

- For these and all the countless blessings of our life, we bow our hearts gratefully and in reverence. And for Him in Whom life became a redeeming grace, we give thee all thanks and praise and adoration, O Lord. Almighty God, who has committed to thy people the ministry of intercession, hear us now, as we pray for others and grant that our hearts may be filled with peace and charity, that the prayers we pray may become acts of our life to meet our neighbor's need. Let us pray for the whole church of God found throughout the world, particularly for the fourth assembly of the World Council of Churches, as it continues its sessions in Sweden seeking for all of us new ways of renewal, of unity, and of witness in our day. Most gracious Father, we humbly beseech Thee for thy great church universal. Fill it, we ask, with all truth and in all truth, with all peace. Where it is in error, reform it. Where it is in want, furnish it. Where it is right, strengthen and confirm it. And where it is rent asunder, heal Thou its divisions. Almighty and everlasting God who by Thy Holy Spirit, didst preside in the first assembly of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and has promised to be with thy church always, even unto the end of the world, grant, we pray Thee, unto thy servants and our representatives at the World Council of Churches, Thy gracious presence and blessing. Deliver them, we ask O God from error, from pride and from prejudice. Inspire them with wisdom, love and courage to the end that out of their works, Thy kingdom may be advanced by ministers and congregations renewed and Thy gospel of reconciliation and hope may be made known in our confused and warring world. We beseech Thee to hear us O Lord, as we pray now for all in sickness, in pain, and in distress. We ask that Thou wouldst give strength to the weary, relief to the suffering, and comfort to those who are sad. We pray, O Lord, for those who have given up praying for themselves because experience has made them cynical or wary of asking. We pray for those who dislike what they have become but will not turn unto Thee for forgiveness and for those who have made uneasy peace with their conscience. Lord, hear these our prayers of intercession and strengthen us to be a strength unto others. O Lord, whose vast sight takes in the varied anguish of all men, we beseech look upon us, old and young, gathered in our need to praise Thee and to set our hope on Thee. Thou O Lord art still our refuge and all our confidence is in Thy righteous judgment. If we are young, guide us, we ask, in spite of our perplexities to make clear decisions. If we are old, gird us with the strength of peace that our labors, humble as they may have been, may not have been in vain. If we are working at unpopular tasks amid indifference or hostility, grant us the courage which only integrity can give. O Lord, this day began, for some of us, joyfully, for others grimly. Some will spend the hours without anxiety. Others will be caught up in the web of living pain. Some will exult in new vistas of hope and others will carry a burden of heart, too heavy to see very far beyond the moment. Some of us, O Lord, have known Thy forgiveness. And some of us are still seeking it. Some know Thee and some do not know whether they know Thee or not. We are not all alike, but all of us have need of Thee and Thy mercy. We ask now that Thou would minister unto our particular needs as we voice them silently before Thee. God, our Father, we ask that Thou would give us courage to continue to dream dreams and to see visions, the visions of our fathers' faith. Help us to welcome the changes that Thou hast given to be the part and parcel of our time. Teach us so to lay hold on Christ that we, Thy people, might have power to bring to fruition the potentialities of every human being we meet and every human institution to which we belong. Save us, O Lord, from the impatience that would destroy, from the zeal that would spurn the efforts of those who wear different labels or speak with a

different tongue. Help us, O Lord, to continue to seek to bring forth and to perfect what is good in all men. Give us, we ask, O God, deep sympathy with all who are depressed by unfulfilled hopes, with all who despair of themselves, with all who are tempted to give up the struggle for better things. May we so live in their midst as followers of Him who came not to destroy, but to fulfill, that they might turn, find Him and in Him find their true life. We ask it for His name's sake. Now we asked Thy continued blessing as we pray the prayer of discipleship that He taught us to pray together saying, "Our Father Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

- This is a second sermon on William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, the second of two meditations on the author's meditation on history. The first sermon dealt with racism, with white racism. The wind which has sewn the horror wind of black racism the place of the individual and of the church when Christian was presented as two resources which may transform a battle into a brotherhood and fracas into fellowship. Now today, let us look at Nat Turner, the pathetic hero and tragic villain, and reflect on what awaits him after he has been hung by the neck until he is dead, dead, dead. And let us do so by asking three questions. What, why, and whither? First, the what of it. Nat Turner was born into slavery on October 1st, 1800, the property of Benjamin Turner, hence Nat's surname. But he was a cut above the ordinary farm hands, the faceless and nameless toilers, because he was the son of the cook, and so was brought up to be a house nigger. His mother's lived-by slogan was, "Us folk in the house is quality." As a young boy, he stole a book with the appropriate title, *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* by John Bunyan. And the discovery of the theft led to an educational experiment, could a slave be taught to read? He could, but he was not tutored, either to interpret or to understand. His eagerness and capacity to learn led to an apprenticeship in carpentry, to the position of a journeyman and to the promise by his owner that when Nat was 25, he would be emancipated, a free man. But it was not to be. Samuel Turner's estate failed and he quit Virginia for Alabama, leaving Nat to the Christian care of a homosexual preacher who, instead of arranging Nat's freedom, sold him into real slavery. Nat had another string to his bow, besides being a sound carpenter. He became a preacher, sermonizing, baptizing, studying the Word like passages of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Daniel. He seemed to be almost a total stranger to the law in the Old Testament and to the gospel ethic of the New Testament. He came to the conclusion that his duty under God was to lead a rebellion against the white oppressors and set his people free from the burden, the humiliation and the shame of slavery. So both with naivety and with a considerable understanding of tactics, he launched a rebellion as God's agent of judgment when he was 30 years old. His 60 followers managed to kill, with savage abandon, 55 white people. Men, women and children. Nat was personally responsible for but one death. The resultant judgment was both unrestrained, a lynching be and controlled. Around 24 of the 60 insurgents were acquitted, about 15 were transported, 17 were hanged. Man's verdict on that Turner was that he be hung by neck and may the Lord have mercy on your soul. Our question is, "Will the Lord have mercy on his soul?" Now, in order to be able to answer the question, "Will the Lord have mercy on his soul?" We shall have to look at what motivated Nat Turner, the moving "why" he believed himself to be God's agent in a bloody rebellion. And this is not easy in four or five minutes, but let's try. Nat Turner is an unfolding man of conflicting interests and of confused drive. There was little that was simple, full of light in his outlook on life. He was an angry man, resentful, inflamed, up in arms. This state was compounded from several

elements. There was his understandable hatred of the white man, who separated husband from wife and parents from children as they bought and sold slaves. There was his distrust of the white man who said one thing and did another. There was his disappointment in the white man who, at his best, was a paternalistic despot and at his worst, a hypocrite. And the reaction to all this was a wobbly pride in himself as a black man. His first sermon, spontaneous and eloquent, was an attempt to persuade Negroes to have a sense of worth in themselves as black and as men. Another element was the sexual conflict within himself. His desire to remain chaste and celibate and his lusty longings to express himself in fantasy if not in fact. And all combined in the anger of frustration and incapacity to cooperate with the inevitable. Now, a place against these yearnings and anger and self-knowledge his acceptance of the life of a slave, his fellow feeling for other slaves, and even for a poor white whom he baptized. His hatred of hypocrisy, though he himself was a hypocrite. And when all these conflicting desires and drives are interwoven and tangled, the result is rage, hatred, fury. And so Nat Turner was pulled in two directions by force's intention and the outcome was bound to be disastrous. Now, add one more ingredient, a knowledge of the passages of the Old Testament, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, which promised God's backing for insurrection and violence and bloodshed. Here is a negro who's taught to read without interpretation, who is allowed to savor knowledge, but, who can blame him, flunks out on wisdom. And then, through meditation on the outrages imposed on himself in sympathy for his fellow slaves, in exciting visions induced by fasting and by a literal interpretation of biblical passages taken out of context, he develops a messianic complex and moves out to set his people free, literally by the sword, from their white oppressor. And yet, the pathos of *The Book* is not there. The personal tragedy is that after the failure of the bloody rebellion, Nat Turner discovers that he has lost contact with God. From his jail cell and from the pit of his own lostness, he faces execution in a short soliloquy. "I will go without Him, I think. I will go without Him because he has abandoned me without any last sign to hold. Was what I'd done wrong in His sight? And if what I'd done was wrong, is there no redemption?" Is there no redemption? Will the Lord have mercy on his soul? We know what happened to the body of Nat Turner. Drewry in the *Southampton Insurrectionist* told us and Styron quotes him, "The bodies of those executed, with one exception, were buried in a decent and becoming manner. That of Nat Turner was delivered to the doctors, who skinned it and made grease of the flesh. Mr. R.S. Barham's father owned a money purse made of his hide. His skeleton was for many years in the possession of Dr. Massenberg, but has since been misplaced." That's what became of the body. What will God do with the soul of Nat Turner that is with Nat Turner? We cannot know. But what do we think think God should do with him? There are some of us who answer in one word: Heaven. He will see God be forgiven by God and have continuing life with God. If Jesus could tell the woman taken in adultery that he did not condemn her, though she should sin no more. And if he told the friendlier thief on Calvary that he would be with Jesus that very day in paradise, then he isn't going to be over squeamish about Nat Turner, considering his status in life, his religious mania and his emotional instability. Moreover, there are two pluses to be placed to his account. First, unable to kill anyone, but the innocent, friendly, outgoing Margaret Whitehead, he deliberately allowed the Harris farm girl to escape and she spread the alarm, which thwarted the insurrection. And second, he recovered his contact with God in the last pages of *The Book*. his lawyer finally brought him a Bible and the feel of that in his hands steadied him. Its presence warms the cell. And then, in his mind's eye, he sees Margaret Whitehead, his friend and victim, and hears her speak to him in the language of *The New, The New Testament*. Here are the last words of the book. "We'll love one another. She seems to be intriguing me very close now. We'll love one another by the light of Heaven above. I feel the nearness of flowing waters,

tumultuous waves, rushing winds. The voice of the jailer calls again, 'Come.' 'Yes,' I think, just before I turned to greet him, 'I would've done it all again. I would've destroyed them all. Yet, I would've spared one. I would've spared her that showed me Him, whose presence I had not fathomed or maybe never even known. Great God, how early it is Until now, I'd almost forgotten His name.' 'Come,' the voice booms, but commanding now. Another voice speaks, 'Come, my son' And I turn in surrender." Yes, it's forgiveness and Heaven for him. There are others of us who also answer in one word: Hell "Turner will be separated from God forever. And what's worse, he will know he is separated and that will be the ultimate torture. That is Hell. How can any man who advocated violence as a way of life expect to land anywhere else than with violent men? Jesus was not mealy-mouthed about what happened to the wicked in the hereafter. Read the parable of the sheep and the goats, especially about the goats. He told them to go to a place prepared for the Devil and his angels, which is hardly paradise regained. Nat Turner is in Hell and good riddance." There's so much truth in both answers that it suggests, perhaps, that the truth really lies in the third position. And this I offer tentatively, sincerely and without asking that you believe it. You ready? What will God do with Nat Turner? He will send him to a Protestant purgatory. Now, let me explain and so defend this on usual, but, for chance, valid suggestion. Purgatory, according to our separated Roman brethren, is a place of punishment limited in duration, where those disembodied souls en route to Heaven make amends for past sins, whose guilt is already forgiven. The name is derived from the Latin verb "purgari" to make clean, to purify. And since fire is thought of as a purifying cleanser, fire is intimately linked with purgatory. But that's in the more popular theories of the Roman church, not in its basic theological teaching. The real suffering in purgatory is to be derived of the vision of God, temporarily. Doctrine of Purgatory is not explicitly stated in the Bible. The Roman Catholic church admits that. It's based on tradition, which Rome rightly believes is given of God. Our morning lesson is sometimes construed as purgatorial, Paul talking of being tested by fire. I have reservations about such an interpretation. Now the (indistinct) theory of purgatory, soft pebbles, chastisement and punishment. My Purgatory has a twofold purpose. The first is reformatory, a disciplinary process of cleansing, which changes the mind and renews the heart. Why, Nat Turner would profit from that. The second purpose is pedagogic. A disciplinary process of instruction in a deepened understanding of the things of God and of his Christ and that Matt Turner meet and would prophet by. And then his seemingly literal bibliolatry would be redeemed by an instructed analysis of the biblical text, by a knowledgeable study of its content, by an enlightened commitment to its central teaching, which has something to do with the love of God and of neighbors, all neighbors, white as well as black. Purgatory is a prep school for Heaven. A coaching school for those who are hardly ready to stand before the majesty, the glory and most shattering of all, the grace, the graciousness of God. Purgatory is an optimistic doctrine, both in its Roman and (indistinct) forms. Why do I say that? There's only one door out of Purgatory. It opens directly into Heaven. Purgatory is a Christian doctrine because it recognizes the two aspects of Christian love, justice and mercy. It's a consoling doctrine because salvation is guaranteed after the bootcamp, which we flunked in this life. It's a necessary doctrine because many of us, as Saint Augustine pointed out, are not so bad as to be deemed unworthy of mercy, not so good as to be entitled to immediate happiness. Now, the better we are, the more we admit the truth of that statement of Saint Augustine's. So I think that Purgatory awaits Nat Turner at the hands of a wise God, who knows the necessary relationship between justice and mercy. There, he will be prepared for Heaven so that he may take his place there, Redeemed, instructed, understanding, unembarrassed, glad. And therefore, blessed. I wonder if William Styron will agree with me. He'll tell me because he's asked for a copy of this sermon. I hopefully believe he will because the scripture passages

which open and which close his book are as follows, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. Neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." That precedes the first page. "And he said, unto me, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is a thirst of the fountain of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things and I will be his God. And he shall be my son." These are the words which come after the last page. And I think we shall leave the matter there. Let us pray. Grant, O God, that where thy justice cannot forget thy everlasting mercy, may in kindness forgive. For the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (uplifting organ music) ♪ There's a wideness in God's mercy ♪ ♪ like the wideness of the sea ♪ ♪ There's a kindness in God's justice ♪ ♪ which is more than liberty ♪ ♪ There is welcome for the sinner ♪ ♪ and more graces for the good ♪ ♪ There is mercy with the Savior ♪ ♪ there is healing in his blood ♪ ♪ For the love of God is broader ♪ ♪ than the measures of the mind ♪ ♪ and the heart of the Eternal ♪ ♪ is most wonderfully kind ♪ ♪ If our love were but more simple ♪ ♪ we should rest upon God's word ♪ ♪ and our lives would be illumined ♪ ♪ by the presence of our Lord ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (soft organ music) ♪ For all the saints, whom from their labor rest ♪ ♪ Who thee by faith before the world confessed ♪ ♪ Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Thou was their rock, their fortress, and their might ♪ ♪ Thou, Lord, their captain in the well fought fight ♪ ♪ Thou, in the darkness dread, their one true light ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Oh, may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold ♪ ♪ Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old ♪ ♪ And win with them the victor's crown of gold ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine ♪ ♪ We feebly struggle, they in glory shine ♪ ♪ Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ But lo there breaks a yet more glorious day ♪ ♪ The saints triumphant rise in bright array ♪ ♪ The King of glory passes on this way ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (uplifting organ music) (congregation sings indistinctly)

- Almighty God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, grant that the words of Thy book, which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through Thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good and human living to the honor and praise of Thy name. Grant that our gifts, being dedicated to Thy service, may be used for the good of Thy church and the welfare of Thy people. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with Thee and the Holy Spirit be all glory and praise, a world without end. Amen. Go now in peace to do the work of God in the world and may the love of God the Father and the grace of God the Son and the power of God the Holy Spirit be with you all. ♪ Amen ♪ ♪ Amen ♪ (bell tolls) (uplifting organ music)