

COMMON BELIEFS TO LIVE BY

Conserving Our Spiritual Environment

"The prevailing feelings, attitudes, values and commitments that make us human and humane"

By A. Vaughan Abercrombie

Common Beliefs to Live By

WE BELIEVE THAT THE PURPOSE OF LIFE
IS GOOD LIVING;
WE BELIEVE IN OUR BETTER SELVES, OUR
FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS, AND IN OUR WORK;
WE BELIEVE IN MORAL INTEGRITY, IN
SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND
IN HAVING FAITH; (*)
WE BELIEVE IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH, THE QUEST
FOR BEAUTY, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EXCELLENCE;
WE BELIEVE IN HUMANE CAUSES, IN THOSE
WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR GOOD WORKS,
IN THE IMMORTALITY OF INFLUENCE, AND IN A
COMING WORLD-WIDE, HUMANE CIVILIZATION.

(*) Faith as reverent risk-taking, patient resignation, and
childlike trust.

DEDICATED TO

Horace Bushnell, Marian Evans, C.C. Everett, William James, George
Herbert, George Herbert Palmer, George Herbert Mead, Alfred North Whitehead,
Arthur Clinton Watson, Lyman Abbott, Edward Scribner Ames, John Dewey, Harry
Emerson Fosdick, Ralph Barton Perry, Shailer Matthews, James Bissett Pratt,
Willard Leroyd Sperry, William Ernest Hocking, Karen Horney, Martin Buber,
Elton Trueblood, Roland Emerson Wolfe, Julius Seelye Bixler, Douglas Steere,
Floyd H. Ross, Philip H. Phenix, Albert Upton, Mortimer J. Adler and the many
others so freely quoted herein.

TIMELY COMMENTS ABOUT THIS BOOK

“This book is a stimulating and intellectually challenging work. My lifetime experience as a soldier gave me opportunities to observe the behavior of many peoples both in times of war and peace. If this text were required reading, especially for a nation’s forces and embassies, it would be invaluable in developing harmonious relations everywhere.

“It fills the need for a virtual ‘code of conduct’ for adults of all ages and backgrounds. In it are most of the essentials of a vital humanitarianism. How much better my understanding of others abroad would have been had I mastered more of the insights and perspectives this book articulates and applies to humane feelings, attitudes, values and commitments!

“It further provides a guide for leading society away from self-destruction. Citizens of whatever origin in any civilized nation can profit by using this work as a practical text for finding ‘Common Beliefs to Live By’ in our emerging world community.” ---Col. Maurice J. Naudts, (USA, Ret.)

"What a magnum opus! It must have been a lifetime in the making.

Few recent writings have caused me to sit up, take notice, and do some thinking about myself and the world. My hope is that this book may be widely circulated. It is irrelevant whether readers agree with all points of view so specifically discussed here on moral and spiritual matters. The point is that these pages force the reader to examine his/her points of view and ask, ‘Where do I stand?’

“In the many places when a chapter or a paragraph begins with ‘We would like to believe,’ I said ‘Amen’ because that is exactly what I would like to do. I have always considered myself an optimist, but now cannot say so with enthusiasm about my present view of the world and civilization. In reading the text I kept wanting the author to do the impossible -- to give a plausible explanations with solutions for the impact of modern circumstances upon people and the world, knowing we do not have any viable alternative but to have faith and do the best we can. I liked Dr. Abercrombie’s use of the phrase, ‘A stubborn faith.’ Certainly one is required of everybody these days! I hope there soon might be more top level summits among all religious leaders in search of common standards so clearly articulated here. It is regrettable that history seems to show that sectarians are too often reluctant to emphasize the many ways we are alike in ideals and experience.”

--Denton R. Coker, Ph.D, former President, South Georgia College; Retired Provost, Stetson University.

Foreword

This small book is one of two works written as companion pieces. The first, already on the Internet, bears the title “The Wisdom of Jesus in Living Paraphrase with Commentary.” It summarizes and comments upon the principles of humane conduct as well as the principles of judgment in the religion and ethics of Jesus. And it illustrates the universality of his teachings that seem relevant to everyday living.

The Wisdom of Jesus: Online Book: <http://www.pcola.gulf.net/~comava/Wisdom/>
Reference: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/>

The present manuscript, now temporarily offered (also gratis) on the Internet, is based upon seventeen “Common Beliefs to Live By” -- hopefully providing a rationale for beliefs appropriate to the spiritual needs of people in most traditions.

URL: origin.org/se/editall.cfm

About the author, or better, compiler of these essays:

Dr. A. Vaughan Abercrombie, a native of Nichols, Connecticut, did his undergraduate study at Marietta College in Ohio. He received his theological training at Harvard Divinity School. After three years as a Secretary in the Bridgeport YMCA, he became a Congregational minister and served churches in Ohio, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and the State of Washington. From 1964-69 he was Executive Secretary of the National Association of Congregational Churches of the United States. During the eight years preceding his retirement in 1978, he was pastor of the Congregational Christian Church in East Orange, NJ. Piedmont College awarded him a doctorate in 1981.

Acknowledgments:

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Introduction

Common Beliefs about Life and Living

This book is “ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT” as posted in brief one-page excerpts during the year 2000 on the Internet General Forum of United Communities of Spirit. Its purpose was, and now in an expanded form, is to highlight BASIC BELIEFS ABOUT LIFE AND LIVING in the language of common sense. The beliefs discussed here are both human and humane. By their application, people and groups of all traditions do and are able continually to gain a greater measure of conscious control over their prevailing feelings, attitudes, values and commitments.

When we were in college sixty-five years ago, the word “environment” was one of those “big” words with which we tried to impress our friends -- and ourselves. Now it is a household word. While playing with some kindergarten children, the writer asked, “What does the owl say?” One of them answered, “Give a hoot, don't pollute.” Now nearly everybody is aware of our mutual dependence upon the limited resources of Mother Earth. Most are mindful of our inter-dependence as one human family with common needs and interests on a small planet in a vast and awe-inspiring Cosmos. However, the word environment is used generally without including one of its most profound implications -- the fact that we also share a common spiritual environment. For informed moderns, the spiritual environment consists of human feelings, attitudes, values and commitments that, although unseen, are as real as atoms, cells, organisms, stars and galaxies.

Obviously we are surrounded by and sustained within a magnificent Universe. We are a part of a vast cultural complex. Yet is it realistic to exclude from our definition of environment the spiritual realities that also nourish and sustain us? Is kindness unreal because we cannot put it in a bottle? Is wisdom unreal because we cannot catch it in a net and pin it on a board? Are neighborliness, companionship, forgiveness, magnanimity, love in its myriad human forms a part of our environment? Of course they are! They are so integral with our growth as persons, and so basic to individual stability and social cohesion that we must take them into account in our daily inventory of Reality.

When we awaken each morning in awe before the rising sun and the incredible beauty of this world, so also we should arise with a new awareness

of the spiritual realities that make us both human and humane. As the natural world constitutes our physical environment, so the complex of human feelings, attitudes, values and commitments within and around us constitutes our spiritual environment. Our characters and our habits of life depend upon the attitudes we assume, the values we adopt, and the commitments we make to others and ourselves. Like prevailing winds, these attributes generate the force of our personalities and the climate of our relations with ourselves, others, and the entire Creation. So, if each of us is to fulfill his/her obligation to develop and conserve the spiritual environment, we need to attain greater conscious control over the means of nurturing mature characters and improving the spirit of every human association and institution.

Unlike our animal neighbors, human beings are involved consciously but also linguistically in character building and in building meaningful communities. In books and television documentaries we are learning more and more about how much we share with animals. Indeed, this is a fascinating study. However, human beings differ from animals in at least two fundamental respects. They are involved not only consciously but also linguistically in the development of mature personalities and, especially, in generating a healthy *esprit de corps* in every social relationship.

Conscious control in any science or art is possible and enhanced when viable words and symbols transmit human experience from one generation to another. This axiom applies as well to the moral and spiritual realities of life, and highlights the importance of the language tools which philosophy, ethics and religion can provide. An awareness of and an emphasis upon common moral and spiritual facts by parents, teachers and leaders is the best guarantee that the young will attain better control over their prevailing moods, objectives and social behavior. Moral and spiritual facts, taught directly by precept and example, then reinforced by dedicated institutions, are most effective in nurturing mature personalities and in helping create spiritually productive friendships, families and communities.

The keys to all sciences are the standards by which we gain understanding of and a growing control over the processes of Nature. These standards are symbolized in words. For instance, if one asks an electrical engineer to define an ampere, he is apt to respond, "An ampere is the amount of electricity it takes to plate off a given amount of silver in a given interval of time." He might then go on to explain how Western Civilization has been transformed through those standards by which electricity is put to work to serve humankind. The point is, in any science or art,

understanding of natural processes increases when people adopt word symbols to communicate experience and standardize procedures leading to results worthy of repetition as each generation follows another.

A story is told of a preacher who asked his son if he were ever tempted to use bad language when alone with his peers. The boy replied, “No, Father, but I know all of the words.” Knowing the words is the beginning of conscious control, whether one wants to do a little therapeutic cussing, or, especially, if one expects to become creatively involved in developing spiritually sensitive personalities and in helping build spiritually productive societies. Character and community building words are the foundation of civilization. There are character building words like childlikeness, obedience, conscience, integrity, honor, meekness, discipline, repentance, forgiveness, righteousness, discretion and trustworthiness. In addition, there are community building words like goodwill, sympathy, compassion, fellowship, hospitality, understanding, discretion, mediation, reconciliation and peacemaking.

Any index to the Hebrew Proverbs, the sayings of Jesus, the analects of Confucius, Lao-tze, Buddha or Mohammed would yield similar words indicating the universality of man’s reaching toward conscious controls over the feelings, attitudes, values and commitments that make any people human and humane. There are no insurmountable conflicts between science and the principles of humane conduct or judgment taught by Jesus and the other sages in all traditions. Their writings continue to point the way for modern humans to become innovative contributors to the spirit of every group to which we may belong – beginning with our friendships, our families, and every kind of community, including the world community with its emerging world-wide (and we hope) humane civilization.

The essays that follow are a discussion of a statement of basic beliefs, based not upon abstract universals, but upon concrete statements that delineate the common sense parameters of the whole spiritual spectrum in relation to the everyday experiences of living. Don’t people want to celebrate what they can believe wholeheartedly now? The litany of beliefs around which these essays have been developed is the present writer’s attempt to point out some affirmations that may encourage further study of elements relevant to articulating and applying viable modern standards for desirable prevailing feelings, attitudes, values and commitments.

The sages are calling, more than ever, for teachers and followers who will

become character builders: beginning first with their own personalities, and then, with their potential powers of spiritual greatness, they encourage others to grow in moral and spiritual stature. Those among us who deliberately pollute the spiritual environment have still to glimpse the vision of mankind's duty and destiny. Men and women of good will, governments and cooperating nations are obliged to restrain with both firmness and compassion those whose overt actions undermine the spiritual commonwealth. So when we write of basic beliefs, we mean beliefs that are common to most modern human beings in every culture. Whether they realize it or not, people everywhere, by such common beliefs, can and do deal directly with the spiritual environment. Furthermore, in one form or another, the beliefs articulated here are implied in most of the social and religious creeds of every culture. When accepted as practical ideals these premises strengthen deeply felt traditional moral and spiritual insights.

No doubt the reader's present habits of worship and methods of character development already undergird the positive purposes suggested here. These days many people have difficulty with traditional creeds, most of which are couched in abstract rather than concrete universals. Therefore, we have tried to deal with the ethical, moral and spiritual circumstances of living, using what I have called "Common Beliefs to Live By." These tenets indicate concrete universals directed toward helping readers organize a system of basic beliefs around communicable standards of individual behavior and constructive social action. It is, if you will, a modern credo for teaching and celebrating wholeheartedly what we can and do believe now, in our generation, and in the Universe of our own experience. What I have written is merely the string upon which I have threaded the pearls of wisdom gathered from great books and great teachers to whom I have dedicated these pages.

A. Vaughan Abercrombie, Pensacola, FL, 7/1//02.

CHAPTER 1

The Belief that the Purpose of Life is Good Living

Let us begin simply with the practical question, “Can we believe wholeheartedly that life is worth living?” Most who write on this subject can't resist the punster's answer, “It all depends upon the liver, (or the heart or the kidneys).” If the “liver,” the one who does the living, is an optimist, he may agree with the ancient Greek poet:

All kinds of life are good to live:
The town has comradeship to give;
Home is a screen for private grief;
The countryside yields glad relief;
To sail the sea brings opulence
And foreign lands experience;
Marriage means sympathies to share,
Unmarried life is void of care;
Children adorn their sire's estate,
The childless give no pledge to fate:
For valor, youth; for wisdom, age;
Live bold and plant your heritage. (1)

If the one who does the living is a pessimist, he may applaud the ancient contemporary who wrote a parody of the above ancient lines:

How shall a man select his way in life?
Home means domestic troubles; in the fields
Is heavy toil; sheer dread the ocean yields;
Hast thou wealth overseas?
Then thou must fear;
If thou hast nothing, sure thy lot is drear.
If thou art wed, a load of care is thine;
Art thou unwed? in loneliness repine.
Children are plagues; a curse is childlessness;
Witless is youth, gray hairs are powerless.
No other choice but one of two know I –
Not to be born, or born, straightway to die. (2)

A. Optimism and Pessimism

Like belief and doubt, optimism and pessimism can be understood as alternations in human attitudes, both of which are prone to exaggeration. Each may become an antidote to the other. Not only unrequited lovers, but also utopians and dictators sooner or later have to realize that, like the rest of us, they are actors in a never-ending drama, marchers in an everlasting parade. Life goes on because it “has to.” In the constitution of the Universe, there seems to be at least one unconditional commandment: life keeps going on no matter what! This is true not only of the Cosmos; but it seems as well to be true for us as individuals and for our societies:

I wake up every morning and I wonder
Why everything's the same as it was;
I can't understand; O I can't understand
Why life goes on the way it does.
Why does the sun go on shining?
And why do these eyes of mine cry?
Don't they know it's the end of the world?
It ended when you said “good-bye.” (3)

B. Wishing and Willing to Believe

The proposition, the belief that life is worth living, seems not to be self-proving; it cannot be taken at its face value. Obviously, there is in it an ingredient of good fortune. There is also an element of choice that the believer must exercise before such a belief can be sustained as a prevailing attitude “for better or for worse.” How often things get worse before they get better! Nevertheless, the dilemma of needing to believe, while wishing to believe, does not easily become a “will to believe”:

Faith means belief in [realities] concerning which doubt is theoretically possible; and as the test of belief is the willingness to act, one may say that faith is a readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance. . . . In the average [person] . . . the power to trust, to risk a little beyond the literal evidence, is an essential function.(4)

The title “The Will to Believe” . . . led many [to conclude that the author of the above quotation] . . . was saying that a person could will belief in whatever he chose without respect for the external world. But [he] did not mean this at all, and later, . . . regretted that he had not called his essay “The Right [or Option] to Believe.”(5)

The query, “Can life be worth living?” seems easier to answer. To this question we may respond, “It all depends upon the circumstances.” This reply can be understood by anybody who has lived beyond the protected security of a healthy, happy childhood, and who has confronted the real adult work-a-day world. It takes considerable living, observation and contemplation “to see life clearly and to see it whole.” (6) Perhaps that is why wise parents try to teach their children the habit of living “as if” life is worth living. In my own childhood home we were discouraged from showing any overt dissatisfaction with our lot. I tried crying, sulking, and distemper to no avail. I explored many ways without success to deviate from the established norm of gratitude – “being thankful and not complaining.”

If the reader, like the writer, was brought up in the Judeo-Christian tradition, you were expected to act upon a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:1, that the world as created was declared “good” by the Highest Authority. What a sweeping conclusion, what an audacious act of confidence in the Nature of Things: that everything, the earth, the dome of heaven, all creatures and people, as they are, ever in the process of becoming what they will or can be, are essentially and potentially good! Luckily, for some, the moods inculcated by wise betters in our upbringing started us toward dependable positive prevailing feelings about being alive:

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoyed the sun,
To have lived light in the spring?
To have lived, to have done,
To have advanced true friends,
And beat down baffling foes? (7)

A. Adopted Feelings and Enforced Attitudes

These adopted feelings and enforced attitudes do not guarantee that one will confirm all of the traditional answers in one’s own survey of life’s possibilities. In memorizing optimistic psalms about the world and human nature – in accepting the precepts and acting upon the principles of humane conduct and wise judgment proclaimed by the sages – the young are directed toward the rewards of knowledge and the “abundant life” promised to those who “ask and seek and knock” (8) on the doors of life’s countless opportunities. Thus we are led toward confidence in the best methods of both religion and science. One great scientist-philosopher of our century spoke for many of his learned contemporaries not ordinarily identified with organized religion. He advocated a positive prevailing attitude toward life and living:

I believe that life can be worth living. I believe this in spite of pain, squalor, cruelty, unhappiness and death. I do not believe that it is necessarily worth living, but only for most people it can be so. (9)

Humankind in our lifetime has witnessed untold numbers of dazzling evidences of the possibilities of good living abroad in the world and in the yet to be explored regions of inner and outer space. Scholars tell us that thousands even millions in every culture are re-conceiving their dour presuppositions about life in the light of these encouraging revelations. More and more people are sharing the advantages of broader visions and humanizing technologies. We are told also that many of the world's religions are rediscovering forgotten Scriptures left behind in earlier times:

Today. . . humanity . . . must rediscover lost values and recapture reverence and wonder. . . . Mankind has always recognized greatness. The sayings and deeds of the great are not mere museum pieces but are answers to the basic questions of mankind. . . . In every religion we have people who do not believe in provincialism, who emphasize religion as experience to be attained by self-conquest, appreciation of other faiths, and a sense of loyalty to world community. If man is to achieve wholeness for himself and for the world, or even if he seeks harmonious living, he must set aside differences caused by accidents of geography or history and accept the ideas transmitted by a common heritage. (10)

Nevertheless, because of the unspeakable behavior of partisans and states that attest to the violent side of human nature and point out the inhumane elements in our social structures, millions are still looking hopelessly to gloomy oracles and hearing nothing but the crack of doom. For myself, I am grateful to all, living or dead, who have found life worth living, and chosen to face both life's challenges and difficulties with a studied, mature optimism. Literature in every tradition is replete with aphorisms, proverbs, songs and stories designed to enlighten and encourage individuals to choose the open-ended path of optimism over the dead-end of pessimism.

D. The Option to Believe

Each person, with the help of his neighbors, has to work through the hard disciplines of living, feeling, thinking and acting to arrive at a firsthand belief in the facts, and a wholehearted acceptance of the circumstances of living in this modern age:

This life, we can say, is worth living, because, from the moral point of view, it is what we make it; and we are determined, from that point of view, to make it a success so far as we have anything to do with it. Suppose, however, when evils crowd thickly upon you, that your unconquerable subjectivity proves to be their match, and that you find a more wonderful joy than any passive pleasure can bring in trusting ever in a larger whole! Have you not made life worth living on these terms? What sort of thing would life really be, with your qualities ready for a tussle with it, if it only brought fair weather and gave these higher qualities of yours no scope?

Please remember that optimism and pessimism are definitions of the world. Our own reactions on the world, small as they are in bulk, are integral parts of the whole thing, and necessarily help to determine the definition. Now, in this description of faiths that verify themselves, I have assumed that our faith in [the unseen spiritual realities – the feelings, attitudes, values and commitments that make us human and humane] inspires those efforts and that patience which make the visible order good for moral [human beings].

Here is our deepest organ of communion with the nature of things; and compared with the concrete movements of our souls, all abstract statements and scientific arguments sound to us like mere chattering of teeth. For here possibilities, not finished facts, are the realities with which we have actively to deal; and as “the essence of courage is to stake one’s life on a possibility, so the essence of faith is to believe that a possibility exists. . . .These then are my last words to you. Be not afraid of life. Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact.” (11) The “scientific proof” that you are right may not be clear until the day of judgment or some other stage of being is reached which that expression may symbolize. But the faithful fighters of this hour. . .may turn to the fainthearted who decline to go on to victory, and say with Henry VIII, “Hang yourself – we fought at Arques, and you were not there.” (12)

A meaningful life is the conscious or unconscious desire of all healthy human beings. Furthermore, every person has by circumstances or by choice a multitude of potential meanings that are essential to a good and fruitful life. One of last century's great teacher of teachers made this profound observation:

The meanings that constitute the proper content of human experience do not appear automatically but by a process of natural growth and development... This is another way of saying that meaningful human life is necessarily social. It is only through the educative power of human community that genuine persons are brought into being.

Regrettably, however, society and culture are by no means perfect. Nor are human beings necessarily responsive to whatever beneficent influences are brought to bear on them. People both resist and deny meanings and seek and affirm them, and cultures both destroy meanings and create them. Moreover, quite apart from individual or social threats to meaning, the perfection of human life is limited by the finitude of human existence. Because men are fallible, weak, and mortal, no person can experience in his lifetime more than an infinitesimal fraction of possible meanings.

The educator, therefore, needs to understand human life as a complex of meanings and to know what the various realms of meaning are. He also needs to be aware of the enemies of meaning that arise within the human situation and to organize instruction in such a way as to overcome or minimize the threatened meaninglessness [in our time]. (12b)

As to the “ultimate” purpose of life, there have been many dogmatic answers proposed and defended. Most of these answers have been designed to support one or another doctrine about the relation between the Creation and the mystery of human life in this world or the next. Early Calvinists found inspiration in teaching that “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Modern non-creedal groups declare their unity by “owning” covenants “to seek and do their best according to the light made known or yet to be disclosed.” (13) Underlying all creeds and covenants in most traditions is the basic belief that the purpose of life is good living; and the word “good” is defined by each individual’s inner life and each group’s social and devotional experience:

Since what we choose is what we are
And what we love we yet shall be;
The goal may ever shine afar;
The will to win it makes us free. (14)

We will say more about goodness in Chapter XIII.

Notes in Chapter 1

- (1) Poem by Julianus Aegyptius, c 200 B.C. in *Little Poems from the Greek*, by Walter Leaf, Grant Richards, Ltd., London, 1922, Pg. 89.
- (2) Ibid. Pg.95
- (3) Popular “Country” ballad.
- (4) William James, *The Will to Believe*, Longmans Green, N.Y.,1898, Pg. 90, faith defined in *The Sentiment of Rationality*
- (5) Gay Wilson Allen, *William James*, a Biography, Viking Press, N.Y., 1967, Pg. 503
- (6) Matthew Arnold, 1822-1886, source not found.
- (7) Poem by Matthew Arnold, “To a Friend”
- (8) NT Mt.7:7
- (9) Julian Huxley, quoted in *I Believe*, Clifton Fadiman, et. al., Simon and Schuster, 1939, Pg. 127.
- (10) S. Radhakirshnan, quoted in *Philosophy, Religion and the Coming World Civilization*, Leroy S. Rouner, et. al., The Hague, 1966, Pg. 295.
- (11 & 12) William James, Opsit: *The Will To Believe*, essay on “Is Life Worth Living?” Pgs.60-62ff
- (12b) Philip H. Phenix, *Realms of Meaning*, McGraw Hill, N.Y. 1964, Pgs.30-31
- (13) AVA, *How to Gather and Order a Church*, National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 1986, Pgs. 3,7
- (14) Hymn by William Dewitt Hyde, 1858-1917, “Creation's Lord, We Give Thee Thanks,” Pilgrim Hymnal, Pilgrim Press, 1935, Pg. 316

CHAPTER 2

The Belief in Our Better Selves

We shall assume that we have accepted Tennyson's advice to "cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt," (1) and have decided that in general life can be worth living. So we may turn to considering the belief in our better selves. Somebody seems to have asked the author of the familiar spiritual, "How do you feel about yourself?" We can identify with the plaintive reply:

Sometimes I'm up; sometimes I'm down . . .
Sometimes I'm almost to the ground . . .
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen . . .
Nobody knows but Jesus . . .! (2)

The ambiguity in the spiritual's theme is a characteristic of human behavior – a sufficient cause for having difficulty maintaining anything like a constant belief in ourselves. We cannot honestly say that we believe in ourselves without admitting at the outset that our lesser selves are forever in conflict with our better selves. Although we may not use the same theological frames of reference, we are inspired by the Spiritual's candor and sincerity. Observations like these lead to the conclusion that the attitudes we take toward ourselves are various. If we are lucky, in time we arrive at some more or less dependable prevailing habits of self-analysis, self-direction and a growing measure of self-esteem.

A. Pessimistic Dogmas

Abroad in every tradition are dogmas that are intended to prejudice folks against positive generalizations about human nature. One great theologian tried to dispel the hopelessness implied in these morbid views of our beginnings and destiny:

Upon the basis of [scriptural infallibility], wholly out of keeping with the spirit of [great religion], doctrines have been extracted that were never [in the originals]. I for one am certain that no such doctrine as the Fall of Man as essential to faith . . . is taught in the [Scriptures]. There is, to be sure, a Fall story, full of suggestive truth, but no doctrine of the Fall. (3)

It is a blessed relief to be assured that, literally, there never was a Golden Age – that primitive humans were never perfect, and that we can safely discard forthwith the false dogmas that the dead past, especially the mythical and legendary past, are

normative for all ages. A realistic description of Eden as a sterile paradise should be an emancipation for self-understanding, but it does not free us by any means from taking into account the negative consequences of mankind's latent animality:

From our present standpoint we may fairly ask what would be the worth of that primitive innocence in ancient myths had it ever been realized in [actuality]? What would have been the moral value or significance of a race of human beings ignorant of [sinfulness] and doing beneficent acts with no more consciousness or volition than a deftly contrived machine? . . . Clearly for strong, resolute men and women, an Eden would be a false paradise. (4)

B. Rituals of Self-abnegation

There is also a continuing and widespread emphasis upon acts of contrition calling for exaggerated self-abnegation. In practice this amounts to a habit of “glorifying God by vilifying man.” Even the beautiful traditional “Prayer of Confession” requires worshippers to admit that they are “miserable sinners”; then it makes them say, “and there is no health in us.” (5) This may be a justifiable expression of a personal feeling, but is it fair to the facts? The poor soul making this confession may be bad, but probably not that bad! One theologian clarifies this predicament in which liturgies have placed us:

It is sometimes said that there is no good in man. It would be truer to say that there is no evil in him. For there is nothing in man that is inherently evil; nothing that cannot be directed to a good purpose . . . Vice is virtue misplaced. Appetite? Is it a vice? Some should eat less; but there are some whose doctors wish them to eat more. . . Pride, is that a sin? A man without pride! Such a creature is not a man, he has no backbone. Acquisitiveness, is that a sin? Acquisitiveness, which is the seed of all manner of evil, is also the seed of all manner of good; it drives the busy wheels of industry and sets us all working. (6)

If ever we expect to believe in our better selves we should quit looking at each other as forever carrying about the disease germs of chronic or total depravity. Make no mistake, humans are too prone to beastly behavior, and we are by no means above moral failure and spiritual decline. But there are much healthier ways to deal with our lesser natures than to ignore our virtues and wallow in trumped-up false guilt. Genuine guilt is enough to manage. We fail because of ignorance and inexperience. We fail, too, because of physical conditions – the spirit may be willing when the flesh is weak. We fail also when we lack sound psychological knowledge because we need better tools for adequate self-understanding and more dependable insights

with which to master conflicts within, and to overcome conflicts around us. And we fail because of just plain cussedness or lack of compassion, or self-respect or self-control.

C. Growth in Self Respect

Moving toward and with congenial people came easily for me, but being alone and truly enjoying myself took a bit of doing. An uncle of mine, in spite of my mother's reluctance, let me go fishing "by myself" – a phrase more significant than many parents and teachers suspect. What a school for creative solitude – a growing lad, alone in a boat, somewhere on an open lake, anchor fast, fishing by the hour! If you are wondering if I caught any fish, you know what fishing is, but not what fishing is for. Besides fishing, I breathed, and smelled, and looked until my eyes hurt. I thought and daydreamed and catnapped; and lost one oarlock overboard.

Suddenly all of the warnings I had heard rushed to my mind: "Don't panic!" "Stay with the boat!" "Never swim alone!" "Don't try to swim ashore!" Nobody had ever said, "Don't peek over the side!" So I did, and there was the oarlock in plain sight lying on the pure white sand. Then I remembered "You can take one oar, sit forward and paddle ashore." "Not me," I cried aloud, "not two miles!" Mustering my courage with one long breath, I dove deep, swam down, clutched my prize, and had just enough wind left to make the surface. I pulled myself over the side and fell into the boat. "Not bad," I told myself. "We did all right." Ever since that day I have repeated these words a thousand times, and felt the same sense of self-satisfaction whenever I have been fishing alone, not necessarily in water, and netting a modest catch of self-respect. Later, I came to appreciate the poet's sage advice:

By all means use sometime to be alone.
Salute thyself: see what thy soul doth wear.
Dare to look into thy chest; for 'tis thine own;
And tumble up and down what thou find'st there. (7)

D. Self-knowledge and Society

It takes time to get to know oneself, time to hammer out a satisfactory prevailing attitude toward who you are and what you are aiming to become – and furthermore to outgrow what other people think you are or ought to be. Let's face it, growing up can be a life-long process. In college, a namesake of the last quoted poet taught me that my ego, the "I," the thinking-remembering-talking part of me, among

other mysteries, is a gadfly probing the raw materials of my potential selves. But it reports only tentatively on the whole of “me,” or the Nature of Things. Had I learned this distinction earlier, I might have been able to accept more readily my lesser selves as a normal part of my unfolding better self with whom I grew increasingly anxious to establish reliable relations:

The individual experiences himself as such not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoint of other individual members of social groups to which he belongs. . .The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience. . .When it has arisen, we can think of a person as in solitary confinement for the rest of his life but who still has himself as a companion, and is able to think and converse with himself as he [communicates] with others. . .[Thus] we are finding out what we are going to say, what we are to do, by saying and doing! . . .In the process we are continually controlling the process itself. . .in terms of the “I” and the “me” – the “me”. . .being the organized attitudes [responded to] as an “I.” (8)

Another profound scholar, also named after the same wise poet, concluded that there are four characteristics with which to distinguish persons from things: (a) self-consciousness, (b) self-direction, (c) self-development, and (d) self-sacrifice:

These four are so likely to go together, that the appearance of one gives confidence of the rest. If, for example we discover a being sacrificing itself for another . . . it will stir sympathy that we shall see it in a likeness of our own kind. Or, finding a creature capable of steering itself, or deciding what its ends will be, and adjusting its many powers to reach them . . . here is a human being like ourselves. (9)

What a bundle of contradictions a person is! Is there not a subtle truth in the one-liner, “Are you a man or a civil war?” In youth or age we never quite rise above moral failure, and are always at risk of spiritual decline. Fortunately, however, we learn, “if we look into our chests,” that our lesser selves are real; but they can be understood as a normal part of the evolving better selves with whom we may develop a creative compatibility. Because we are self-conscious and self-directing we are able to overcome one character blemish at a time; and rise to acts of self-giving and self-sacrifice. In this natural process we grow up, and strengthen our appreciation of and loyalty to our better selves.

E. The Support of Others

We would be remiss if we were to conclude this subject without saying that our belief in our better selves is not only an individual matter, as deeply personal as it is. Character development, like selfhood, is connected to one's relationships with others, especially with members of the “beloved communities” to which we belong – families, churches, fraternities, networks and bowling teams – wherever friendships and confidences are shared. It is in the nature of such associations to include many who believe in their better selves and respect the potential maturity in others. When others believe in us, “wooing us back to live in the heights of our selves” (10), it is easier for us to believe in our own capacities for growth and, most of the time, to live up to the inner images of our better selves. Good fellowship and worship that decry “fruitless brooding and faithless reflection” help all participants to refine and maintain high standards of personal and social achievement. It is important to want and develop the art of self-forgiveness leading to self-acceptance. In this age of specialists in the fields of emotional and mental health, professional guidance is available when our personal and interpersonal relations get out of hand. When they do, help is no further away than the telephone.

F. Why Do We Believe?

The WHY of our better selves is like all of the whys in the mystery of life. Most of the time we maintain a prevailing sense of self-worth, so why do we believe in our better selves? Hear the answers of two wise observers of human behavior:

Why do [human beings] cleave to the true, the good and the beautiful, following an ever-renewing nobleness? Because they are selective beings, and that is what they select. (11)

The remaking of human nature. . .is in large part a work of [persons themselves]. . . The self-conscious being is inevitably a self-changing-being. . .the self-conscious will taking a broad cosmic responsibility for the work of self-building [in partnership] with [mankind's] remoter destiny. (12)

Maturity in all its aspects may be slow in coming, but it comes much sooner when a person learns and earns a prevailing attitude of whole-hearted belief in his/her better self:

Life is a piece of paper white
Whereon each one of us may write

His word or two, and then comes night.

Greatly begin ! though thou hast time
But for a line, be that sublime –
Not failure, but low aim is crime. (13)

Notes in Chapter 2

- (1) Poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1809-1892, *The Ancient Sage*.
- (2) Traditional Negro Spiritual
- (3) John Wright Buckham, *Religion as Experience*, Abington Press, 1922, Pg. 125.
- (4) Lyman Abbott, *What Christianity Means to Me*, Macmillan Company, 1921, Pg. 137.
- (5) “Prayer of General Confession” The Book of Common Prayer, James Dow, Boston, 1854, Pg. 22
- (6) Lyman Abbott, *Ibid.* Pg. 138.
- (7) Poem by George Porch Herbert, 1593-1633, *The Church*
- (8) George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, University of Chicago Press, 1934, Pgs. 135, 140.
- (9) George Herbert Palmer, *The Nature of Goodness*, Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1903, Pgs. 56, 59.
- (10) William Henry Body, My Church, One Pg. flyer, Presbyterian National Mission Board, New York, N.Y.
- (11) Arthur Clinton Watson, *The Logic of Religion*, Ph.D. Thesis, Chicago University, American Journal of Theology, 1916.
- (12) William Ernest Hocking, *What Man Can Make of Man*, Yale University Press, 1923, Pg. 171
- (13) James Russell Lowell, 1819-1891, “For an Autograph”

CHAPER 3

The Belief in Our Fellow Human Beings

Every human child undergoes a progressive population explosion in experience that may ultimately develop into a vision of himself or herself as a citizen of an evolving world community. Luckily, the folks who brought me up had good intentions toward me. As the population of my inner and outer world increased, my outlook toward people-in-general was optimistic. In due course, as most of us do, I came up against some liars, cheats, thieves and scoundrels. If, in my youth, I had been asked how I felt about people, I would have answered that it depends upon what people you are talking about. It made a difference to us delivery boys whether the folks who came into the village store were customers, salesmen, or bill-collectors.

Living in a small town was a good place to discover that all people have their peculiarities – their differences in background, temperament, abilities, interests and motivations – and these peculiarities require a ready flexibility of response. I shall ever be grateful to Mary Healy Lally, one of the few Roman Catholics in our village. The mail brought me a note in her hand thanking me for being cheerful and courteous. Never since have I been able to accept stereotypic notions of nuns, priests or popes. Isador Koslowski, our only Jewish resident, taught me how to use a power scroll-saw; and George Sherman, the only “colored” man in town, helped us butcher our pigs, and let us set our traps on the Indian Reservation. These and many more fine folks contributed to my expanding ethnic and ethical horizons.

As with the initial question about our belief in ourselves, we cannot give an unequivocal answer to the question, “Can we believe in our fellow humans?” Much depends upon those we have in mind, what activity may be proposed, or whether we are dealing with individuals or with organized groups. Let us begin with the matter of our prevailing attitudes toward individuals. Obviously human beings are not angels.

A. Our Mutual Interdependence as Finite Persons

We are finite persons living in a finite society on a finite planet. The Cosmos and God may be and probably are infinite as some scientists and most theologians suggest. One of the foremost theologians of the century before last wrote that there are many advantages in our finitude and particularly in our mutual interdependence:

. . .we [humans] have relations [as] equals. . . .How much this means we can easily discover. . . .as when old comrades in school, in suffering and labor, in shipwreck and battle, come to us in their unaffected, unexaggerated offices of friendship. On this plane of mortal equality, therefore, we have a whole set of principles, virtues and felicities that belong to our finite privilege, in a way that is exclusive; duties and deeds of courtesy, society, voluntary differences, hospitable customs, modes, manners, entertainments, generousities and ways of freedom – all which. . . .belong to equals only, and become a virtue in them that is strictly their own.” (1)

B. Three Bad Habits of Individuals¹

Notwithstanding these mutual advantages of our finite status, we also share the weaknesses of our animal neighbors in some less desirable behavior patterns. We are prone to at least three bad habits that make it impossible for anybody to trust everybody all of the time. First, there is the insidious habit of verbal realism – taking it for granted that words explain everything, that what one says can be taken at its face value as the whole truth about anything or everything. A lot of living and a lot of reflection teaches that it takes more than dictionary definitions to understand and cope with another person, especially if he or she charges words with emotional overtones, or loads them with pet prejudices.

Second, there is the widespread but futile hope of finding simple answers to complex problems or complicated circumstances. The demand for easy answers dogs the heels of our interpersonal relations, and confounds the natural conflicts within ourselves, and between ourselves and others. And third, there is the subtle error that the psychologists call “projection” – the habit of falsely projecting one's own thoughts and experience into relations with others, without taking into account the fact that they do not necessarily feel as we feel, or want what we want, or think (as if they could) with our brains, muscles and memories.

Avoiding these bad habits is difficult. And overcoming them after they have become reflexive behavior patterns requires considerable self-analysis toward growth in practical wisdom about people and how to deal constructively with “all sorts and conditions of men.” (2) But, because we are required by living to get along with others, any prevailing attitude must be sufficiently flexible to allow for accommodation to varieties of personalities in many different circumstances. However, we ought to be able to conclude, at this point, that any negative

generalizations about other people are fruitless and dead wrong. Like the Psalm writer, we had better rule out sweeping negatives: “I said in my haste, ‘All men are liars.’” (3) All men are not any one anything!

C. Most Humans Are Reliable Most of the Time

In actual day to day living we are obliged to adopt, consciously or unconsciously, the positive generalization that by and large we can believe in and trust our fellow humans. How many bad checks do you receive in the course of a year’s business? Not many, if any! And there you are reclining in a jet-liner, yielding your precious life to the care of total strangers in cockpit, tower and weather observatories, linked together in a chain of laws, commitments and dedication reaching around the globe. We can and must believe in our fellow human beings!

On the other hand, the hard facts of experience – a common sense understanding that inter-personal relations are most times congenial but sometimes adversarial – remind us that we need to be not only “harmless as doves” but also “wise as serpents.” (4) We can believe in and trust people who will not let us down. However, at the same time, we need to keep a weather-eye open for storm warnings because it takes good seamanship to navigate the rougher waters on the broad ocean of human relations.

D. Societies Have the Same Bad Habits

So much for our prevailing attitudes toward individuals. Now, what prevailing attitudes can be sustained when we have to deal with groups of people – families, neighbors, societies, races, nations, humanity? Can we take seriously the bold proposition that “God has made of one blood all peoples?” (5) Is this thesis a dependable ground for a positive generalization when applied to the groups with which we have to live and do business? Again, our answer has to be yes and no. Groups of human beings share the same latent animality, and indulge the same habits of verbal realism, over-simplification, and projection as do individuals:

The fake science that Hitler so vociferously proclaimed, that there are master races, and permanently inferior races, has not a leg to stand on . . . Many kinds of evil are clearly recognized. . .but the subtle, quiet, exclusive prejudice against a whole human group is one of the most ruinous menaces on earth. . .Group prejudice is not the answer to anything. It is immoral, unintelligent, and practically insane. (6)

E. Science, Stereotypes and Future Hopes

Science has laid the groundwork for the ultimate destruction of many stereotypic images; even their colors change. Eskimos learn to fly jet-fighters, while children of forest people earn degrees at Oxford. We need only cite the virtually universal exchanges of blood for transfusions to illustrate that the “one blood” can be taken almost literally. Unfortunately, however, another strain in many traditions is still used to buttress some very exclusivist, inhumane activities. One writer puts his finger on this perennial social disease, and prescribes a remedy:

Whenever it appears, the chosen people complex is an obstacle to genuine appreciation [between people] and to world community. The time is overdue when [races and organized religious groups] must relinquish the entire assumption of being uniquely called to the exclusion of other groups, or other ways of interpreting experience. (7)

Only fools blind their eyes to the sordid pages in the record of man's inhumanity to man, especially when it is expressed in mob violence and the mass destruction of bodies, minds and cities:

Daily we see humanity commit all the crimes in the Decalogue; yet, today, more than ever. . .we cannot, however well founded our doubts, be betrayed into mere cynicism and contempt for the human race. We must not, despite the evidence of its fantastic vileness, forget its great and honorable traits, revealed in the shape of art, science, the search for truth, the creation of beauty, [and] the conception of justice. (8)

Hopefully, in our time more and more people are showing concern for humankind's pressing social problems: poverty, public health, segregation, war and peace, environmental management, world order, world economy, and world community. We may take some comfort from these encouraging signs. We can and must believe in our fellow human beings!

At last man's understanding of himself has become clear enough for him to see that his highest duty is to his own kind; and that if the life of man himself is becoming larger and finer, nothing else can yield such enduring satisfaction. . . . We are rapidly making devotion to humanity [a spiritual principle]. (9)

Notes in Chapter 3

- (1) Horace Bushnell, *Sermons on Living Subjects*, Charles Scribner's Sons, N. Y., 1887, Pages 335, 336.
- (2) *Prayer of Confession*, Morning Prayer, Book of Common Prayer.
- (3) OT Psalm 116:11. (4) NT Mt. 10:16. (5) NT Acts 17:26.
- (6) Harry Emerson Fosdick, *A Faith for Tough Times*, Harpers, 1952, Pg. 38.
- (7) Floyd H. Ross, *Addressed to Christians*, Harpers, 1950, Pg. 140, Pg. 140.
- (8) Thomas Mann, quoted in "I Believe," Op. cit. Pg. 191.
- (9) Edward S. Ames, *The New Theology*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1918, Pg. 30.

CHAPTER 4

The Belief in Our Work

A person's self image is a bundle of interacting strands of mental, emotional, social and physical experiences, not the least of which is work: hard work, leg work, and back work. Most of my adult life has been cluttered with another kind of back-work, piles of it, still unfinished, on my bench, my desk, my calendar. When I was a boy, the assignment to scrub the bare oak kitchen floor every Saturday was real back work; and Mother saw to it that it was not neglected. Both of my parents were workers, at home and in the world. They had to leave school after seventh grade to work ten hours a day, six days a week in what we know now as sweatshops. But that did not stop them from learning, for they kept up with their children's school experience. They showed no resentment toward work; liking work, to them, was a secondary consideration.

My sisters and I took our places beside our parents, doing chores, repairs, gardening, and all the housekeeping and homemaking arts that the prudent and less affluent are obliged to do for themselves. We found adventure in discovering new skills and self-fulfillment in becoming more proficient in old ones. We would have been reprimanded had we quoted the cynical sayings that "work fascinates people because they can sit and look at it for hours"; or that "the world is full of willing people: those willing to work, and the rest willing to let them." In our lazy moments we might have preferred to join the latter; but we had to face the truth, that work for us was inevitable.

A. The Necessity and Inevitability of Work

Abraham Lincoln said his father taught him to work but not to love it. In this observation we can see that the first step beyond accepting work as inevitable is to recognize that a person's failure or success in this world is half decided when he gains, or fails to gain, the habit of working. Speaking for myself, I have found in countless futile experiments that it is usually more work to get out of work than it is to do it. No wonder Charles Kingsley advised a young man to be thankful every morning that he had something to do each day that had to be done whether he liked it or not. Kingsley pointed out that a person's being forced by the Nature of Things to work, and to do it well, has "bred in him temperance, self-control, diligence,

strength of will, cheerfulness, content, and a hundred virtues that the idle never know.” (1)

On these terms, we had better admit that we believe in work – just plain work. We need not always like it; we may not always understand why we have to do the work that it seems to be our duty to do. But, no matter how reluctant the confession, we do believe in our work. Furthermore, we can come to believe in work as an opportunity, because we can look with just pride upon all it has done for mankind. Work transforms the face of the earth, builds cities, creates great industries and institutions, devises fantastic means of transportation, amusement and education. In much of the globe, instead of want, misery and barbarism, hard work has brought plenty, comfort and civilization to multitudes (along with all of the problems associated with luxury, materialism, self-indulgence, greed and the exploitation of others that we will consider in later pages).

B. Jobs and Professions as Vocations

Fortunate indeed are those whose work becomes their vocation – their “lifework” that makes a “calling” out of the mere demand that they must do something to earn their keep. A Chicago professor was once chided because he did not use his remarkable talents elsewhere for more salary. His reply was, “If I were able, I would pay for the privilege of doing what this university pays me to do.” (2) He had found his own special niche in the world’s work because he believed wholeheartedly in his vocation.

Much of young people’s anxiety arises out of having to do frustrating tasks that are an apprenticeship in learning how to work: finding out what they can do, who might be willing to engage their services, and to whom or what institution they might give their commitment and loyalty. It takes time, opportunity, and no small amount of know-how to arrive at the state in which what we have to do is what we want to do because of a feeling that we were “meant” to do it. But work we must – ordinarily at what is available, until we find, if we ever do, that ultimate place of soul-satisfying responsibility or of greatest service for which we pray.

Another insight has helped me maintain a dependable prevailing attitude toward work and my vocation. One of the Psalmists prays to the Creator, “Let thy work appear unto thy servants . . .” (3) Had we been able to ask him, “What is the Creator’s work?” might

he not have answered, “Everything – continuous creation of stuff, life, human beings, institutions, planets, galaxies, the works.” Mankind, too, has a responsible place in this Eternal Economy. Somewhere Helen Keller, speaking of her vocation, caught the meaning of this relation between her work and the infinite enterprises underlying the Universe. She said her share of the world’s work, though limited, was precious to her because it was significant work. She held that the world is moved, not only by the mighty, but also by the aggregate of tiny pushes of each honest worker. (4)

Work, then, conceived as being done in co-partnership with the whole human family and its Source of Being and Becoming can be viewed as a glorious opportunity. Nevertheless, and sadly, much work in the modern world is potentially degrading. Monotony is the word for many jobs in an industrialized, mechanized economy; and such jobs are not sufficiently self-fulfilling for people whose cultural interests are expanding with the worldwide information explosion. A Mother may stand drudgery year in and year out because she is motivated by the most compelling human emotions. It may not remain so with the many who make their living in some of our mass production lines.

C. Work and Social Vision

There now is a growing concern in many countries for resolving some of the problems of production workers. This concern was anticipated and prophetically sparked a half century ago by forward looking students of our culture:

There is need for social vision that shall explicitly correlate the efforts of the toiling millions to the ends that are served by such toil. . . [Societies] will endeavor, either by a social interpretation of each [person's] work in the total welfare of mankind, or by the discovery of avocations, or both, to cultivate and establish that attitude of goodwill that redeems industrial life from sordidness and cynicism. (5)

The goal of full employment, coupled with working conditions of the sort suggested above is a tribute to the growing social sensitivities of capital, labor and government. May those who have steady, soul-satisfying work, and those who earnestly seek it find inspiration and joy in wholeheartedly singing the old-time gospel song “Work for the Night Is Coming”:

Give every flying moment
Something to keep in store;

Work for the night is coming,
When man works no more.(6)

If we can't sing, at least we can whistle while we do our work. And we can wholeheartedly believe in it. (7)

Notes In Chapter 4

(1) Charles Kingsley, quoted from
Thesaurus of Quotations, Edmund Fuller, Crown
Publishers, 1941, Pg. 993.

(2) Gerald Birney Smith, *Principles of Christian Living*, University of Chicago
Press, 1924, Pg. 130.

(3) O.T. Psalm 90:16 . (4) Helen Keller, Reference not found.

(5) Gerald Birney Smith, *Ibid.* Pg. 137.

(6) Hymn by Anna L. Coghill, *Work for the Night is
Coming.*

(7) Walt Disney, *Snow White*, The March of the Dwarfs.

CHAPTER 5

The Belief in Moral Integrity

We move forward to talk about prevailing moral, spiritual and religious values. There is apt to be more grief than satisfaction in mastering enough etiquette to quiet our betters; and before we do we are pushed into the more complicated arena of ethics. I was taken to a banquet before my table habits were reliable and was seated across the table from a loud-talking corpulent fellow. In front of me was a huge square of Jell-O on a bed of lettuce. I reached to cut the lettuce and the Jell-O left the plate and plopped shimmering in the middle of the table. As if I did not have embarrassment enough, the fat man guffawed, and in a voice everybody could hear, remarked, “That's all right, buddy; it’s your Jell-O, and you can do what you want with it!” I looked hopelessly for a hole in the floor.

The process of developing some rudimentary ethical standards proved even more embarrassing. Once I borrowed a neighbor's wheelbarrow, and in spite of scolding from my family, failed to return it promptly. I learned my lesson when the neighbor sent his son with the message, “My father wants to know if we can borrow our wheelbarrow.” Variations in etiquette may be relative (mostly our own relatives). And ethical standards arise from the tastes or customs of any given society. But moral values are rooted deep down in the history of the race, and in the Nature of Things; so we may best begin with the question: What do we mean by the word “moral”?

A. The Meaning of the Word “Moral”

In common parlance, the moral of a story is the truth about living that the story illustrates. Millions of real life stories were lived through centuries of trial and error, in joy and in grief, before our ancestors found out what they needed to know about the moral conditions that had to be met before stable families, tribes or nations could be established. All of the mores and moral codes of the world’s many cultures are distillations of the hard facts of mankind's long – painfully long – social experience.

No wonder the ancient Hebrews saw their Decalogue as a “revelation” direct from Yahweh. Moses did not really need a burning bush to reveal to him the moral facts

of life, for he lived in the wilderness for forty years with those rambunctious Israelites. A three-cornered love affair makes hellfire incarnate in the desert or in Yankee stadium; and killing isn't the only possible tragic outcome. Moses was right in making plain to his stiff-necked caravans that no one man could discover, all by himself in one lifetime, the concentrated insights of the Law, nor live long enough in ten lifetimes to find out firsthand why communities and cultures, when they flagrantly ignore the moral facts of this world, come ultimately to a sorry end in confusion, bloodshed and tragedy.

When Jesus came into Jerusalem out of Galilee, he made sure the people understood, whatever his views on other traditions, that he did not aim to destroy their respect for the Law of Moses. He knew that he could not alter the basic subject matter nor the general conclusions of the Ten Commandments any more than he could make the sun rise in the West and set in the East.

The word moral, then, stands for certain given conditions in the Nature of Things that obtain more or less uniformly wherever human beings set up simple or complex social units. We will not over-argue the point, but state categorically, making due allowances for variations in the manner of their development, that the moral conditions of social evolution are similar the world over. Sociologists may produce evidence of societies with a wide range of moral standards; but examples of long-lived societies built only upon falsehood, theft, infidelity, treachery and cowardice – never!

B. Moral Conditions are “Given” by Nature

Moral conditions, we may conclude, are not the creation of society; they are “given” by Nature. But codes of mores, of morally acceptable conduct, are defined and enforced by societies for their own protection. Moral standards are not subject to the inclinations and the whims of individuals. They are told the limitations within which they are free to decide what shall be morally right or wrong for them:

In vain we call old notions fudge,
And bend our conscience to our dealing:
The Ten Commandments will not budge,
And stealing will continue stealing. (1)

We boys bent our consciences every summer to steal a few ripe peaches from a farmer's orchard. Helping ourselves to a dozen peaches, we thought, might have

been a big deal if the farmer had only one tree; but he had a thousand trees and bushels of peaches. We were roundly punished when our parents found out what we were doing, and our arguments got nowhere with them: “You are not to steal anything, from anybody, anytime!” There were no loopholes in that dogma, and the same went for lying, coveting, infidelity, and law-breaking in particular and in general. Looking back, I am grateful that our moral options were rigidly defined for us, and that we were expected to accept and believe in standards of moral integrity.

Most people in every social unit accept the prescribed moral norms without undue resistance, and without too much deviation from them. There is always a criminal or offbeat element that, in one way or another, tries to “beat the rap” in moral matters; but social pressure, civil law, and penalties supported by “the common sense of most,” tend to “keep the fretful realm in awe.” (2) Yet, we dare not rest on our laurels as inheritors of the moral capital funded in every tradition:

Morality is like a cultivated field in the midst of a desert. It is a partial and precarious conquest. Ground that has been conquered has to be protected against the resurgence of original divisive forces. The moralized life is never immune against moral decline. At the same time that morality gains ground in one direction, it may lose in another. Changes in the natural and historical environment and the development of man himself are perpetually introducing new factors and requiring a moral reorganization to embrace them. In the last analysis all depends on the energy, perseverance, and perpetual vigilance of the human person.(3)

C. An Enlightened Few

In most societies there is an enlightened few who have thought through the circumstances that underlie civilized life, articulated the reasons why moral standards are indispensable, and who not only conform to them but also interpret them to others as “the proper thing to do” – or better, as the safeguards of all individual and social interests, to be respected, improved upon and voluntarily upheld. So I shall assume, that we, as members of this latter group, find ourselves able to declare our unequivocal belief in moral integrity.

During recent decades we have experimented with a number of “new moralities,” with names like “situation ethics,” and “liberations” of one kind or another. The jury is still out on which of these will lead to behavior patterns and lifestyles that

Nature's fragile ecology, and viable human expectations can sustain. I suspect that we may wisely conclude that for most of us, rational moral standards will remain the price tags we put on common decency. We have no intention of minimizing the human tendencies, noted above, to vacillate in our moods, motives and behavior. But when our better selves are in control, we place the highest value on human life, honesty, fidelity, truthfulness and generosity. These are but positive expressions of the last five of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not kill, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness or covet":

In the darkest hour through which a human soul can pass, whatever else is doubtful, this is at least certain. . .it is better to be generous than selfish, better to be chaste than licentious, better to be courageous than a coward...Thrice blest is he, who, when all is cheerless within and without, has obstinately clung to the moral good. (4)

D. Societies also Have Moral Obligations

As we enter the 21st Century, our world has moved beyond the point where mankind can afford to think of moral integrity as applicable only to individuals in relation to other individuals and to society. Societies themselves, ethnic, cultural and political, are subject to the moral order given in the Nature of Things. In its intercourse with other societies, and all society, every social unit is now called upon to fulfill its own special moral obligations. Awareness of this fact is a relatively new element in the long history of the race; but believers in moral integrity do well to embrace all of its implications:

Indeed, our present chaos, far from refuting, bears witness to inexorable laws in the ethical realm with which we have been tampering – our wars, our militant nationalisms, our imperialistic greed, our social discriminations, our economic avarice, our dedication of science to destructive purposes! We are shaken by unshakable moral laws with which men and nations may not innocuously fool. (5)

The answer to atomic power is moral power. No matter how rich we are in physical resources, we shall decline as a people, unless we can produce. . .an ethical system that will make our technical discoveries a boon to mankind, which they can be, if rightly directed; and keep them from being a means of disaster that they may be, and which, without such effort, they will certainly be.(6)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Agreements, and the

more recent arms reduction agreements are proof that the process of defining moral standards for all societies is being undertaken by leaders of all races and nationalities. Their constructive work is in our line of duty as believers in moral integrity. And in spite of the obstacles before nations large and small, such constructive effort is a tangible ground for hope.

Notes in Chapter 5

(1) Poem by James Russell Lowell, quoted by Harry Emerson Fosdick, *A Great Time to Be Alive*, Harpers, 1944, Pg. 140

(2) Poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1809-1892, *Locksley Hall*, Tennyson's Poetical Works, Houghton Mifflin, 1899, Pg. 124.

(3) Ralph Barton Perry, *Realms of Value*, Harvard University Press, 1954, Reprinted in *Approaches to Ethics*, W.T. Jones, et. al., McGraw-Hill, 1969, Pg. 504.

(4) Frederick W. Robinson, quoted by Harry Emerson Fosdick, *A Faith for Tough Times*, Harpers, 1952, Pg 36.

(5) Elton Trublood, *Foundations of Reconstruction*, Harpers, 1946, Pg.8

(6) Harry Emerson Fosdick, *ibid.*, Pg. 38

CHAPTER 6

The Belief in Spiritual Responsibility

If, as we have said, moral values are the price tags we put on common decency, it follows then that spiritual values are the price tags we put on our personal and social relations. We cannot take time here to wander down the blind alleys of much metaphysical and most occult speculations, where the word “spiritual” means supernatural abstractions or disembodied ghosts. The author is without competence in either field and admits quite frankly his reluctance to advise others to expect much direct assistance these days from angels, whether semantic or ethereal.

A. The Word “Spiritual”

The word spiritual, for our purposes, stands specifically for what one sage called the realities that, “although unseen, are eternal” – that is, less bound by time than things. (1) Wisdom, neighborliness, companionship, forgiveness, magnanimity, love in its myriad human forms, and all other spiritual aspects of existence are not things; but they are as real as cells, atoms and stars. And because they are so integral with the development of character and personality, and so essential to social cohesion, one wonders why very little study has been made of them for what they are, apart from sectarian interests in them.

All of us are obliged to deal with the spiritual environment around us and within us. A well known teetotaler was sent a plum cake saturated with brandy. Aware of his reputation as a non-drinker, he was hard put to know what to write in his thank-you note. With tongue in cheek, he wrote, “I want to thank you for the gift, and the spirit in which it was sent.” Spiritual responsibility is the art of apprehending the spirit in which things are said and done – the spirit of a conversation, a personality, a human relationship or the *esprit de corps* of a group, an institution, or community.

B. Ideas, Ideals and Spirituality

Modern psychologies have helped to remove many obstacles that, until our time, have blocked progress toward a working understanding of the dynamic relation

between ideas, ideals and spiritually productive behavior. In the language of ordinary folk, life is seen more and more as a department store where we can buy hang-ups in most every department. I say “buy,” because I avoided facing up to my worst hang-ups until long after I became an adult. As I said before, moving toward people came easily, but I have had a lifelong struggle to make myself move against others when circumstances made such behavior necessary. My saddest days have been spent dodging or working around conflicts most of which were inevitable. Confronting head-on those issues, opinions, policies, persons or factions that required the resolution of real differences, was always a last resort. All aggressive attitudes, in fact, including healthy competitiveness, have been complicated because of this emotional handicap. As a teenager, I once had a gripe with a neighbor. Rather than going directly to him, I wrote him a mildly critical letter. He called me in and offered the admonition: “Your mouth will get you into enough difficulty, so be careful about putting your criticisms on paper!” I have shied away from letter-writing ever since.

As noted earlier, we become persons in society. The very sense of being a person, along with many characteristics of personality, arises within the social mold in which one’s life is cast. From birth, society comes at us with many faces. We are met alternately and at every turn with affection, rejection, acceptance, aggression and all sorts of combinations of the same. Getting used to so many seemingly capricious sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction – such inescapable strains and stresses – it’s a miracle how we reach maturity at all.

C. Emotional and Spiritual Maturity

One psychiatrist says, using the figurative terms developed in her research, that emotional maturity means “the ability to put the whole of oneself into one's feeling, one's work, and one's beliefs.” She goes on to say that the way to a person’s emotional growth is in learning how to be wholehearted in the midst of so many internal and external commands. “Come here, go there, let me alone!” and “See here, you!” Her description fits my own emotional development to a tee. Nothing takes the spirit out of me like unresolved conflicts (and here I am engulfed by them). As if that were not enough, I am torn this way and that inside myself because I, too, make up part of my society. I have to live with myself, including my lesser and potential selves. When I move toward people, or away from them, or when I must sometimes move against them, I become a problem to myself and others in my home, community and the world. (2)

How cozy it would be if we could automatically find peace in this combination love-nest and battleground of live emotions! If only we had some clear-cut set of rules, which if applied uniformly “according to the book,” would make this world “Paradise enow.” Poor Omar could not “grasp this sorry scheme of things entire” and “remold it to the heart’s desire.” (3) And neither can we!

There is no viable alternative for those we glibly speak of as normal people but to grow up to accept the emotional circumstances of their social genesis and to acknowledge the undeniable facts of this ever-present social complex with all of its pleasures, anxieties, frustrations and disappointments. Thereby they will be set free to turn their wit and energies to resolving internal or external conflicts as they arise, one at a time. Soon they will learn that they can live with considerable serenity, grateful for the surprising amount of harmony, companionship and fulfillment to be found nearly everywhere.

Doctors, social workers, clergy and other professionals are doing much for those who cannot make it emotionally without assistance. The rest of us also need plenty of help especially in learning how to handle our hostilities, those negative feelings that burn us up and burn us out – resentment, anger, suspicion, real guilt. There are more productive positive responses to better express these powerful feelings with less damaging consequences to our associates and ourselves. Let me emphasize here that all societies have a stake in this universal predicament, for organized hostilities are one factor threatening this and every civilization.

Someday, we hope, children everywhere will be helped to learn these emotional disciplines along with their ABCs. Meanwhile, parents, teachers and civic leaders can become role models by living like emotionally mature adults. To do so requires the taking of spiritual responsibility as soon as conflicts arise and when ways of resolving them can and must be found. Social units, as we have seen, set most of our moral standards. But standards are lived up to by people loving, working and contending with other people. If we are to arrive at the ideal we call “the best for all concerned” in any controversy, whether moral or a lesser conflict of interest or opinion, such matters are never “just a matter of simple justice.”

E. Spiritual Discrimination

Some high-principled elders were about to stone a woman to death for committing Adultery. Either to taunt Jesus or to test his wisdom, they asked him if the woman's death, as Moses taught, was justifiable. It is said that the Master bowed his head, and doodled with his fingers in the sand (perhaps to give their consciences a chance to work). He then raised his eyes and said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." One by one the moral experts left the circle. "Where are your accusers?" Jesus asked the woman. They had obviously gone. Then he said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (4)

This anecdote illustrates the hard fact that there is no "simple justice." Now, mind you, moral standards are obviously indispensable; and civil law and order are fundamental to the existence of any commonwealth, as we shall note in later pages. But when any standard or contract or confidence or fidelity is broken, and conflicts arise, some associates or judges or friends or enemies or lovers have to face up to the spiritual responsibility of being human beings. That means selective beings, with genuine emotions and hearts and heads to use discrimination over and above all rigid desires or views or laws. "The letter kills, the spirit gives life." (5)

No amount of ceremonial "tithing of mint leaves" or million dollar philanthropies or vows to love or hate until the end of time can make up for the failure to take into account one of the "weightier matters of the Law": judgment! Students of the Greek and Aramaic say the word "judgment" in this context means spiritual discrimination – the ability to make spiritually significant distinctions and decisions that restore the wholesome spirit in a person or improve the spiritual tone of a community. All approving, disapproving or non-committal responses, all internal, individual, or collective responses are by our terms, then, judgments. (6)

D. Judgment with Humane Selectivity and Mercy

Many have been confused because they have overlooked the obvious ambiguity in the aphorisms found in the Sermon on the Mount. It is ridiculous to attempt to use these sayings as inflexible additions to the Decalogue, or sterile prescribed responses in the lesser realms of taste or etiquette. Instead, they are principles of humane conduct, of spiritual discrimination, a tool-kit as it were, of ways to deal with a broad spectrum of human responses, positive and negative. (7) Was the Master-teacher saying that people should always "turn the other cheek"? Or

was he confused when he told the people “not to cast their pearls before [the] swine” they sometimes met among their fellowmen? (8)

There are in this world weak, wriggling, dishonest mentalities. We cannot equate [human beings] in terms of stamina and reliability. Willingness to oppose, an honorable pugnacity toward self and others must enter into the building materials of strong [citizenship]. [Goodwill] must operate with sympathy, but also with a set jaw. . . . lest the saying “the meek shall inherit the earth” becomes in practice “the sly shall inherit the earth.” (9)

The forgiving, non-resisting, or enemy-loving attitude has its entire justification in the new idea that it conveys to the wrongdoer. It is a language; and the whole value of a language is that it is understood. Not only must the user of this language consider whether he can use it honestly; he must consider also whether he has a listener! (10)

When Jesus taught folks not to be “anxious for the morrow,” (11) did he mean that they should cease being good stewards of the material goods without which the spiritual realities would soon be nonexistent? Of course not! His sayings were and are reliable principles of conduct and wise judgment with which to face creatively the many faces of the social complex, that feeling-filled domain within ourselves, binding all mankind in one emotional and actional continuum.

If judgment is the innate or acquired ability to make spiritually significant choices, then mercy is the ideal, the motivating feeling that gives judgment its humane direction. There is no simple justice; but justice in its broadest sense is linked inexorably with the ideal of mercy. Any act of judgment, therefore, whether a mandate of the United Nations General Assembly, or some subtle response in the twinkling of an eye, contributes to the common good. So, whether a person is dealing with himself or herself, another person or any aggregate of people, responsibility cannot be a puny word when spiritual responsibility is exercised. These are but a few of the implications of the tenet, “We believe in taking spiritual responsibility.”

Notes in Chapter 6

(1) NT, II Cor. 4:18

(2) Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts*, W. W. Norton, 1945, Introduction, Chapter 5.

(3) Poem Omar Khayyam, 1070-1123, *The Rubaiyat*, Tr. Edward Fitzgerald, 1809-1883.

- (4) NT Jn. 8:2-10
- (5) NT II Cor. 3:6
- (6) NT Lu. 11:42
- (7) Mt. 5.6.& 7
- (8) NT Mt. 7:6
- (9) William Ernest Hocking, in *Fortune Magazine*,
A New East In a New World, August, 1942, Pg.26.
- (10) William Ernest Hocking, *Human Nature and Its
Remaking*, Yale University Press, 1923, Pgs. 375, 376.
- (11) NT, Mt. 6:34.

CHAPTER 7

The Belief in Having Faith

We come now to a consideration of our religious values. The reader has every reason to ask, “What does the writer mean by the word ‘religion’?” The following definition of religion is an attempt to keep our discussion on the level of common sense. It shall be our assumption that there are common religious values in all traditions, my religion and your religion.

The religion we live by is what we do (or what others do) to help us manage our feelings, attitudes, values and commitments. That means, (a) to articulate the whole spiritual spectrum, and (b) to gain an increasing amount of conscious control over our purposes and our spiritual responses to the varied conditions of living in this world. Everyday, like every other human being, we use our feelings, our hunches, our thoughts, our judgments, and our imaginations to deal with both the material and the spiritual environments. But because we are persons in society, our own life-experiences are augmented by what others have learned by theirs. We are helped or hindered, therefore, by what others have done or do to manage their (and our) feelings, attitudes, values and commitments.

A. Human Religious Values

Human religious values, to use the same figure as before, are the price tags we put upon the unconditional demands of Providence. I use the word “Providence” rather than Nature because it calls to mind the providing, sustaining, and balancing functions that are evident whenever we contemplate the workings of this mysterious, awe-inspiring and all-embracing Eternal Economy that is the ground of our existence. The demands of Providence do not come to us humans – if they ever did – as words spoken in a loud voice out of the ionosphere. Nor did they initially come from holy words of holy men written in holy books. What was the ancient psalm writer talking about when he spoke of the “commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments. . .that are true and good and righteous altogether?” (1) Was he not, like us in our generation, referring to the processes of Nature and life itself that are indelibly inscribed in the structure of the Universe and in the constitution of human nature? Profound, indeed, is our debt of gratitude to those before us who recognized and appreciated these processes, then treasured up in theologies, poetry

and song the fruits of their experience as a boon to later generations.(1b)

B. Processes that Keep us Going, Growing and Spiritually Minded

In our era, Science (especially Astronomy, Geology, Biology and their derivatives) has unveiled ten thousand times the evidence the ancients had of creation's handiwork. Ten million more wonders pass before our eyes than those that brought the psalm writers to their knees before the unconditional demands of Providence. Among these are the processes that keep life going; the endless cycles of Nature; the reflex actions in all living forms, and the compelling drives that keep alive the teeming multitudes of flora and fauna on the earth (and possibly elsewhere in this magnificent Universe). Because of these processes, we are alive, and in their beneficence we are sustained. Because of them also, however, we have to face the consequences of natural calamity, our latent animality, and all the problems of procreation from sex to over-population. Science and technology, on the other hand, give promise that, for more and more humans, the teeth will be gradually removed from these biting realities.

Here in this world also are the processes that keep life growing: infinite variation, continuous change and competition in Nature and society. Because of these processes, we are living in a world transformed from jungle life to civilization. But because of them, we also have to face the hard facts of day-to-day uncertainty, the necessities of adaptation and compromise, and the perpetual problems of poverty and abundance. Except for the stubborn persistence of what seems to be inevitable day-to-day uncertainty, science and mankind's growing understanding of social and economic forces give promise of preventing much of the carnage wrought in the lives of the world's peoples by these hard facts of life.

And finally, there are the processes that keep us human and spiritually minded: the limitations of human knowledge, the cost and sacrifice involved in every worthwhile undertaking, and infirmity and death. Because of these processes we know the joys of thought and the thrills of seeking increased knowledge until a greater wisdom is learned and earned. Meanwhile these processes tend to restrain us from "playing God" whenever we are tempted to go beyond our depth or powers. Because of them we also rise to noble heights of self-giving above self-interest. But because of these same processes we also face the tragedy of human suffering and the grim facts of our mortality.

It would be vain to worship – to express our appreciation for the majesty and beauty of creation – yet refuse to hold in high regard the processes that account for them and that set limits upon our enjoyment of them. Almost anyone can sing praises in the warm sun when flowers are blooming in the Spring. And saying this is not intended to minimize the spiritual force of gratitude or belittle heart-felt joy bursting into songs and ritual. But it is a more difficult discipline to learn and practice the art of accepting with grace the consequences of day-to-day uncertainty, human suffering and death.

C. The Role of Great Religions

The religions of the world have evolved in response to people's need to find practical as well as theoretical responses to the positive and negative consequences of living. They make their appeals both to our understanding and to our imagination – that age-old partnership in the exploration of Reality goes on. These two faculties work together upon the fundamental enterprises of our hands and minds and hearts:

The understanding represents the mind in its analytical activity, as the imagination represents it in its constructive activity. . .The understanding tearing the world apart, analyzing it into its ultimate particles. . .the imagination [resting] content with nothing less than the rounded beauty of the whole. . . .The understanding [claiming] to give us the actual, the imagination [claiming] to give us the ideal. . . .The understanding, then, [giving] us the details of prose; the imagination [giving] us the fullness of poetry. (2)

To catch the meaning of the phrase “the fullness of poetry,” we ought to take a quick look at some conclusions of modern semanticists. Signs, words, symbols, similes and metaphors, they say, are the “tools of communication.” The primary functions of languages are “problem-solving” and “emotional adjustment”:

Our symbol systems (our languages) [are] the instruments by which we modify the physical environment, rule the animal kingdom and establish whatever norms of decency and order exist among us. . .It is doubtful that civilized man could survive the millions of artificial shocks his insatiable curiosity is heir to or the tensions and frustrations that his contentions and confusions inevitably produce if language did not offer him a means of relaxation and escape. . .[Language] becomes the instrument of the creative imagination and the means of psychological survival. With language in the

form of poetry, as with . . . music, we give a necessary formulation to our feelings of weal and woe. (3)

D. What the Word “God” Stands For

Speaking of weal and woe, I became involved in the poetic search for a “cosmic view of life” when I tried to comprehend what people meant by words like creation, God, revelation and eternity. The theory of evolution appealed to my understanding, but I was also inspired by the view that the Creator “looked upon all that he had made and called it good.” (4) Discovery struck me as the method by which we learn most about the Universe. It never has been clear why there needed to be interminable arguments about the difference, if there is any, between discovery and revelation. Eternity is a period beyond definition, and its potentialities are incomprehensible. I have been nevertheless intrigued by a study of what the word “God” stands for in everyday human experience and in Reality itself. That study has brought home the difficulties one runs into when trying to talk about basic beliefs in a universal sense.

Many people seem to enjoy collaring others with the question, “Do you believe God exists?” Those who demand an answer are sincere as well as insistent, but their question is impertinent. I say impertinent because there is a more fundamental question, and that is, “How do you interpret the silence of eternity?” There’s that word “eternity” again, this time in all its poetic grandeur, standing for the whole of Reality, the Other, the Everlasting Thou (5), the Cosmos – all that undergirds and sustains the processes of life and living, the silent Eternity in Which or with Whom we “live and move and have our being.” (6)

For centuries the poets have meditated upon the silence of Eternity. But listen as they might, they have agreed with the psalm writer that our ears detect no celestial sounds that explain the depths of the Everlasting Life of Life Itself. They forthrightly suspect that any voices they hear are the “still small voices” in their reason or in their hearts or in their imaginations:

“The spacious firmament on high
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame
Their great Original proclaim.
The unwearied sun from day to day
Does his Creator's power display . . .

What though no real voice nor sound
Amidst [the] radiant orbs be found,
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
Forever singing as they shine,
'The hand that made us is divine'." (7)

Whatever name for Reality we or those in other traditions use in speculation, worship or in contemplation depends upon the metaphors of intellectual or devotional preferences. Most of the creative sages approached life and Nature from an intuitive-mystical rather than a rational-mechanical attitude, as do many who now have the advantages of three hundred years of scientific discovery and research. The sages had a two-storied view of the universe, consisting of the Natural and the Supernatural. Nevertheless, modern science had its beginnings in the sages' common sense observations and practical conclusions. It is difficult if not impossible for many in our time to accept a belief in a supernatural society of deities and angels as the movers and shakers of the complex processes of Nature and human nature. However, we have been and are inheritors of the moral and spiritual fruits of our forerunners' conceptions and ideals. To them we owe most of our moral insights, our principles of humane conduct and our concepts of law and social cohesion. We have them to thank for the art and music that grew out of their emotional, intellectual and artistic responses to a "divine" environment in which they wholeheartedly believed:

In the Western religions it has been said that (humans are) created 'in the image of God' . . . It says that human life has the unique privilege of sharing in that boundless wealth and being in which all finite [realities] have their ground and goal. (8) [That]. . . religious meaning incorporates all realms of meaning in a comprehensive orientation. . . The Word, the Truth, Perfection, Love, the Holy – all refer to one and the same Being. . . From the perspective of the infinite, all things spring from the same source as aspects of one Whole.(9)

The American poet approached the eternal silence with a less complicated and pastoral view of the hills by the Sea of Galilee:

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee

The silence of eternity
Interpreted by love. (10)

D. Modern Reluctance to Use Traditional Theological Language

Many of our contemporaries are reluctant to use traditional theistic language or to adopt specific metaphysical orientations. They prefer to avoid personalizing their conceptions of or their relationship with Reality. This does not relieve them, however, of the need to organize their beliefs about life and living. Here again we must respect the differences in preferences for words and metaphorical approaches to the same facts of life. The popular notion that humans themselves have created their gods (and God) is a misleading half-truth. Ideas about God begin in our imaginations, develop in patterns of experience and change in evolving cultures. But ideas about God are not infallible descriptions or definitions of the whole of Reality that the word "God" represents:

When one looks a photograph. . .of a friend. . .one does not look at the photograph. One looks through the photograph at the friend. So it is. . .with the symbols of religion. . .[The worshipper] looks not at the symbols but through them to the divine Other. . .The inability of the human mind to formulate an exact definition of [divine Reality] does not dishearten. . .the religious [person] or disturb his/her worship.(11)

Why? Because worship can be a spontaneous, inspiring and continuing companionship between a humble human being and the Source of life and ultimate destiny of an individual or a society.

The starting point for religion, as for any other form of behavior, is a relationship with the universe described by the scientist. No matter how self-conscious or subjective a [person] may be, [one] cannot escape the forces in the midst of which [one] has to live. [This] simply means that in religion, as well as in physics. we must adopt new patterns by which cosmic relations can be rationalized and better established.(12)

Human life is dependent upon a personality-producing process with which [we] may choose to adjust ourselves, or be at enmity. [We] must struggle scientifically with the non-personal elements of the universe, but [our] supreme aim is richer [personalities], and a social order which subordinates material goods to human values. In this struggle [we are] aided by science, and by personal adjustment with the cosmic activities which have made human personality and human society possible. (13)

E. Some Varieties of Religious Experience

Some come by their standards through rational, unemotional steps. They develop their ideals “without benefit of clergy,” as it were, and without using what are called “theological” frames of reference. They may depend more on the understanding and less on the imagination than theists. Their imaginations are at work on their own terms, and lead them to high ideals and commendable standards of good living. They choose, consciously or unconsciously, to work from an anthropocentric rather than a “God's-eye” view of duty and destiny.

Those of a theistic persuasion seek to know “the will of God,” as they say. They ask themselves, “If I were God, what would I ask for my earthly children?” They weigh the alternatives that come to mind, check them with their own understanding and experience and compare them with the experience of others. Then they choose which are the most acceptable alternatives according to their sense of what seems best for all concerned, and say, “In my judgment, this is the will of God.”

The non-theistic call this use of the poetic faculties “discovery”; the theistic call it “revelation.” Whichever, it seems to this writer that by some such procedure the prophets and poets of both traditions have endowed mankind with instructions and inspirations all the way from the Ten Commandments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By their spoken words and their writings and personal influence, the sages and avatars of the race have prepared the way for a wide variety of later beliefs and believers.

Modern theists and non-theists need to recognize and admit to the mystical elements in their own responses to being alive in this world. We need also to remain open to any creative insights that may be forthcoming from mystics of all persuasions (religious, occult or scientific) who are our contemporaries in the present atomic age:

If, then, you belong to the company of those inclined to think that the mystics have a religious truth which is worth knowing and keeping, I venture this conclusion. . .Mysticism, whatever else it requires, demands of us childlikeness, insofar as its most characteristic experiences seem to be timeless and are accompanied by wonder. . .[involving] a determination to keep faith with whatever eternal moments life may have given us; and to

guard the powers of wondering, trust and humility, which are common to the child and the saint. . .It is more important that we should discipline ourselves in these attitudes than that we should define too hastily all that they may imply. (14)

F. Some Meanings of the Word “Faith”

Like our forebears, mystic, theistic, and non-theistic, when we say that we believe in having faith, we are each calling upon the same human poetical faculties in arriving at our basic beliefs. Scholars say that the word “faith” in the New Testament Scriptures means simply “humble trusting” – the “act of faithing,” which we have characterized as the selected and willed responses of reverent risk-taking, patient resignation, and childlike trust.

An unknown writer in the first century wrote that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.” (15) Faith, in his definition, is an act of expecting realities not yet true because they have not yet happened or believing in the possibility of expectations which have not yet come to light. He illustrated his point by reference to the Patriarchs of his tradition: Abraham went forth toward a better country, not knowing where he went. Moses articulated the highest standards of morality because he lived as “seeing the invisible” moral and spiritual environment. Of the other patriarchs mentioned in his letter, he says that, because of their faith and their action upon it, they obtained a fuller life than they could ever imagine. Although these Patriarchs, he writes, did not attain the ends potentially available to the race, they were glad in the intuitive knowledge that these prospects would become the heritage of their children and their children’s children. Faith, this combination of reverent risk-taking, patient resignation, and childlike trust, was the substance of their fondest hopes, the evidence of what yet could be “in spite of scourgings, deprivations, and death by calamity and sword.” (15)

Perhaps this is as good a time as any to say that most orthodox theologies hold the view that faith is a virtue by which true believers can accept, usually without the right to dissent, the dogmas of their particular sect. Faith and dogma are taken as if they are synonymous. Those in power are looked upon as defenders of a “faith once delivered.” This viewpoint is a variation of the false doctrine that the past is normative for all ages – that the whole truth is derived from only one tradition, in one unique set of events and dispensed through one divinely instituted authority. Fortunately, most religions turn out to be better in practice than in their dogmatic

claims or their inflexible pedagogies. At their best, in their devotions, both the faithful and their leaders find a sufficient measure of “faith beyond the forms of faith” (16) that we have defined as reverent risk-taking.

G. Faith as Reverent Risk-taking

Obviously it is foolhardy for people to go against the potential hazards of any uncertain future with faith alone. Faith is no substitute for prudent preparation, straight thinking or hard work. Humans have always been required to do whatever is possible in order to foresee real troubles and forestall real dangers. We are less dependent on self-reliance than were our forebears, but we can use all of it that we can muster. Modern folks are forewarned against calamities. Worldwide fraternities of teachers, scientists, doctors, technicians, industries and organized actions dedicated toward human welfare are engaged in round-the-clock programs of experimentation, mass production of material goods and services, and the dissemination of every kind of useful information. Keeping these facts in mind should lessen our anxiety about day-to-day uncertainties and arm us against many natural and man-made disasters.

Great is the power of reason in both individual and social preparation for unknown eventualities. Reasoning helps us cope with day-to-day uncertainty, reduces our fears and lessens our feelings of insecurity. Included among our reasons is the knowledge we now have of the built-in stamina of the human body and the resilience in the physical and psycho-social realms which make up our environment. The infinite number of things that could happen and do not is pretty good proof that not everything that might happen will happen. Even bad possibilities may turn out to be good in the long run.

The fact that life keeps going (as it has for eons) is, in itself, an encouraging thought – more assuring to the race, perhaps, than to individuals whose happiness or very life may depend upon the outcome of unknown future events. Some of these reasons (and others not mentioned) are beautifully epitomized in Scriptures, proverbs and poetry. They are invaluable sources of inspiration whenever we wrestle with the bogies of fear, doubt, pessimism and despair. This literature, this wealth of human experience, when felt and learned and used as spiritual exercise, brings strength to the weary and courage to the downhearted. So also do the many religious practices in most traditions. As one philosopher pointed out, “A candle wasting itself before an image will prevent no misfortune, but it may bear witness to

some silent hope or relieve some sorrow by expressing it.” (17)

After we have called to mind, however, all of the good reasons to be hopeful, optimistic and courageous, and after we have reasoned to reason’s end and have previously done all that it was humanly possible to do, we are still apt to find ourselves smack up against stubborn, unrelenting day-to-day uncertainty: “We know not what one day or one hour may bring forth.” (18) How then can we pass over uncertainty's brink without cracking up? Here is how: By yielding ourselves and all we are and have into the care and keeping of a Wisdom not our own and a Beneficence beyond our understanding that envelops and sustains us. This act of reverent risk-taking voluntarily chosen, willed and (if possible) exercised to the point of its becoming a reflex action, is what we mean first when we say we believe in having faith.

H. Faith as Patient Resignation

Having faith also means patient resignation – the human need and ability to deal forthrightly even with inevitable suffering and death. One teacher told his students that pain and death are best dealt with by making them subjects for reflection, by treating them “with a sensitivity which refuses to consider them final”:

All men suffer, some of them most of the time; and suffering, whether our own or that of another, breaks down barriers of caste and creed. (19)

This observation points out that in the face of suffering, faith alone is insufficient. Again, we must do all that can be done to prevent suffering from happening. Who can resign himself to human suffering that is not inevitable, or accept with childlike trust the loss of even one life that care, in time, at any cost, could save? Here, written plain to see, is the perennially insoluble “problem of evil,” the source of frustration and bitterness that no amount of reasoning can erase. But reason we must. Human bodies are subjected to the wear and tear of less complicated mechanisms. When they become hurt or infected or infirm, pain and anguish are part of the healing or disintegrating process. The character-building values in suffering do not by any means justify all the undeserved suffering in this world, even though they reveal some of its positive effects. Love is strengthened by sorrow shared; and some suffering may be “transmuted by love.” Job’s reactions to suffering and loss are among the best of reasons: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. . . shall we accept good and not evil. . . ?” (20) Milton makes a similar appeal to reason:

All's best 'though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of Highest Wisdom brings about. (21)

Again, after we have done all that is humanly possible to relieve and eliminate human suffering; and after reasoning until we can reason no more, lest we give over to despair, or nurse our bitterness until it overwhelms us, we have our last ally – faith as patient resignation:

Suffering can be overcome. . . Do not resist it, take it . . . Accept it fully, make it a part of life. Everything we really accept undergoes change. So suffering must become love. This is the mystery. This is what I must do, I must pass from personal to greater love.(22)

I. Faith as Childlike Trust

Hear Job, again, speaking of his Creator: “Even if he slays me, yet will I love him.” This is having faith – faith as childlike trust. (23)

A great Quaker discussed helpfully the fact that we continually prepare for our own death by accepting the “little deaths” of disappointment, the frustration of uncompleted work and unrealized ideals. (24) But when death comes to another, we are usually unprepared, even to do the few things that human hands can do – to find some tender way to fold the dear, cold hands, and yield the precious ashes back to Mother Earth. Yet, reason still we must. Even though we know that death in general is inevitable, and thereby may be good, such reasoning never satisfies the “Why” that keeps on welling up in a bereaved heart. So in spite of all the reassurances of creeds and orthodoxies, we keep returning to that most persistent anchor of the soul, the hope of immortality:

What is this mystery that men call death?
My friend before me lies –
He sleeps – he is not dead –
Such souls forever live
In boundless measure of the love they give. (25)

Is this the very most our human minds and hearts can say, that “love can never lose its own,” (26) that influence is immortal in the Everlasting life of Life? So far, it seems to be. And personal immortality, no matter how conceived, remains a hope, a balm, but not a cure for grief. Again we turn for light and strength to having faith. With faith, in childlike trust, we return to our Creator the ones we will forever love,

as he who on a cross gave back his life and breathed the Psalmist's faith-filled words, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." (27)

(See also Chapter 16 on the Immortality of Influence.)

Notes in Chapter 7

- (1) OT Psalm 19:8ff.
- (1b) Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Macmillan, N.Y., 1929, Chapter One
- (2) C.C. Everett, *Poetry, Comedy and Duty*, Houghton Mifflin, 1896, Pg.25.
- (3) Albert Upton, *Design for Thinking*, Stanford University Press, 1961, Pgs. 37,38.
- (4) OT Gen. 1:31
- (5) Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y. 1958
- (6) NT Epictetus quoted, NT Acts 17:28
- (7) Hymn by Joseph Addison, 1692-1892, *The Spacious Firmament on High* Pilgrim Hymnal Pg.160
- (8) Philip H. Phenix, *Philosophy of Education*, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, N.Y, 1958, Pg. 480
- (9) Philip H. Phenix, *Realms of Meaning*, McGraw-Hill, N.Y., 1964, Pg. 250
- (10) John Greenleaf Whittier, Hymn, *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*
- (11) James Bissett Pratt, *Eternal Values in Religion* Macmillan, N.Y., 1950, Pg. 152
- (12) Willard Leroyd Sperry, *Signs of These Times*, Doubleday-Doran, 1929, Pgs 160,178
- (13) Shailer Matthews, *The Growth of the Idea of God*, Macmillan, 1931, (18) OT Pr.21:1.
- (14) Ibid, Willard Leroyd Sperry. Ibid.
- (15) NT Heb. 11:1-40pp.
- (16) Poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, H.A.H

- (17) George Santayana, *Reason in Religion*,
The Works of George Santayana, Vol. IV, Triton
Edition, Page 36.
- (18) Psalm 27:1
- (19) Julius Seeley Bixler, *A Faith that
Fulfills*, Harpers and Brothers, 1951, Pg.69
- (20) OT Job 2:10
- (21) by John Milton, 1608-1674, *Samson Agonistes*,
Oxford Book of English Poetry, 1961, Page 336
- (22) Kathryn Masefield's Journal, quoted by Bixler,
Ibid. Pg. 73.
- (23) OT Job 1:21, 2:10b
- (24) Douglas Steere, *On Beginning from Within*,
Harpers, 1943, Pg. 143
- (25) Poem by Jerome B. Bell *Mystery*, Ibid.
Masterpieces, Pg. 597
- (26) Poem by John Greenleaf Whittier, *Yet Love Will
Dream*, Ibid. *Masterpieces etc*, Pg. 605
- (27) OT Ps.22:1; 31:5; NT Mt.27:46; Lu.23:46

CHAPTER 8

The Belief in Vital Companionships

Prevailing attitudes, values and now, basic beliefs in terms of prevailing commitments! We shall consider some ten areas of common life experience where everyday living calls for human beings to make up their minds, hearts and wills to choose between alternative behavior patterns and possible lifestyles. Such choices, we shall find, have not only personal but also significant social consequences involving commitments between consenting partners, between families and families, between generations past, present and future, between lesser and greater units of government and governmental agencies, and between institutions, nations, international organizations and the Cosmos itself. In other words, human behavior patterns are infinitely varied and human lifestyles are exceedingly complex.

My own behavior patterns as a baby were “gut-reactions,” to use the vernacular. Or, if you prefer, the pan-organic responses of some primitive me-consciousness. When I wanted anything, my parents had to guess what my needs were. It wasn't my fault. I couldn't talk, even to myself. I was warmed by their affections and cajoled into learning a few words so I could make a few simple distinctions. When I finally learned to say “I,” I was rocketed among the wonders and the hazards of egocentricity.

A. Youthful Companionships

In early childhood, my ego-structure was fragile. But Judd, my playmate for fifteen years, had ego enough for both of us. He led me into and out of countless ego-building scrapes. Once we dropped sulfur from Judd's chemistry set into a one-pipe furnace. Our minister, who lived at Judd's house, left coughing and sneezing. Another time, we built a bonfire under Judd's front porch one cold afternoon. When the overheated beams began to smoke, I sneaked home, leaving Judd to put out the fire and deal with a neighbor who saw what we had been up to. Whenever I thought about it, Judd, as everyone reminded me, was a questionable influence. Yet, what could I do? I needed him, and he needed me. Judd taught me about kite flying, stamp collecting, camping and what all. One day he jumped from a tree. As he fell, a branch caught his pullover sweater, leaving him hanging like a cocoon, arms up and smothering. I climbed up, hammered the branch with a stone, and down he came

flat on his back. Another day we were swimming and playing follow the leader. Judd dove under an old iron pipe and stuck like a turtle in the mud. Luckily, I was able to pull him out by the feet. No, no amount of thinking and lecturing about Judd could change our mutual dependence:

Comrades, comrades,
Ever since we were boys;
Sharing each other's sorrows,
Sharing each other's joys. (1)

B. The Meaning of Companionship

Like air to our lungs, companionship gives life to our souls. Looking back upon our happiest or saddest days we recall the faces, the voices and the tender sensitivities of those with whom we have shared self-giving and life-fulfilling vital companionships. Living is a succession of cycles, with circles of different companions in a wide variety of activities, each requiring lesser or greater amounts of emotional and social commitment. And each cycle requires all participants to exercise responsibility for the consequences resulting from each relationship enjoyed:

Individualism is a mutual affair – a relation of two or more individuals to one another, a compound of self-respect and of deference to one another. . . . Individualism in all of its ennobling and perfecting aspects is the product of organized society. If a [person] is to become a sovereign entity. . . he must have his faculties emancipated from urgent biological needs and enjoy the order, the security and the opportunity which social institutions alone can provide. Even more evident it is that [an individual] cannot be happy and complete without human relations. [Each of us] is in a hundred ways dependent upon what [our human companions] can give to us and what we can give to them. [People] can afford to live apart only after they have learned to live together; they can live for themselves in a rich and satisfying sense, only when at the same time they live for one another. (2)

The word “relationship” is currently applied to a wide variety of non-binding, temporary activities in the lives of many unmarried teens and adults, some involving serious hygienic, moral, psychological, and social hazards. (Eg. herpes, or other diseases; infidelity, promiscuity; prostitution, buggery, bigamy and blackmail.) With the passing of words like “courtship” and “engagement,” it has become more difficult to characterize the level of commitment involved in many modern lifestyles. Traditional ideals of “friendship leading to marriage, home and

parenthood” probably ought to be reinstated or redefined because of the popular acceptance of other arrangements as being desirable and legitimate. We shall leave these problems to others, but speak specifically of the principles of humane conduct and prudent judgment relevant to all vital companionships, anytime, anywhere. A progressive bishop wrote to his international colleagues with sensitivity about human sexuality and realism about alternative lifestyles:

We believe that [all] people are [God's and Nature's] children who. . .must therefore be treated with fairness, justice and equality before the law. We abhor the hostility that [any] people have received from Christians and non-Christians alike during our history. . .We also deplore those times when the rhetoric of [partisans] has suggested that destructive and degenerate behavior, which all of us would condemn, is the standard behavior of [any one segment of society]. We recognize that the molesting of children is an evil of which too many have been guilty. [But] child molesting is not the proclivity of [any given group] any more than it is of all, or even most. Whenever our rhetoric suggests otherwise, we are guilty of spreading both ignorance and prejudice. We believe that [spokesmen] in [any] side of the current debate can find significant agreement around [such] first principles.(3)

In other words, when “preferred lifestyles” go beyond the envelope of “common decency” or the possible bounds of organizational flexibility, conflicts arise such as those surrounding the “don’t ask, don’t tell” position on inter-personal relations in the military. In any social or governmental institution, when factions gather around groups with special agendas or exclusive interests, great strains are forced upon the task of maintaining *esprit de corps*. Factionalism over preferred lifestyles is to be discouraged not only in the military, but also in churches, schools, libraries and garden clubs! So the good bishop continues:

We further believe a consensus exists that promiscuous sexual behavior. . .is dehumanizing to both partners and is therefore wrong. [Therefore] any sexual behavior that is predatory or promiscuous is [rightly to be condemned.] We affirm that [sexual activity] is a [gift of life] meant to be shared in [relationships] of [lasting] commitment. When that level of commitment is missing, sex is cheapened, our humanity is denied, and [others] become objects to be used instead of persons to be [respected] and loved.

We stand together in upholding the sacredness of marriage and the importance of the family unit in every society. . . .Despite this stated ideal, we also recognize that where the exigencies of life require it, single parents, step-

parents and surrogate parents [can and do exercise] the task of raising children with [competence], beauty and holiness.(3)

B. Self-giving and Life-fulfilling Companionships

Self-giving and life-fulfilling companionships may best begin with the attainment of a healthy self-esteem and the ability wholeheartedly to enjoy oneself. This we have touched upon sufficiently in our discussion of believing in our better selves. Self-content, however, is no cure for the loneliness one feels without vital companionships. Let us, therefore, sketch some of the character traits that contribute to the building of stable interpersonal relations between persons anywhere, anytime. The following pairs of opposites may be helpful. Vital companionships are “a two-way street” with the busy traffic of stimuli and responses moving both ways.

Sincerity/hypocrisy: Sincerity is unfeigned goodwill toward another that can be accepted on its face value without questioning either the words used or the spirit manifest in the exchange of feelings or ideas. To be sincere is to cultivate the soil in the gardens of friendship or marriage or other associations in home or workplace. Where there is sincerity, there also vital companionships take root, flourish and grow. Hypocrisy is the name for hiding one’s meanings in conversation, or one’s motives in being friendly, or one’s thoughts or feelings lest one become obligated or committed beyond one’s self-interest. Obviously, it is prudent to look out for one’s own interests. But it is hypocritical to take continually the goodwill of others and give none of oneself in return. Where there is hypocrisy, it is unlikely that there will be vital companionship.

Integrity/deceitfulness: Integrity means dependability in character and in performance of both the letter and the spirit of confidences and commitments. Trust is earned by constancy and consistency – not so much by consistency in words, but more by consistency in a reliable sense of duty toward the conscience and the reputation of another. Most vital companionships will admit little room for outright lying or subtle deceitfulness. To forgive is not necessarily to forget, especially if the transgression of a companion is coupled with duplicity. Deceit will cut the ground from under any stable relationship, and the rebuilding of trust may be a long or futile enterprise.

Fidelity/unfaithfulness: The most significant and most satisfying companionships, those that involve both the body and the soul of the participants, require an

unconditional fidelity – not only a pledge of faithfulness, but continuing evidence of unswerving loyalty and devotion. The intention to be faithful “for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health till death do us part” (4) became a part of worldwide liturgies to remind those entering into lifelong covenants that the maintaining of homes and the rearing of families has implications over and above the interests of the parties themselves. Unfaithfulness begins when those who covenant to a lifelong partnership look upon their separation as a viable option. Then the little deviations from fidelity begin to grow. The rationalizations of unbecoming behavior erode compatibility, leading to estrangement, and, if unresolved, to separation or divorce.

Responsibility/carelessness: We said that vital companionships require responsibility not only for the well-being of all participants, but also for the social consequences of their relationships. The cost in broken hearts, friendships and families need not be quantified with staggering statistics. The costs in litigation, in drains on the public treasuries, cannot be compared to the devastation in the lives of helpless children and others when companionships fail. Perhaps carelessness is a most inadequate word to describe the factors that so sadly undermine the vital companionships in which we believe when life is vibrant with hope and idealism. All of the world's cultures must find ways to neutralize “the acids of modernity” seemingly eating away at the language structure and the behavior standards that perpetuate the qualities of sincerity, integrity, fidelity and responsibility. In the past, such words, coupled with commensurate actions, have guided the building and maintaining of stable friendships, homes and communities. A return to the use of these words, or modern words with equivalent meanings, may be one answer to leading our own and future generations toward desirable interpersonal relations and reliable social solidarity:

Like marriage, virginity for the sake of innocence or prudence, abstinence for the sake of virtue or compassion, and celibacy for the sake of causes greater than self-interest are also holy estates. (5)

Familial and kin networks are essential arenas in which sociability becomes sympathy, and self interest is transformed . . . into duty and fair play. (6)

C. The Role of Beloved Communities

The above insights are fundamental ingredients in both individual and social development. Just look around in every corner of the complex societies in which we live! What do we see? Networks all – in churches, synagogues, mosques,

parent-teacher associations, youth groups, country clubs, lodges. You name them! All of these in one way or another are “beloved communities,” or families of families, or fellowships of individuals committed by common interests to serve others and themselves. Religious communities, because they are primarily families of families, as well as being families for young or old without families, are examples of what voluntary associations contribute to personality development and the safeguarding of social and cultural life. An old document delineates the benefits of belonging to a religious society:

These benefits are . . . participation in . . . increased activity and enjoyment . . . by combining the affections and endeavors of [members] and by inciting each other to love and good works; watchful and fraternal help. . . aid in the . . . nurture and training of their children, that their households may be [exemplary] and their posterity be not cut off from the blessings of [their] covenant. (7)

Blest indeed is the country religious society set with its steeple in the heart of a small village where the sense of community is predetermined in the nature of the situation. Most groups in larger towns and cities are obliged to devise ways to generate meaningful community feeling by arranging small neighborhood activities for members of their constituencies. By such strategies larger bodies are better able to become “beloved communities of memory and hope, of mutual helpfulness and service to others”:

O blest communion, fellowship divine,
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine,
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.(8)

Notes in Chapter 8

(1) Traditional Song

(2) Ralph Barton Perry, *Puritanism and Democracy*, Vanguard Press, 1944, Page 8

(3) John Shelby Spong, Bishop of Newark, NJ. (Episcopal), (as excerpted and paraphrased from a letter to the Lambeth Conference, 1998, as reported on his Web Page.)

(4) Traditional wedding vow. (Book of Common Prayer)

(5) Cf. Mt. 19:11-2 (AVA paraphrase)

(6) James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense*, quoted by George Will, Washington Post, Pensacola News-Journal, 12\19\93.

(7) Congregational *Boston Platform 1865*, The Government and Communion of the Congregational Churches in the USA. Congregational Publishing Society, Boston, 1872.

(8) Hymn by William Waltham How, *For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest*, Pilgrim Hymnal, Pg.157.

CHAPTER 9

The Belief in Free Societies

Somewhere down in the depths of all human beings is an urge and a need to rise above the forces that require them to conform to the whims of others and the status quo in the societies into which they are born. Most people born into the world have not found out what to do with this urge and need, nor have they been able to get on top of the annoying forces that have throttled their inarticulate ambition – the will to be free!

This will to be free has two aspects: (a) the yearning to be free from unnecessary restraints upon individual initiative, and (b) the desire to be free for doing potentially creative accomplishments and reaching unrealized dreams. We have noted before that all humans are born into societies where we grow from helplessness to a measure of self-reliance and social responsibility. But few of the world's societies, past or present, have been structured to fulfill the need, let alone accommodate the urge for people in general to live in freedom. We shall not recount the long historical process through which the Western world has struggled toward the ideals of individual liberty and the democratic control of institutions. It will be enough to state briefly the main points of what makes a free society.

A. What Makes a Free Society?

The essential principle of [a free society] is (a) tolerance. . . as a hopeful intent to foster those faculties of reason, conscience and imagination by which human life may be variously enriched and progressively perfected. (b) The faith of [a free society] is the belief that sound institutions are founded on truth; (c) that truth is accessible to all men through the cultivation and exercise of their higher faculties; (d) that truth will in the end unite men rather than divide them; (e) and to this end men should be permitted to freely think, profess, discuss and persuade. (1)

These principles hold true in any society where they are present, whether in a friendship, a family, or a voluntary association of folks united by a common purpose. They may obtain also in social, religious, corporate and political institutions, provided their constitutions, rules of order, and actual practice reflect the humane standards implied in the word “free.” To some who have made lifetime

studies of the subject, the word free means:

. . .to be able, by the power inherent in human nature, to change one's character creatively by deciding for oneself what one shall do, [or become able to do], through acquired wisdom or virtue – to will or live as one ought in conformity to the moral law or an ideal befitting human nature. . .and, under favorable circumstances, to act as one wishes for one's individual good as one sees it. (2)

B. Natural and Moral Freedom

The first of the above is called “natural freedom,” the second is called “moral freedom,” and the third is called “circumstantial freedom.” Natural freedom is inherent in human beings. They may think what they wish, desire what they desire and feel what they feel, because, as the poet says, “Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage” for the will, mind and heart. (3)

Moral freedom is liberty to choose to do what is right or wrong in one's own judgment. Of course to choose to do what is wrong is called not liberty but “license.” Circumstantial freedom is the limited freedom to do what one is able to do under the circumstances that pertain in living with others and participating in societies where the interests of all must be considered by each:

Living in organized societies under effective government and enforceable laws as they must in order to survive and prosper, human beings neither have [absolute] autonomy nor are they entitled to unlimited liberty of action . . . Unlimited liberty is destructive of [organized society]. . . [Hence]. . .the distinction between liberty and license. . .when accepted, it follows that the individual who is prevented from doing what he pleases by just restraint, suffers no loss of liberty. (4)

C. The Goal of Equality

The word “equality” in our Western tradition has been linked to the words “freedom” and “liberty.” The American Declaration of Independence speaks of all men as having been “created equal” and having been endowed by the Creator with the “inalienable rights” of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” The “right to pursue” does not guarantee that citizens will find happiness, but benevolent local, state and national governments formed and controlled by the people can provide the atmosphere and the institutions that will inspire the pursuit. Likewise the means to make a living

are a responsibility both of the individual citizen and the commonwealth, to the end that life may not only be sustained, but also enriched.

These observations lead to the questions, “How can equality be defined? How equal is equal?” Surely the founders did not mean that we are born equal in talents or in circumstances. Nor could they have meant that the new government could promise absolute equality to all citizens – except to guarantee equality of each citizen “before the law” by the rights to vote, to petition and to secure justice administered in courts made up of their peers. Our success in bringing these promises to all citizens has been slow in coming and is still evolving and moving toward a universalism of “fairness” unmatched by any earlier civilized society:

American] democracy is founded on truth. It is the one form of human society that is not only not afraid of truth, but looks to truth as its ally. But truth, in its original and only defensible sense of the term, reflects the nature of things, and is adapted to the permanent environment of human life. (5)

America is fortunate in its economic, racial and climatic diversity and enjoys a unique opportunity of preserving national unity without cultural impoverishment. Americanism. . .this sense of tolerant inclusiveness. . . consists in a common creed of diversity, adopted by each individual and group because of liberty enjoyed, and because of the fructifying intercourse of multiple liberties. (6)

D. Freedom of Association

This free society that we have inherited, and in which we believe, has been able from its beginning to rise to new opportunities without waiting for some official order or to get permission from some authority higher than the individual’s conscience or a group’s decision to act. This characteristic was emphasized by de Tocqueville in a chapter titled “Of the Use Which the Americans Make of Public Associations in Civil Life”:

Americans of all ages, all conditions and all dispositions, constantly form associations. They not only have commercial . . . companies in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds – religious, moral, serious, futile, extensive, or restricted, enormous or diminutive. Americans make associations to give entertainment, to found establishments for education, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; and in this manner they founded hospitals, prisons and schools. If

it be proposed to advance some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. (7)

What Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the America of 1831-32 had its beginnings in the character of the Pilgrims, Puritans and succeeding pioneering innovators of a growing civilization unencumbered by inflexible norms, rigid traditions or limited horizons. In fact, in the 1830's our pioneers were only beginning to make an economic, cultural, humanitarian and spiritual impact upon this continent, an impact which, in time, they would make upon the whole world.

E. An Unfinished Manifest Destiny

The Pilgrims came to New England singing the anthem of their mission to found “a church without a bishop, and a state without a king.” They had fled from a tyrannical state church in England, first to Holland and then to America. They did not have an ordained clergyman for seven years. But before ten years had passed, the outlines of what they later called “the congregational (democratic) way of faith and order” had become the model for local church and town governments, as well as the voluntary fellowship of their autonomous churches.

In time both the presbyterian and episcopal (representative-connectional) forms of church structure were organized. Also in time, the ties between the early churches and the “magistrates” gave way before the state and national constitutional doctrines of “freedom of religion” and “the separation of church and state.” As a result, here in the United States, all churches of whatever polity are free to live and work separately or together without interference from civil governments. Therefore, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, or Protestants of whatever denomination can declare, “We believe in free societies, and especially in free churches!”

(In exchange for “tax-exempt status” the several American state governments require all religious societies to follow specific corporation statutes in order to own and hold property. These statutes usually require participation by lay members on their boards of directors. The laws giving some bishops legal status as “a corporation sole” make possible a compromise with “a higher authority” in the Vatican or in Eternity for Roman Catholic or Mormon hierarchies. This last is an

experiment currently being tested because of scandals over some bishop and clergy misbehavior.)

Americans, believing wholeheartedly in their own free society, especially as we have so glowingly described it, ought to be tempered with humility whenever they appraise its failures and its yet-to-be-achieved perfection. We dare not overlook the excesses that have resulted in the demoralization of millions at home and abroad – the waste, the addictions and fanaticisms, the violence, the dependence upon materialism, the pockets of poverty, and the flagrant shows of affluence that lead to the rise of unrealistic expectations on a planet with limited resources. These are just a few of the consequences that Americans must correct as we continue to play a leadership role that destiny seems to have placed in our hands. We shall take responsibility for all of the consequences of the theory and the practice of our heritage of freedom.

O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life. . .
America, America, God mend thine every flaw;
Confirm thy soul with self-control, thy Liberty in law. (8)

Notes in Chapter 9

(1) Ralph Barton Perry, Op. cit. *Puritanism Etc.*
Pg. 437.

(2) Mortimer J. Adler, *Six Great Ideas*,
Collier Books, 1984, Pgs. 141, 142.

(3) Poem by Richard Lovelace, 1618-1658,
To Althea from Prison.

(4) Adler, Ibid. Pg. 144;

(5-6) Ralph Barton Perry, *Puritanism etc.*
Pg. 640.

(7) Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*,
Book One (1833), Collier & Sons, N.Y., 1900

(8) Hymn, *America the Beautiful*, Katherine Lee Bates

CHAPTER 10

The Belief in Justice, Law, and Order

The reader may not have noticed the extra comma in the title to this chapter. It is our intention to consider each of these concepts separately, even though they always must be considered as a carriage with two horses. The carriage is justice because the desired end of laws and orderly proceedings is to bring about justice and equity among the citizens of a free society. The scholars point to “the sovereignty of justice” in its differing relations to both liberty and equality:

With respect to liberty, [justice] imposes a limitation on the amount of individual freedom that it allows, if the exercise of freedom is to be just . . . With respect to equality, [justice] imposes a limitation on the kind and degree of the equality (and the inequality) it requires, if a community is to deal justly with all its members. . . When justice thus regulates the pursuit of liberty and equality, both can be maximized harmoniously within the limits set. The irresolvable conflict between the erroneous extremism of the libertarian and the erroneous extremism of the egalitarian vanishes. The sovereignty of justice has corrected the errors and resolved the conflict. (1)

In our complicated age, when everybody’s complaints are in everybody else’s living room, too many are tempted to succumb to the negative over-simplification that “There ain’t no justice.” There wasn’t much justice in my hometown constabulary and its court. The “turnpike,” as we called the two lane blacktop running through our village, was a cinch for victimizing out-of-towners after minor traffic violations. One source of our teen-age entertainment was to hear the Constable charge, “On such-and-such a day, your honor; and at such-and-such an hour, the defendant drove past the watering-trough at a speed of twenty-seven miles per hour.”

“Didn't you see,” demanded the prosecutor, “that this highway is posted? Answer yes or no.” Then the judge would bang his gavel, and decree, “Guilty; ten dollars fine, and twenty-five dollars for the costs of this court.” After court, we used to look through the windows and watch those scoundrels split the “costs.” And we wondered if there was any justice in this shakedown!

A. The Process of Bringing Justice into Being

There is justice in our judicial system – not perfect justice, for justice is the result of

human judgment and human procedures and practices. But anyone who observes our American system as plaintiff, defendant or juror for a period of time, and then compares the justice available here to that in some other lands, should become a true believer, and an advocate for constructive reform in our system wherever reforms are needed. Justice arises from “liberty under law” as the saying goes; or put another way, “Obedience to law is liberty.”

The expression ‘equality before the law’ may be taken to mean those equalities of rights – the right to govern and the right to benefit by government – on which the whole system of the law reposes. But it has a more restricted meaning . . . in the phrase ‘equal protection under the law.’ A law is a general rule, impersonal in its formulation. It applies to, and so far as effective, will be imposed upon all persons who fit the meaning of its terms, no matter who they may be. . . . (2)

It may be said that this [saying] follows from the meaning of the law itself and affirms no more than that there shall be law, and that it shall be impartially – that is strictly – enforced . . . However harsh the terms of the law, the individual can adapt himself to its provisions, and within these provisions, order his life in an orderly social environment. (3)

B. Rules of Order Are Essential

More simply put in an old saying, “The first law is the law that there’s got to be law.” In kindergarten and before, someone more experienced than the children has to help them learn that if they all talk at once, no one will be able to listen to anybody. The teacher might even recommend such archaic suggestions as “Sit down, be quiet and pay attention!”, thus creating an orderly social environment in the class. By some such orientation of experience, and out of the long difficult development toward individual liberty and democratic control, the rules of parliamentary order evolved, the “due process,” as it were, whereby consensus is arrived at and mutually helpful decisions come to pass. How shortsighted is the view that “law and order” signifies only the uneasy calm enforced by vigilantes or the police! Appended to these chapters are “Rules of Order for Group Meetings” taken from ordinary practice of deliberative bodies in the United States. They were compiled in 1895, with the following introduction:

All matters relating to the affairs of any democratic society should be discussed and decided in the simplest and most fraternal way. And yet, in

order that progress may be made, and that [most] will be satisfied with the result, it is necessary that the common rules for conducting business should be observed by all and enforced by the presiding officer. . . .It ought to be remembered that the rules and methods adopted by particular State legislators, or by Congress, are often variations from and additions to common parliamentary practice, and that such variations should not be regarded in fraternal affairs. 'Majority rule' is not to be equated with a truly democratic society. . . .Sixty-fourty votes without unity of spirit, and where the minority cannot in good conscience remain the 'loyal opposition' are an indication that there has not been sufficient consideration or clarification of the issues. Parliamentary short cuts and pressure tactics are a breach of orderly procedure. (4)

C. Fairness, Consensus, Competition and Cooperation

What then is the basis of our belief in Justice, Law, and Order? What is the ruling principle underlying our liberties? Another of the present day's leading social philosophers holds that the essence of Justice is "Fairness"; (5) He makes clear the thesis that modern democracies must not only allow almost unlimited opportunities for cooperation, but also must prescribe and insist upon competition – the kind of competition as defined in our codes of law and legal precedents that is dependent upon an active consensus derived from the people. (5)

Our bicameral systems of legislation, the separations of legislative, administrative and judicial functions, and the provision for local, state and national jurisdictions are designed to prevent the crystallization of power in any one organ of government. Our antitrust, fair trade, labor, and pure food and drug laws set legal limits within which economic competition may go on. And in the realms of ideas, attitudes, values and commitments, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion are guaranteed, making competition in search of truth an obligation upon us all. Monopolies, whether governmental or economic or ecclesiastical are forbidden here. American democracy, in its ideal conception, is not only an object for wholehearted belief, but also an ongoing experiment toward the political maturity of the race worthy of our full allegiance in working toward individual freedom, sound laws, real justice, orderly commonwealths and stable democracies:

Laws, freedom, truth and faith . . .
Came with those exiles o'er the waves . . . (6)

Notes in Chapter 10

1. Adler, *Six Great Ideas*, Ibid. Pg. 139
2. Perry, Ralph Barton, Op. sit. *Puritanism, etc.*, Pg. 566
3. Ibid. Pgs, 567-568
4. AVA, *Handbook for Presiding Officers*, Hammond, 1971. Pg. 33ff
5. Rawls, John, *Justice as Fairness*, Belknap Press/Harvard University, as reviewed by J.B. Schneewind in the News York Times Book Review, June 24, 2001
6. Hymn by Leonard Bacon, *O God Beneath Thy Guiding Hand*

CHAPTER 11

The Belief in the Search for Truth

The trouble with liars, cheats and scoundrels is that they do not tell the truth. They do not know or do not care to know the difference between what is true in their testimony, or false in their behavior. This is one use of the word truth, but it is not our specific concern in this chapter. We touched upon that aspect of truth in Chapter Five.

Mathematicians concern themselves with axioms and postulates, measurements and probabilities. Scientists occupy themselves with all the complicated details and processes of this magnificent universe. Psychologists ponder the mysteries of our mental activities and our emotional adjustments. Sociologists analyze humankind's past and present social behavior and speculate upon our future development in an emerging social kaleidoscope. Philosophers and theologians ponder about absolutes, ultimates, and man's relationships with cosmic or everlasting phenomena. Then there are those who seek the truths that can be learned "directly," as they say, by intuition, through contemplation, and from individual and communal meditations. These folks underscore the mystical capabilities of all truth seekers.

All who believe in the search for truth are using their own tools and methods in their own fields. Each contributes to the expanding knowledge of the others, and to the rest of us, insofar as we are able to comprehend and make practical use of their findings. Back in 1839, Horace Bushnell anticipated the progress before mankind in all of these disciplines:

When astrology becomes astronomy, when alchemy become chemistry, then the disciplines will agree; because science being over them as [natural] law, not under them as opinion, commands agreement; but the day is approaching when religion will take the position of a science and command the agreement of all good [human beings.] (1)

A. Some Meanings of the Word "Truth"

The word truth is dear to all of the above truth-seekers; but our concern here is the primary search for truth by common folk who ask, "What are the essential truths about good living in this world?" When the Galilean Carpenter told Pontius Pilate,

in effect, “I came out of Nazareth to witness to the truth,” Pilate is reported to have asked, “What is Truth?” Apparently Jesus and Pilate were “on different wavelengths,” as we say. Did Pilate mean Truth as the absolute truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth – the will-o'-the-wisp of searching for simple answers to the complex nature of the universe and humankind’s place in it? Or was he making a statement about the dogmatic assumptions of the leaders and the intolerance of the crowds who were demanding the death of Jesus? If the latter, Pilate had only the political recourse of washing his hands of the matter while declaring, “I see no fault in this man.” (1b)

Our purpose here is to encourage readers to make a distinction between the futile desire to find certainty about everything and the quest to become wise in the pursuit of enough certainty to live with joy and equanimity in this world as one finds it. In other words, ours is a search for truths that lead to sound knowledge about life and living and that culminate in the combination of experience, thought and action that is called wisdom.

In our village we had an old minstrel-show routine where an End-man would make some dogmatic statement, and the Interlocutor would ask, “Are you sure of that?” The End-man would answer, “Sure? Why, I’m positive!” Then the Interlocutor would say, “Only fools are positive.” Next the End-man would respond, “Are you sure?” And the trapped Interlocutor would answer, “I’m positive!”

B. The Futile Search for Absolute Certainty about Everything

One last century philosopher wrote a whole book on “The Quest for Certainty.” In it he decries the foolishness in trying to be positively sure of the results of every hypothesis or theory or proposition. In his book he recounts the damage wrought in human history by this counter-productive search for truth as absolute certainty:

Man who lives in a world of hazards is compelled to seek for security. He has sought to attain it in two ways. One of them began with an attempt to propitiate the powers that environ him and determine [or seem to determine] his destiny. It expressed itself in supplication, sacrifice, ceremonial rite and magical cult. In time these crude methods were largely displaced. The sacrifice of a contrite heart was esteemed more pleasing than that of bulls and oxen; the inner attitudes of reverence and devotion were deemed more desirable than external ceremonies. . . The other course was to invent

arts and by their means to turn the powers of nature to account; man constructs a fortress out of the very conditions and forces which [seem to] threaten him. He builds shelters, weaves garments, makes flames his friend instead of his enemy, and grows into the complicated arts of associated living. This is the method of changing the world through action. . .that, by means of the arts, man might establish a [society] of order, justice and beauty through nature's energies and laws. (2)

The author of this famous book goes on to show how growth in both of the above methods of truth-seeking may be utilized by combining thinking and practice with common sense wisdom. Being content with relative certainty is sufficient for individual security and social well-being. Here again is the dilemma of Pontius Pilate, and the teaching methods of the Carpenter:

Ask and it shall be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and the doors of life will be opened for you. . .If you live by my words, you will know the truth about living, and the truth will make you free – free from bestiality, ignorance, superstition and evil habits. . . I witness to the truth about good living. You can know this truth, and it will make you free – free to grow in health, wisdom, mature character, and commitment to mutuality, justice and community well-being. (3)

These paraphrases above are taken from a modern collection of the sayings of Jesus about good living in this world, arranged under the following headings: The Good News; The Moral and Spiritual Facts of Life (Principles of Humane Conduct, and Principles of Judgment); The Finer Appetites; The Power of Intentions; The Art of Being Merciful; The Ways of Peacemaking; The Problem of Riches; The Need of Integrity; The Cross in the Nature of Things; The Immortality of Influence; The Coming Civilization; and On Being Disciples. Only those sayings which give instructions in good living in this world are highlighted and paraphrased in “The Wisdom of Jesus.” The book contains nearly a hundred pages emphasizing the Galilean Carpenter's standards of truth-seeking as he declared them: “I give you the spirit of truth-seeking and truth doing: to ask and seek and knock.” (4) This was the right combination of theory and practice, an ancient forerunner of what we now call “the scientific method.”

C. The Will to Seek the Truth About Good Living

We will quote here in full from our guiding philosopher because the completeness of his survey of the matter is clear and inspiring:

The time will come [and it cannot come soon enough, when human beings will not be content] with haphazard beliefs about the qualities of objects [and ideas] that regulate our deepest interests, and the prevalent notion that [moral] and spiritual values are already well known, that all which is lacking is the will to cultivate them. . . In action the most profound lack is not the will to act upon goods already known, but the will to know what they are. . . “All the serious perplexities of life come back to the genuine difficulty of a judgment as to the [alternatives in given situations]; they come back to a conflict of goods. Only dogmatism can suppose that serious moral [and spiritual] conflicts [are] between something clearly bad and something known to be good; and that uncertainty lies wholly in the [person] choosing. (5)

Most conflicts of importance are conflicts between things which are or have been satisfying, not between good and evil. . . If we [learn] the conditions under which the [acts] of liking, of enjoyment, [of self-giving and cooperation] take place, we are in a position to know the consequence of such acts. Thus we are led to our main proposition: judgments about [feelings, attitudes] values [and commitments] are judgments about the conditions and the results of experienced [aspects of living]. . . which should regulate the formation of our desires, affections and enjoyments. For whatever decides their formation will determine the main course of our conduct, personal and social. (5b)

We may conclude, then, that the search for truth has many meanings, not the least of which is “a targeted look of the eyes and the mind's eye for specific clarifying answers to practical questions about reliable principles of humane conduct and sound judgment.” This common sense search for “the truth” about human moral and spiritual experience in this world is a fundamental conception of the word “truth.” Fortunate indeed are those who find and are able to maintain a wholehearted belief in that search.

Tradition has wisely linked the “true, the good and the beautiful” in a triad of virtues, intertwined and inseparable, with truth as the overarching guarantor of their integrity. We will turn in the next chapter to the belief in the quest for beauty as a never-ending adventurous journey of the hands, the heart, and all the senses. In the chapter following the next, we will discuss the struggle for excellence as the enjoyment of and proficiency in goodness and creative accomplishments.

Notes in Chapter 11

<1> Horace Bushnell, *The Spirit in Man*, published by his daughter, Mary Bushnell Cheney, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1907, pages 238-359.

(1b) N.T. Lu.23: 4-14

(2) John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, Minton-Balch, 1929, Pgs. 3,4

(3) A. Vaughan Abercrombie, *The Wisdom of Jesus*, Wisdom Press, Pensacola, 1996, Pg. 24, (now out of print but available on the Internet by using the main search engines, or using the following

URL: <http://www.pcola.gulf.net/~comava/Wisdom/>

(4) Op cit., See Table of Contents, internet edition

(5 & 5b) Ibid., John Dewey, 265-66, 268.

CHAPTER 12

The Belief in the Quest for Beauty

Belief in the search for truth turned out to be a method of finding and appraising truths about good living in this world. We may conclude by a similar logic that we can believe also in our encounters with, and enjoyment of, the admirable and beautiful realities in life's journey – the quest for beauty. First the question, “Why a search for truth and a quest for beauty?” We said that the search for truth is a targeted look by the eyes and the mind's eye for answers to specific practical questions. The quest for beauty will be considered as an important but not the only aspect of the never-ending adventurous journey among the manifold realities of life that are met with all of the senses. The beautiful realities may be sought, but they are most often discovered unexpectedly. And the works of our hands, our minds, our imaginations and those of our fellows play a critical role in the creation of beauties yet to be.

It is confusing when we put capital letters on the words Truth, Beauty and Goodness, thus giving the false impression that there is a realm of absolute virtues as observable and accessible as specific people with the names Tom, Dick and Harry. Many major philosophers have fallen into this semantic trap, writing many books arguing over whether Beauty is objective or subjective – whether Beauty is in the object beheld, or only in the eyes of the beholder. We might be better served here to start with the commonplace assumptions of the poets, both classical and popular:

A thing of beauty is a joy forever; (1) and,
Everything is beautiful, in its own way. (2)

A. Enjoyable Beauty

A modern philosopher makes the distinction between “enjoyable beauty” and “admirable beauty.” These categories fit very well with the two poetical assumptions above, and we shall make them the basis of our discussion:

The beautiful is that which pleases us upon being contemplated when we comprehend it with our minds alone. . .or if not our minds alone, then by our minds in conjunction with our senses, but not by the sense of sight alone. . . We are simply pleased by contemplating, apprehending, or beholding [an] object only if we remember that we can behold. . .in other ways other than

by sight. Nothing more is required for us to experience the delight and the enjoyment that [are] present when we call the object beautiful. (3)

Perhaps the reader's experience, like mine, amounted to getting told by our betters when to use the word beautiful and the other emotionally charged superlatives used in adult conversations. Sunrises and sunsets, cloud clusters by day and star-studded evenings brought "ooohs and aaahs" from others, leading us to our own firsthand responses to Nature's awe-inspiring wonders. In time we learned to use our own feelings and expressions in making evaluations of life's varied and enjoyable moments:

Our judgments concerning the worth of things, big or little, depend on the feelings the things arouse in us. . . If we were radically feelingless. . . we should lose all our likes and dislikes at a stroke, and be unable to point to any one situation or experience in life more valuable than any other. (4)

Besides their example, our parents and associates in those days taught us to sing songs and hymns that emphasized "the beauty of the earth, and the glory of the skies; and the love which from our birth over and around us lies." (5) Both our devotions and our interests in love, even in lovemaking were, set to music:

Music, Music
You can never go wrong,
If you say it with a beautiful song! (6)

B. Early Influences

So not only did our lifelong course in music appreciation begin, but our acceptance of the poetic use of both ideas and metaphors opened new horizons of feeling and expression upon which our teachers could help us enlarge. Since all of us living in this generation have had the advantages of photography, moving pictures, television and computer technology, we are exposed constantly to all of the fine arts in all of their forms: writing, poetry, music, painting, sculpture and architecture. The moments and the feelings which each human being remembers as being "beautiful" are as varied as there are individuals, tastes and ways of enjoyment. This fact, to use the words of the author quoted above,

. . . commands us to tolerate, respect, and indulge those whom we see harmlessly interested and happy in their own ways [of enjoyment], however unintelligible these may be to us. Hands off: neither the whole truth nor the whole of good [or beauty] is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the particular position in

which he stands. . . It is enough to ask of each of us that he should be faithful to his own opportunities and make the best of his own blessings, without presuming to regulate the rest of the vast field [of human enjoyments]. (7)

C. Admirable Beauty

So much for “enjoyable beauty.” Now some selected quotes from what the philosopher has defined as “admirable beauty”:

But there is another sense in which, when we call an object beautiful, we are speaking about the object itself and not about ourselves or about the object in relation to us. . . What remains to be seen is whether there is any relation between the admireability of [an] object and its enjoyability by individuals differing in their temperaments, sensibilities, nurture and culture. (8)

Granted that everything may be beautiful “in its own way” does not mean that every object may be desired by somebody to “possess, to use, consume, or in some other way incorporate” into that somebody’s person or life. He may be satisfied to simply “contemplate and behold it”:

A person can find a natural landscape or a painting in a gallery enjoyable in this special way without having any practical interest in acquiring the real estate or the work of art that would make the enjoyable a permanent possession . . .

The same individual may be a connoisseur and a collector; but he or she can be a collector without being a connoisseur, relying on the judgment of others concerning the enjoyability of the thing in question. . . . Most of us are neither. We neither claim to have an expert or privileged position in judging which things to call beautiful. . . . Enjoyment as immediate admiration may be mediated by thought and is dependent upon [special] knowledge. (9)

D. The Breadth and Depth of the Beautiful

What the above writer has said about the painting in the gallery applies to all works of human art: poems, statues, symphonies or buildings – objects man-made for both use and enjoyment. Furthermore, whatever is man-made is either well or poorly made. It exhibits perfection appropriate to the kind of thing that it is.

The judgment about the beauty of an object in terms of its admirability for intrinsic excellence or perfection is the judgment of the expert with special knowledge and skill in judging specimens of a certain kind. . . In short, must we not conclude that judgments about the admirable beauty of objects are expressions of taste on the part of those who make such judgments [enabling] them to rank objects correctly in a way that accords with the degree to which they possess intrinsic excellence or perfection? (10)

The philosopher leaves us with a question requiring a course or two in esthetics in which we might or might not find a better answer than the suggestions he has given. But there should be no question of our need to believe in and engage in the quest for beauty with persistence, wisdom, and reverence. In a scene from one of Shaw's plays, a dying artist "feebly folds his hands and recites his creed":

I haven't always been able to live up to my ideal. But in my own real world I have never . . .denied my faith, never been untrue to myself. . . and now there is an indescribable peace [because] I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that have made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen. (11)

Notes in Chapter 12

- (1) Poem by John Keats, 1795-1821, *Endymion*, Book I.
- (2) Modern Popular Ballad
- (3) Mortimer Adler, *Six Great Ideas*, Op.Sit. Pg. 108
- (4) William James, *Talks to Teachers*, Henry Holt,1916, Pg. 229
- (5) Hymn by Foliott S. Pierpoint, 1864-1917, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, Pilgrim Hymnal, Ibid., Op. Sit. Pg.168.
- (6) Modern Popular Song
- (7) William James, Ibid. *Talks Etc.* Pg. 264

(8) Mortimer J. Adler, *Six Great Ideas*,
Op. cit. Pg. 112

9) Ibid. 105, 106

(10) Ibid. 115, 116

(11) George Bernard Shaw, lines from his play,
The Doctors, Complete Plays with Prefaces,
Dodd Mead & Co. N.Y.. 1963

CHAPTER 13

The Belief in the Struggle for Excellence

The lucky few of us in this world who are able to live above the level of mere survival spend our lives in the struggle for excellence. The fact that we may have an abundance of the “goods” necessary to sustain our bodies does not relieve us of the obligation to attain the “higher” goods, and some proficiency in creative accomplishment. Our guiding philosopher discusses “the range and scale of goods, the goods that fulfill our needs or satisfy our wants, the goods that are desirable,” and which enable us to express degrees of evaluation for the purpose of ranking and grading the realities in experience:

The things we rank or grade may be judged for their usefulness or for the pleasure they afford us, or they may simply be judged for their intrinsic worth as having the excellence appropriate to that kind of [reality]. (1)

A. The Good, the Better and the Best

Thus, he says, “good, better and best” may mean more or less useful, more or less pleasant, excellent or less than excellent. Any real or apparent good may be classified as a good “we desire to have,” or a good “we desire to do,” or a good “we desire to be”:

The good we desire to have may be real or apparent goods, real if they are personal perfections we ought to seek, such as health, good habits or knowledge; apparent if they are possessions we want but do not need. . .The good we should desire to do is either an action on our part that is good for us...[as] a personal possession or [as] a personal perfection or [resulting] in a real good for someone else. The good we should desire to be is the excellence of a good man or woman. . .having achieved the personal perfections that fulfill his or her potentialities or capacities [as a human being]. (2)

Goodness and excellence! The good we need; the good we want, whether we need it or not; the good we should desire to do and be – these are the battlegrounds of our individual struggle to attain the “higher goods” and some proficiency in creative accomplishment. Perhaps the best preparation for believing in the struggle for excellence is to have been brought up with a variety of role models – to be

challenged by others who have “made it” in the struggle by self-discipline, know-how and a measure of good luck. My grandfather, after whom my father and I were named, was a master-machinist, inventor, Bible scholar, father of sixteen and stepfather to a seventeenth. One of his by-words was, “Being good is not good enough.” One day he was expounding the Scriptures and defending the saying that “it is man's duty to replenish the earth.” “And well it does,” another dour Scotsman interrupted, “but I donna read that Aberrrrrrrombie should do it all!”

Grandpa used to tell this story on himself, and in telling it he exhibited the good humor and humility underlying his usual rigid literalism. When my aunts wanted to go to the movies on Sunday, and argued that “Everybody nowadays does it,” his reply was, “Everybody does not do it, because we do not.” I used to work for Grandpa each summer. A spiked iron fence surrounded his place, and in spite of warnings, I used to jump over it. One day when the front porch was full of aunts, I misjudged and tore the seat out of a new pair of pants. Grandpa's shop was the only refuge for male privacy. All he did was chuckle and say, “I expect someday you will learn to behave yourself.” Behavior was to Grandpa an important ingredient in goodness, but he used to distinguish between what he called a “moral” and a “spiritual” person, a person “who knew not only the words but the tune of righteousness.”

B. Excellence in the Finer Arts

My father, both of my grandfathers and all of my artisan uncles drilled respect for mechanical precision into me. But my father's stepmother introduced me to the finer arts. She presided over her household, her table, her accounts as if these responsibilities were like breathing – a reflexive response not intended to occupy one's conscious talents. Her hands, thoughts and emotions were reserved for all of the creative arts and the joys they bring to life. When we sat on the floor, her sewing, tatting, crocheting or needle point cascaded about us, while her “Orthophonic” phonograph played selections from Bach, Franck, or Charles Ives. During the First World War she studied French. During the Second War she returned to taking piano lessons, mastering to her satisfaction the concertos which had long been in her soul's repertoire. Even when she was in her eighties, she was the first in the car whenever there were museums to visit, or operas or concerts to attend.

My musical accomplishments have been meager compared to grandma's, but I did learn to read one line of notes. A wonderful neighbor, John Burr Curtis, bought me

a clarinet, and paid for my lessons so we could have a clarinet in the village orchestra. That one line of notes got me into the high school band and orchestra. I faked my way with the help of a good ear and our talented director, and sang tenor in the glee club. Tenors are even harder to find than clarinet players.

C. Excellence in Character Building and Social Improvement

So much for my role models and my own lesser achievements in artistic pursuits. I also want to mention one of the role models who, beside my father, set my course in struggling to be a mature human being. Elliott Plumb Curtiss (same family but different spelling) was our teacher in church school from the time we were in kindergarten until we went away to college. He and his wife opened their home and spent their talents in bringing up two generations of young people in our village. The community church, the county YMCA, the village improvement association, and the voluntary fire department all had our participation because this teacher drew us to himself and into his vital interests.

No one will ever know how much that fine teacher went through for us. He was taking a car full of us home one night after some activity when I was about ten. Before his open touring car stopped in front of our house, I fell out and landed on the pavement, unconscious. He never ceased being grateful that I came to unharmed the next morning. Through the years that followed, his warm personal interest in me was not sentimental but practical. He taught me how to teach. His way was to make leaders by leading them to share in the planning and the doing of whatever had to be done. As a committeeman in the city YMCA, he encouraged them to take me on as a boys' work secretary three years between high school and college. These reflections take me back again to one of the conclusions of our philosopher when he writes about "The Ultimate and Common Good" as they relate to the struggle for excellence:

The pursuit of happiness . . . puts us under the categorical obligation to seek everything that is really good for us and nothing that interferes with the attainment of all of the real goods that fulfill our human needs. To discharge this obligation, we must form the habit of choice that consists in desiring aright and desiring nothing amiss. . .The individual may be a good person in the sense of being virtuous. But a good person does not always succeed in the pursuit of happiness, in making a good life for himself or herself. Virtue itself does not suffice for the attainment of the ultimate good. If it did,

mankind would have little or no reason to carry on its age-old struggle for a good society with liberty and justice for all. (3)

Life of ages, richly poured.
Flowing in the prophet's word
And the people's liberty!
Breathing in the thinker's creed,
Pulsing in the hero's blood,
Nerving simplest thought and deed,
Freshening time with truth and good,
Flow still in the prophet's word
And the peoples' liberty! (4)

Even after so much help from our distinguished philosopher, we have far from exhausted this intriguing subject. Nevertheless, we shall now turn to the challenging moral obligation of belief in humane causes.

Notes in Chapter 13

(1) Mortimer J. Adler, Op. cit. *Six Great Ideas*, Pg. 83

(2) Ibid. Pgs. 86-88; 97-98

(3) Mortimer J. Adler, Op. cit., Pgs. 97-98

(4) Hymn by Samuel Johnson "Life of Ages Richly Poured"

CHAPTER 14

The Belief in Humane Causes

Like the urge to be free, down deep in the mystery of human nature is the feeling we call sympathy. Those of us who are watching pictures of the starving in Africa, the typhoons in Asia, hurricanes in North America and the floods in India, Bangladesh, and Central America know first hand what the philosophers try to account for in their explanations:

From what part of our nature comes the impulse to those actions to which we give the name of right? The first, [and] most essential, [are] the altruistic feelings to which the names “sympathy” or “love” can be applied according to the intensity of the emotion that we would describe. (1)

Because we share these feelings with our animal neighbors, it is said that such feelings and the actions they lead to are instinctive; that is, that they are done “without thinking or hesitation,” while what we do from a sense of duty alone “is marked by some degree of both”:

From this point of view, what is done from the instinct of [sympathy] or love may seem no less admirable than that which is done from the so-called higher motive [duty]. All that concerns us is the obvious fact that in sympathy and love we have the source of the original impulse to perform those acts that become later recognized as right [or humane]. (2)

A. The Word Humane

The word humane came into popular use at the beginning of last century when groups called “Humane Societies” were formed to discourage cruelty to animals, implying that we should have the same feelings toward animals and should treat them with the same respect given to humans. Hence the dictionary definition: humane: marked by compassion, sympathy, or consideration for other human beings or animals. Since de Toqueville’s observation about the American penchant for voluntarily forming clubs, schools and all manner of organizations, literally hundreds of thousands of them have sprung up around thousands of humane causes, charitable, educational, recreational, cultural and artistic. Consequently, all Americans find themselves being called upon daily by mail, newspaper, television, telephone or e-mail to join with, subscribe to or contribute to the worthy causes such groups represent. Most of these appeals

require a voluntary response on the part of the individual citizen, some asking an outright gift to be dispensed without any control or suggestions by the donor. In our youth, organizations like the YMCA or YWCA granted the donor a membership with rights to vote in the policy making and administration of the local Y's.

B. Community Chests and United Funds

Since the advent of Community Chests, United Funds and other cooperative fund-raising units, gifts are solicited as payroll deductions without allowing the donor either a membership or voting rights in the participating agencies. Consequently, the joys of active participation by the individual in the causes represented by the merged groups is left to a few members on mostly self-perpetuating boards of directors of each. The most successful agencies, like the Red Cross, insisted on the right to make occasional and widespread solicitations in addition to the regular annual contributions received from the budgets of the United Funds.

As the years have passed, many of the humane causes that were originally the province of churches or social agencies have been taken over and enlarged upon by local, state and national governments. These we support by paying taxes; and our sense of participation is diluted in a vast ocean of political and legislative bureaucracies. Recalling the circumstances of our modern ways of giving is not intended to give the impression that we do not believe in specific humane causes or understand the systematic methods required by a complicated industrial society. To the contrary, we should take great satisfaction in having so many social, medical, educational and other partners dedicated to the general welfare as well as to the cultural health of our nation. We may be excused for some frustration with the incessant clamor for our attention, time and dollars brought about by the communication explosion that allows every conceivable group to make known its needs. United Fund appeals and tax-supported charities leave many with little extra for voluntary giving. The very wealthy can assign to secretaries the task of deciding what proportion of their income can be distributed over and above their favorite charities. The rest of us are obliged to budget our designated gifts as best we can to contribute specifically to causes that serve the common good.

C. Sympathy, Altruism and Self-interest

Sympathy leads to acts of altruism, but the factor of self-interest also plays a role in a person's belief in and support of humane causes:

The altruistic impulses and [self-interest], taken together, give rise to the sense of justice and the demand for it . . . If a person has a thoroughly sympathetic feeling toward [others], he [or she] will extend [their] sense of honor so as to cover them. . .No [person] stands alone in the world. Each is a member of a great society. If one asserts [oneself] as a mere individual, [one] fails to assert [oneself] as a member of a greater body to which [one] belongs . . . a family, a nation or a part of a universal humanity. (3)

(Editorial note: The above paragraph and this note illustrate what happens when one tries to make someone else's quotations gender neutral. AVA)

D. Honor and Sympathies Unite in Conscience

Thus we may conclude that a person's honor and sympathies unite to create and sustain what we refer to as a conscience that enforces our commitment to the belief in humane causes:

A man who is conscious that he is not merely an abstract being, but intertwined with the fibers of other lives (so that in affirming himself he affirms these larger relations, and in affirming these he affirms himself) – such a man feels that to fail in any act of kindness or helpfulness would be foreign to his nature. . .His sense of honor forbids him to stoop to any purely selfish attitude or denial of his inward feelings of obligation to respond to human needs whenever they arise. (4)

One modern scholar has traced the course of this instinct of sympathy in the history of the Middle East. He also touches on humanists and humanitarianism in Eastern, Buddhist and Islamic lands:

Lawgivers, prophets, poets, proverb collectors and storytellers especially sensitive to human needs (the poor, the ill, the downtrodden, women, children and the infirm) have made profound contributions to society. But they have rarely been dominant in any culture. However, the evolution and spread of charitable professions, laws and institutions bespeak a positive line of progress in the history of the race. (5)

The magnitude of human suffering which is beamed into our living rooms every day through our electronic windows on the world may easily overwhelm our sensibilities, especially when the details of so many tragedies are graphically displayed. Here again we need to discipline ourselves. We can cultivate the habit of

being content in doing what we can do personally and cooperatively where we live. And we can direct money and our prayers as seems best to places near and far away. Like all other beliefs, the belief in humane causes is strengthened when we sincerely apply it in everyday life.

Fellow feeling, sympathy and love, payroll deductions, taxes, enlightened self-interest, conscience, honor, and action toward the common good – all of these constitute the complex of believing in humane causes. But there is one more significant aspect of this bundle of considerations that we will confront in the next chapter: the belief in those who are persecuted for good works.

Notes in Chapter 14

(1) C. C. Everett, *Poetry, Comedy and Duty*, Houghton Mifflin, 1896, Pgs. 229, 230.

(2) Ibid. Pgs. 230, 231.

(3) Ibid. Pgs. 240-243.

(4) Ibid. Pgs. 245-247.

(5) Roland Emerson Wolfe, *The Twelve Religions of the Bible*, Edward Mellon Press, N.Y. 1982; Chapter 8, Page 215ff.

CHAPTER 15

The Belief in Those Who Are Persecuted for Good Works

There is a cross in the Nature of Things. Goodness or righteousness or creativity is never achieved without someone's having to pay the costs of common decency or human progress. Since time began, people have racked their brains to find an answer to this persistent, inexorable fact of life. Like the mystery of human suffering, whether we like it or not, natural catastrophes can be rationalized as being obviously necessary. For example, if a seven pound baby is to be conceived, nurtured and delivered, its entry into the world must be through some mother's travail (or by some artificial procedure.) By the same logic, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods and landslides are aspects of a living, changing, dynamic planet. At long last, superstitious explanations are being superseded by a reasonable acceptance of these recurring planetary events as natural processes essential to the functioning of a magnificent universe.

A. Biological Necessity and Cosmic Inevitability

In both of the above cases, we have only to study the facts of biological necessity and cosmic inevitability. Then, of course, we must do everything possible that human minds, hands, technologies and community spirit can do to lessen the hard consequences of what philosophers and poets call "the tragic sense of life":

If we look deeper, I think that we shall discover that our own heart-searching . . . comes from the feeling that . . . when great [natural] events [occur], as individuals we are playing the part of bystanders. . . The plight of displaced persons is still so serious that the thought of our comparative security brings a feeling of guilt. But through all our reflections runs the sharp personal challenge: What should I have done and/or what can I do now? (1)

Our specific concern in this essay is not to dwell upon the suffering resulting from natural processes, but to assess the suffering and persecution wrought by negative attitudes and vicious actions visited by individuals and groups upon other individuals and groups. Everywhere, in every society, there are conflicts of tastes, ideas, principles and actions. These conflicts too often lead to prejudice, derision, rejection, calumny and tragedy heaped upon those in whom we must believe if progress is to be made and new heights of human achievements attained.

Civilization is like a garden, nurtured by growing knowledge and fertilized by new discoveries and new ideas. Most of us are content to gather the flowers of yesterday's knowledge and the fruits of generally accepted ideas. We become emotionally attached to familiar, generalized notions of "how things are," and conclude prematurely that "this is the way things ought to be." Prejudice, you see, is not necessarily the result of meanness, but can be understood as contentment with one's own limited experience. Call it "ignorance" if that limited experience is coupled with hatred of anyone who questions the status quo in any given furrow or plot or acre in the garden. The poet lays it on the line for us:

New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth. (2)

B. The Noble Army of Martyrs

One might fill a thousand pages recounting the tragic histories of martyrs who have suffered derision, ostracism, tortures of mind, heart and body in the interest of knowledge, morality, social betterment, science and religion. All of these, like Socrates, Jesus, Galileo, Madame Curie or Gandhi are remembered for their sacrifices. But we ought also to reflect upon the satisfactions they received for teaching others about what they discovered, the joy in sharing the larger truths made known by their observation, imagination and wisdom: "Blessed, indeed, are those who are persecuted for good works." (3) The author of this beatitude is, has been, and will continue to be a living presence in history and in the inner life of multitudes who treasure his sayings and godlike example. Modern folks see in his example a vision of spiritual maturity human beings may reach. He lived above the world's false barriers, its half-truths and shoddy values. His was a life of kindness. With each kindly act he transmitted moods of genuine goodwill. In him "there was no guile," and those who killed him did so with his blessings falling on them as they drove the nails into his hands. Thus the lowly Carpenter became a symbol of spiritual maturity (or godliness) and joined that special fellowship of those who have been and are persecuted for good works.

C. On Confronting Dogmatism, Superstition and Fanaticism

Back in 1900, a scholar warned of the consequences of questioning cherished but erroneous conceptions of history or religion. He was particularly concerned about

the problems of superstition and fanaticism and the serious risks involved in confronting them:

Superstition and fanaticism have often been allied with religion or have even taken its place. They are now [1900], in their extreme forms, generally reprobated. I would ask you, however, to consider whether you still regard the principles of superstition and fanaticism as fundamental to true religion? If so, you make what you call religion detestable to every rational mind, to every one who has at heart the progress and happiness of the [human] spirit. (4)

Nothing avails, I know, against congenital inclination and inveterate tradition. In vain will you use the plainest words, declaring that God is a spirit. . .No one will understand you. Your earnest disciples, thinking to defend your memory, will proceed to explain that you mean that God has no hands and no feet, but is a quite bodiless psychological combination of will and idea. It is almost useless to protest. . . They will continue to turn truths into existences and expressions into myths; and if by great effort and at the cost of being called an atheist and condemned to death, you persuaded them to surrender an ancient misunderstanding and to see, in the old symbols, the meaning they [once] possessed, your hard-won victory will avail nothing. Your followers will turn your own words into a new mythology, and the spirit you preached about will of itself become a thing. (4)

If you would understand spiritual religion, disassociate yourselves altogether from controversy. Turn rather to human nature, to poetry, to history, to the Bible which contains so much of all three. Read it not with superstitious qualms and selfish anxiety. Read it with an open heart, with a humane imagination. Remember that religion must have meant something when it was . . . conceived. It was then, beyond question, a sort of symbol for human experience. Try to conceive what that experience was, and make yourself free by that comprehension to use the same symbols or others like them to express your own soul. . . .Moralties are the most natural [realities] in the world, and only one who sees [realities] as they are can have a [mature] religion. (5)

Another scholar who spent most of his long life comparing Christianity and the other great religions concluded that Jesus (as the Christ) may become in time a symbol acceptable to all mankind, provided:

. . . that the Christ symbol ceases to be an obligatory symbol or the perquisite

of a favored group, still less as an escape from induced fears. . .As a privilege the Christ symbol “will draw all men.” As a threat – never! But as [this] symbol becomes purified of partisanship and folly, [its] rejection becomes [a matter of choice]. . .and [this] perfect interpretation of the human heart will assume its due place. . .among the seekers of God. (6)

D. Master Workers in Building a Better Civilization

The persecuted are master-workers in the garden, or kingdom, or realm, or whatever we wish to name the better civilization of tomorrow. Great satisfactions are theirs: (a) searching for and finding undiscovered insights into the nature of things; (b) thinking more deeply and reasoning more clearly about “facts” and “certainties”; (c) using skilled hands to build, paint, carve, invent new tools for work or instruments upon which finer music may be played; (d) standing alone in the presence of realities not yet sufficiently understood, appreciated or appropriated to human betterment; (e) seeing through a mind’s eye or feeling through a poetic heart the truths that “with their mild persistence urge men’s minds to vaster issues.” (7) All these satisfactions and more are theirs. Thus we have it from perhaps the most celebrated of all martyrs that we ourselves should “rejoice” when we find ourselves derided, ostracized and persecuted for our fidelity.

If you are abused for your good works, I assure you of the long-term value in your scars, and mark your kinship with all the benefactors of the human family. (8)

Risk-takers, however, who, in their enthusiasm for righteousness, may become foolhardy in its pursuit, need also to remember the precautionary advice of Jesus: “Beware of evil men who will kill you and believe that they are doing God a favor”; and, (8) “Give not that which is holy to dogs; and cast not your pearls before swine, lest they turn and tear you to pieces.” (9)

There is a cross in the Nature of Things, attesting to the necessity of believing in those who are persecuted for good works. The martyrs and the poets declare that it is our duty to carry daily the crosses each of us chooses or is called upon to bear – with the promise that, in spite of the costs, we will also share with them the same spiritual satisfactions:

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure

By the cross are sanctified;

Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that through all time abide. (10)

Notes in Chapter 15

- (1) Julius Seelye Bixler, *A Faith that Fulfills*, Harpers Brothers, 1951, Pg. 13.
- (2) Hymn by James Russell Lowell, 1819-1891, *Once to Every Man and Nation*, Pilgrim Hymnal, Pg.441, Pilgrim Press, 1958.
- (3) NT Mt. 5:1 (AVA Paraphrase).
- (4) George Santayana, *Moral Symbols in the Bible*, The Works..., Triton Edition
- (5) William Ernest Hocking, *Living Religions and a World Faith*. Macmillan, 1940 Pg. 269
- (6) Poem by Marian Evans, *The Choir Invisible*
- (7) NT Mt. 5:12 ,
- (8) NT Mt. 10:17
- (9) NT Mt. 7:6
- (10) Sir John Browning, Hymn, *In the Cross of Christ I Glory*

CHAPTER 16

The Belief in the Immortality of Influence

The Anglican statesman, with condescension, but more probably with tongue-in-cheek, wrote about those “who do not have the comforts of revealed religion.” (1) One can suppose he meant those non-conforming sectarians or unbelievers who are not officially assured of heaven “in the bosom of Abraham” or “in the arms of Jesus”:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His spirit, washed in His blood ! (2)

The Scottish poet sang with candor that “The fear o’ hell’s a hangman’s noose to [hold] the wretch in order.” (3) My blasphemous uncle Frank used to say, “To hell with hell, and heaven knows if there is a heaven.” So much for the true believers and the skeptics who are either certain of or disbelieving in individual immortality of one kind or another.

A. An Old and Persistent Question

In first century Jerusalem there was a continuous wrangle between the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection of the dead and the Sadducees who openly declared their unbelief in that ancient doctrine. One troublemaker tried to get Jesus involved in that argument by asking a question about a widow who had married in succession seven brothers following the death of each: “In the Resurrection,” the pundit asked, “whose wife shall she be?” Jesus replied to the effect that in any resurrection “none would be married or given in marriage.” This common sense answer probably did not appeal to either party. (4)

One of the present generation’s most distinguished biologists and moral philosophers, writing about the human “hunger for spirituality,” concludes that human nature is biologically based; that is, on the facts provided by the sciences, we have become humans who, like our ancestors, need “some kind of sacred

narrative.” Their horizons were only rocks, trees, and mountains. Ours not only include stars, but galaxies and universes being born and dying before our eyes. But we too cannot live without “a sense of larger purpose, in whatever form or another, however intellectualized.”

Ethics and religion are far too complex for present day science to explain in depth. They possess strength to the extent that it codifies and puts into enduring poetic form the highest values of humanity consistent with empirical [scientific, ethical, esthetic, and cultural] knowledge. (5)

B. The Widespread Belief in Individual Immortality

Before me is a little book by one of last century’s most distinguished philosophers. It bears the title “The Hope for Immortality.” In his introduction the author speaks with wisdom about our human efforts to verify the facts underlying the widespread belief in individual immortality:

Man has gone to great lengths to represent and establish his immortality. This great [amount] of thinking and imagining does not, however, signify a high degree of certitude, but rather, an unwillingness to remain incredulous. It is a monument of man’s effort to justify a dear belief. . . As regards theoretical evidence for immortality, or arguments for its probability, I therefore come forward empty handed. I regret that this is the case – had I any proofs, I would rejoice, as a bearer of good tidings. But since I have none, I must justify my presumptions on other grounds. While pleading the common ignorance, I also share the common hope. (6)

In order to avoid too many excerpts from this wise professor’s essay, I shall summarize briefly his thoughts and conclusions, and try to reflect upon his sensitivity to this universal belief, or, as he confesses, his “hope.” He considers first “the good of any individual’s future life” as seen by the individual himself. He defines immortality “simply and literally” as the extensions of the human being beyond biological death, or better, a transition to “some new phase of life in which the person’s identity is maintained” and “in which his characteristic activities are prolonged.” He says that for whatever he is interested in doing, he needs time:

To retain possession of the energy, faculties, and powers which one’s interests require is to be alive. . . Whenever there is a will at all, there is an unfinished business in and a hopeful forward look, and the assumption of an enduring capacity. . . a will to live beyond that moment. In this sense, to live

at all is to refuse to die. . .The extent to which I feel that unwillingness today will then depend on the extent to which I anticipate tomorrow's fresh crop of interests or generalize the perpetual [rise] of new interests to supersede the old. (7)

C. A Common Concern for the Dying and the Bereaved

Second, he shifts his study to a person's future life as it is seen by others, whether with the partiality of love or with the impartial eye of admiration. He says that whereas philosophical literature neglects the meaning of death "to those who survive"; and whereas the religions "have a surer instinct" expressing both a common concern for the dead and for those left behind:

The only kind of hope born of bereavement which is not, through insensibility or forgetfulness, disloyal to love is a hope that the dead will live on; in fulfillment of their own hopes, and at the same time in support of those relationships of endearment and dependence which bind us to them. So far as the faithful heart yields itself freely to the prompting of bereavement, it feels or represents as best it can some survival beyond the grave of those associations which have formed so large a part of the life that has been known. (8)

D. Any View that Praises Our Creation should Deplore Our Annihilation

Third, he discusses how any philosophy that praises man's creation should deplore his annihilation. He believed that:

A world devoid of feeling in which there was nobody who cared would be a world devoid of good. Then if a man with desires, hopes and aspirations in his breast brings good with him into the world, he takes good with him when he goes. In whatever terms and in proportions as a human life presents itself as fair we must weep when it is destroyed. (9)

This perceptive author goes on to remind us of the value of human beings in terms of cost, uniqueness and unrealized potentialities: "Products of growth" becoming what they are in a "long, intricate and toilsome process, never to be duplicated." They are but parts of a person, "his ideas, the effects of his deeds which continue like an echo to reverberate after their source is silent."

[No matter how conceived] immortality means that the ledger of life is never

closed: there is no bankruptcy, no final irretrievable failure. . .In the last analysis, then, the question resolves itself into the choice between faith and despair. If one clings to the belief that good can in the long run prevail, and if one has the will to victory, one will ask for time. . .The desire for more life springs from the belief that life on the whole is good, and to ask for more time is to have some affirmative reason for its use. (10)

E. The Pearl of Greatest Price

It is the opinion of the present writer that the most compelling reason for our use of more time is that, in this world, we have a “pearl of greatest price,” which, when recognized and sought after, is inspiring enough for us “to sell all we have to possess it” – the immortality of influence:

The undying life is like a merchant seeking goodly pearls, and when he has found a pearl of greatest value, he sells all and buys it. (11)

The poet says it all so beautifully: “The Choir Invisible”:

O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence:
Live in pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self;
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence
Urge men’s minds to vaster issues:
So to live is heaven,
To make undying music in the world,
Breathing a beauteous order that controls
With growing sway, the growing life of man. . .
May I reach that purest heaven: Be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love;
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty;
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense!
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world. (12)

Notes in Chapter 16

- (1) Winston Churchill, source being researched.
- (2) Gospel Song by Fanny J. Crosby, *Blessed Assurance*, 1820- 1918, Hymns of Praise, Hope Publishing, Pg. 185.
- (3) Poem by Robert Burns, 1759-1796, *Letter to a Young Friend*.
- (4) NT Mt. 22:23-33.
- (5) Edward O. Wilson, *The Biological Basis of Morality*,>in The Atlantic Monthly Magazine, April, 1998, Pg.70
- (6) Ralph Barton Perry, *The Hope for Immortality*, Vanguard Press, 1945, Pg. 3
- (7) Ibid. Pg. 5; (8 & 9); (10) Ibid. Pgs. 23, 31
- (11) NT Mt. 13:45 (AVA Paraphrase).
- (12) Poem by George Eliot, *The Choir Invisible*, Op. cit. Masterpieces Etc., Pg. 595.

CHAPTER 17

The Belief in a Coming Worldwide Humane Civilization

So far the reader may have approached each of the last sixteen proposed basic beliefs with the prospect of wholehearted agreement. But in the light of present conditions in society and among the nations of our world, how can the ideal of a worldwide, humane civilization be accepted as a reasonable hope? It must be admitted at the outset that we may have been over-optimistic at mid-century before the advent of atomic weapons and cold wars. Hear the glowing description of the coming age by a sociologist in 1952:

A. A Sociologist's View of the World in 1952

. . .quoting from the United Nations survey of World Social Conditions: In the broad sweep of history, the Twentieth Century will be chiefly remembered in future centuries, not as an age of political conflicts or technical inventions, but an age in which human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective . . . [and] not just because of the great material, technological progress of a few of the more developed nations. . . The progress of [less developed states] depends not so much on material aid that more highly developed countries can provide, but upon whether we all can have the understanding, humility and love for our fellows needed to work with that great resource of the human spirit that exists among humble people in all nations of the world. (1)

B. The World-view of Two Historians

At about the same time, two great historians, one from Europe and one from India, were reviewing the history of past civilizations, West and East. Their speculations about the future were more skeptical than the American sociologist quoted above; but neither were they without hope for a coming worldwide civilization:

. . .the problems that have beset and worsted other civilizations have come to a head in our world today, [divided] by ideologies and atomic weapons. . . Along what path are we to look for salvation in this parlous plight, in which we hold in our hands the choice of life and death, not only for ourselves but

also for the whole human race? Salvation perhaps lies, as so often, in finding a middle way. As one middle-aged middle-class Western European observer sees the world today, salvation cometh neither from the East nor from the West. (2)

The separation of East and West is over. The history of the new world, the one world, has begun. It promises to be large in extent, varied in color, rich in quality. If we believe in democracy, it requires us to effect social justice within nations and extend democratic liberties to other nations. . . Peace is not the mere absence of war; it is the development of a strong fellow-feeling, an honest appreciation of other people's ideas and values. . . We need not only a closer contact between East and West, but a closer union, a meeting of minds and hearts. (3)

C. A More Critical Analysis

In the same decade a great American professor was writing about *The Coming World Civilization*. (4) His thoughts were more analytical, less hopeful, and more prescriptive than the sociologist quoted above. He had already sensed a growing impotence in national states to bring about in their citizens the development of character leading to mature personalities. He was skeptical of the state, not only in the East, but also in the West to deal successfully by itself with crime, education, the family, or the economy. He observed an ominous dilemma respecting law enforcement and judicial competence; and suggested the following as one source of the states' impotence:

In noting these aspects of deficiency. . . I am not sounding a litany of defeat. I do not believe in defeat. . . In every inadequacy we have noted, the state's incapacity arises from a failure of the motivation it has hitherto been able to assume in its public. And since political society is essentially an organization of wills, motivation is of its essence; but the nature of this motivation and the source of its health, are not to be read from the surface of things. (5)

The good professor launches into thirty-five pages of philosophical history and the problems of modern thought that are inspiring to the student of such matters. The upshot of his sojourn is that human motivation arises from deeply held perspectives and rational ethical norms. Such characteristics, he says are the "essences" of great religion: feelings of compassion, commitments to duties conceived and "the desire to take responsibility for and active participation in the obligations perceived in one's life, in the life of society, and in one's relation to one's higher destiny."

Is Christianity, then, as a whole, universal? My answer is that it is on its way to [becoming] universal; and its travail through the Western phases of modernity has qualified it, and requires it, to take a certain leadership in meeting the religious problems of the coming civilization. But further, that this leadership can be held, not only by a humility, ready to acknowledge its own continuing need for reconception, but also [an awareness] of the depth and breadth of the religious experience of other lands. The moment calls for an enlightened severity of self-consciousness on the part of all religion[s]. . . (6)

If there is to be a common science the world over, there will have to be a common conscience as well. The common science has already come. . .the common conscience seems far to seek. (7)

D. Some Recent Sober Thoughts and Questions

On the Internet these days, many students are searching for ways to cope with the problems of world hunger. It is a commendable concern that has sparked deep-seated feelings of young idealists for a century. Eighty years ago when children did not clean up their plates, parents would remind us of the “starving Armenians.” Today none can be unmindful of the sad truth that so many in the world are still suffering from starvation and war. A sadder truth seems to be that the hungry most everywhere may continue to be hungry unless the great ideas expressed in student papers, world surveys and academic speculations become concrete in policies and programs capable of implementation in a radically changed world economy and world community.

Younger minds with older heads must answer with actions such questions as these:

1. How can we expect to relieve hunger in the less developed areas of our world if we continue to exploit them by selling arms to both sides in their warring factions, or bombing rogue parties into submission to one or a few nations’ interests? And we cannot neglect to mention other Western acts of exploitation or paternalistic ill will.
2. How can the teeming millions be taught (without water, soap or basic hygiene) the self-knowledge needed before a balance is reached between population growth and the limited resources available in theirs or any other natural environment?
3. And how will we avoid exacerbating the problems of so many millions by

flooding their airways with rubbish deliberately designed to increase what may prove to be too many obviously unrealistic expectations in their lifetimes, or in some not-far-off future?

World leaders will need more than superficial assurances that the crumbs from our affluent tables will somehow “trickle down” to world neighbors of ours for whom, so far, we have failed to create enough substance and know-how for them to solve their own problems – those same problems that, in the long run, may undermine our own fragile physical, moral and spiritual environments. One modern social analyst calls these latter elements “social capital”:

. . . indeed social scientists have begun to refer to a society’s shared values and social rules as “social capital.” Like physical capital (land, buildings, machines) and human capital (the skills and knowledge we carry around in our heads), social capital [also] produces wealth and is therefore of economic value to a national [or world] economy. . . How can we [build and] rebuild social capital in the future? . . . There seem to be two parallel processes at work. In the political and economic spheres history seems to be progressive and directional, and at the end of the twentieth century has culminated in liberal democracy as the only viable choice for technological societies. In time social and moral spheres, however, history seems to be cyclical with social order ebbing and flowing over the course of generations. There is nothing to guarantee an upturn in the cycle; our only hope is the very powerful human capacity for reconstructing social order. On the success of this process of reconstruction depends the upward direction of the arrow of History. (8)

E. Other Calls for Larger, Universalized Views of the Future

We have been exploring some ways to reconcile our own presuppositions in these seventeen essays on basic beliefs about life and living. One of the teachers who has guided us in this chapter issued a challenging call for the West, the East and the Middle East as well to enlarge and universalize their views of the future:

Today we stand on the threshold of a new [realization] – civilization in the singular. We still have civilizations: the distinctions between East and West [the Middle East and the Southern Hemispheres] still have validity. Much of what was once transmitted [between them] by the methods of imperialism has become self-propagating, first imposed, then demanded as a right. . . In any

case, our present period is one of general and reciprocal osmosis of thought, technology, art and law. . . For the first time, too, among these ideas are certain discoveries of the inner dynamics of material particles which deliver into our hands the power to destroy massively whatever man has built, including conceivably, though not probably, the recondite trails leading to those very discoveries. The era of “the civilizations” being past, what we now enter is either the era of [one substantially peaceful] civilization or the era of universal desolation. (9)

Is there any doubt that we ought now more deliberately to reconceive our history by abandoning any of the subtle or overt arrogance of “special chosenness” that has been characteristic of cultures and religions for thousands of years? Those who profess and call themselves Christians [or Buddhists, or Jews, or Moslems] do not have a patent on the humane feelings, attitudes, values and commitments that are available by the Grace of Ultimate Circumstances to any born of woman who profess and call themselves by whatever names.

F. Building Bridges Between Cultures

There is an old story about a New England Congregationalist who, after his church burned down, met a Jewish neighbor and said, “Thank you for letting us use your synagogue; it is such a Christian thing to do.” The devout Jew might have been thinking that it was a Jewish thing to do. Any “yet-to-be-a-believer” suspects this subtle sense of moral or spiritual superiority, and justly feels that it is inconsistent with any Scripture’s stated principles of humane conduct.

Neither does the Good News about God’s love and governing principles in the Nature of Things require a Jew to give up his pride in circumcision as a drastic but necessary way of avoiding the horrible consequences of yeast infections in an arid environment. However, Jews ought to cease branding those ignorant of this discovery as “the Uncircumcised.” Looking back should help us all to understand why such discoveries may have led to an idea of special chosenness that needs to be tempered, if not abandoned. Thanks to the Jews, when modern methods of hygiene are worldwide, circumcision may become virtually universal:

In the building of bridges between different cultures [the human race must] rewrite history in terms of wider fellowship and deeper relatedness. . . The search for life’s deeper meanings can [begin]. . .within any culture or tradition. . .Any attitudes . . .which stand in the way of [world mindedness]

must be relinquished. . . This is the victory of faith over fear, of life over [immature] religion, of man over himself. (10)

G. The Significance of Education in a Coming Common Culture

From the beginning of our essays, we have been considering how best to become wholehearted believers in common human feelings, attitudes, values and commitments, thinking about and ruminating upon them. In a small way, perhaps, we are contributing toward a universal effort to reconceive our social and religious orientations. We shall thereby broaden our spiritual, moral and ethical horizons by relating them to common sense experience and relying upon education in all that the word implies:

If education is the transmission of civilization, we are unquestionably progressing. Civilization is not inherited; it has to be learned and earned by each generation anew. . . The heritage that we can now more fully transmit is richer than ever before. . . If progress is real despite our whining. . . the heritage rises, and [humankind] rises in proportion as they [receive] it. The historian will not mourn because he can see no [absolute] meaning in human existence except that which [we humans] put into it; let it be our pride that we ourselves put meaning into our lives. (11a)

Wisdom and knowledge as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislators and magistrates in all future periods of this commonwealth to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them, especially the university at Cambridge [Massachusetts], public schools, and grammar schools in the towns; to encourage private societies and public institutions, rewards and immunities, for the promotion of agriculture, arts, sciences, commerce, trades, manufactures and a natural history of the country; to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings, sincerity, good humor, and all social affections, and generous sentiments among the people. (11b)

We would like to believe wholeheartedly in the long-term potentialities of the race in this world, even against a background of news reports suggesting that our world

is passing through a period verging on ungovernability, international chaos, worldwide criminality and unspeakable violence. Conditions were not ideal when Augustine prayed for an earthly and heavenly “City of God,” when Moore speculated about “Utopia,” and when Tennyson envisioned a “Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.” (12)

We will never know how much these visionaries inspired the cooperative efforts that led to establishing of The League of Nations, The World Court, The United Nations and all of the current agreements on human rights and atomic arms limitations. Shaky as have been the effectiveness of these institutions and so uncertain the implementation of their objectives, they are nevertheless at work! Their efforts will be extended and become more effective. They may be augmented by new and better equipped alliances and more generally acceptable institutions. The world community is slowly gaining experience in international law, cooperative peacemaking (and now peacekeeping), defining and dealing with crimes against humanity with some promise of outlawing mass violence and other threats to humankind’s self-annihilation. These goals bespeak the intention of generations now living to further the ends envisioned by their forebears.

H. The Hope in a Stubborn Faith

Belief about the possibility of world community and a coming worldwide civilization requires a stubborn faith in what may seem impossible. It also will require Judeo-Taoist-Islamic-Buddhist-Christian acceptance of the ambiguity implied in the Master-teacher's Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. The enemies of a farmer sowed weeds in his wheat field, and when discovered, he ordered his servants not to pull up the weeds lest they disturb the growing wheat. Instead, he told them to wait until the harvest, then to separate the wheat from the weeds, burn the weeds and thresh the wheat. When his disciples asked Jesus to explain his parable, he might have said:

The universe is the garden, and the field is the world. The good seed are people committed to good will and the search for truth. The weeds are those who remain insensitive to spiritual realities. And the enemy are those who are deliberately inhumane. The harvest is the time when one generation is succeeded by another, and when righteousness [right living] is rewarded by an undying life [of creative influence] in a coming humane world civilization. (13)

This highlighting of Common Basic Beliefs to Live By, our description of The Spiritual Environment in terms of ideal prevailing humane feelings, attitudes, values and commitments, has been an attempt to help readers organize a simple system of beliefs including communicable standards of individual behavior and social action. It has been our intention to challenge persons of goodwill to join in such an ideal quest, for there seems to be no reasonable alternative. Those who interpret their particular scriptures to conclude that the human enterprise is doomed to end in failure and catastrophe are engaged in a “cop out.” Even if such pessimistic believers cannot join in a wholehearted belief in a coming humane worldwide civilization, they may not evade their obligation “to be found at their work” (14) – teaching the principles of humane conduct and practicing the arts of making spiritually productive judgments that the Master proclaimed:

You are the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world. . . So labor not for the meat that lasts for one day only, but for the meat that does not perish: companionship, integrity, helpfulness, enlightenment, culture and justice. Thus do God’s earthly children truly share His everlasting life. (15)

I. We Believe More Than We Profess

To quickly summarize our thesis: in these momentous times all religions are being challenged to fashion, extend and, where possible, institutionalize an ever-broadening ecumenical spirit. The worlds Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Unitarian-Universalists, even unbelievers, agnostics and atheists hold many common moral, spiritual, universal and constitutional beliefs! It is regrettable that these shared beliefs are rarely professed in our creeds and sectarian devotional exercises. As we have sought to illustrate, most traditions hold and live by many common prevailing feelings and attitudes, such as the belief that the purpose of life is good living, including belief in our better selves, our fellow humans, and in our work. We also have common prevailing moral, spiritual and religious values, such as moral integrity, taking spiritual responsibility and having faith. We share great common commitments like beliefs in vital companionships; law, order and justice; the search for truth; the quest for beauty; and the struggle for excellence. Most civilized societies are committed to humane causes, cherish those who are persecuted for good works, understand the immortality of influence, and sense the best prospects before mankind in a coming worldwide humane civilization! In these common beliefs and commitments we have every reason to be united and courageous.

J. Addendum: Repentance, Forgiveness, Mercy and Justice

Since this chapter was written, the United States has been attacked by a fanatical terrorist conspiracy. The quick and resolute response of America and its allies has led many citizens to ask, "Are we going to war too soon?" This question might be relevant if the current lamentable conflicts were like former wars between nations, either attacking or defending themselves against one another. Wars like these are no longer justifiable in a stable world community or humane civilization. Indeed, if continued, such wars might bring about the end of every civilization.

This recourse to war and the "rules of war" has implications much to the regret of every civilized person or community, particularly "collateral damage," the added suffering to the innocent and helpless. This is indeed a harsh way to bring about the repentance of those who are not only misguided but already positioned to inflict havoc wherever their cells are alive and ready to act. The vain wish that we had chosen a less drastic alternative, if there had been any, does not lessen the righteousness in our common search for justice and the potential for lasting peace under which civilized societies may be mercifully maintained or improved for all individuals and nations in this new century.

The "war" now declared is intended to be an effort of all civilized people to restrain a ruthless underworld obviously standing in the way of an evolving commonwealth of cooperating as well as competing societies and cultures. If the forces of goodwill in most nations are marshaled in this effort to use every financial and economic intelligence, and (when necessary) military tool, we may move on toward the greater goal of eliminating the horrible scourge of war itself. Pope John Paul, in a timely declaration, issued a universal call for mercy and forgiveness as well as for justice:

On this World Day of Peace, may a more intense prayer rise from the hearts of all believers for the victims of terrorism, for their families so tragically stricken, for all the peoples who continue to be hurt and convulsed by terrorism and war. May the light of our prayer extend even to those who gravely offend God and man by these pitiless acts, that they may look into their hearts, see the evil of what they do, abandon all violent intentions, and seek forgiveness. In these troubled times, may the whole human family find true and lasting peace, born of the marriage of justice and mercy! (Pope John Paul II, quoted widely in the press.)

Forgiveness, yes! “If your neighbor trespasses against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him...” (Luke 17:3) This principle of action and reaction can be applied to conflicts between individuals, even if one’s neighbor repents “seven or seventy times seven times in a day.” The more difficult moral problem arises when one neighbor ignores another neighbor’s rebuke and continues to trespass against him. In an orderly free society, vengeance is not allowed, but all have police protection and the right to take a neighbor to court. There the recalcitrant neighbor will be forced by the authority of the court to justify his unwillingness to repent.

When one nation in our modern world trespasses against another nation, either party in the dispute may appeal to the World Court, where, hopefully, justice may be achieved and violence and war avoided. As yet our World Court has not achieved the kind of authority it needs to be looked upon as the alternative to war and the final dispenser of justice for all nations.

Our present international moral dilemma arises from ruthless terrorist groups who defy all authorities, moral, legal or governmental. Their unspeakable, deliberate violence inflicted upon thousands of innocent people has led to a coalition of nations who have chosen, in the absence of an international police force, to restrain by military action and, if possible, eliminate an organized underworld intent on violence and uncivilized behavior.

This indeed is an opportune time for a bold, enlarged and sustained united humanitarian generosity, a greater emphasis on both peace-making and peace-keeping, and a determined strengthening of every world-wide institution dedicated to goodwill and justice. May we attain greater unity in “hope that sends a shining ray, far down the future’s broadening way...in work that keeps faith sweet and strong...in trust that triumphs over wrong.” (16)

Courage! AVA

Notes on Chapter 17

- (1) Francis Leet, Director of R.I. Department of Human Services, Address, privately published, c1952.
- (2) Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, Oxford University Press, N.Y.. 1948, Pages 27,28

- (3) Radhakrisnan, *East and West*, Harpers, N.Y.,1936, Page 113.
- (4,5,6, & 7) William Ernest Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization*, Harpers and Brothers, N.Y, 1956. Pgs. 17, 131-132, 136
- (8) Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption* article in Atlantic Monthly, May, 1999, Pg.55ff
- (9) William Ernest Hocking, Op. cit. *The Coming World Civilization* Pgs. 51-52
- (10) Floyd Ross. Op. Cit.. *Addressed to Christians*, Pg.144,
- (11a)William and Ariel Durant, *Lessons in History*, Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1968. Pg. 101.
- (11b) Quote from Constitution of Commonwealth of Massachusetts, by David McCullough, Pg.223 in “John Adams,” (John Adams was author of this historic document), Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 2001
- (12)Poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Locksley Hall*
- (13) NT Mt. 13:24-30;
- (14) NT Mt. 13:36-43, 24:45,46;
- (15) NT Mt. 5:13; Cf. Jn.11:26.25; Jn. 4:9; Jn.14:;12; Jn. 6:27.(AVA Paraphrase).
- (16) Pope John Paul II, quoted in most newspapers, c 9/13-15/01
- (17) Hymn by Washington Gladden, O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee

APPENDIX

Rules of Order for Group Meetings

All matters relating to the affairs of any democratic society should be discussed and decided in the simplest and most fraternal way. Yet, in order that progress may be made, and that all may be content with the results, it is necessary that the common rules for conducting business should be observed and enforced by the presiding officer.

It ought to be remembered that rules and methods adopted by particular State legislators or by Congress are often variations from and additions to common parliamentary practice, and that such variations should not be regarded in truly democratic meetings. "Majority rule" must be balanced with the principle that decisions should not be made if the minority cannot in good conscience remain "the loyal opposition."

The following rules are taken from the ordinary practices of deliberative bodies in the United States of America. They were carefully compiled by George M. Boynton, submitted to Alonzo H. Quint for his revision and valuable suggestions, and published in A Congregational handbook, 1880 (1); The Pilgrim Pastor's Manual, 1895 (2). The present author revised them in his How to Gather a Church, 1966 (3) and in his Handbook for Presiding Officers, 1971 (4). These revisions conform to modern parliamentary practice.

(*) Pilgrim Pastors Manual, Congregational Publishing Society, Boston, Mass., 1895. [Compared in editing with Robert' Rules of Order (Newly Revised), Scott Foresman, Glenview, Ill., 1970.]

I. ORGANIZATION, ETC.

All meetings should be opened with an Invocation, and closed with a Benediction. Regular or special Meetings should be called to order by the Moderator (or President) or in his absence by the Secretary or Clerk who may call for the nomination and election of a Moderator pro tem.

If the meeting is called to consider special business (at a Special Meeting rather than an Annual Meeting where any business may be presented) the call or warrant

should be read by the Secretary or stated by the Moderator or, at his invitation, by the Chairperson of the Committee that issued the call.

A Quorum

If the number necessary for the transaction of business is not fixed in Bylaws any number present at a properly called meeting are competent to transact business, though often it may be unwise to proceed with a small number. If a quorum has been present it is presumed to be present unless the question is raised by the Chair or any member. If the quorum is found not to be present, proceedings must be stayed until a quorum is secured; otherwise the body may adjourn, but it may fix the time and place to which it adjourns.

Agenda (Order of Business)

The natural order of business, in the absence of any special rule, after the meeting is called order is:(a) an invocation; (b) to read, correct, and approve the records of the last meeting; (c) to take up unfinished (old) business, reports of committees, etc.; and (d) to receive and act upon resolutions or motions for new business; (e) other business if any; (f) benediction and adjournment.

II. THE MODERATOR (OR PRESIDENT)

These are the customary titles for the presiding officer of most groups. The Moderator should restate all motions made, secure order in the discussion of them., put them to vote, and announce the results. The Moderator is to decide points of order, subject always to the vote of members when an appeal is made by any member. Likewise (subject to appeal) the Moderator must rule on what the Bylaws require.

The Moderator may appoint a competent member to act as a parliamentarian or he may engage a professional for consultation and advice if provided for in the budget or at the Moderator's own expense.

If two or more persons claim the floor at the same time, the Moderator must impartially decide as to who is entitled to it. If in doubt preference may be given to the one who has not already spoken, or to the one farthest from the rostrum.

The Moderator cannot speak on the merits of a question without leaving the chair,

and before speaking, calling some other member to preside.

The Moderator may vote in all cases where the vote is by ballot, or by yeas and nays, and at other times when his vote would change the result. In organizations where paid officers or executive secretaries preside, it is a wise policy that they leave the chair when matters concerning such officers are being decided.

III. THE SECRETARY (OR CLERK)

The duties of the Secretary are to form the roll as required, to make and keep a record of the business transacted ("minutes") at regular or special meetings, and usually to take charge of all documents belonging to the group. The Secretary may be called upon to read whatever may be called for with the sanction of the Moderator.

All motions or resolutions upon which a vote has been taken, and as such only, should be recorded. Records should be approved by vote of the body whose proceedings they report and thus declared to be accurate, (a motion "to approve").

If the permanent Secretary is not present, a member should be elected or appointed to fill that office temporarily (a "Secretary pro tem").

IV. DISCUSSION

A member desiring to offer a motion or speak to one should arise, address the Moderator, speak to the question, then resume his seat as soon as he has finished.

No discussion is in order unless (a) upon a motion already made or (b) to raise a point of order or (c) by "unanimous consent", asked for by the Moderator, or by a motion voted upon.

All dealing in personalities or discourtesies of speech or manner between members should be carefully avoided and respect should be shown for the suggestions of the Moderator. Strict attentions should be given to those addressing the meeting and private conversation should be abstained from. A speaker or member neglecting these proprieties may be called to order by the Moderator or by any member, and the unruly person must conform. A speaker may yield the floor for a question or

an explanation by another, but not for continued remarks. In this case the questioner forfeits his right to the floor.

Discussion cannot be stopped by calls for "Question! Question!" The proper methods are stated in section VI.

V. MOTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

A motion is a proposal looking to some simple and immediate business; a resolution is a more formal expression of the opinion or will of an official or public body adopted by vote. A motion, if simple and brief, may be stated verbally, but must be written if requested by the Moderator.

A resolution should be reduced to writing and read by the Secretary before it is (1) moved, (2) Seconded and, (3) acted upon by a formal vote.

A motion or resolution should be proposed by one member and seconded by another, so that at least two shall agree in presenting it for discussion or adoption. It then should be clearly stated by the Moderator as made and seconded with opportunity given for its discussion. It cannot then be withdrawn by unanimous consent, but must take its regular course.

When a question is under debate, the Moderator shall receive motions on (1) to adjourn, (2) to lay on the table, (3) to move the previous question, (4) to postpone to a time certain, (5) to refer, (6) to amend, (7) to postpone indefinitely, which several motions shall have precedence in the foregoing order.

VI. MOTIONS CLASSIFIED BY THEIR

1. TO SECURE AN EXPRESSION OR OPINION OR ACTION ON ANY SUBJECT: This is called a main or principle question and may be introduced when no other question is immediately before the body.
2. TO MODIFY OR IMPROVE THE MAIN QUESTION: A MOTION TO AMEND: This may be done: (a) by striking out certain words; (b) by adding certain words; or (c) by striking our or adding words; or (d) by substitution a different proposition: (a substitute motion on the same subject; or (e) by dividing a question so as to get a separate vote on its parts.

Words inserted by the adoption of an amendment cannot be removed nor those stricken or inserted again except, in either case in connection with additional words. An amendment may not conflict with the spirit of the original motion, and must be on the same general subject. It must be germane or relevant. It is not considered proper to amend by inserting the word "not", because a direct for or against is more easily understood.

A motion can be entertained to amend an amendment, but not to amend an amendment to an amendment.

Motions which cannot be debated (see page recommended) cannot be amended.

The mover and seconder of the principal motion may accept an amendment if no objection is made, (common consent, but not otherwise.) The amendment thus becomes part of the original motion.

When an amendment is under consideration, discussion should be confined to the amendment only.

A motion is sometimes passed that leaves blanks to be filled with numbers, names or dates. If several numbers are suggested, the vote is taken on the largest number or amount first, and so on to the smallest; if dates, the most remote; if names, that first mentioned is voted on first. This being really an amendment, when the blank is filled, a vote should be taken on the motion thus amended.

3. TO DEFER ACTION: a. By postponing to a definite time. b. By laying on the table. This is done that some pressing matter may be first considered. This motion cannot be debated or amended. The question is by it laid aside until by vote it is taken from the table for discussion and action and cannot be taken from the table until some other business has intervened. Laying an amendment on the table carries with it the main question.
4. TO SUPPRESS THE QUESTION: a. By postponing indefinitely. This motion cannot be debated or amended. b. By laying on the table with the expectation that it will not be taken up again. This is an easier way of effecting the same result if there is a majority who desire it.
5. TO SUPPRESS DISCUSSION: a, By moving that the previous question now be taken. This is done to prevent a minority from protracting discussion needlessly

6. or obstructively. A member may "call for the previous question; and this being seconded, the Moderator says, "Shall the main question now be put?" This question is open for discussion. By an affirmative vote discussion ceases and the main question is at once put to vote, beginning with any pending amendments.

(As this is a technical phrase it might be better not to introduce it, but rather to accomplish the same end a) By moving to close the discussion, or (b). By moving to limit the discussion, by fixing the time to be allowed to each speaker, or the time at which the vote shall be taken, which ought not to be immediate. (Rules of order generally call for a two-thirds majority in both of the above.)

7. TO REVISE ACTION ALREADY TAKEN: a. The motion to reconsider. This is the remedy for hasty or uninformed action, or is sometimes used to fix beyond repeal, by its own defeat. It can be moved only by one who has voted with the majority. The first motion is to reconsider. This if carried brings up the main question as if it had not been carried at all. It should be made at the same meeting at which the vote referred to was passed, and, in fairness, when there are as many members present as voted at that time. The body retains the right to rescind its action at a subsequent meeting, provided due notice is given in the proposal, and unless prohibited by the standing rules (Bylaws).
8. TO FACILITATE OR HASTEN BUSINESS: a. By a motion to suspend the rules (generally with a two-thirds majority). This should be done where speed is essential and the action unanimous, and only where the standing rules (Bylaws) give authority therefore. b. By the order of the day. Where it has been decided that ascertain questions should come up at a definite time, the order of the day may be announced by the Moderator; or, in case he neglects to do so, it may be called for by a member and must be taken up. The business thus in order may, of course, be laid on the table or further postponed by vote.
8. TO SECURE ORDER: a. Point of order. If the Moderator fails to enforce the rules and preserve order, a member can "rise to a point of order," state the matter of which he complains without discussion, and ask for a decision from the chair. If a proposition is introduced that a member believes to be outside the proper objects of the meeting, he may object to its consideration as out of order. This must be done at its first introduction, and is decided by the Moderator.

b. Appeal. Any member may appeal from a decision by the Moderator. The appeal must be seconded when, the decision having been again stated, together with reasons for it, the appeal may be discussed, the members speaking first and the Moderator closing, - not leaving the chair therefore. The question is then put, "Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?" In regard to indecorum, the appeal is not debatable. c. A question of privilege. This is a question affecting the rights of the meeting or of any member who may state the "question of privilege," and the Moderator decides whether it is such a question or not. This must be disposed of by immediate consideration, postponement or reference to a committee before the discussion that was interrupted can be resumed.

9. TO CLOSE THE MEETING: a. By fixing in advance at which time to adjourn.
b. By adjourning to a certain time or sine die. This motion cannot be amended or discussed, unless the motion itself contains a specification of date or place, or unless an adjournment would dissolve the body.

VII. COMMITTEES

Committees are appointed as the meeting may direct, or under standing rules (Bylaws).

They may be nominated by the Moderator or by a nominating committee, in either case to be confirmed by vote.; or the Moderator may be authorized to appoint. An odd number of members is recommended. A special committee appointed to carry out instructions should be small and so composed that a majority shall be favorable to the proposed action. A committee for investigation or deliberation should be large enough to represent those of various opinions so as to secure ample discussion in the committee

The first named person on a committee should call it together and act as chairman until another is elected. Usually the body intends that the first named person shall be its chairman. If he fails to summon the committee, the second named person may call it together.

If all do not agree, the majority should report in the name of the committee. A minority report may be made and can by vote of the body be substituted for the committee's report.

When a committee to which any matter may have been referred shall recommend any specific action by the body, or shall desire the body to approve or adopt the sentiments of a report, such proposed action shall always be embodied in resolutions. While many bodies use the term "accept" as equivalent to "adopt," it is much clearer to distinguish between the two. The question should be, "Shall the report of your committee be accepted?" If no resolutions are amended, the report, after accepted, should be placed on file.

A committee is discharged when its report is received. A committee may, however, merely report progress and be continued (by vote or common consent) until its final report is made.

When business is referred to a committee with power, it may take action on the matter referred to it at its discretion.

A meeting sometimes resolves itself into a committee of the whole, in order to discuss freely and ascertain the sentiment of the majority. A committee of the whole is governed by the same rules as any other committee. In this case the Moderator does not preside but calls some other member to the chair. The same end may sometimes be accomplished by agreeing to take an informal vote, before taking formal and final action.

A standing committee is one appointed under general rules (Bylaws) to act during a given time on all business relating to the department with which it is entrusted, either to make recommendations to the body, or to take final actions according to the terms of its appointment. (e.g., Boards and Committees elected annually according to standing rules or Bylaws).

VIII. THE VOTE

(For duties and rights of the Moderator see II.)

No question is properly put except by taking the votes for and against.

In most group meetings the vote is usually taking the raising of hands. If the vote is close, so that the Moderator cannot easily decide, the hands may be counted. If the decision is doubted, the vote may be taken by standing. Tellers may be appointed to make the count. The right of a written ballot may not be denied if it is requested by any member.

In elections required by a standing rule (Bylaws) to be by ballot, every member present must have the opportunity to deposit his own ballot and to vote for whom he will. Instructions given by vote of the meeting to one person to cast a ballot for all deprives the members of their rights violates the rule.

A motion to elect by acclamation is out of order. Members are not obliged to vote, but all must have the opportunity to deposit a written or printed ballot.

In elections by ballot tellers are appointed to distribute, collect and count the ballots. They report to the Moderator or at his request to the meeting. In announcing the result, there should be stated the whole number of votes cast, the number necessary for the successful candidate, and if called for, for all other candidates. The Moderator must announce the names of the persons elected. If there is no choice, the number cast for the various candidates is always reported.

A majority vote is more than all votes cast. A plurality is more that those cast any one candidate.

IX. A TABULATED STATEMENT

MOTIONS WHICH CANNOT BE AMENDED.

To adjourn, except to a specified time.

To amend an amendment.

To appeal to a mater of decorum.

To lay on the table.

To postpone indefinitely.

The previous question.

To suspend the rules.

To take up a question out of it order.

To take from the table.

MOTIONS WHICH CANNOT BE DEBATED

To adjourn.

To appeal a mater of decorum.

To lay on the table.

A question upon which the previous question has been ordered.

To take up a question out of its order.

To take from the table.

VOTES WHICH CANNOT BE RECONSIDERED

To adjourn.

To suspend the rules.

An affirmative vote to take from the table.

To reconsider a question.

MOTIONS REQUIRING MORE THAN A SIMPLE MAJORITY.

(Rules of order generally call for a two-thirds majority).

To appeal a decision of the Chair.

To limit (extend) or close discussion.

To suspend the rules. (It is recommended that by unanimous vote and only when specifically authorized in standing rules or the Bylaws.

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Congregational Publishing Society, Boston, Mass., 1895.

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