

A Snapshot of the 1st-Century Christian Church . . .

Acts 4:32-37 (ESV) / ³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 5:1-11 (ESV) / But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. ⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you^[a] sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." ⁹ But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

Flannery O'Connor / letter to friend "A" (Betty Hester) / 25 Aug. 1955 / after "A" has wondered whether O'Connor's short stories express a pessimistic, "fascist" perspective . . .

"I wish St. Thomas were handy to consult about the **fascist** business. . . . But if it does mean a *doubt of the efficacy of love and if this is to be observed in my fiction*, then it has to be explained or **partly explained by what happens to conviction (I believe love to be efficacious in the loooong run) when it is translated into fiction designed for a public with a predisposition to believe the opposite**. This along with the limitations of the writer could account for the negative appearance. But find another word than fascist, for me and St. Thomas too. And totalitarian won't do either. . . . Incidentally, St. John would have been able to sit down with the prostitute and said, 'Daughter, let us consider this,' but St. Thomas doubtless knew his own nature and knew that he had to get rid of her with a poker or she would overcome him. I am not only for St. Thomas here but am in accord with his use of the poker. **I call this being tolerantly realistic, not being a fascist.** Another reason for the negative appearance: if you live today you breathe in **nihilism**. In or out of the Church, it's the gas you breathe. If I hadn't had the Church to fight it with or to tell me the necessity of fighting it, I would be the stinkiest logical positivist you ever saw right now. **With such a current to write against, the result almost has to be negative.** It does well **just to be**" (Habit 97).

“A Musical Instrument” (1860; 1860)**Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

	Rhyme	Syllables
What was he doing, the great god Pan,	A	9
Down in the reeds by the river?	B	8
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,	A	8 or 9
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,	C	10
And breaking the golden lilies afloat	5 C	10
With the dragon-fly on the river.	B	9
He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,	A	9
From the deep cool bed of the river:	B	9
The limpid water turbidly ran,	A	9
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,	10 D	10
And the dragon-fly had fled away,	D	9
Ere he brought it out of the river.	B	9
High on the shore sat the great god Pan,	A	9
While turbidly flow'd the river:	B	8
And hack'd and hew'd as a great god can,	15 A	9
With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,	E	10
Till there was not a sign of a leaf indeed	E	11
To prove it fresh from the river.	B	8
He cut it short, did the great god Pan,	A	9
(How tall it stood in the river!)	20 B	8
Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,	A	10
Steadily from the outside ring,	F	8
And notch'd the poor dry empty thing	F	8
In holes, as he sat by the river.	B	9
“This is the way,” laugh'd the great god Pan,	25 A	9
(Laugh'd while he sat by the river,)	B	8
“The only way, since gods began	A	8
To make sweet music, they could succeed.”	E	9
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,	E	11
He blew in power by the river.	30 B	8 or 9
Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!	A	5
Piercing sweet by the river!	B	7
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!	A	7
The sun on the hill forgot to die,	F	9
And the lilies reviv'd, and the dragon-fly	35 F	11
Came back to dream on the river.	B	8
Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,	A	9
To laugh as he sits by the river,	B	9
Making a poet out of a man:	A	9
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain, --	40 G	9
For the reed which grows nevermore again	G	10
As a reed with the reeds in the river.	B	10

“Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” (1839; 1842)
Robert Browning

I

Gr-r-r-there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming? 5
Oh, that rose has prior claims--
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames!

II

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear 10
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
What's the Latin name for "parsley"? 15
What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

III

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
And a goblet for ourself, 20
Rinsed like something sacrificial
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps —
Marked with L. for our initial!
(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

IV

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores 25
Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
— Can't I see his dead eye glow, 30
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
(That is, if he'd let it show!)

V

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays

Cross-wise, to my recollection, 35
As I do, in Jesu's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange-pulp —
In three sips the Arian frustrate
While he drains his at one gulp. 40

VI

Oh, those melons? If he's able
We're to have a feast! so nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
All of us eager to get a slice.
How go on your flowers? None double? 45
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange! And I, too, at such trouble,
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

VII

There's a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails 50
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails.
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying 55
Off to hell, a Manichee?

VIII

Or, my scrofulous French novel,
On grey paper with blunt type!
Simply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe: 60
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

IX

Or, there's Satan! — one might venture 65
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss it till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia
We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine . . . 70
'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r — you swine!

Salvador Dalí's *Woman with a Head Full of Roses* (1935)

