Chapter 12

Old age is not a disaster nor a disease. It is freedom to innovate. It is freedom to build upon your own past and to get a historical perspective on what you have seen and known and suffered and lived through. It is a marvelous state of being. Old age is the time to engage in a new life style of outrage and to go down swinging. And with that kind of agenda ahead of you, you know nothing will keep you in bed.

Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panthers

“A Light Shines in the Darkness . . .”

An Active Retirement

After all the years of struggle and rejection, the celebration of Maurice McCrackin's eightieth birthday on December 1, 1985, in the basement of St. Joseph's Catholic Church marked the beginning of a period of accolades and acceptance. As neighborhood women presided over heavily laden refreshment tables, hundreds of well-wishers settled in on folding chairs around the platform stage. One of the many speakers was Ernest Bromley, nearly blind but surprisingly spry, who sang by heart in his mellow baritone a ballad he had composed about McCrackin's struggle for social justice. The chorus, sung by all to the tune of “Simple Gifts,” went:

Hail, Mac, you're always on track,
Forging ahead without looking back.
Courageous always, yet never seeking praise,
You will live in our hearts for the rest of our days.

A delegation from the Cincinnati Presbytery, in a gesture of reconciliation, delivered birthday greetings. Well-wishers from as far away as Massachusetts and California were as eager to catch up on news about each other as they were to honor Maurice McCrackin.

This celebration did not mark the end of McCrackin's active, prophetic ministry. He would continue to “go with his body” whenever calls of conscience pulled him, risking arrest and jail in the process. But he was never again to be an object of widespread ridicule. Not only had he reached an age where he could no longer be accused of misguided personal ambition, but many had come to share his view that the government and other institutions often abused their considerable powers.

Several speakers at McCrackin's birthday celebration referred to his notorious 1978 kidnapping. His imprisonment for refusing to testify against his kidnappers had had an unexpected effect: it helped promote cooperation among other ministers and the Dominican Sisters working in Cincinnati’s West End neighborhood, who had joined together to work for McCrackin's release. Once he was out of jail, he urged them to continue meeting as the West End Alliance of Churches and Ministries. Almost immediately, McCrackin introduced this newly formed group to the idea of sponsoring a Community Land Co-op to provide affordable housing for those with low incomes.
The Dayton Street area, home to McCrackin's Community Church, with its exquisite but run-down mansions, was beginning to attract developers. “Urban renewal” and gentrification were becoming synonymous with displacement of the poor. McCrackin called on Peacemaker Chuck Matthei to help. Matthei was the director of the Institute for Community Economics, a national organization centered in Greenfield, Massachusetts, that aided grassroots cooperative efforts. Matthei helped the West End group establish a rolling loan fund for the purpose of buying buildings and renovating them for sale or rent to people with low incomes.

The Community Land Co-op of Cincinnati, begun in 1980, was housed on the third floor of the Community Church building, above McCrackin's living quarters. The West End Alliance and the Community Land Co-op illustrate the ecumenism and coalition-building that McCrackin regularly promoted. He thought cooperation on a project was more important than agreement on ideology, doctrine, or forms of worship. He would say, “Let everyone worship in the tradition that works for them; then let them do the work of the Lord in a cooperative manner.”

The 1979 injunction that barred McCrackin from Ohio prisons freed him to focus more attention on the dangers of war. In the early 1980s he renewed his affiliation with groups protesting against U.S. militarism.

In 1981 McCrackin was invited by the Community for Creative Nonviolence in Washington, led by Mitch Snyder, and Jonah House in Baltimore, home to Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister, to join a pray-in at the White House to protest against U.S. support for a brutal regime in El Salvador and cutbacks in humane government spending. Small groups of protestors were to join regular tours of the White House and then break away to pray on the lawn. On July 3, the praying group displayed photographs of atrocities committed in El Salvador. McCrackin was arrested that day and, as usual, refused to cooperate with the arrest and fasted the three days he was in jail.

McCrackin also took part in several peace actions in 1983. On May 22, the feast of Pentecost, and again on May 23, he and thirty others from the Roman Catholic New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati, including the charismatic Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, were among the hundreds who demonstrated in the Rotunda of the Capitol to protest the scheduled deployment of cruise missiles in Europe and the development of the MX missile. The Peace Pentecost action was part of Peace and Justice Week, sponsored by a coalition of secular and religious peace groups. Over 240 people were arrested in the Rotunda, among them McCrackin, Father Rohr, and Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners, a community dedicated to social action. "There is a conversion happening in the church,” Wallis proclaimed. “It is a conversion happening for the sake of peace.”

Soon after his release, McCrackin took part in a local demonstration protesting the development of cruise and MX missiles. He was one of twenty-five who occupied the Federal Building in downtown Cincinnati on June 17, 1983. The group had been trained to respond nonviolently to arrest, but the Cincinnati Police Department outmaneuvered them. Instead of arresting them and placing them in a waiting patrol wagon, the police simply issued warnings to the protesters and deposited them on the streetcorner outside the building. It appeared that the Cincinnati police had figured out a way to deal with McCrackin's protests.

Two months later, in late August 1983, McCrackin again traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate with Cincinnati friends in the twentieth anniversary of the great March on Washington. Before the march, the 250,000 demonstrators stood on the Mall in the sweltering 100-degree heat and listened as gigantic loudspeakers projected a tape recording of King's "I Have a Dream" speech, given at the 1963 event. McCrackin marched with the great throng to the re-
fecting pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial and adjacent to the Vietnam Memorial, where Peter, Paul, and Mary sang “Blowing in the Wind” and Jesse Jackson addressed the crowd. The words and spirit of this day reinforced McCrackin's determination to continue acts of civil disobedience in the name of peace and justice.

A couple of months later, a Detroit group called the Covenant of Peace decided to stage an action at the Williams International Plant near Pontiac, Michigan, where cruise missiles are made. It was exactly the kind of witness McCrackin believed in: he and the Bromleys had said many times that a small, committed group was more powerful than a large coalition that had to make compromises in order to accommodate everyone. The Covenant of Peace had fewer than a dozen members. McCrackin joined them, becoming one of fifty-two arrested on November 30 after blocking the main gate at the Williams Plant. Tried in absentia because he would not walk from his jail cell to the courtroom, he was given a thirty-day sentence for disobeying the injunction against blocking the entrance to the plant.\(^2\) He spent his seventy-eighth birthday in jail, refusing to post bond. After ten days, in response to an outpouring of letters and phone calls, the judge released McCrackin, who returned to Cincinnati in time for Christmas.

The year 1985 also saw McCrackin taking part in various protests against U.S. military policies. In March 1985, he, along with Ernest Bromley, Polly Brokaw, and others, was arrested at the main gate of the General Electric plant in the Cincinnati suburb of Evendale for protesting against that company's heavy involvement in defense contracts. They were charged with trespassing and held a week in jail. Ernest Bromley and a young demonstrator named Thad Coffin were roughed up during their confinement.

That summer, at the age of seventy-nine, McCrackin endured the worst experience of his history of arrests and imprisonments. The incident occurred in Washington, where he had joined the annual Peace Protest sponsored by the Community for Creative Nonviolence, Sojourners, and others. The action again involved breaking away from a regular White House tour for the purpose of praying and speaking out against U.S. military intervention in Central America. There he was among seventy-two arrested on May 28. In his usual manner, McCrackin went limp and refused to cooperate in any way with the police. Those arrested were taken to the district's Central Cellblock, where an enraged guard tried to get McCrackin to move by violently twisting his wrists and bending his fingers. The next day, a U.S. deputy marshal resorted to using an electric stun gun repeatedly on McCrackin's legs in an attempt to get him to walk back from a court hearing.\(^3\)

Afterward McCrackin filed a report on his ordeals that concluded with an unintended tribute to his own sturdiness:

> During these three days no wheelchair or pallet was ever used. I was always dragged; by my feet or by my hands and arms; sometimes on my back and sometimes on my stomach. My body was covered with bruises and at my age I think I'm lucky I didn't end up with some broken bones.\(^4\)

McCrackin returned to Washington several times to help with the police investigation of this incident, hoping that the offending officers would receive counseling and be assigned to less stressful tasks. The stun guns were never meant to be used on noncooperating prisoners of conscience like McCrackin. The St. Louis *Post Dispatch* quotes Herbert M. Rutherford III, the U.S. marshal for the district, as saying that the stun guns were to be used “when controlling belligerent and violent subjects.”\(^5\) Yet the deputy in charge of McCrackin had used his weapon for sa-
distic punishment and not for control. The investigations into the stun-gun incident resulted in the early retirement of one officer and a clarification of the policy on the use of stun guns with prisoners.

In the spring of 1987, McCrackin traveled to Washington for yet another demonstration and once more ended up in jail for committing civil disobedience—what he was coming to call “divine obedience.” The Mobilization for Justice and Peace in Central America and South Africa drew 75,000, among them a busload of people from the Community Church of Cincinnati. For many church members it was their first protest gathering. All wore buttons that read, “Mac's Irrigation System,” and they had to go to some length to explain this slogan to other marchers. McCrackin had borrowed a phrase he heard William Sloane Coffin use. Coffin, an outspoken social critic and pastor of New York's Riverside Church, had come up with a challenging response to Amos 5:24: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” Coffin made the crucial addition: “But we have to furnish the irrigation system.”

The next day, in order to call attention to the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in the tragedies of Central America, several thousand people attempted to disrupt “business as usual” at the CIA complex in Langley, Virginia. Some 550 people were arrested for blocking entrances to the CIA grounds, among them Daniel Ellsberg, Philip Berrigan, and two of McCrackin's Cincinnati friends, Vivian Kinebrew and Gordon Maham. Most of those arrested paid their fines and went home, but 92 remained in jail. McCrackin could have been released early had he been willing to cooperate with authorities, who treated him well, monitoring his physical condition as he fasted. By McCrackin's own count it was his ninth imprisonment.

The arrest in Virginia preceded by a matter of weeks three honors bestowed upon McCrackin by institutions that had been formative in his development. In the spring of 1987, McCormick Seminary in Chicago honored him with its Distinguished Alumnus Award. And in June McCrackin was reinstated into the Presbyterian Church and given the annual Peacemaker Award by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship.

Charles Forbes, an energetic Presbyterian elder from Baltimore, had been busy for over a year orchestrating a campaign to bring the McCrackin case before the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Biloxi, Mississippi. Some twenty years earlier, Forbes, then a young college graduate working for the American Friends Service Committee in Dayton, Ohio, had driven the fifty miles from Dayton to Cincinnati about once a month to attend services at McCrackin's newly established Community Church. Over the years Forbes and McCrackin had stayed in touch. With Forbes becoming increasingly involved in peace work, it bothered him more and more that McCrackin remained outside the church. As he explained in one of the background papers he sent to McCrackin's supporters both inside and outside the Presbyterian Church,

For Presbyterians who know Mac, as Reverend McCrackin is universally called, the Permanent Judicial Commission ruling--affirmed by the General Assembly in 1962--which suspended his ordination as of February, 1963, is a difficult cross to bear when working in a peacemaking program of our church. This Decade of Peacemaking is surely the time to heal the wounds in our own body, and confess our errors of the past in dealing with a person who has demonstrated the highest Christian ideals and suffered great personal sacrifice many times for them.

Forbes saw to it that a proposal to reinstate McCrackin was properly introduced from his
own presbytery and a neighboring one. Ministers within the Cincinnati Presbytery, hearing of this initiative, sought to initiate a similar proposal locally. The Reverend Harold Porter, a newcomer to Cincinnati and pastor of Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church, guided the proposal through the Cincinnati Presbytery, where it passed by a very narrow margin. Then, as a commissioner to the General Assembly, Porter followed through on the national level.

As luck would have it, Porter was assigned to the very national commission that would act on the McCrackin proposal at the General Assembly. The main item before the assembly that year was the relocation of the newly consolidated church offices. The northern branch of the Presbyterian Church had just merged with the southern branch. The church wished to cement this union by moving the central office away from New York City. But before deciding on Louisville, Kentucky, as their new national headquarters, the assembly voted unanimously not only to reinstate McCrackin, but also to ask his forgiveness for their error in defrocking him. They also honored him with a prolonged and emotional standing ovation. McCrackin was deeply moved by the assembly's action. He had not forgotten how much his Presbyterian heritage meant to him, and he told the General Assembly:

I believe it to be a highly significant and historic action that has now been taken by the General Assembly of a church body numbering three million members. This body is not proclaiming in glittering generalities that “God is Lord of Conscience” but is being very specific in saying to me, “We believe that God is Lord of your conscience. Come and exercise it as a member within the Presbyterian Church.”

Among the commissioners representing the Cincinnati Presbytery was Lincoln Stokes, retired sheriff of Hamilton County and McCrackin's jailer during his four-month imprisonment in 1979. At first Stokes attempted to speak against the motion to reinstate McCrackin on the grounds that it was a matter for local church officials. He knew that the implied reprimand from the General Assembly might embarrass the Cincinnati Presbytery. But Stokes had come to respect McCrackin's integrity, and he too joined in the groundswell of good feeling that followed the motion to honor his old opponent.

Yet all was not so easily settled. Back in Cincinnati, it seemed for a time that McCrackin might actually refuse reinstatement. After all, his own Community Church and his ministry were thriving without Presbyterian affiliation. In fact, the summer of 1987 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Community Church. Big festivities were planned for July 19 in conjunction with the church service to be held in the nearby Bloom School. Original supporters who had been there when the heat was on for McCrackin were there again that sweltering summer Sunday. U. S. Fowler, the Congregational minister who had led services while McCrackin was imprisoned in 1959, returned from Baltimore to preach the sermon. With or without Presbyterian affiliation, he observed, this little band of faithful worshipers had lived out their creed, had been the base community of a far-reaching and expansive ministry, had done more than survive--they had prospered!

Not only was the Community Church doing quite well without Presbyterian affiliation, but the Cincinnati Presbytery had voted McCrackin back in by the slimmest of margins, 73 to 68. The McCrackin question was still an emotional one in the Presbytery even after more than
twenty-five years. McCrackin was concerned that the Presbytery had not really faced the issues implicit in its earlier dismissal of him. It was not that he wanted more of an apology from them; rather, he worried that they were not yet honoring the primacy of informed personal conscience. Before accepting reinstatement, McCrackin wanted to make sure that civil disobedience was viewed as a valid expression of personal conscience within the Presbyterian Church, and that the Presbytery recognized that God was Lord of Conscience. He did not want the reconciliation viewed as an isolated, sentimental gesture. McCrackin was also worried that those who had stood by him all these years, especially his congregation, might be offended by his acceptance of reinstatement if the Presbytery did not admit that it had been wrong.

The Reverend Theodore Kalsbeek, a member of the judicial commission that had ousted McCrackin so many years before, also had reservations about restoring him. Kalsbeek, proud of his own more traditional ministry in suburban Cincinnati, saw the issue as one of constitutionality. He feared a breakdown of the social order if McCrackin's appeals to personal conscience took precedence over ecclesiastical law and obedience to church leaders. Brought up in the strict Dutch Reformed tradition and ministering among people who worked hard to accumulate the material symbols of success, Kalsbeek found little in his experience to help him understand McCrackin's identification with blacks and prisoners. Kalsbeek saw his service on the original judicial commission as a sacrifice, just as McCrackin saw his dismissal as one. Now Kalsbeek felt undercut by the national decision not only to reinstate McCrackin, but also to admit error in having defrocked him in the first place. Kalsbeek and some others within the Presbytery wanted to examine McCrackin as they would a seminarian entering the ministry—they wanted proof of his orthodoxy.

On the other hand, many Presbyterians, like Charles Forbes, felt that McCrackin's return to the fold at this late date perhaps meant more to the institutional church than it did to McCrackin personally. They felt that he had been ahead of his time in proclaiming the social gospel on issues of racism, peace, and tax resistance. After 1962 many other Presbyterian church leaders had resorted to civil disobedience without being chastised, including former Stated Clerk Eugene Carson Blake, who had played a role in dismissing McCrackin from the Presbyterian ministry for a similar act of conscience.

While McCrackin was considering these issues, a guest column written by a local Presbyterian minister appeared in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* implying that McCrackin's defrocking had nothing to do with his stand on civil rights and pacifism, but attributed it to his unwillingness to follow due process within the judicial system and the Presbytery. This troubled McCrackin, and he was determined that this misconception had to be cleared up before he would accept reinstatement. David Lowry, executive of the Cincinnati Presbytery, countered the misleading column in a piece (written for the same paper) that stressed the hard work involved in any sort of reconciliation. Lowry acknowledged that “in the 1950s and 1960s neither the Presbytery of Cincinnati nor the community at large was ready for the witness of Maurice McCrackin.” But he went on to say, “Times have changed and so have many of us after 25 years. I believe we are ready now to renew this broken relationship and move forward together.”

As a way of sorting through all of these issues, McCrackin did a characteristic thing: he called a meeting of some of his closest friends and supporters. Gathered around the Bromleys' kitchen table, they listened while McCrackin named his concerns. Finally, after much discussion and reflection, McCrackin knew what he should do. His reinstatement would be a healing of wounds, an opening of possibilities for growth. Much more would be gained by his acceptance of reinstatement than by a holdout in the name of principle.
September 6, 1987, was the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, marked by a great fireworks display at Cincinnati's riverfront. Several hundred people gathered that day in the West Cincinnati Presbyterian Church to be a part of the restoration service. In his sermon, the Reverend Duane Holm of the Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati compared McCrackin to Jeremiah, the great prophet of Judah at the time of its fall to Babylon. Both had spoken out against the excesses of their societies, and both had been reviled. Getting the Presbyterian Church and Maurice McCrackin back together again, he said, was like reconciling “an irresistible force and an immovable object.” Instead of singling out McCrackin's renewal of vows, all elders and ministers present were asked to come to the front of the church. The gesture was ingenious and dramatic--around two hundred men and women, all ordained Presbyterian ministers and elders, gathered around McCrackin and repeated in unison their ordination vows. Thus McCrackin rejoined his ministerial colleagues and began once again attending the regular meetings of the Presbytery, although most ministers his age would have considered themselves retired. The Community Church congregation, though it received no apology or affirmation during these negotiations, was accepted as a valid ministry for McCrackin, without Presbyterian affiliation.

McCrackin's golden years were characterized by the same intense personal involvement that had characterized his earlier years. Having been banned from visiting Ohio prisons, he made trips to LaGrange Prison in Kentucky to visit, among others, Cullen Ray, an imprisoned artist whose drawings were often reproduced as covers for Community Church bulletins. He visited the sick in hospitals and nursing homes. He spoke at rallies and gatherings. And, of course, he continued his ministry at Community Church. Having given up driving in 1984, much to the relief of his congregation, he traveled around the city by bus. Public transportation offered him additional and unexpected opportunities to meet and minister to people.

And the awards kept pouring in. The mayor of Cincinnati, Charlie Luken, declared November 12, 1987, the Reverend Maurice McCrackin Day in conjunction with the Annual Good Neighbor Award presented at the Twelfth Annual Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast, a yearly event attended by ministers of all races and local politicians. The FOR made McCrackin the recipient in 1988 of its prestigious Martin Luther King, Jr., Award, honoring him at its national conference in Atlanta in August of that year. State Representative William L. Mallory saw to it that the 118th General Assembly of Ohio issued McCrackin a certificate for “outstanding social concern” in 1989. These awards acknowledged McCrackin's role as gadfly in relation to city, state, and national government.

In the late 1980s McCrackin made a point of visiting those who had played significant roles in earlier struggles. Always an enthusiastic traveler, he enjoyed renewing Operation Freedom friendships in Tennessee and Mississippi on the way to the 1987 General Assembly in Biloxi. He sought out John McFerren in his Ruleville, Mississippi, grocery store to reminisce about meetings held in the back room; Birdie Lee Griffin to recall the dangerous voter registration drives in Sunflower County, Mississippi; Mae Bertha Carter in Cleveland, Mississippi, to talk about school conditions. He was pleased to find out that one of the Carters' daughters had recently been appointed to the school board. Who could have envisioned such a possibility when Operation Freedom began in 1961?

In 1986 and again in 1987, McCrackin visited Myles Horton at the Highlander Education Center, recalling that fateful weekend thirty years earlier when Highlander's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration was infiltrated by the Georgia Education Commission. Many feared that Horton and McCrackin would go down under the weight of the ferocious hatred of the segre-
tionists, but each had continued his witness.  These two old warriors had used the opposition to teach their followers courage, tolerance, and the pull of social justice.

In the summer of 1987 McCrackin visited Storms, Ohio, the place of his birth. Not much remained of the grain elevator or the family homestead besides the old water pump and handle that McCrackin retrieved for a souvenir. A sense of peace and power permeated this isolated place, qualities that McCrackin had drawn into himself at birth and that had been nurtured by his forebears and his Monmouth upbringing. This and other visits called up affectionate memories of a lifetime well invested.

McCrackin's little black books, his calendar and address books, were almost as full of obligations during this period of accolades as they had been during earlier years. He often took time out to share his story, which he called the “Pilgrimage of a Conscience,” with the steady stream of students, reporters, and searchers after truth who found their way to him at Dayton Street. He kept photocopies of recent articles that such people might be interested in. And he gave away buttons and bumper stickers with such mottoes as “Why do we kill people who kill people in order to prove that killing people is wrong?”

Always conscious of the yearning of young people for models and advice to live by, McCrackin made himself available to schools on a regular basis. After his talk to a class of high school students, a young girl was overheard to say, “Now I know what I'll do with the rest of my life. I don't know what I'll do to earn a living, but I know how I'll spend my time in the evenings and on the weekends.”

Even with the Community Land Co-op upstairs, many of McCrackin's friends worried about his living alone on Dayton Street. When he was out of town, there were occasional break-ins. When he was home, there was the danger that he might fall or become ill. It made sense for somebody to live with him, since there was plenty of room in the living quarters of the house. Several prisoners were paroled to McCrackin, but that arrangement soon became more of an additional responsibility than a help. Another time he took in a whole family he had found homeless and living in their car. This group, too, proved to be unreliable and had to be sent on their way after a number of McCrackin's personal books were discovered in a used book store. McCrackin, better at confronting institutions than individuals, had to elicit support from church members Bill Mundon and Tim Kraus when it became necessary to hold the offending family accountable. The family left, but the problem remained. In 1988 he surprised everyone by announcing his retirement as minister of the Community Church and moving around the block into quarters rehabilitated by the Community Land Co-op and adjacent to the residence of the Dominican Sisters who had become his close friends. He liked to describe this arrangement by saying that he was their chaplain and advisor.

The golden years were a time of reflection and honor, but not necessarily a time of rest. In 1988 McCrackin continued his vigorous engagement with life. With community organizer Buddy Gray, he helped plan the occupation of an abandoned building in behalf of the homeless of Cincinnati. This action precipitated yet another arrest and another brief stay in jail. He continued his protests at the nuclear weapons materials plant in Fernald, Ohio, just twenty miles northwest of Cincinnati. The Fernald protests were vindicated in the eyes of many people when the plant became the focus of national attention for its ongoing radioactive pollution of the air, soil, and aquifer.

In 1988 McCrackin endured knee replacement surgery. He did not allow his physical condition to compromise his long-standing principles, and he refused to cooperate with law officers or show up for court hearings on the trespass charges that resulted from his witness in the
abandoned building and at Fernald. But this time most of the legal establishment seemed eager not to keep him in jail. His fines were remitted, and he was excused from signing an agreement that he would honor any future summons in connection with the building occupation. It seemed that his age and the rightness of his causes had finally won the day.

At a November 1989 memorial service for six murdered priests in El Salvador, however, McCrackin was picked up once again by the police for the outstanding warrant resulting from the Fernald incident. He was briefly held in jail then and was rearrested when he failed to show up for court hearings. These continuing arrests prompted McCrackin's backers to circulate in the spring of 1990 a petition urging legal officials to desist from harassing him and focus instead on the injustices his arrests called attention to.

At Christmas in 1989, following the celebration of his eighty-fourth birthday, McCrackin received a card from a friend inscribed, “When I reflect on your hard but fruitful life, I think of the line from John's gospel, ‘A light shines in the darkness. . .’ Your life has indeed been a light in the face of terrifying darkness. But what is so amazing and wonderful is that 'the darkness has not overcome it.'”

When asked why he kept on going, why he did not leave the testifying to those younger than he, McCrackin liked to respond lightheartedly. He wanted to get all the mileage out of his body that he could—and he liked to quote his friend Daniel Berrigan:

“I can't not do the things I ought to do.”

Why did McCrackin keep on? Neither the question nor the answer is as simple as it first seems. The question presumes a distinction between career and retirement that in his case did not apply. And it presumes that the point of activity is to accomplish and complete something—in this case, to reform the penal system, stop war and racism, or empower the poor, none of which has yet been achieved. Perhaps the reason McCrackin did not slow down is that a person cannot retire from loving. His life witness is an ongoing process of love. The effects of love are not measured in immediate, identifiable results. Instead, love is experienced by all who come into its orbit as an ongoing source of strength and nurture, complete in itself though inspiring further expressions in ever-widening circles.

Maurice McCrackin's story is one of great adventure, conflict, suffering, and triumph. And the course of his life was motivated, surprisingly, by a very simple and powerful ideal, learned as a youth from Kirby Page, Sherwood Eddy, and Charles Sheldon, and reinforced by his mother and aunt: in every situation, try to do as Jesus would do. That idea led Maurice McCrackin to the ministry, to Iran and missionary work, to settlement houses in Chicago and Cincinnati, to pacifism, to the civil rights and human freedom movement, to picket lines, tax resistance, jail, prison ministry, defrocking. And it also led him to joyfulness, fellowship, community, reconciliation, and love.

Notes for Chapter 12

5. “Minister, 79, Says Marshal Used ‘Stun Gun.’”
6. Maham had worked on the Manhattan Project in the 1940s but resigned when he realized what the atom bomb could do. He was drafted into the army thereafter and refused to honor the call. His refusal resulted in a three-year prison term.
8. Statement before the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Biloxi, June 1987.
13. Highland had been padlocked, vandalized, and de-chartered by the state of Tennessee in the early 1960s. It was reconstituted in a new location (New Market, Tennessee) and under a slightly different name (Highlander Research and Education Center). Myles Horton continued his vigorous witness for justice right up to his death at age eighty-four on January 19, 1990.