

“Justice”

What I later came to appreciate more deeply was that these faith-convictions were Calvinist through and through. It was not hard for me to imagine the *Institutes* perched on the bedside table of a Union student, tenement-house resident in New York City. “Religion for what ails you” was alive and well. (244)

As I read more about Union, I thought a lot about my childhood in Olahoma, how being a cowgirl and a Disciple of Christ non-conformist somehow aligned me with Union’s renegade past. Union’s rebel history—speaking theologically to power, fighting against injustice, leading the struggle against racism, sexism, and the ravages of poverty, following Jesus—fit right in with the outlaw-faith I had been bred to believe. (247)

I became fascinated with a man named Charles Briggs. At the turn of the century, he was a Presbyterian biblical scholar at Union . . . teaching the radical idea that history might be a useful tool in understanding the Bible. (247-248)

And I discovered afresh the backstory of Paul Tillich . . . faculty all decided to take a pay cut and even pooled money to create a travel fund for Tillich to get out of Germany. (248)

The intellectual energy that started the National Council of Churches, the Society for the Study of Biblical Literature, the movement for Clinical Pastoral Education, and the early Peace Corps also bubbled up out of Union’s corridors. (249)

. . . that you couldn’t have a seminary ardently devoted to educating theologically robust, critical thinking, activist pastors and leaders without having, along with it, the ardent desire of that community to question the authority of its own leadership. (251)

“If Union ceased to exist, we would have to create it. It’s the bell tower of Christian conscience, everywhere.” (251)

This antagonism between the secular left and the religious right created the perception of a void in the middle, leaving no public acknowledgement of the kind of faith I had grown up with . . . (253)

. . . we either had to sell the air or close. (259)

A stereotype of Jesus is that he was all hellfire—uncompromising, rigid in his demands, a borderline anarchist. But the Jesus I have come to rely on was a man driven by knowledge of Divine love that led him down streets and across dusty roads, always refusing to meet people's facile and self-interested desires for him to do their bidding. At every turn, he left it in our hands to figure out which street or dusty road we should travel. (261)

If you accept that sin is extensive, persistent, systemic, and collective, you are kidding yourself if you think you can get through life, much less build institutional homes, without being tainted by it. (265)

“Mercy”

. . . the word *mercy* is often used as a synonym for “forgiveness.” They aren't the same. . . . (270)

It's hard work to forgive and to be forgiven . . . (271)

It is most potent when it is least expected and when it falls upon the undeserving. To have mercy upon someone is simply to release them from punishment. (271)

Compassion is the root of mercy. (271)

Mercy grants freedom from the bondage of harms. Justice is the struggle to make sure those harms stop. (272)

Sadly, seeing these things about herself didn't amount to changing them. The older she got, the more proudly she owned them, including being increasingly angered by the mere presence of me in her life. (272-273)

“Not really. It's how I keep track of my life. I have an internal history book of wrongs and deserved paybacks.” (276)

In my theological imagination, I also believed that God, rather than keeping lists, is so powerfully loving that divine love washed away all sins, even the most incomprehensible ones like McVeigh's or painful, abusive ones like Dick Jones's and like my mother's—even when the victims of these sins never heal or forget. (277-278)

. . . when it came to my mother, I simply could not live what I believed. I had no capacity for mercy towards her . . . (278)

When there is no change in the behaviors that produce harm, it's almost impossible for people actually to forgive each other. (278)

Despite my pleas, she eventually told Dad everything . . . Her affair quickly became Oklahoma City's talk of the town. (284)

. . . what was most painful of all was her relentless insistence on telling my father, day after day, as he kept caring for her, that she never loved him. (284)

. . . she never approximated, let alone embraced, the reality of God's mercy—not for God or for others or for herself. (286)

. . . she felt no impulse to forgive and saw no reason to be forgiven. Indeed, she seemed to relish the agony of her own alienation from God. (286)

She was never able to get outside of herself, to love. To be loved. To accept her own brokenness and to accept others' broken lives as well. (286)

Caught in the web of my own hurt, I never had the courage it would have taken to act mercifully toward her. I didn't have the theological bearing. (287)

“Love”

Mercy is the whole process of becoming permanently forgiving, of living in a mode of divine knowing and presence. (297)

. . . *reconciliation*, which names the process of bringing together things that oppose each other so that they somehow align with one another. And reconciliation requires, I believe, a new vision of love . . . (298)

He became the scapegoat for every ounce of rage stored up inside her, and it flowed out of her towards him with a fury I had never before witnessed in anyone. (299)

“Honey, I just don't have the energy to think about that. When I try to, nothing comes.” He couldn't even bring himself to say the words *God* or *believe*. Just *that*. (302)

. . . with his disavowal of his whole life's work. (303)

. . . faith is a social act and lives inside our social webs of meaning. Far from the monastic vision of saints beholding God in a cave or alone on a hilltop, faith is about both God and our community. Believe lives in the in-between space of our relationships, our connective tissue. When that tissue tares, the whole group feels the rip. (303)

His life slowly became graceless . . . the utter and total absence of grace and faith in his life. (305)

Our current languages and cultures, especially those of the West, are subject-object oriented. So, too, was my father's relationship with my mother. She was his object; everything and everyone, including my father, were her objects. (309)

"Serene, it's not that I don't have any faith; it's just that I've put thinking about it aside for a while. You know, I spent my whole life thinking about God." (310)

"No. We can say one thing. God comes to us, even though we can't reach God." (312)