alone reaches. It is in no sense a mere consent to death. That requires resignation only. This devotional consent requires faith, a divine energy; for the act of belief which this consent constitutes, is no matter of choice in a reasonable context which any reasonable person of good will might 'try on for size'. Hypothesis, theories, options have nothing to do with it. What is it then? It is consent to the non-relative primordial relation between finite being and the Infinite; and, in particular, to the non-relative primordial relation between man and God. Either this non-relative relation is the case or all differentiations and distinctions are without a stable reference and so illusory; and, if illusory, so is any observation that would pronounce them so.

This creaturely limit occasions for man the possibility of a primordial offense. Without the occasion for this first offense, the second occasion for offense, namely, the cross, is without ontological significance. This is a crucial matter for the Christian to observe, for unless the cross has ontological significance it reduces to a vulgar sentimentality from which no amount of moral, personal or collective heroics can save it. For man, the primordial, the ontological occasion for offense is irreducible since it turns upon the case and not on theory.

Either one takes offense at this non-relative primordial relation between himself and God, or in faith he consents to it. That one can deceive himself into believing he has made this consent--when in fact he has not even faced the possibility of the offense--is nowhere more apparent than in the history of philosophy. And where better to look than toward the pious crowd over

opportunity but also faith's trial. The trying of faith effects patience. (James 1:2-3). And unless patience is allowed to have 'her perfect work' we cannot continue completing ourselves in God; nor be ever learning, as Lady Julian of Norwich says, that "God is nearer to us than our own soul".

II

If, in the power of God, one through consent keeps himself from becoming enviously or contemptuously offended at the distance between himself and God he has made his beginning in the spiritual life. But he has not yet done with occasions for offense. At this point Christianity brings forward the second occasion. It is the Cross. It is not the tragedy of the cross that makes possible that offense. The Gospel will not leave it at that; for the tragic view of history accommodates itself only heroically to the record of man's inhumanity to man while savoring the sorrowful beauty of its own austere dispassion, its noble disdain and titanic self-affirmation. The historical cross occasions pity but not necessarily offense.

The possibility of offense at the Cross appears when the Christian confesses that it is God who hangs upon it; for there is a beginning which must be made here also. The beginning is found in the proclamation that the Word became flesh. It is not that God once entered history, stayed awhile, was treated atrociously and then departed--as though he were not always entirely present in the order of things that come to be and pass away. Is not the Word "the image of the invisible God...in whom all things were created through him and for him? And in him do not all things hold together?" (Col. 1:15-17). This we might accept without the possibility of offense if our piety were pure enough.

opportunity but also faith's final. The trying of faith effects patience. (James 1:2-3). And unless patience is allowed to have 'her perfect work' we cannot remain as always in God completing ourselves; nor be ever learning, as Lady Julian of Norwich says, that "God is nearer to us than our own soul".

II

If in the power of God one, through consent, keeps himself from becoming enviously or offended contemptuously at the distance between himself and God he has made his beginning in the spiritual life. But he has not yet done with occasions for offense. At this point Christianity brings forward the second occasion. It is the Cross. But it is not the tragedy of the cross that makes possible that offense. There have been many martyrs before and since Jesus of Nazareth. But the Gospel will not leave it at that; for the tragic view of history accommodates itself only poetically to the record of man's inhumanity to man, taking pride in the sorrowful beauty of its austere dispassion, its noble disdain and titanic self-affirmation.