

### Chapter 3

Paul had drifted imperceptibly into teaching. As early as he could remember he had wanted to be a preacher. If God was the Almighty Ruler of the Universe, then Paul wanted to be as close as possible to where the power was. Sometimes on Sunday morning he had been allowed to read the lesson; it was exhilarating to look out on all those upturned faces like empty vessels and feel the word of God pouring through him and filling them up to the brim. Once he had visited a dairy and watched the bottles rattling along the belt and into the great circular machine which fed them - just enough - and punched the caps firmly into place. It must be the most wonderful feeling in the world, he thought, to be a priest and administer the sacraments, placing the wafers, one by one, on all those gratefully extended tongues. How strange that men had taken so long to invent the assembly line when God had shown them how to do it so many centuries before.

Even before his voice had changed, Paul knew that he was particularly liable to the sin of pride. Sometimes he lay in bed and wrestled with his will, trying to bend it by brute force to the will of God. Why couldn't God simply make him humble? In the Bible, God was always appearing to people and straightening them out. Why didn't he, Paul, ever have any visions? Sometimes it was very hard believing in a God who never gave him any help whatsoever.

But he kept at it nevertheless. When he was fifteen he even wrote a sermon on pride and was allowed to read it one Sunday morning. It was called "The Hidden Sin". It was very well received. Everyone congratulated him after the service and Paul was prouder than ever. Years later, when he read *Murder in the Cathedral*, he found a kindred spirit in Thomas a Becket, but then it was too late to help.

When he was sixteen, Paul fell in love. Her name was Daphne and she had been in his geometry class the year before. They met again one day on a streetcar. Paul learned that her parents had taken her out of high school and put her in a fashionable boarding school for her last two years. She was very sophisticated and knew a great many rich people. Her parents let her smoke and drink wine with the family on special occasions. Paul had never smoked or drank, but the next day he bought a cheap pipe and a small can of Bond Street. It made him dizzy and tasted foul, but he got used to it after a few weeks. He never smoked at home.

Daphne belonged to St. Swithin's Episcopal Church. It looked like a small English Gothic cathedral, except that it was built of reinforced concrete. The rector was very high church and read the service with an English accent which disappeared afterwards when he shook hands with the congregation.

They were all dressed with expensive good taste and looked very much at home amidst all the silk and silver and walnut.

The choir sounded much better than the one Paul sang in. At Paul's church the choir only sang one anthem and led the hymns. The choir director was crippled and had a loud tenor voice which more than made up for the fact that he was the only tenor in the choir. When Daphne came to his church one Sunday, Paul felt ashamed of him and of the cheerfully noisy congregation of salesmen and mechanics and policemen. Daphne was very sweet and didn't say anything, but the next week Paul joined the choir at St. Swithin's. He explained to his parents that it would be very good musical training.

At school Paul had things just about the way he wanted them. He wasn't interested in sports and most of the other students weren't interested in anything else. By his last year, without much effort, he was editor of the school paper and had virtually been promised the annual D.A.R. scholarship.

Paul was popular with his teachers, partly because he seemed interested in their lectures and always laughed at their jokes. It wasn't that he was a hypocrite; he had always felt most comfortable in the company of adults and was very anxious to please them. Unlike his contemporaries, they never made fun of him for being different.

At St. Swithin's, Paul achieved a special status because he had decided to study for the priesthood. The other members of the League of Young Churchmen might come from more important families or have more money, but Paul had a special relationship with the Almighty. He studied manuals of devotion so as to learn all the places in the Mass where he could cross himself or genuflect. The exercise he scorned on the football field he almost made up for on Sunday morning.

To no one's surprise, Paul graduated from high school at the top of his class. His nearest rival was a negro boy who was very bright but who often neglected to do his homework. Paul both resented and admired his easy fluency. The boy wrote long and very funny essays peppered with deliberate grammatical errors and when these were corrected he grinned at his teachers in a way that made them uncomfortable. They suspected that he was mocking them and marked him down half a grade for being uncooperative. He couldn't afford to go to college and so after graduation he became an apprentice mechanic.

For his undergraduate studies, Paul went to a liberal arts college in central California. It was unsettling at first to find himself only one of a number of students who had been first at school, some of them brighter than he was. But the shock was more than compensated for by finding himself in a small

circle of compatible fellow-students and for the first time he began making close friends his own age.

One of Paul's professors was Dr. Goldstein, who was in charge of lower division studies in the humanities. Dr. Goldstein had dark deep-set eyes which looked straight into you but did not condemn what they saw. He lectured gravely and deliberately, without notes, walking slowly back and forth in front of the class.

Sometimes he looked as if he were in pain. He would trail off at the end of a sentence and stare at the floor in front of him, his arms hanging straight at his sides. Once he delivered an entire lecture lying on his back on top of the desk staring at the ceiling. No one giggled or made the slightest noise. Four years later Dr. Goldstein committed suicide.

THE CLASS was called "World Literature and Art." Paul was exposed for the first time to writers who had been only names to him. Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Dante, Rabelais, Dr. Johnson, Swift, Goethe – the wisdom of two millenia passed before him while Dr. Goldstein drew huge arcs on the blackboard, placing names and dates beside various segments. Profound abstractions faced each other between little arrows: myth—animal fable, classicism—romanticism, man—woman, form—content, love—death. Every artist, every writer took his place on the great cycles which welded them together into a gigantic interrelated structure, a Sistine ceiling of science and art and aspiration; and arcing far into the future was a prophetic cycle labeled "Pacific Basin Culture" – the artists still unborn who would carry on the unending task of inspiration and enlightenment.

Paul went to church less and less frequently. He began to look upon God as an aesthetic influence, whose function had been to inspire those works of art which most excited him: the paintings of Giotto, in which identifiable personalities began to peep through the formally symbolic figures of mediaeval art; the boisterous ribaldry of Rabelais, who treated God as an intimate drinking companion with an unlimited capacity and an eye for the ladies; urbane, civilized Chaucer, neither hierarch nor heretic, balanced, all-encompassing, never lacking in either piety or humor, the perfect churchman and the perfect gentleman; and, most of all, the Gothic cathedrals, those inexhaustible monuments to Mary and to Moloch, repositories of faith and terror, full of saints and goblins and kings and commoners, centers of worship and gossip, the mute witnesses of investitures and assassinations, the endlessly evolving outlets for the creative urges of bishops, merchants, stonemasons, silversmiths, sculptors, carpenters, weavers, and, laborers. The churches Paul knew were either mean or vulgar, their liturgy lacked grandeur, their parishioners were hopelessly common and middle class. God must be bored beyond endurance.

Or perhaps it was all a malicious joke. Since God had denied him intimacy, Paul could only deduce His nature from the external evidence. He began to wonder at the apparently infinite waste of evolution, the callous cruelty of war, the casual husbandry that would permit so many of His chosen creatures to live and die in ignorance and mortal sin before sending a sacrificial messenger to tip them off. Paul was both stimulated and frightened by these philosophical speculations but he found relief in the fine arts, where beauty was transcendent and everything had a beginning, a middle, and an end. Thank God for Dr. Goldstein.

PAUL continued to see Daphne for a while at weekends. She had gone to Stanford (Paul's family couldn't afford it) and was dated by several rich upperclassmen, but she still seemed to be attracted to Paul. He wanted very much to make love to her and kept gathering his courage to ask her but at the last minute he was always afraid she would refuse, or worse, that he wouldn't be able to go through with it. All the Great Books, aside from the Bible, approved of sex, but something at the back of his mind told him he shouldn't.

While he was still trying to decide what to do, he was seduced one night by a thirty-year-old schoolteacher who had come back to college for graduate work. She had been separated from her husband for six months and was suffering from acute deprivation. The first night Paul was impotent, but she was very understanding and three nights later all went well. Paul was relieved at his success but at the same time he found her vaguely repulsive and a sense of shame kept him from seeing Daphne, who was too proud to call him and ask what had happened. When the schoolteacher had to leave college suddenly at the end of term, Paul was too embarrassed to go back to Daphne. He didn't have sex again until he went to Berkeley.

PAUL idolized Dr. Goldstein. His ability to mesmerize a classroom made Paul think seriously of becoming a professor. Teaching was much more exciting, really, than just delivering a sermon once a week. Besides, Paul had begun to develop a genuine intellectual curiosity. When Dr. Goldstein offered to recommend him for a graduate scholarship in English at Berkeley, Paul jumped at the chance. He loved San Francisco and his slight familiarity with it had convinced him that it was the only civilized city in America. He didn't need to visit the others, having read about them extensively.

Paul's bishop was secretly relieved when Paul told him about the scholarship. He felt that Paul was becoming too intellectual to be a priest and was out of touch with the common man. Bishop Spaulding himself was constantly in touch, particularly with the common business man. He went regularly to Kiwanis luncheons and was very much in demand to give the

invocation at business and political conventions. He was also a chaplain in the Naval Reserve and had been appalled when Paul told him that he had registered as a conscientious objector. When Paul assured him that he intended to go on to seminary after completing his graduate study at Berkeley, Bishop Spaulding said yes, yes, do keep in touch, and patted him on the back. They never saw each other again.

When Paul graduated from college he decided to go straight into summer school at Berkeley. His parents now lived in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley and the thought of another summer living at home and working in the cannery was more than he could stomach. He hated the relentless heat and the brown arid miles of featureless landscape, with the Sierra Nevadas ragged against the horizon, too far to visit but near enough to tantalize. And most of all he hated his parents' friends: farmers, salesmen, small-town schoolteachers, who speculated endlessly about the crops, the autumn rainfall, and the probable outcome of their favorite television serials.

And so, as soon as commencement exercises were over, Paul packed his clothes and his library, dismantled his hi-fi set, loaded the borrowed family station wagon, and set off for the Promised Land.