



# The Country of God

## Part III

by A. A. A. Hartvisen

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Genre: Fiction—Religion/Faith/Family.

High Desert Ventures LLC  
608 East Madison  
Burns, Oregon

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## *The Country of God*

### Part III

Two weeks later, Misael was out tightening the fence around the yard where the steers were fattened up for slaughter. He had drawn the first wire taut with the come-along and was going around stapling it to the posts when he saw Prester Malasar coming up the road. The boy looked toward the barn, but his father was currently hidden from view on the other side, repairing an old tractor he just bought. An occasional puff of smoke was blown around the barn by the wind, and the sound of the engine stopping and starting was heard when Misael stopped swinging the hammer.

“Howdy, Misael,” said Prester Malasar, now at the edge of the corral.

“Hello,” said Misael

“I thought I’d stop by and say, ‘Hello.’”

Misael hung his hammer on the wire and turned to the prester.

“I want to know what you’re all about,” he said suddenly.

The prester said nothing.

“I mean, why are you folk different from the rest?” asked Misael. Then he hastily added, “I know we’re a little different too, but I know the reasons for that. What’s yours?”

Prestor Malasar paused thoughtfully before he spoke.

“Well, Misael, I think I know what you’re askin’, and I can only tell you why I personally have chosen the Quasifactorian Free Ministry. For hundreds of years, the race of Man has been cut off from God. He went away and left us here. We don’t really know why, but my guess is plain disgust. He figured to let us stew for a while, and withdrew his presence from the world.”

“But God speaks to us all,” Misael interrupted. “And we can see his power in the world around us.”

The prester let the objection hang in the air a moment and looked across the field.

“God is all-merciful,” he said at last. “Naturally, he can’t totally abandon us all, but he can limit his contact to only the most personal level, and speak only to those who would seek his wisdom. To the rest of Man, he says nothing. And he may be present, in a sense, in the world around us, but his *will* is absent. Anyone can see that

the Will of the Lord is not done in the Earth. Man is too weak and twisted to bring about, on his own power, the great works of grace and charity that the world needs. And a dim sense of his presence, or a featherlight personal guidance, will not make it happen, no matter how well-meaning are the men to whom he reveals so little of himself. And the understanding that God made the world around us won't get us much farther.

“This world, Misael, is a *preversion* of the natural order. It is our chastisement. In the right order of things, the whole world, and Man's relationship with it, will be overseen and bound together by the power of God. He will work through men, as always, since it pleases him, but these men will be strengthened by his graces, and the way will be opened for the fulfilment of his Will.

“This is our time of chastisement, but the end draws near, and I would rather pave his Way than stand in it. That's why I am a prester of the Q. F. M.”

“Heck,” said Misael. “I'll have to think about that.”

“We'd rather have you think about it and reject it than swallow it without understanding.”

“Okay,” said Misael.

“Anyway,” said Prester Malasar, “I'm glad to see you're doing well. I might drop by again. I've got to get over to Miss Beula's place.”

With that, Malasar turned and went. Miss Beula was an old widow who lived in a big house by the river. Her husband died over a year ago. Last winter, no one had

time enough to help her get fixed up quite right, and if Ecclesiastes had not stopped in when he did, she would have frozen to death. When she recovered, she converted immediately to the Quasifactorian Free Ministry, and this year every young man in the parish was required to devote a little time to helping her out.

The idea of the young prester splitting her wood entered Misael's mind and commingled inextricably with thoughts on the prester's saying.

"Misael!"

Misael turned to see his father walking up to the corral with a carburettor in his hand.

"That Quazzie kid keeping you from your work?" he asked.

"No, Father," said Misael. "He was just sayin', 'Hello.' I allowed myself to be distracted from my work."

"Well, we need this thing ready for those cows tomorrow. Get on it!"

Father hefted the carburettor.

"I need to get this thing cleaned out," he said. "I'll be back in a little while."

He turned to go, but then paused and looked back to Misael. The boy was already swinging the hammer.

"Don't let that guy mess up your mind, Misael. Those Quazzies are tricky, regular Francie Mesmers, some of them. So watch yourself! Come talk to me later, if anything starts to clog your brain. And remember: there's more to life than socialisin'! A lot more."

But although Misael's brain was getting clogged, he did not speak to Balaam. And Prester Malasar came back to see him again a month later.

This time, Misael was cleaning out the headgate that fed the irrigation pipes. It was up at the base of the foothills, in a thickly wooded area. Balaam had perceived a loss of water pressure and, after ascertaining that none of the pipes had burst, sent Misael up to the headgate. Nadab and Balaam remained working in the field below.

The arrangement was not uncommon. Whenever Balaam needed to send someone to take care of a job wherein unforeseen difficulties could arise, he sent Misael. Nadab had proven his incompetence, again and again and again. His inability to adapt to unexpected circumstances was almost miraculous, so much did it defy human belief.

Nadab was also unwilling to extend his efforts beyond the most specific range of instructions he was given. Rarely, if a problem presented itself whose timely solution could be forgone, Balaam would send Nadab out as a sort of test. But, as usual, Nadab would fail, take his punishment, and the natural order was restored.

And so Misael was alone, concealed in the trees, mucking around the headgate. The filter which kept debris out of the pipes was clogged with a mass of tightly compacted vegetation and drowned frogs. That the headgate itself was overrun with slime and pinecones impeded his efforts.

“Howdy, Misael.”



Misael straightened up and saw Prester Malasar squatting on the rampart which kept the water from flowing freely into the lowlands.

“Hey, Prester,” said Misael.

“Call me, ‘Malasar.’”

“Okay, Malasar,” said Misael. “But give me a minute to get this filter cleared out. They need the water below. The fields are burning up!”

While Misael sloshed around the headgate, Prester Malasar kept talking.

“Last time we spoke you asked what we are all about. I’ve been thinkin’ about it, and I think I can give you some better answers. The Lord has chosen a human vessel to bear his will into the world, Misael. The Quasifacturian Free Ministry is that vessel. Our leaders, the patriarchs, the soothsayers, and many of the presters themselves, are guided by the explicit Word of God. He speaks to us through his Holy Scriptures,” said Malasar, holding up the bible. “But not through willy-nilly interpretations of the written word, but through the Spirit of the Word directly.

“The Bible, Misael, is the way that the Spirit can speak to us. We all know that there are valuable lessons to be learnt from the historical accounts in the bible, and much of the poetry takes the form of proverbs or admonitions. But these alone are too restricted in scope to be of much help in solvin’ the real-life problems. And the prophecies are of even more dubious value, since they are written so strangely and since so many of them have already come to pass.

“But there is a mystic power in the scriptural canon, which is not widely known. God has arranged the Holy Scriptures so that they form a path between the soul of the Asker and the Spirit of the Word.”

Misael finally got the filter unplugged, and felt the force of the water being drawn down the pipes. He began skimming great handfuls of slime and pinecones off the surface and throwing them up onto the rampart. Malasar got up and moved out of the immediate vicinity, in order to avoid getting his clothes splattered with mud.

“But this way,” Malasar went on. “Is open only to those for whom the Lord has some big purpose in his plan of Renewal. This is the *Ecclesis*, the threshing out of the wheat from the chaff. And those who have been chosen, the *ecclletes*, need only Ask, and they shall be answered by the Spirit of the Word, through the mystic path that is opened up by Holy Scripture.”

Misael finished clearing out the headgate to his satisfaction, and climbed up onto the rampart. He judged he had time to sit and talk for a minute, since the water was filling up the pipes.

“How do you know all this?” asked Misael.

“I think it would be obvious!” the prester laughed. “It’s been revealed to us, by the Spirit. One can also see that it’s firmly grounded in the original revelations given to men before the time of our chastisement. But only in retrospect, since the old revelations have been so thickly encumbered by false interpretations. Without the strong hand of God to guide us, we must always go astray.”

“Tell me about this calling, again,” said Misael. “I forget the name.”

“The *ecclesis*,” said Malasar. “It’s the name given to both the process of the selection and to the eccletes collectively. The ecclesis has been seen before, but only in the most ancient of times, when God needed to gather together into a single group, united in purpose, a number of human agents to work out his end. The ecclesis is God’s toolbox, so to speak. And those who are chosen, the eccletes, are his tools. We’ve been brought together this time for the purpose of preparin’ for the end of the chastisement and the return of divine guidance to the earth. We’re God’s purchasers.”

“So, you, then, are one of the ecclesis?” asked Misael.

Malasar pressed his lips together and thought before answering.

“Yes, I can say. Yes. Normally, we are bound not to reveal our identity to outsiders, because of the useless strife it could inspire among those who will not hear his Voice. But I know you’re not a blabbermouth, and it’s very important that you *understand*.”

“So that’s the purpose behind the Quasifacturian Free Ministry? It’s sort of a secret front for the ecclesis... Malasar, I don’t think it’s that necessary. Nobody would know what to make of ecclesis anyway.”

“Well, Misael, you’ve got it wrong. First, the Q. F. M. is not made up exclusively of eccletes; we are a minority of the members. And if word got out about the ecclesis, its meanin’ would soon get out too, all twisted up into something terrible and

frightening. It's human nature." To which Malasar swiftly added, "At least as it's been preverted by sin."

"I've one more question for you, Malasar, and then I'd better get back to the field," said Misael. "How is the picking of the ecclesis made known to the rest of you. How does one, uh, ecclete, passin' in the field, recognise his brother?"

"It's done in much the same way as the priests were called in the times before the chastisement. Each ecclete begins as a *catechumen*, a time when he doesn't know about his chusing. It's a sort of test of two things. First, of his responsibility to the will of God, and secondly of his personal willingness to undergo ecclesis. As in all things, man's individual dignity and freedom is honoured. Not only would it be dangerous and stupid to produce an unwillin' ecclete, but it'd be an outrage against the natural order!

"Anyway, like I was sayin'—the name of the catechumen is put into the mind of the patriarch under whose jurisdiction the ecclesis will occur. The Spirit handles most of the footwork, producing opportunities for the catechumen to meet with the patriarch or his agent, and to learn of the ecclesis. Eventually the catechumen's own ecclesis is made known to him, often through direct infusion of the Spirit into the catechumen. And finally, he's given the Choice.

"Regarding our ability to recognise one another in the field, Misael, there's no foolproof system in place. It's basicly a matter of recognisin' the Marks of Ecclesis on a brother ecclete. For one who's been through ecclesis, they're pretty obvious."

"This all seems rather far-fetched," said Misael.

“Yeah, well... Think about it. And, well, uh, I’ll see you around, okay?” said Malasar. “Goodbye.”

“Yeah,” said Misael. “Thanks for the talk.”

And, as the proselyte walked off into the trees again, Misael began his descent to the fields.

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