

The Day My Brother Was Murdered

Memoirs of a
shattered
hope.

by Michael Novak

[Recently, I found the following memoir in my files. It was written, I believe, within a year of the event described. At certain points, I have updated it with new information. —M.N.]

ON JANUARY 16, 1964, IN THE MORNING, Father Richard Novak left Notre Dame College in Dacca, East Pakistan, on his bicycle. He was wearing his white cassock, a light blue jacket over the cassock, and full black trousers.

The day was cool, fresh, clear, like a June morning in Minnesota. The sky was playful and deep. Unfortunately, this was the fifth day of violence against Hindus, which had cost several thousand lives. Bodies could be seen floating in the river.

Slipping through the policemen and the militia who had maintained Dacca's recent nighttime curfew, and who still patrolled the roads of the countryside, Dick bicycled twelve miles down the road, along the river, to the village of Narayanganj. He spoke for a while with Monsignor D'Costa, the elderly pastor at the local church, seeking information on the family of a Hindu nurse from the Catholic hospital in Dacca, whom the nuns had asked Richard to help them find. The older priest tried to persuade him to hurry directly back to Dacca, to get away from the danger zone. Dick listened thoughtfully. He said good-bye, and headed upstream toward Dacca.

But he did not return directly to the college. He made three stops, to inquire among refugees about the welfare of the missing Hindu family. All week, bitter riots had swept this Moslem province. Thousands of Hindus had been killed, and countless more dispossessed or plundered. Hundreds of thousands were forced to take refuge in Hindu India—where retaliation was taken upon the Moslem population there. At places in Pakistan, bodies lay piled in heaps or strewn across fields. In Dacca alone, at least a thousand lay dead.

On this bright day, Dick made one too many inquiries. Westerners were never or rarely molested in this periodic internecine warfare, which had broken out sporadically since 1954. But my brother was

last seen, by chance passersby, as he waved to a ferry boat to come take him to the farther side of the wide, slow river. On the opposite bank, he intended to visit one last mill where he had been told that many refugees were gathered. It was noon.

The boat came toward him. He pulled his bike on board. The boat pushed out toward the opposite shore.

Dick was first missed during the evening of January 16, when his fellow priests gathered for dinner. By that time, the nightly curfew made any search impossible. His friends hoped he had stayed over with Monsignor D'Costa or elsewhere.

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All day Friday, the 17th, by telephone and by trips along his route, an inquiry about his safety was undertaken. With each hour, the picture took a more ominous shape. Like flame touched to a field of powder, a wave of violence had swept through the area where he disappeared. A ruthless martial law was later imposed on a wide region. It was impossible to enter some parts of the area; for days, in fact, the bodies of victims in that area were not buried. The searchers notified the American consulate and the Pakistani police that Dick was missing.

The following notice, together with a picture, was released to the local press:

Father Richard Novak, C.S.C., Roman Catholic Priest, Lecturer in Philosophy at Notre Dame College, aged 28 years, American citizen, weight 150 lbs., height 5 feet 9 inches, has been missing since noon of Thursday, January 16, 1964. He was last seen in the vicinity of Luxmi Narayan Cotton Mill, Narayanganj. A reward is offered for information leading to his discovery. Please contact Notre Dame College.

Ten days later, on January 27, a solemn funeral was held for Dick, even though his body had not been found. For by that time the outlines of his story had begun to come clear. But not everything was clear, even months later, when those who murdered him were at last apprehended and confessed. They were five teenage boys.



Meanwhile, in reporting the funeral, the Pakistani press wrote of him:

He was known to many in Dacca as one who had a deep love for the people of Pakistan, and in many ways he showed his deep interest in the Bengali culture and language. He was a member of the Bengali Academy.

He often visited local families, and was frequently seen at the Tejgaon Bottomley Orphanage, where he loved to play with the children and practice his Bengali with them. He slept on a *chowki*, wore a *chaddar*.

He also had a very keen interest in the field of Islamics. In addition to his studies in Arabic at Harvard, and in Islamic History at Dacca University, he had done wide reading in the field. He frequently attended seminars sponsored by the Islamic Academy.

Fr. Novak is survived by both his parents, by three brothers and a sister.

The following pages cannot help being personal. A history of Dick is in some ways my history, as mine would be his. The meaning of brotherly love comes to be understood when one brother is torn away.

1. THE SHATTERING OF HOPE

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IS FOR ME no longer academic. My nearest brother has been murdered.

The first news we heard was that Dick was missing and believed dead. It reached us exactly two months to the day after John F. Kennedy was assassinated; the taste of senseless death was still too familiar. I had loved John F. Kennedy, and with his death lost a certain hope. Now, with another, closer senselessness, I wanted to cease trying to live, to surrender from the struggle.

My wife and I had come into Idlewild International Airport from Madrid at almost 9 p.m. on January 22. The January air was cool but not cold; the runways and buildings were apparent in the moonlight.

We were happy. We had been very glad to head back to the States on the 19th, after more than four months abroad. We drove our little white Volkswagen up towards Nice, where we intended to ship it to the United States. We had been scheduled to depart for New York via Paris on the 20th, but when we showed up at the airport we found that storms over Paris had caused our flight to be canceled. Since we were already at the airport, my wife insisted on taking the

morning TWA flight to Madrid, instead of waiting 24 hours and hoping that the storm over Paris might clear. We would spend the rest of the day in Madrid, take in El Greco and Goya at the Prado, and then catch the next day's flight, through Lisbon, to New York. All the way to New York she worried that if we crashed in that plane, she would be to blame.

Only once, in Lisbon, where we landed briefly on our way from Madrid to New York, did I share her fear. Then, returning to the aircraft after a drink in the terminal, we looked up at the serene sky. Many miles above, thin sleeves of translucent cirrus floated in the cold wind. In a few moments, we would ascend again between them and the daytime moon. I hugged Karen playfully around the waist to shield us from the chill of the air.

When we reached our hotel in New York, the first thing I had to do was rush down to my editor's office at Macmillan, to deliver the manuscript of *The Open Church*, which I was now bringing in a day late. Betty Bartelme, my editor, had a tense brow and concerned manner, and told me that I must immediately telephone my father. He had been trying to reach me since the day before. Her furrowed brow and concerned manner made me worry, and I began going through scenarios of very bad news. Betty put me in a private office, and solemnly told me how to dial out.

WHEN I FINALLY GOT THROUGH to Johnstown, my father's voice was so subdued and broken that I felt terror instantly.

"We have some very bad news," he said slowly.

"Mother," I thought with panic.

"Father DePrizio called on Monday. Richie is missing in Pakistan." That line struck terror—and guilt—into my heart. Rich was my little brother, and I felt responsible for him.

Who said so? I wanted to know. Where had he been? When did he go missing? Under what circumstance? Was anybody with him? How is mother taking it? It took several minutes of quiet questioning to get the story clear. Dick had last been seen on January 16—almost a week before. Poignantly, I remembered rereading his last letter at noon on January 16, in Rome, while clearing off my desk and packing to leave. Dick had been a bit discouraged about the current state of the missions, but hopeful about the future. He always wrote to me with exceeding frankness, and I usually thought it only fair to destroy his letters. I tried to decide what to do with the letter, and then, according to my usual custom,

tore it in two and dropped it into the wastebasket. As I was tearing his letter in two in Rome, he was meeting death, alone, in Pakistan.

Dick had apparently left Dacca on the morning of the 16th, Thursday, to visit an older priest at the village of Narayanganj, twelve miles away. For several days, there had been riots between Moslems and Hindus in that area, but on Wednesday things seemed to be quieting down. Thursday was a free day

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at the school. We found out years later that the medical mission sisters at the neighboring hospital had asked him that morning if he could check on the safety of one of their Pakistani nurses. He sought and received permission from his superiors (the riots had relented somewhat) and set off by bike. But my father was given the impression that Rich had gone out on his own.

So far as Dad knew by that time, Dick had never been seen again. Further riots had broken out that day. The only wise thing was to assume that he was dead. The area was not such that he could be in hiding for very long. The one possibility was that he was wounded or hurt and could not come for help.

"Assume that he is dead," I counseled Dad. "It will be easier."

"I do," he said.

"How long have you known?"

"Since Monday. But we didn't tell anyone until tonight. The *Tribune* called because they got a release from the Associated Press. They asked me to confirm it. Where have you been so long? I've been telephoning everywhere."

"We lost a day. We couldn't get into Paris because of a storm. We had to come by way of Madrid, and wait for a plane."

"When did you get to New York? Did you get my message from Callahans?"

"We just arrived, this minute. We didn't get to the Callahans. I called right away but your line was busy."

"Yes, I was making a call. Joe and Ann are here, and we're saying the rosary."

"How's mother taking it?"

"Very well. She's holding up very well. She's still hoping he's all right." His voice dropped. "But I don't think so, Mike."

"Let me speak to her."

He called her to the phone. She tried to sound cheerful. Her voice was girlish and strong. I remember now only one remark she let slip. "I want to be like Jackie Kennedy."

BACK AT THE HOTEL I began telling Karen what had happened. We were extremely sleepy, for it was after midnight European time, and we had been on the go for 20 hours that day, and very busy for three days before that. But intensity and despair drove away fatigue. Imagination presented horrible images of death and torture. Was he alive? How and why had he died? Would we ever know?

Dad had said the *New York Times* had two stories in Thursday's paper, on pages 7 and 42. I pulled on a sweater and went out into the hotel in search of a paper. The elevator went very slowly. The elevator man didn't know where I could find a *Times* at this hour; maybe at the kiosk down the block. This man, this sleepy boy, didn't seem to realize that my brother Dick was dead. There was numbness and indifference in my whole body, a sense of unbearable sickness. Didn't he feel it at all?

No papers in the lobby. Outside, the corner kiosk was closed up for the night. I ran across the broad street to a hotel across the way. The man at the desk

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was contemptuous: Of course there were no papers. How should he know where I could find a paper? Ask the girl over there. The hostess at the entrance to the bar, her face masked with gray cosmetics, and her silver eyelashes grotesquely extended, didn't know where I could find a paper.

It seemed fitting to have to wait until morning for the news dispatch about my brother's death.

In the lobby of our hotel, however, I found the rubbish cart of the cleaning lady. There was a *Times* on top of the pile of emptied papers. I rescued it and began to leaf through its pages. I found the general

story on the rioting in Pakistan: a subdued story, reporting in vague, general terms riots that admittedly had been going on for weeks. Whole villages were being burned. Deaths were estimated in the thousands. The rioting was the most serious since the partition of Pakistan from India. But the story was deep on the inside pages. Part of the difficulty was, my father had said, that strict censorship had been imposed by the Pakistan government on news about the bloodshed.

Back in our room, I could not find the story about Dick. I searched every page ending with a "2," and then every single page, column by column. The *Times* was very full that day. But, even after an hour, I could not find the story.

The next day, reporting again at my publisher's to turn in the last chapter of my manuscript on the Second Vatican Council, I was given a copy of an earlier edition of Thursday's paper. The short dispatch was as Dad had said: missing and presumed dead. The cold print seemed to make the news more real.

There was just a little work to be done, Betty Bartelme had said, to shorten my manuscript. But before tackling that, back in my room, I telephoned both the *New York Times* and *Time*, trying to see whether they had any further dispatches that might reveal his fate. Nothing.

My parents wanted Karen and me home as soon as possible. They had learned that a funeral mass was going to be sung in Pakistan on Monday, January 27. Father George DePrizio, C.S.C., Dick's provincial superior, encouraged Mother and Dad to schedule a funeral in Johnstown on the same day. "It will take away the tension and uncertainty," he told me by phone. "In Dacca, they seem to be certain that he's dead. But they cannot cable any details." Actually, Father DePrizio soon had many more details, which out of mercy he did not share with my parents—as my sister Mary Ann discovered in researching community archives.

That day a report came that a body had been found, believed to be that of a Westerner and probably Dick's. It seemed a relief to have something definite. Fantasies of his prolonged suffering or helplessness were much more terrifying than news of his death.

Reluctantly, Mother and Dad agreed to the funeral. The bishop would preside. Father DePrizio and other Holy Cross priests would come.

Then the report proved unfounded. The body was not Dick's. Nevertheless, the funeral Mass in

Dacca was not postponed. This seemed right to me. They were in a position to assess the situation. The Holy Cross priests had been in East Pakistan for more than a hundred years. They had seen the fury of the January riots. Dick's body, presumably, had been thrown in the river or in some paddy, where it would never be found.

My brother, Dick.

I felt guilty for not having written him more often, for all the neglect and slighting I had ever shown him, and for still being alive.

Saturday morning, Karen and I took the train to Princeton where we had left our old, green Plymouth with friends, and then drove to Johnstown. It was a cold afternoon, and up in the mountains the air was full of gusts of rain turning to snow. But the snow didn't pile up, not even on Bedford mountain, and we started down the other side of the mountain towards Johnstown knowing that we would make it without mishap.

Mother and Dad seemed to relax the moment we came in the door. We were the first of the family to return home. Ben would come in from Penn State on Sunday. Jim, a lieutenant in the Armored Corps, would fly home from Germany, courtesy of the Red Cross, just in time for the funeral. Mary Ann, who was fifteen and had been home all along, was especially tender and affectionate when she embraced us at the door.

2. GROWING UP

IT IS HARD FOR ME TO DESCRIBE DICK. It would probably come out wrong if I tried. One thing that both his brothers and his sister feel is that his life must not be falsified. I have heard each of them—Jim, Ben, Mary Ann—bemoan the effort to make a “martyr” of him, the piteous attempt to idealize him. He was our brother. We felt his loss sufficiently not to wish to lose him from our imagination, too, in the illusions of piety.

He was 28 years old. He had a good heart, a sharp mind, a temper, and sometimes infuriating ways. We all remember arguments with him. We will admit that he was the most gentle of us, the one with the most even disposition. But none of us believes that he was a “saint,” or even what would be called a “good boy.” Compared to the rest of us, our parents have long imagined that Dick was especially innocent. Among his friends, that deception early disappeared. He was mischievous, imaginative, clever, and fear-

less. He got away with things with our parents as none of the rest of us could. He hid his mischief, using a sense of humor.

I cannot speak about his high school days with any authority, for at that time I was already studying for the priesthood myself. All I know is that to his friends Rich had become Dick, then Nick; that without raising any special trouble he had begun to smoke—even been caught by my father, who discovered the fact by borrowing one of his jackets with a pack of cigarettes in the pocket. My father found it very difficult to believe, for Rich was not a rebellious son, and always seemed placid and innocent. At

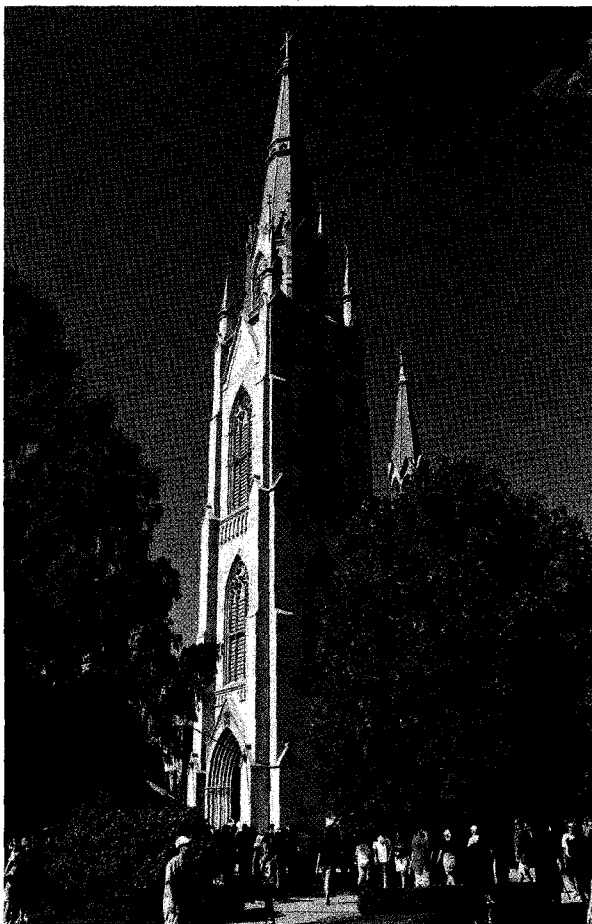
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Johnstown Catholic, likewise, Rich had a reputation for being the originator of pranks and carefully hidden illicit behavior (beer drinking during play practice), of which he himself was almost never suspected by the nuns. No one in authority could ever imagine Dick as a culprit; he seemed docile and sweet. But he was a joy to his friends because of the escapades he used to suggest and carry off in seeming innocence, leading the way.

It is difficult to speak about the earlier years without drawing myself into the story. Dick was born in 1935, when I was almost two. Jim was next, in 1939. So it is plain that Dick and I grew up closest together in the earliest years, though later Jim and Ben (1943) came to know him better than I. As the oldest son, I am afraid much of the first attention of the family was spent on me. Even physically, Dick was always smaller and weaker than I had been at the same age. In studies, my marks were higher. Moreover, I was a bit of a tyrant to him. In our board games, or athletic contests (one on one), I always had to win. He always had to “do me a favor, go get...” (This is a tradition unhappily continued in the family, Rich to Jim, Jim to Ben, Ben to Mary Ann.)

I remember once at about age ten, in a pique, turning to throw a stone in his direction to keep him from following me into the part of the yard where I was playing. It hit him on the forehead. I still remember the shock of that August evening, when his hands

THE DAY MY BROTHER WAS MURDERED



went to the place of impact and pain, and I was filled with horror.

He had every reason to resent me. Instead, he was unbelievably loyal. Once, when he was six or so, he used his entire Christmas fund to buy me a present, skipping everybody else. He made me "go away" in the store where he bought it. It was to be a secret and he was immensely proud of it. When we met Mother later, at a predetermined rendezvous in the store, he handed the package to her to place in the bundle of other packages she had. A string slipped. Out fell a propeller-driven metal boat, a foot long, blue, yellow, and red. The look in his eyes, of disappointment and despair, has never left me.

AT FOURTEEN, I WENT AWAY TO SEMINARY, 900 miles away. I came home only at Christmas and for eight weeks in the summer. In those same years, Dick began to blossom. He was too light to go out for sports; but gamely tried. He shrugged off his failures and contented himself with other activities.

Then, after he graduated from high school and I had just finished my first year of college, Dick went to the University of Notre Dame. He chose to major in electrical engineering and enrolled in a special five-year program. Engineering was a mistake for anyone in our family, and he was soon shifting over to the liberal arts. He played the clarinet in the Notre Dame band; he got the position by keeping his instrument at his lips, he said (implausibly), without making a sound. When I watched the annual television game, that year Navy, in Philadelphia, he told me to look for him in the marching shape of a horse; I'd find him right under the tail.

Dick had never talked about the priesthood. But at Notre Dame he began to spend evenings with the older seminarians who were living on campus at "the old college." By June of his first year he was determined to enter the novitiate. Surprisingly to me, he chose to enter the Eastern Province, which meant we would spend a year or two together.

In August of 1954, he received the cassock of the Holy Cross Fathers in the novitiate at Bennington, Vermont. The building was an old mansion on the side of a lovely wooded hill, acquired by the community only in 1952, where I spent the last two months of my own novitiate, as a member of the pioneering class. The heavy stone mansion hid out in acres of orchards on a quiet hillside. Brother Protase had the cow barns in pretty good shape by the time Rich got there; and some of the long-neglected apple trees were being pruned again; they were expected to give more abundant fruit the next year.

Dick was apparently the leader of the pranksters in his class. At Halloween, he linked a strong black thread from the porter's bell at the mansion gate, along the outside of the ivy-covered mansion and up into his bedroom window, along the floor to his bed. After "lights out," he tolled the bell once. Then a few minutes later. The assistant novice-master went to his window and watched. Not a sound. When he turned away, the bell tolled again. The priest reached for an electric lantern, waited in the silence, and when the bell rang again snapped on the silent beam. Everything was still. Dick lay innocently in his bed, and yanked the invisible thread even with the light upon it. That final ring mystified and infuriated the assistant novice-master.

Rich did another trick with a string—this time he dropped it down through the fireplace from the mysterious, cluttered attic where some of the possessions of the original owners still lay in trunks and

boxes. On the end of this string in the attic was a long chain, which from his bed he could drag across the ceiling of the room next to his.

When Dick's class came to Stonehill College in North Easton to continue their studies, having made temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for one year, my friends among them hastened to tell me about Dick's escapades. The situation at the novitiate was far from healthy; the leadership was not in all respects admirable; ebullience of spirit was all the more necessary because of the isolation of the mansion on the hill.

AT STONEHILL, DICK AND I WERE GLAD for the opportunity to get to know one another again. We had been separated since 1947. Still, our temperaments were so different that we did not spend long hours together, or even take part in the same activities. Yet our affection and unity were very deep. It was perhaps because we feared surface disagreements that we stayed apart. Dick was quiet, quick-minded, ironical, and unless a point of justice was at stake, he usually met challenges with a shrug. I was aggressive and wanted to dominate. Dick and I often joked that as long as we were physically miles apart we were in perfect harmony; when we were together, we hardly spoke to one another, or, when we did, we ended in argument. I'm not sure why we argued. I think it was because I imagined myself as his superior, always right, and his diffidence only revealed my pretensions. When he would tentatively disagree with me, I would bristle. He took it as a point of honor to disagree with me when he thought I was wrong. I deeply admired this trait, and hated my own responses. He never seemed to hold my faults against me.

At Stonehill, the seminarians' touch football team had a reputation both for playing a peculiarly aggressive, rough kind of football—and for being nearly unbeatable. Dick was light but very quick on his feet. Besides, he was intelligent and readily grasped the strategy of the game. On the six-man team, he played a very reliable defensive end. By this time, I was captain and it was our strategy that if the ends prevented the other side from running around them, by "boxing" them in, our backs could cover pass receivers with perfect security. Many of our stronger, heavier ends would try to crash the opposing passer, and in the process yield an open field around them. I found I could trust Dick implicitly, against whatever odds, to keep his feet and keep gliding outwards to box the opposition. The other team

would often place huge 200-pounders against him, but in touch football all that weight could be discounted if the defensive end merely slid away, always to the outside, and turned the passer in. Dick used

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intelligence and courage to make up for his lack of weight. I remember him in the October air, in grass-stained chinos and a green team jersey too big for him, with a face of serious concentration.

In countless ways, there was instant communication between Dick and me. Just as he grasped a strategy I had in mind while calling out a defensive pattern, so I leaped along with him in reading a set of books or developing a chain of ideas. It was not as though one led and the other followed, except for the inevitable factor of the two-year difference in our ages. It was as though, spontaneously, we liked, cherished, and desired the same things.

Sometimes it was difficult for me to get along with the other fellows in the seminary. My last year at Stonehill, for example, I was "dean" or representative of the others before the superior, a lot which fell to the one who had professed his vows at the earliest date. On many minor holidays, the smokers in the group would press me to ask the superior for special smoking periods during recreation times; for the rules on smoking were rather strict. Sometimes these requests seemed foolish, but I made it a point always to ask for permission unless I could convince the smokers in question that we'd be better off not overdoing the requests. There were also the problems of extra work periods, and assigning some men to do some jobs, others to others. It was good to be able to count on Dick for silent support at such times. My own over-sensitive yet assertive ways, hidden sometimes under a studied gentleness, made all such decisions disagreeable. He understood.

Moreover, during the spring of the year I graduated, 1956, Dick gathered a crew of volunteers to

begin the construction of a long path across the marshes from our seminary (a former barn, converted by our own hard work) to the area where the new college buildings were going up. Nearly every afternoon during recreation, Dick and the others would take axes, picks, and spades and try to extend their 700-yard bridge another few feet. For fill, they hauled logs, brush, stone, and dirt from the nearby woods. They drove stakes to hold twin rows of logs in place upon the wet ground, and between the logs they dumped their fill. They christened their highway in Latin, to please the taste of their Latin professor, *Via Palludosa*: the way through the marsh.

THE SEMINARY IN WHICH WE LIVED had once been a cow barn on the famous Ames estate. Our recreation room, in the adjacent building, was a hardwood-paneled room in which the farm's prize bulls had lived. The pine groves behind the barn and the cornfields beyond them separated us from the college proper: the grotto, tennis courts, and school buildings. Both Dick and I rejoiced in the open skies, the sunlight on the fields, the darting swallows, and the scent of the nearby pine groves.

The one peculiarity of our seminary days at Stonehill was that the college was co-educational. There were girls in nearly all our classes. Our rules allowed us to be courteous and friendly, but forbade us to "linger" or to initiate familiar conversations. Needless to say, for young men in their twenties, when the saps of life seem to run fullest, the presence of the girls was an attractive invitation, a constant warmth. It was a healthy problem: the vow of chastity became a matter for rededication every day, pronounced not in unknowing isolation but in the patterns of later, ordinary life. We felt we were the most fortunate of seminarians.

Of course, the necessary sublimation sometimes required pretty fast peddling, as it were. On certain springtime evenings, in certain moods, or during times when other students attended plays or dances, sweet fingers of desire would sweep through the heart. Officially, there was little advice given us about how to form and maintain healthy attitudes. We had to find our own way. Dick and I and a few others did it mainly by making countless jokes. We referred to the girls at the college as "nuns," we described pretty girls by how many ships they could launch (if Helen's face could launch a thousand), and the like. Sometimes the humor revealed too much preoccupation. Yet, all in all, I think we took the

healthy course. We were very much attracted to girls; and it was difficult to keep our natural instincts for admiration, affection, and human love from overwhelming our commitment to the Lord.

One friend who must be brought into this record is Joe Skaff. Dick's classmate, even slighter of build than Dick, and blessed with a zany, merry temper, Joe was often the foil of our jokes and our affection. He was our Falstaff and our whipping-boy. His handsome Lebanese nose was the peg of a thousand quips. His knowledge of Arabic, at a crucial point, encouraged Dick's interest in the tongue. His love of the East brought that love to Dick, together with the experience of Arab dishes, reunions—and belly dances. Joe's home near Boston became a frequent visiting place, and Joe's pretty cousins became the storied ladies of imagination and mutual teasing. ("You guys don't like *me*; you like my cousins!")

Joe was ordained the same year as Dick, but preceded him to Pakistan by more than a year. There their friendship revived after three years of separation while Dick studied in France. Both families felt consoled to know that the two were together in Pakistan.

3. FRANCE

DICK GRADUATED *magna cum laude* from Stonehill in 1958. Our cousins from New England, uncles and aunts from Pennsylvania, parents, brothers and sister, gathered round him. Bill and Irene O'Day, second cousins from New Britain, had their little Richard (Dick's namesake) along—with Timmy and Eileen.

At this time, I was studying in Rome and deep in confusion about my own vocation. My desires to work in fiction and philosophy were running off in more directions than the priesthood seemed able to contain. In searching out the roots of my vocation I came to tangles I couldn't seem to solve. I was hoping, then, that Dick might likewise be assigned to Rome. I loved Rome, and wanted him to share my love for the city and my many happy experiences. There was talk also of France, but the Holy Cross house in France was small, not well organized, and notoriously difficult for Americans.

It was to France, however, that Dick was sent. Well, at least he was in Europe; I was very glad that the fact that I had earlier been sent abroad to study had not prevented our superiors from sending him, too.

Meanwhile, my own interior troubles were so acute that it seemed that something would have to burst. Yet it certainly did not seem sensible, after so many years, so many deep desires, so much preparation, to leave my studies for the priesthood. Cut a long and confused story short to say that late that summer, after I had written a letter about my doubts to Father DePrizio, he sent back a cable to Father Heston, my superior in Rome, calling me back to America. Within 12 hours I was taking a train away from my friends at summer camp in Bressanone, and looking up at the night sky and at my fellow worldly passengers, and thinking: "This is my world, and I belong to it again!" For I was sure that I was returning to the States to leave the seminary.

Meanwhile, Dick had himself just made his perpetual vows and was at home, preparing himself for the trip to France. (He had spent the preceding summer at St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, where he had made a start on French. He delighted in the pastoral work involved in helping the many pilgrims who come there in the summer.) He heard the news of my coming home, of my confused state of mind, and he was a little shaken. It took him only a moment to adjust, however, for he wrote that night to Father George S. DePrizio that his own desires remained unchanged. "I am anxious to study theology, and willing to do it wherever I am sent, certain that wherever obedience sends me I will find fulfillment of my vocation."

The next sentence in the letter is one which, when I first read it after his death, made me wish to cry. "Of course the letter from Mike does not leave me insensitive....Although we have been together for less than two years (altogether) in the past eleven, we have enjoyed a closeness impossible to express in writing."

He admitted that he had not been able to enjoy his vacation on account of my uncertainty:

Just as certainly I do not feel that anything which occurs should take away from the dedication of myself which I made the 16th last.

So I am doing what, probably, you are hoping I do not do—leaving the decision up to you. It's one of the privileges the vow gives me, and I exercise it with great relief. Certainly I have looked with anticipation on the prospect of seeing the Old World; but at the same time I am willing to take my theology in Washington. Or even, if you thought it advisable after seeing Mike, to spend a year teaching.

I hope you do not think from this that I took my vows merely to save myself the trouble of making decisions. On the contrary, I find it constantly necessary, in everything I do, to reaffirm a decision taken before Novitiate but I hope, expanded and deepened since then. But whether I do this in France or Washington or Rome or Haflong I feel, is, and should be, out of my hands and in yours.

If I might cheat somewhat on these ideals I would like to confess a great desire to see Mike when he returns. But again, this is in your hands.

The boat trip to Le Havre was quite rough. Dick wrote that though he managed to avoid seasickness, he "certainly didn't feel too strong and healthy when we disembarked." There were only ten seminarians at the small house in Le Mans where the Holy Cross

Dick's letters to me were always ruthlessly frank; he used me as an outlet for all the doubts and frustrations that were difficult to confide in someone else, without scandalizing them.

Fathers were first established, in 1839. "I suppose," he wrote to Father DePrizio on October 8, "one of the things you'll want to know is whether I like it here—though it's really too late to worry about that. But the truth is that I am happier in France than I have been for a long time. I love everything I've seen of the people and the customs, and the atmosphere of the seminary and the attitudes of the seminarians. If first impressions are the most important, then I should have no troubles at all over here. Of course a life without troubles would be most boring, so I'll manage to find some—as soon as I learn the language." He wrote back to Stonehill that the seminarians with him "are serious, intelligent, crazy enough so I can enjoy myself without Skaiff." He declined to pass judgment on the quality of the theology courses at *Le Grand Seminaire* since he had "a difficult time distinguishing between the Greek and the French in Scripture class."

THE THREE YEARS IN FRANCE passed quickly. They were not without grave psychological struggles. Dick's letters to me were always

ruthlessly frank; he used me as an outlet for all the doubts and frustrations that were difficult to confide in someone else, without scandalizing them. By this time, on the advice of Father DePrizio, I had gone back to the seminary, this time in Washington, to see

Dick came to love more the possibilities of American Catholicism, but to desire less to live out his priestly life in this country. His calling led elsewhere.

if a change in climate would make a difference in my own attitudes. I hated the sight of black cassocks, and was made almost physically ill by the effort of entering theology classes. But a splendid counselor and the opportunity to visit regularly with a psychiatrist soon eased my tensions considerably.

Meanwhile, Dick was much afflicted by the gap between the people and the clergy that he felt in France. He had gone to Europe despondent about the lack of intelligence and vision in American Catholicism; he looked forward to the "more intelligent" Europe of Bloy, Péguy, Claudel, Maritain, Marcel. Within a year, he had begun to appreciate the unrealized potential of American Catholicism, its unspectacular but latent health. He rejoiced, like me, in Maritain's *Reflections on America*, especially in the footnote in which Maritain claimed that the society on earth closest to the vision of his marvelous outline of a new civilization, *Humanisme Intégral*, was that of the United States.

This is not to say that Dick wished to live as a priest in the United States. On the contrary, he hated the kind of work that most American priests were engaged in: teaching, raising money, supervising buildings, using canon law as if it were the rule book of bureaucratic organization. Any reader of J. F. Powers, and Edwin O'Connor's Irish priests, will recognize his point. With each year that went on, Dick came to love more the possibilities of American Catholicism, but to desire less to live out his priestly life in this country. His calling led elsewhere.

He was depressed by many things in France: the gloomy building in which he lived; the life of a small community of bachelors; the contradiction between his affectionate spirit and the grind of early rising, studies, and clerical surroundings. "Have bike and beret; will travel," he wrote. Traveling over the coun-

tryside, meeting with God's nature and God's people, became his joy.

In a letter to Dick, Mary Ann, then ten, spelled Brittany "Brittenknee," and Dick wrote back to Father Provincial in August of 1959:

Vacation in Brittenknee...was three weeks of head-clearing and left me much more peaceful of heart and prepared for the coming year. The clean sea breeze and the cool green waters, the evening sunsets and the morning sun-rise from a fishing boat far at sea, the trips by bike and bus and boat and taxi, and all the cider and cheese and crêpes and all that is Brittany, did more to set me back on my feet than I had thought possible. Reading Thérèse of Lisieux helped quite a bit; such is the way our God works, in His quiet and relaxing and sweet (*disponit omnia suaviter* says the first advent antiphon) fashion; and I thank you for the prayers you daily offer for your religious.

Once, from the coast of Normandy where they had gone for a few days vacation, Dick sent me a postcard of crowds of people enjoying the sun on the beach. Deliciously, the message on the reverse side instructed me to note the sky, the water, the pier, the pebbles on the beach. There was no mention of the plentiful bikinis.

He wrote lingering letters of his trips to Chartres, LaFleche, Arras, Rheims, Paris. He loved to play ball with children in Le Mans, and to stop to talk with children on all his trips. They were as if the children he would never have.

The revolution in Algeria in the winter of 1959-60 brought excitement even into the seminary:

De Gaulle's Fireside Chat on radio sure was a beauty. All our French seminarians were worried about being drafted, had the revolution continued. It's a pity the thing calmed down, you know. Had things gotten worse, some one may have accidentally dropped a bomb on the grand sem. But that could only be a dream.

Dick was extremely ill for several weeks in 1959. He couldn't hold food in his stomach; but he was so weak he very much needed food. At the hospital, the sisters babied him back to health, teasing out his appetite with special dishes. I felt miserable hearing of his troubles, for my own difficulties were still

unresolved. I had been gaining peace, only to begin getting tense again.

What was wrong with me? There was pitifully little solace I could give him at so great a distance. I imagined that he had gotten into a situation of almost total spiritual loneliness. However kind his friends were, his ideas and desires were different and now no one was around to reinforce them. I knew he had to learn to stand alone (as I was trying to do). But at our distance I could never be sure what to say and what not to say, to be of the most help and least interference.



IN THE SUMMER OF 1959, I found a happiness deeper than I had experienced for many years. At summer camp at Lake Sebago in Maine with Joe Skaff and a few others, I found the affectionate companionship, the beauties of lake and wood, and the daily work periods out-of-doors a needed tonic. Besides, there was time to write: time to work on a novel, as well as on a short musical comedy which, in our small circle, and for our benefactors, was a happy success. But once classes began, and the actual decision to go on to the priesthood pressed on me again, it became apparent that I could not keep my peace. Just after choosing a chalice and holy cards, and giving my parents the idea that they could begin preparing for ordination in June, I realized that I couldn't go through with it. On December 8, I told my superior.

At the end of the first semester, in late January of 1960, I left for home. After almost 13 years in the seminary, I was the only departing seminarian for whom Father Superior allowed a going-away party, to spare my friends any surprises. I was the last guy to leave, among the group of 30 that started little seminary with me in 1947.

I had bought brown trousers, a tie, and a light topcoat; on the train I felt a joy such as I had in Italy eighteen months before: "The world is mine again!"

I had always loved the world and kept that love alive in my heart; so long as my vocation seemed to be the priesthood, I was ready to relinquish what I loved, but never to despise it. Now I returned to it with peace and exhilaration.

Dick understood my reaction and was reassured as soon as he heard of it.

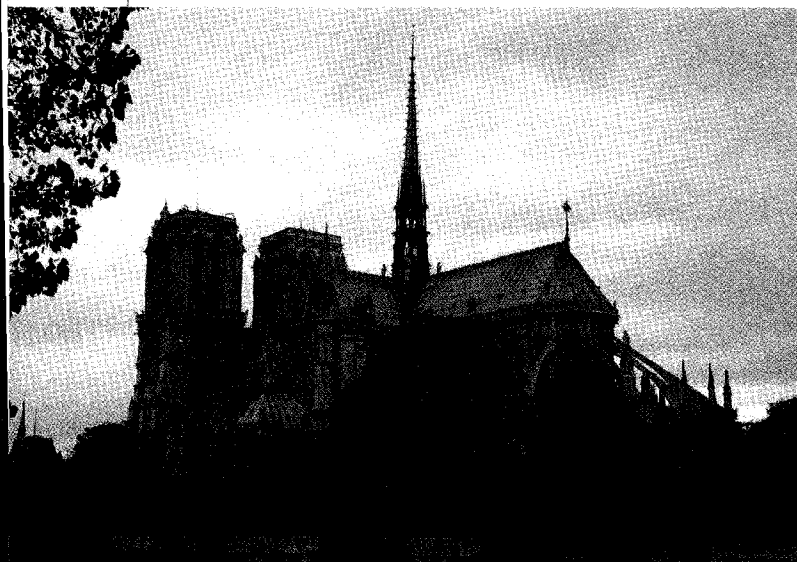
That Easter, he and Bill Persia and Fred Floyd and his other companions broke from the regular routine as much as they could.

"Lent didn't end too soon for our mental health," he wrote,

and now we're getting ourselves back to normal with as many trips and as far from Le Mans as we can manage. Yesterday's long voyage on bicycles was a little difficult on my miniscule muscles, but it was a happy time, free and easy, with the ten of us on the bikes slowing each other down to a reasonable pace. We bought some Gaulois, drank beer (it's safer than water, and the milk is tubercular), saw the country, talked to the people, made noise and all in all had a relaxing time. Bill Persia was in charge, and we gave him a hard enough time to make it enjoyable for him. He needed the change, too. The ceremonies here at the parish weren't the greatest I'm told, and poor Bill had the task of getting the choir in shape and keeping the mad-man who was playing the organ from ruining everything. When he played it sounded like he was walking on the keys with hob-nails, and that didn't help Bill's frayed nerves any. Fred grayed his hairs watching the fiasco on the altar, with twenty-five-odd *enfants de chœur* running all over not knowing what to do, to speak nothing of the ministers. I was lucky enough (because I'm by no means indispensable to the choir) to be MC up at the Solitude Friday [a large convent], and Sub-Deacon Saturday. Aside from a new fire that resembled the burning of Rome and the MC (me) getting stuck on a door handle and having to be unhooked by a nearby nun, things went fine Saturday. It was my first time in an Alb, and I darn near fell on my face ascending the altar the first time, but with 25 nuns in black and a dozen novices in the most unbelievably white veils watching you all the time, things are pretty subdued, and there is occasion for entering into the spirit of the Liturgy. Also everything at the Solitude is clean and polished and gleaming under the bright

THE DAY MY BROTHER WAS MURDERED

lights, and that is a pleasure for the spirit and the body; especially because at the sem we have neither cleanliness nor bright lights. As for Friday, *n'en parlons pas*. I was too intent on making sure every man was where he should be that the Liturgy passed me by, I fear. But I didn't get stuck on any door handles....



That summer, the boys took part in the *Mission de France*. Together with young men and women from all over France, they descended on a small area to "preach the gospel to every creature." They lived in a camp. They visited door-to-door, planned skits, held discussions, listened, inquired, talked. It was an exhilarating time. Dick loved to be with ardent people. He was happy on the *Mission*.

"Your last letter," he wrote to Father DePrizio,

came to me while I was on the Mission on the coast of the English Channel—the little vacation town of Mer-les-Bains. There were 2 other csc's with the Mission up the coast at Cayeux, and again 2 further north at Fort Mahon. I hope you'll excuse me if I speak but partially of the camp: there were the almost constant late hours and lack of sleep; most of all there was the personal awareness of each one of his ineptitude at conveying the Gospel message; and finally of course the disappointment that the results of our efforts are never visible. But to make up for all of this, there was the '*surabondance*' of joy in the camp, and the community of effort, and the fact that through all of our mistakes we

were learning more deeply what it was to be a Christian—and for myself, a greater appreciation of what it will be to be a Priest. It was a good and deep experience, Father, and thus extremely hard to describe. But it sure was delicious to live among the Frenchmen, and to have the occasion to see their manner of living and thinking.

He continued:

This past week has found us all at Le Mans. For the 3 days after the Mission, the 4 of us csc's visited Arras, Lille, Rheims and Paris. Ah Paris. In my two visits (before and after the Mission) I saw an opera, 3 presentations of the Comedie Francaise, the film *Dialogue des Carmelites* (Gertrude von Le Fort and George Bernanos), spent 2 days in the Louvre, another at the Museum of Modern Art (the French Impressionists) and the rest of the time visiting St. Sulpice and the Catholic art shops, Montmartre, La Madeleine, Notre Dame de Paris, la Sainte Chappelle, etc. I really got around in 5 and a half days, and I'd really looked for sleep on returning to Le Mans.

But instead it's been 5 straight days of tearing off wallpaper and washing off water, paint and plastering. Next week we begin painting....

Dick's own room was painted to his taste, as best they could manage:

The window wall is a beautiful deep maroon-red, and the other walls silver grey, with a pale yellow ceiling. With the floor waxed it looks like a castle. The other rooms are various shades of green, grey, blue, salmon, etc. Sorry, no beige. But it will be bright and clean and refreshing during the rainy season.

In December, Dick was ordained a subdeacon in a church in Le Mans whose origins went back to the sixth century. "I didn't find it very romantic, however, as these long-drawn-out ceremonies leave me cold literally and sensitively..."

Mother and Dad, meanwhile, were already planning to visit Europe for the ordination in June.

THE PRECEDING AUGUST, Jim, then a senior at Boston College, had married Patricia O'Reagan of County Galway, Ireland. Since Pat had no

immediate relatives in the U.S., my parents offered to hold the wedding in Johnstown. That was the first major family ceremony to be held in Our Mother of Sorrows, our beautiful, quiet English-Gothic church in the suburb of Westmont. Dick, of course, could not be there.

But the next summer Dick was back, a priest. On June 29, 1961, in the parish church of Notre Dame de Sainte Croix in Le Mans, Archbishop Lawrence Graner of Dacca, a Holy Cross man who happened to be in Europe, ordained Dick a priest. Mother and Dad participated. While Dick was on retreat before the ceremony, there had been hours of long conversation with the other boys, the priests, the Archbishop—and the bottles of wine in festivity. By the day of the ceremony, all were one at heart. At the mass of the ordination, then, turning to descend with communion to my parents, the Archbishop tripped and the new white hosts, which Dick had co-consecrated, were strewn across the sanctuary floor. There were tense moments till the Sacred Breads—become-Christ were recovered, and the ceremony could proceed.

After traveling through France to Rome and back with Mother and Dad, Dick returned to Le Mans. He followed them later to the States, and said his first Mass in Our Mother of Sorrows Church in mid-August. The church was full of well-wishers, relatives and friends. The day was clear and bright. The gray-blue flagstones of the church floor, and of the sidewalk outside, remain fixed in my memory. I was master-of-ceremonies on the altar, putting to good use the knowledge I had acquired of such things. After Mass, the procession of visiting priests, pastor, and servers wound around to the new parish hall, where a lovely breakfast had been prepared. The mood was happy. The women wore summer outfits and flowers; flowers decked the room. Relatives who had not gathered for many months, even years, were present. There was great pride in the family. Dick, we knew, was a true priest. Compassionate, open, honest, thirsting after justice. Ben and Jim, who are suspicious of all outward piety, were also proud of him; for him, they could swallow their anticlericalism.

To the despair of all of their children, Mother and Dad insisted on calling Dick "Father Richard," and even tried to make us do it. Dick let them have their way, without open protest, though he made plain by ironical winks to us that it was only not to mar their joy.

At the reception, Dick shrugged off all ceremony and fuss. He was uniformly "present" to everyone who came to greet him in the receiving line; he gave of himself, effortlessly. His chalice, a tiny silver one modeled after a tenth-century chalice he had seen in a museum, was as honest, solid, and traditional as his own personality. He was not a "regular guy." He was trying to restore in himself a long tradition. He hoped it would shape him in such a way that he would only need to be himself for it to speak. There was no gimmick to his affability. He was himself.

While he was still in Le Mans, Dick had written several poems for *Colloquium*, the international student publication of the Holy Cross Fathers. One of them seems especially revealing.

I AM NO LAZY LOVER

*I am no lazy lover
With sweeping grandeurs
of small talk. Words, you discover,
are passing; love endures.*

*Proffered is no measured length
of the potential soul.
Rather, influence of strength,
corner-stone, cemented whole.*

*The senses know the form
and smile and eyes
of love, but the lover's norm
is to pierce through this disguise
to spirit which in all things
does love intensify
to ripened being. Each day that sings
our love is more July.*

*Sand below and stars above
give instance of me.
Mine is no lazy love;
come taste my love and see.*

4. TO DACCA

DICK HAD HARDLY RETURNED to his first assignment, further study at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., when he was writing to request permission to go to the Missions. In 1958, he had asked Father DePrizio whether he could take the "fourth vow"; viz., to go anywhere in the world his superiors might wish to send him. In Holy Cross, this

vow was in practice looked upon as a request to go to the Missions. Father DePrizio advised him to wait, unless he was sure he wanted to go. Dick was willing to go, but he wasn't sure he wanted to go.

In France, he soon realized that he did want to go. It was too early to do anything about it. He waited again. But as soon as he was settled in Washington, he wrote to Father DePrizio. He had talked with Father Arnold Fell, the Director of the Holy Cross Mission program, and Father Robert McKee, the Superior of the Vicariate of Dacca; he was already

His remains were never found—except for his skull, found by a Bengali detective some months later. The priests' dentist proved without doubt that it was Dick's.

Dick had wanted to be wholly consumed by love for God and neighbor. He was.

speaking of special studies in Islamic culture and philosophy. He had a desire to begin forging intellectual links between Islam and Christianity. First, he had to get permission to take the mission vow.

"I hope you are not deceived by my long silence in this decision taken a long time ago," he wrote to Father DePrizio. "'Twas thyself advised me to wait until I could be 'certain enough to fight for [it].'"

That is how Rich put himself in the queue to be sent to Pakistan. Before arriving there, he was sent for courses to the Holy Cross Foreign Mission Seminary near Catholic University in Washington. In the summer of 1962, he took two courses in Arabic at Harvard. He also had a couple months of experience in the "Southern missions" in rural Georgia. On one occasion, he later recalled, little boys asked to see his tail. They had been taught that all priests were devils, and wore cassocks to hide their tails. The work of bringing Catholic faith to the rural South was very difficult, and yet for him exhilarating. He knew that, however hard, it would be far harder still in Pakistan.

After a brief vacation at home with the family in Johnstown, Rich was driven back to Washington to catch an airplane by my father and my brother Jim (third in line behind Rich and me). On the way home, Jim wrote in his book *Bangladesh: Reflections on the*

Water, my dad stopped the car and began to cry profusely. When Jim asked what was wrong, no reply came for a while. When he could, my father said, "I am never going to see him again. He will not come home."

He had had that premonition once before, when in 1943 his best friend Mickey Yuhas had been drafted into the army, and by mid-June had landed in France. My father felt a sense of doom. During the Battle of the Bulge in early December 1944, Mickey Yuhas was killed by a bullet in his forehead. That is the only other time I know of that my father burst into tears.

WHAT DID NOT BECOME CLEAR to the family until well after the death of our parents was the way Dick died. On the ferryboat mentioned above, near the end of the crossing, two young boys grabbed him and shouting, "We caught another Hindu!" pushed him into the water. We did not call Richard "the lion-hearted" for nothing. He fought the boys back until they called two older lads from the shore. He showed them the crucifix Holy Cross Brothers wear around their necks, and explained in Urdu that he was a Christian. They pulled Richard to the shore and now four held him down, while a fifth stabbed him in the throat and then plunged the knife into his chest.

Although robbery was not their motive, the boys took his watch and his bicycle. His eyeglasses had been broken in several pieces by the struggle. The young men threw his body in the water, witnesses said, but when it lodged in the river bank, the vultures and dogs that were feeding on other bodies along the river tore his body apart. His remains were never found—except that a Bengali detective some months later, who found Richard's skull, had the presence of mind to have the priests' dentist study it. He proved without doubt that it was Dick's.

Dick had wanted to be wholly consumed by love for God and neighbor. He was.

I hope it is not wrong to pray to him as a martyr. Thanks to my sister's discovery of so many documents, it is clear to me that he was. ❀

Michael Novak is the George Frederick Jewett Scholar in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute. He wishes to express his indebtedness to his sister, Mary Ann Novak, for her tireless research, which has uncovered many heretofore unknown facts.

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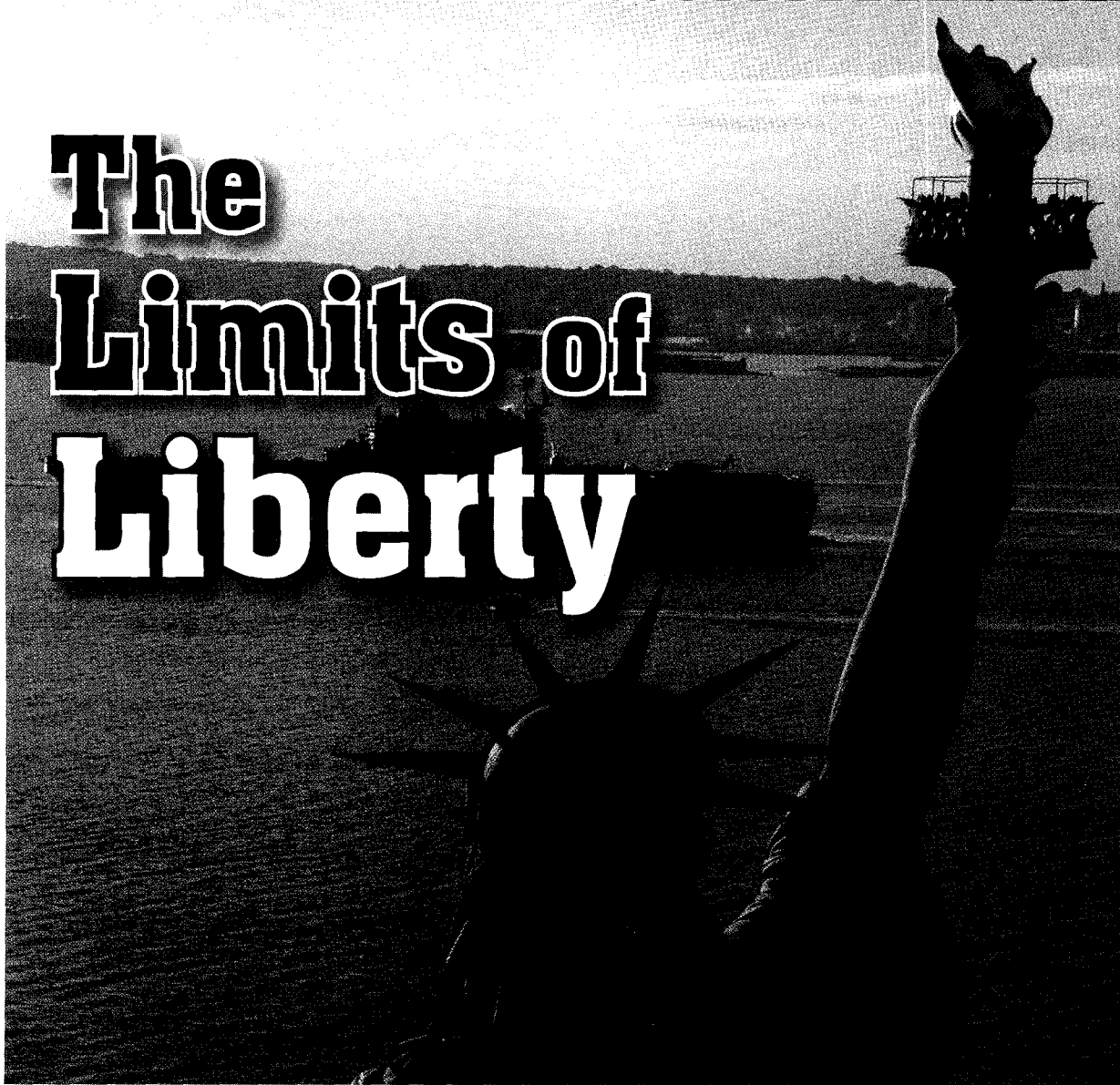


THOMAS NELSON

THE *American Patriot's* ALMANAC



The Limits of Liberty



**As license now
trumps responsibility,
the Western world
fritters away its most
treasured possession.**

Roger Scruton

THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR'S ESSAYS on "the future of individual liberty," which have appeared during the course of this past year, reminded us that liberty remains one of the defining issues of modern politics: it is what is at stake in domestic controversies, in foreign relations, and in the broader ideological movements of our time. The writers have considered the conflict between liberalism and conservatism, the disputes over political correctness in schools and colleges, the emerging issue of religious liberty, the battles over the Constitution, the tension between the European Union and the nation states of Europe,