

## For the Love of Gob

What does it mean to be a human being? I think that to be human means to love. If that is so, Franklin Vanderloon can only be described as a very human man.

Dr. Vanderloon is minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Riverdale, New York, and director of the film program for the United Presbyterian Church, USA's Center for Information on Human Reproduction. *Love in Focus: A Presbyterian Filmmaker's Odyssey* is the title of a book Dr. Vanderloon has written in the form of a diary—but not just any diary. He decided instead to write something entirely new—a completely candid diary, in which his most personal thoughts and impressions would be faithfully recorded on a daily basis.

What does it mean to be candid? I think that to be candid means to be human. That's why I am a Democrat.

The following condensation, which preserves the frank tone of the original, is used by permission of the author.

### LOVE IN FOCUS: A Presbyterian Filmmaker's Odyssey

#### Preface

I do not recall when the idea to write my diary in a candid style first occurred to me. Perhaps it stemmed from my familiarity with the confessional religious literature of traditional Christianity. I was interested in writing a kind of modern-day *Confessions of St. Augustine*, but minus the superstition.

Before beginning, I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of some of those persons who have made vital contributions to the quality of my manuscript. An essential factor in this kind of literary venture is an unerring knowledge of the date. For this I must thank my colleague, Dr. Richard Breen, who has always either had the information at his fingertips or else known where I might find it. Sarah Bosart, a talented actress, has given me much excellent advice. But it is my wife Charlotte to whom I owe the greatest thanks. Without her continual encouragement and support this book would never have been possible.

*J. Whitney Stillman, of New York, is an Aquarius.*

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#### Dedication

For Sarah

1975

January 1, 1975. First day of the New Year today.

Jan. 2. Had a fascinating idea this afternoon—why not keep a diary in which to record my most personal thoughts and impressions? Would be totally honest.

Jan. 3. Reconsider diary idea.

Jan. 4. Decide to go ahead with diary.

Sunday, Jan. 5. Sermon on New Year and value of resolutions. There is a great need for honesty with self and God. Urge congregation members to keep diaries of their most personal thoughts and actions. Service includes the usual hymns, prayers, offertory, etc. At fellowship coffee hour many congregation members express interest in idea of candid diary. Mention St. Augustine's confessions but the need to get away from superstition. Several members ask what kind of notebook best for recording frank thoughts and impressions. Explain that simplest and least pretentious sort of notebook is preferable. Suggest marbled or spiral kind—the latter has the advantage of opening flat, so easier to write in. Shake hands with parishioners as they depart.

Jan. 6. Woke up in the middle of the night last night and couldn't get to sleep for a while. Got up and saw it was snowing outside. Watched the snowflakes falling in the arc of the garden light. Each snowflake's pattern is unique—just like a human being. Yet in a moment each snowflake would be obliterated. The thought sent a shiver down my back.

Jan. 8. In town for conference on new film for junior high schools. To be called *The Many Faces of Love*. Idea is that each person is unique and therefore his or her

sexuality is unique. We plan to take a mature approach.

Sunday, Jan. 12. Sermon: "Our Father Who Art In Heaven—Man or Woman?" Traditional hymns, offertory, etc. Have some interesting talks during Fellowship Hour. Tell Charlotte about them afterwards—she says they sound interesting. They were.

Jan. 21. Timmy home from school with the flu today. I hope that his generation will do better with the world than ours has done.

Jan. 28. In town for meeting at United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., headquarters at the Interfaith Building on Riverside Drive. Have some good fellowship: Charles Parsons makes the point that while Christ was undeniably a great man, he did not know all that we do today.

Jan. 30. More snow last night—1 1/2" in Riverdale. The world looks as if it were completely new.

Sunday, February 1. Sermon: "Christ—What He Didn't Know." Point out that there are many things, familiar to us, which Christ never even knew about—the pill, the atom bomb, psychoanalysis. Usual prayers, offertory, etc.

Feb. 5. Visited sick parishioners this morning, as I do every Wednesday. Apparently it makes them feel better.

Feb. 20. I don't believe that God is an old man who lives in a place called Heaven somewhere up in the sky. I believe that there is a little bit of God in every one of us.

March 3. Spent this afternoon putting together notes I've made for the *Many Faces of Love* script. I keep a pencil and small pad of paper with me at all times so that I'll be able to record the ideas which come to me during stray moments. This way, I can keep track of the various ideas which occur to me. Later I can polish them.

March 5. Visited parish shut-ins this morning. I try to do this every Wednesday. I have been told that it is the bright spot in their week.

March 6. I resolved to make some headway on the script today and have filled nearly a page. It still has to be revised and polished but that will have to wait for later. Now that I am rolling I want to get as much down on paper as possible.

March 27. Attended fellowship luncheon at the U.P.C. headquarters in the Interfaith Building. Charlie Parsons pointed out that none of us was wearing a collar. We started talking about appropri-

ate modes of dress in a contemporary ministry. I said that I only wear my collar when I am actually preaching. Otherwise I feel that a turtleneck with a sports jacket has the right sort of dignified informality. I prefer to dress for comfort rather than for what people might think. The others said they felt the same way.

April 11. As to the script, I think it would be best to try to perfect the page I've got done before going any further. This way I won't have to backtrack after finishing the rest.

April 22. I have been selected to attend a special week of seminars at the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago. Told Charlotte and Timmy. They were pleased.

Sunday, May 3. Sermon: "The Parable of the Prodigal Son."

May 12. I arrived in Chicago only last night, but the atmosphere here at the Institute is absolutely electric. One of the things that first struck me is the way the Institute's elementary school students say grace at mealtimes. First there is syncopated hand-clapping. Then one group of children shouts, "Food is good!" A second group answers, "Right!" The first group calls out, "Life is good!" The second again answers, "Right!" Finally, the first group shouts, "All is good!" And then everyone joins in calling, "It's O.K.!" The experience of this chant was profoundly moving for me.

May 13. I had never thought about it before, but food is good.

May 14. The idea behind the word "God" is misleading. The instructors here prefer to use the term "Gob" or "G-O-B"—for "Ground of Our Being."

May 15. Seminar week ends today. I will be sad to leave Chicago and all the friends I have made here. What this week has given me is nothing less than an entirely new outlook—on Christianity and on our whole society.

June 9. I noticed in going over the film script that the second paragraph, which I wrote while lying down, is considerably better than the first, which I wrote sitting at my desk.

June 10. My discovery of yesterday reminds me that I once wrote Charlotte a note standing up in the kitchen near the refrigerator which she said at the time was rather nicely done. I wouldn't want to write a whole book in the kitchen, but it could be interesting for something shorter, such as a screenplay.

June 26. After dinner, as the sun went down, I sat in my chair on the lawn until after it was dark. Life is beautiful, I think, but lonely. Sometimes I feel that no one really knows me. Charlie Parsons, Timmy—even Charlotte—have no idea who I am. They love and admire a person who isn't really me at all.

June 27. I keep returning to the concept I learned last month at the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago: "G-O-B," "the Ground of Our Being"; Gob, not God. This idea cuts through centuries of superstition. In my despair one thought is tremendously reassuring: Gob loves me.

Sunday, June 28. Sermon: "Gob's Love."

July 8. Think about Gob, and the idea of Gob.

Sunday, July 12. Sermon: "Gob & The Sermon on the Mount."

Sunday, July 19. Sermon: "Gob & The Parable of the Prodigal Son."

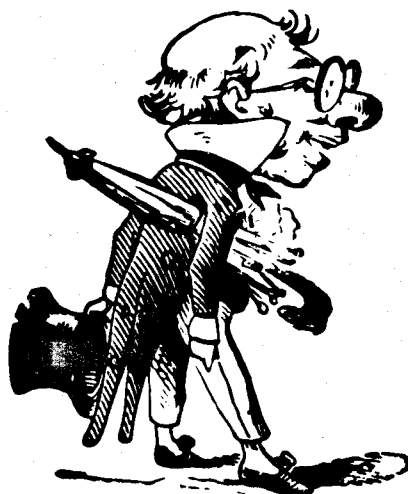
July 24. I don't believe that Gob is just something up in the sky. I believe there is a little bit of Gob in every one of us.

July 25. Wonder about Gob. Does It really exist?

July 26. Talk with Charlie Parsons about Gob. Charlie says that while Gob may at one time have existed, It does not exist now. I am afraid I must agree.

Sunday, August 3. Sermon: "The Sermon on the Mount."

August 11. Read a fascinating book today—*For Neruda, For Chile: An International Anthology*. It is the tribute of over 140 poets from 27 countries to the late Pablo Neruda and to the legacy of



Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government, which sought to bring socialism and justice to the Chilean people. After reading it I couldn't help wondering whether my natural ability doesn't lie more in the realm of poetry than in that of prose or scriptwriting. In some ways I think poetry is the highest means of expression.

Sunday, August 24. Service as usual this morning, followed by fellowship hour. I wish I had my weekends free.

Sept. 8. *The Many Faces of Love* went into production today, under my personal direction. The title does not refer to literal "faces," which will only appear occasionally in the film, depending on the individual means of expressing love. The phrase "many faces" in the title is actually being used on a far more sophisticated level, as a metaphor for the many unique ways an individual might choose to express his or her love.

Sept. 9. Our progress on the film has been excellent. Bob, the seminarian who is acting as assistant director, remarked that I seem to have an extraordinary talent for thinking visually. This ability is tremendously important. It enables me to "write with the camera" as we go along. A written script would get in my way.

Sept. 10. Another good day at the studio. Bob pointed out that I seem to have a unique talent for working with actors. It's an ability I never knew I had before. I

must admit, though, the leading actress, Sarah Bosart, has a wonderfully expressive torso.

Sept. 11. Got *The Many Faces of Love* in the can this afternoon. Later took it out of the can to screen. I think we might have something much bigger than an educational filmstrip. Took Sarah out for a drink to celebrate. She's a Sagittarius.

Sept. 14. Driving into Manhattan this morning I was struck by the tremendous disparity between the living conditions of the rich and poor people in this country. In Harlem it was all '68 and '69 Impalas, but Park Avenue was filled with late-model Cadillacs.

Sept. 25. Think about Salvador Allende and the legacy of his Popular Unity government in Chile.

Oct. 14. What's important to remember is not that Jesus is God, but that he was a very human man.

Oct. 23. Raked leaves this afternoon. The weather was crisp and the colors beautiful. In the evening I built the first fire in the living room fireplace since last winter. I read the *Times*, and later did some thinking.

Sunday, October 26. Sermon: "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." My relationship with Sarah can only deepen the love I feel for Charlotte. Ultimately it will make our marriage a richer one.

Nov. 3. The United States is not in an economic recession but in a depression. America is either going to have massive federal planning or it is going to have authoritarianism.

Nov. 4. Saw President Ford on television tonight. He scares me.

Nov. 10. Think about the disparity in incomes between rich and poor in this country.

Nov. 12. Have been reading about the authoritarian personality. There's something called the F-scale. It measures the degree of fascist tendencies a person has. President Ford would obviously test very high.

Nov. 14. I've decided to use my ministry to try to combat the spread of fascism in this country. I honestly don't know whether I'll succeed. I hope and pray that I do.

Sunday, Nov. 16. Sermon: "The Sermon on the Mount." Confide my fears about President Ford and the CIA to congregation members during fellowship hour. They're scared, too.

Nov. 18. Only strong leadership could get us out of this depression. There is no chance we'll be getting any in the next year. Maybe that will be too late.

Nov. 19. Sarah believes there will be a right-wing takeover this year. I doubt they will make their move until later.

Sunday, Nov. 23. Sermon: "The Parable of the Prodigal Son."

Nov. 26. Think about the urban crisis, and about the crisis in our cities.

Dec. 1. I saw an ad in the paper this morning for a book entitled *Adultery: Your Right to Personal Freedom in Marriage*, co-authored by a medical doctor and a doctor of divinity. I have not yet had the chance to tell Charlotte about my rela-

tionship with Sarah, but I am sure she would have no objections. We both realize that personal growth in a marriage is tremendously important. My love for Sarah could only strengthen our marriage.

Sunday, Dec. 7. Sermon: "The Parable of the Prodigal Son and Prison Reform."

Dec. 9. I saw an interview with President Ford's daughter Susan on the news tonight. She frightens me.

Sunday, Dec. 14. Sermon: "The Sermon on the Mount and the Authoritarian Personality."

Dec. 16. *The Many Faces of Love* has been well received on the junior high level. What we are thinking of now is entering it in some film festivals and then trying for commercial distribution.

Dec. 24. Saw the Pope conduct Mass on television tonight. Roman Catholics scare me.

Dec. 27. There is in this country a net-

work of highly-trained and heavily-armed paramilitary units which could, at any moment, seize total power—the metropolitan police forces.

Dec. 31. Most people see today as the end of one year. I prefer to think of it as the beginning of a new one.

### *The End...Or the Beginning?*

The year 1975 is over now but, for those of us who lived through it, the memory will never fade. Life was not healthy in 1975; one could merely exist—from day to day and hour to hour—never knowing when the tanks and jackbooted soldiers would arrive. (When will we learn to control the sale of handguns?)

Franklin Vanderloon's *Love in Focus: A Presbyterian Filmmaker's Odyssey*

brings 1975 back in the most vivid terms. America was deep in depression that year. Legislation was pending in Congress which would have cut off the funds needed to help young women keep from bringing into the world infants who could not be properly loved or cared for. Milton Friedman was still at large. In 1975 the means of production were in the hands of individuals, the freedom to read was under attack, and, lastly but perhaps most importantly, some people had more things than other people had.

As it turned out, the Far Right was not successful in taking power in 1975, but that's not what's important. What's important is that the most dedicated and sensitive people in this country thought that it might. The message of Franklin Vanderloon's diary is, essentially, a human one: 1975 is a year which must never happen again. □

—Adam Meyerson—

## Torture in the Soviet Union

Two blocks from the Kremlin, on perhaps the busiest square of an increasingly congested Moscow, there stands an imposing statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Polish aristocrat who joined the Bolshevik revolutionaries. The location seems somehow appropriate, for facing the square is a wonderful department store, *Detsky Mir*, a world just for children; and Dzerzhinsky, as your friendly Intourist guide will surely tell you, was the first Soviet Minister of Youth and founder of the Pioneers, Soviet counterpart to our Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. But your guide will not tell you that Dzerzhinsky also founded another organization, called the Cheka, nor will she point out the massive unmarked building on the other side of the square, even though it confers upon the statue just as much significance. The Cheka was the first name for the Soviet secret police; it was the original predecessor of what is today the Committee for State Security, or KGB. The building is the Lubyanka, KGB headquarters and site of one of the most infamous prisons in all history, where Dzerzhinsky's praxis of terror and torture continues, though less frequently, to this very day.

The Lubyanka, and Soviet prisons generally, are far less horrifying today than they were under Stalin. No longer are hundreds of prisoners executed daily. No longer do a million innocents die each year in the Arctic and Far Eastern labor camps. After Stalin's death in 1953, an estimated ten million political prisoners were granted amnesty, the infamous

"night visits" by the secret police were forbidden, at least on paper, and in the wake of "de-Stalinization" Soviet courts have made a much greater pretense of following due process. And yet it is important to contemplate the statue of Dzerzhinsky, and to consider that it was built, on Nikita Khrushchev's orders, in 1961. This was the very year in which Stalin's body was removed from Lenin's side in Red Square, five years after Khrushchev's "Crimes of Stalin" speech, one year before Solzhenitsyn was allowed to publish *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. That the Soviet regime would so honor the founder of its secret police at a time of "de-Stalinization" and comparative intellectual freedom, indicates the limits of its genuine change.

Indeed, when Khrushchev articulated in 1959 what has since been the official position—namely, that "There are no political prisoners in Soviet prisons today"—he was, in the Soviet fashion, simply lying. Avraham Shifrin, arrested in 1953 during a wave of anti-Semitic hysteria, recently testified before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee about his ten years in over thirty Soviet concentration camps and prisons, where he met thousands of fellow political and religious prisoners—and this all after Stalin's death. In *My Testimony*, a record of prison camp life in the 1960s, and *Prison Diaries*, a comparable memoir of the 1970s, Anatoly Marchenko and Edward Kuznetsov have each written powerful accounts of the emaciation, beatings, and desperate self-mutilation they have witnessed—stories that recall Solzhenitsyn's grisly descriptions of an earlier time. Despite ferocious efforts to suppress it, the

Soviet *samizdat* (self-published) network continues to circulate the *Chronicle of Current Events*, which, meticulously and undramatically, reports on Soviet political trials, and documents specific examples of mistreatment in prisons, prison camps, and psychiatric institutions. And last November, Amnesty International published a harrowing 154-page report, *Prisoners of Conscience in the USSR: Their Treatment and Conditions*, the most concisely informative survey of present conditions that is now available in English. Celebrated for its reports on torture in Chile (after Allende) and South Vietnam (before its fall), Amnesty International cannot be accused of an anti-Communist bias. Its report on the Soviet Union (available for \$2.00 from AI Publications, 53 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8SP, England) is therefore all the more convincing, and I draw from it substantially in what follows.

Just how many prisoners of conscience there are, it is very difficult to say. The Soviet Union publishes no penal statistics whatsoever, so one cannot even determine how many prisoners there are overall. Andrei Sakharov has estimated that there are 1.7 million, the CIA has suggested a figure slightly under 2.5 million, on the basis of satellite photos, and scholarly Western estimates tend to posit a minimum of 1 million—a range of remarkably high numbers when one considers that the United States, with only 50 million fewer people, incarcerates but 250,000. Of the one-million-plus in the Soviet Union, no one knows how many are political and religious prisoners, but the consensus of Amnesty International and most Western reports is that the ab-

Adam Meyerson, managing editor of *The Alternative*, recently spent a month in the Soviet Union.