what the novelist may do, nor does it
dictate what he will do. With regard to
the relation of any theoretical or com-
mon presupposition to the novel, the
play, or the story, any adequate account
must employ more subtle instruments of
analysis than exemplification or illus-
tration.

A far more interesting reflection for
the writer is the one that permeates the
letters and essays of Flannery O'Con-
nor: What does the common Christian
vocation say about the activity of being
a writer? From Aquinas via Maritain,
O'Connor took what for her was the lib-
crating conception that artistic activity
aims at the perfection of the thing
made, the bonum operis. It is neither
self-expression nor some coded state-
ment of a private vision, but an effort to
achieve truth by making something tru-
ly. But this leaves many questions as to
when, how, and for what motive a per-
son should engage in such activity. For
guidance on these questions O'Connor
turned to her religious beliefs. It was
her Thomistic conviction that no true
art could be in conflict with the truth
that revealed itself in Jesus. Her convic-
tion, not her theory—and the conviction
survived any number of unasked-for
counsels from Jesuits.

I love Walker Percy's novels. If I had
to pick a favorite, I would waver be-
tween _The Last Gentleman_ and _Love in
the Ruins_. My delight in these stories
does not need to be expressed in a sum-
mary, an interpretation, an explanation.
These novels are good enough to survive
misguided transpositions into other
keys. Walker Percy is a good enough
novelist to survive this accolade from
Robert Coles.

The German Churches Under Hitler:
Background, Struggle, and Epilogue
_by Ernst Christian Helmreich_
(Wayne State University Press; 616 pp.; $30.00)

Gordon Zahn

As the product of precise and extensive-
ly documented scholarship, Professor
Helmreich's study of the difficulties
experienced by the German churches
under Nazi domination merits honor
grades. More than a hundred pages of
footnotes and annotated bibliographical
references evidence mastery of the
widest range of relevant published
sources. Actually, allowing for his help-
ful analyses of the "before" and "after"
situations, Helmreich devotes less than
three hundred pages to the Hitler years
and the relationship between an increas-
ingly unfriendly state and the generally
resistant churches.

As might be expected, major atten-
tion is given to the Lutheran, Evangeli-
cal, and Roman Catholic communities,
but the two summary chapters dealing
with the special problems encountered
by the "free" churches, sects, and other
para-religious bodies are more than ade-
quate. The step-by-step account of the
negotiations leading to the controversial
concordat between the Vatican and the
Third Reich is familiar enough, and the
author duly records the dissatisfaction
of both parties with the finished product
and their attempts to use its provisions
to their own advantage in the troubled
years of strain and open struggle. Less
familiar, and therefore more valuable, is
the description of a seemingly unending
series of organizations and reorganiza-
tions within the Protestant churches,
complicated as they were by the intensi-
ty of the conflict between the state-
encouraged "German Christians" and
the heroically dissident "Confessing
Church." Helmreich covers these devel-
opments in patient detail, sometimes at
the risk of losing the interest of a reader
who might be less patient toward what
times appears to be little more than
factional rivalries and verbal contests.

In this respect the book's greatest
strength is also its basic weakness (quite
apart from the intimidating price, which
probably will restrict it to research and
library catalogues); the account is too
overwhelmingly factual and dependent
upon documentary sources. The impres-
sion one gets is that "church" is used
only in the sense of an organizational
entity, and that the "struggle" finds its
most significant expression in such
things as leadership personnel and
structure, formal declarations of official
bodies, budgetary allocations, and head-
counts. As a result, though we can see
how leading churchmen like Bishop
_Wohnen_, Martin Niemöller, Cardinal
Bertram, et al., were placed in the con-
tests with Nazi officials, only rarely
(and then most vaguely and indirectly)
do we get any hint about how their
actions affected members of their
flocks. Even these distinguished leaders
are presented almost exclusively in their
official roles. They come through to us
as names and titles, not as very human
personalities taking heroic risks or mak-
ing accommodations. Their fears and
hopes as private persons seldom, if ever,
enter the story.

To cite but one instance of how too
rigid a reliance upon documentation can
reduce the impact of the struggle, there
is the distressingly brief reference to
Max Josef Metzger. Helmreich careful-
ly reproduces the invoice of "death
expenses" imposed by the authorities
upon Metzger's religious order follow-
ing his execution and cremation; but,
apart from the mere statement that he
was punished for writing a letter to a
Swedish bishop asking him to mediate
peace (not strictly correct, incidentally),
there is no further indication of this
particular martyr's extensive activity in
the pre-Hitler Catholic peace move-
ment, no acknowledgment of the lack
of understanding on the part of his bishop,
not even any reference to his early and
significant contributions to the ecumen-
ism that Helmreich counts as one of the
major postwar benefits of the Nazi
years. Metzger is at least mentioned,
unlike Franziskus Stratmann, Edith
Stein, Sigmund-Schultze, and others
who carried at least as much of the bat-
tle with the Nazis as the ecclesiastical
officials issuing their formal state-
ments.

This failing, if such it is, relates more
to Helmreich's objective than to the
way he has carried it out. Helmreich has
written his book, and it is very good
indeed. What is urgently needed now is
for someone to write a quite different
history of the struggle from the per-
spective of the ordinary believer. Per-
haps the very thoroughness of the pre-
sent work will free future historians to address these other necessarily undocumented dimensions. Since such studies depend more on private experiences and reminiscences, it may already be too late, but some attempt should be made to recapture as much of the story as possible. Two recently published accounts of the “other side” of the holocaust tragedy serve as good examples. Phillip Hallie’s *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (Harper & Row) and Alexander Ramirez’s *The Assisi Underground: The Priests Who Rescued Jews* (Stein & Day) show how two community-wide operations, one Protestant (in Vichy France) and the other Catholic (in Italy), saved Jews as a religious action. I have been assured there were similar efforts in Poland, and I know of Germans who operated a kind of “underground railroad” in the Freiburg-im-Breisgau area. It took Hallie and Ramirez more than thirty years to follow through on their long-standing intentions to write their accounts, and one is sobered by the thought that without them these inspiring stories might have been lost altogether.

There are probably other stories of such heroism still to be told, but they are not likely to be uncovered in official archives. It would be an altogether unanticipated but valuable contribution of the Helmreich study if, just because it is so definitive within its carefully maintained limits, it redirected the professional historian’s interest in the “church struggle” to the experiences of the men and women who lived it.

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The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations
by Christopher Lasch
(W.W. Norton; 268 pp.; $11.95)

John C. Hawley

In this immensely interesting and suggestive book Christopher Lasch, an American historian at the University of Rochester, offers Narcissus as the mythical character approximating today’s Americans. Surrounded by a coterie of admiring nymphs and beloved by one who could only echo his sentiments, it may be that Narcissus was irrevocably conditioned to bask in the blinding light of his own reflected glory. According to Lasch, however, the modern Narcissus’ obsession with self-reflection is rooted not in love but in boredom and despair.

The author agrees with Freud that narcissism is not self-love but, rather, a defense against aggressive impulses. The young American Narcissus early acquires the savvy to develop beyond the organization man and the market-oriented personality, gaining, with Prufrock, an awareness of the need to “prepare a face to meet the faces.” In his ironic description of a Narcissus who must package himself as a commodity, Lasch laments the passing of the American “culture of competitive individualism,” suggesting that seduction, manipulation, and “management” have replaced independence and initiative as American virtues.

Building on the work of Philip Rieff, Russell Jacoby, Richard Sennett, and others, Lasch first offers a description of the narcissistic personality and then turns his attention to those aspects of American culture that manifest the neuroses of “diminishing expectations.” The initial chapters are the book’s finest, presenting a psychological framework for the “borderline syndrome” of the American Everyman. The author notes that psychiatrists and psychoanalysts are reporting few patients with the classical neuroses Freud described. The typical patient now presents not well-defined symptoms but diffuse dissatisfactions. Maintaining an illusion of limitless options, the modern narcissist has little capacity for personal intimacy and social commitment. On his way to the top he “endlessly examines himself for signs of aging and ill health, for telltale symptoms of psychic stress, for blemishes and flaws that might diminish his attractiveness, or on the other hand for reassuring indications that his life is proceeding according to schedule.” But the apparent freedom of limitless options soon becomes its own trap, raising questions of significance and value. Lasch describes the contemporary American as unwilling and finally unable to establish norms for personal meaning, fearing that progress and personal growth may have become sadly synonymous with mere survival.

In quest of this survival the new narcissist turns on the charm, though his personal life may be increasingly devastated and shallow. His poets and novel-