

THE CHRISTIAN SCENE

THE recent flurry in British public opinion over a Humanist broadcast on religion makes a good starting-point for brief review of attitudes in modern Christianity. England, unlike America, is not a "secular State," yet freedom of religious opinion in England is as extensive as anywhere in the world. Probably the chief distinction between Christianity in England and in America is that the Anglican Church of England (Episcopalian in the United States) is supported financially by the British Government.

The controversy in England centers on the fact that the British Broadcasting Corporation, a Government agency, recently scheduled a series of lectures entitled "Morals Without Religion," given by Mrs. Margaret Knight, a lecturer on psychology at Aberdeen University, Scotland. Both clergymen and newspapers have split on the question of whether the BBC should have permitted the series to take place.

In her first talk, Mrs. Knight declared that orthodox Christianity did not satisfy many persons in these days of crisis, and she compared the efforts of national leaders to arouse the force of Christian belief as a means of opposing communist materialism to "trying to drive out a new myth by reviving an old one." There were some editorial protests to this in the press, but the real storm broke the week following when Mrs. Knight suggested to humanist parents that they let their children understand that some people do not believe in God. She said (according to an AP dispatch from London):

We can tell them [the children] that everyone believed at one time, and some people believe now, that there are two great powers in the world: A good power called God and a bad power called the devil. We can tell them that some people still believe this, but that most people now think that there is not really a devil—a devil is something like the ogres and witches in fairy tales. And we can tell them that

some people now don't think there is really a God, any more than there is really a Santa Claus, though we often like to talk as though there was.

She suggested that it would be a mistake to deny children knowledge of the New Testament stories, since these "are part of the fabric of our culture: they are woven into our literature and architecture and art." But, she added, if the children ask if the stories are true, "they can be told that they are a mixture of fact and legend." Illustrating, Mrs. Knight said:

There was a real Jesus Christ who preached to the Jews and was crucified: but we don't now believe that he was the son of God and a virgin, or that he rose from the dead.

The Anglican clergy responded with great indignation. The Bishop of Coventry branded the BBC "irresponsible" for allowing the talks, called Mrs. Knight a "brusque, so-competent, bossy female," and condemned her lectures as a "pernicious performance." A London Jesuit priest argued that the Nazi, Fascist and Communist ideologies were born of Mrs. Knight's ideas. An eminent British Methodist, however, Dr. Donald Soper, took the other side, remarking:

I am appalled at the working up of hysteria on what seems to me a matter of normal procedure on the part of BBC in giving measures of freedom in religious disagreements, as it does on other issues.

Christians will do themselves harm if they assume that the Christian faith is a kind of hothouse plant that needs to be protected against the weather.

(The foregoing, quoted from a copyrighted New York *Herald Tribune* dispatch from London, dated Jan. 13, differs considerably from the Associated Press account of what Dr. Soper said. The AP story [appearing in the *Los Angeles Times*] reported simply that Dr. Soper said "Mrs. Knight's views were 'bristling with mistakes' but that he supported BBC for giving 'a measure of

freedom in religious disagreement.'” We make this comparison to show how confusing newspaper articles can be concerning a man's actual opinions on controversial subjects.)

The British press seemed about evenly divided on the issue. The conservative *Daily Telegraph* took the view that the BBC, as a government-supported monopoly, should not allow discussion of both sides of a religious dispute, urging that freedom of speech did not apply in this case. The *Telegraph* claimed "bad taste" and argued that since the BBC does not give communists time on the air, it should not "coddle" atheists, either. (Mrs. Knight had offered to give the talks, and the BBC accepted.) The *Daily Mail* and the *Standard* and the *News* supported free discussion of religion on the air, the *Mail* saying: "Christianity is not so weak a faith that its adherents should run screaming from those who attack it."

BBC stood firm on its policy of allowing free expression on matters of belief and disbelief, its only concession to criticism being the decision to turn the last talk by Mrs. Knight into a debate with the wife of a Scottish religious leader. Mrs. Knight herself was "surprised and pleased" by the attention her talk received: "I expected some reaction, but nothing like this," she said, "and of course I think it is a good thing."

On the whole, we think so, too. What Mrs. Knight said in her talks is hardly more than the common-sense approach to religious tradition of many educated families, and it is, if anything, a moral weakness of our culture to pretend that literal orthodox belief is widespread. Further, the opponents of Mrs. Knight do little more than condemn themselves by their objections. The Bishop of Coventry merely relapsed into that form of billingsgate socially permitted to "gentlemen of the cloth." Calling Mrs. Knight, whose remarks were sensible and dignified, a "bossy female" was a rejoinder both shallow and inaccurate, indicating that not all the demagogues are professional politicians. The Jesuit's association of her views

with current totalitarianisms was ridiculous, in view of the limitless authoritarianism of the Roman Church.

If Western anxieties about Communism accomplish nothing else, they may at least bring out into the open the quality of contemporary Christian belief and assist thoughtful people in making up their minds about religious issues. In the United States, as is now becoming well known, it has become "policy" to emphasize the religious side of the Western cultural tradition. President Eisenhower said recently at the annual meeting of the American Association of College Presidents that "we have the faith of the Christian ethic of our own particular religious conviction. Others don't." He added "Our greatest potential enemy in the world is a frank exponent of the doctrine of materialism." While there is a measure of dignity in the President's utterance, much of the new interest in religion is plainly window-dressing. In *Time* for Jan. 17, Bernard Iddings Bell, canon of the Episcopal church, is quoted as attaching little religious importance to this trend. When someone spoke to him of the "current religious revival," he replied:

Religion has become a fad. There's an awful lot of people joining the church, but what it means I don't know. I'm not sure it means anything. . . . It's too easy to be in the church.

In the *Christian Century* for Jan. 19, an elder of the Presbyterian Church, James McBride Dabb, expressed himself concerning the "Spiritual Lag in Today's World." His observations seem worthy to stand with the best of present-day Christian thinking—with, say, the statement of Donald Soper on the right of Humanists to explore their views before the public. Mr. Dabb writes:

We have released forces of which we were unaware; and then have been surprised and shocked when those forces manifest their existence like a tidal wave, sometimes threatening to overwhelm us and our children. Admiral Perry forced the entrance to Japan, and then, to humor the inhabitants, gave them liquor and firearms. The Japanese drank the liquor and ninety years later returned the firearms, wrong end first, at Pearl Harbor. We sold our industrial

products to the East, took their money, and thought the deal, a profitable one, closed. Now Asia demands the machines to make these products and will accept them in a political package from the Communists if we do not make them available. . . .

I belong to a presbytery the chief concern of which is protection of the past. I am embarrassed by the questions put by that body to a student undergoing the ordeal of ordination. And when the candidate gives agreeable answers, as he always does, I shudder. Has this young man, I ask myself, been educated in the modern world? Can he mean what he says? Does he know what he is saying? Finally, some examiner asks him if he will be honest enough to report the matter if he ever changes his mind! Thus, signed, sealed, delivered and done, he enters the sacred ranks and sits down together with the other defenders of the Maginot Line.

But this is a sin. For these young men, being young, ought to be adventurous. If they're living, they're living in the future, not in the past; by faith, hope and love, not by creeds. Whatever the old may do, the young at least should go swashbuckling into the world and cut a wide swath.

Strictly speaking, they should be adventurers. The adventurer is one who, though he is aware of the hardship and the danger of the world, yet believes that life is friendly at last, that, as Browning said, "sudden the worst turns to the best in the brave," and that beyond the danger, aye, even in the midst of the danger, there is a priceless reward. For the religious adventurer—for all adventurous spirits—that reward is God. They will recognize him, the rest of us will not. . . .

Despite our dislike for the term, we think this "God" of the adventurous spirit a kind of deity worth searching for. One thing, at least, is certain, and that is that He will not be found in the churches, except, perhaps, by some sort of spiritual accident. For it is incontestably a fact that the adventurous spirit proves an unpopular and distrusted alien among orthodoxies of whatever kind. Mr. Dabb may be a Presbyterian elder, but his lack of interest in "protecting the past" gives him more of a unity with people like the Humanist Mrs. Knight than with Calvinist cohorts and fellow parishioners.

Here, perhaps, is a touchstone of true religion—in the attitude of the individual toward the institutional quality of religious institutions. Those who seek their salvation in bodies, denominations, creeds, and confessions of faith belong to the "defenders of the past." They are the people who would silence dissenters like Mrs. Knight, who tremble at the thought of having to meet their God, or even to seek him, without the well-lubricated machinery of orthodox organization—who live, fundamentally, in fear. But those who trust themselves, their own hearts and minds, who want to know for themselves, are the true free spirits of religion, regardless of their present membership or habitual associations.

If the strenuous ordeals of current history are able to separate the wheat from the tares on this basis, a new understanding of religion may be born in the West.

Since Mr. Dabb's article appeared in the *Christian Century*, this may be the place to suggest that the *Century* often prints articles reflecting the adventurous spirit. In the issue for Jan. 19, for example, are two other articles, one an editorial, one a contribution, which evidence the moral vigor of the Christian community. The editorial is a brief review of the annual report of the American Civil Liberties Union, in which, we learn, is recorded the emergence of a new spirit of resistance to witch-hunting and the abridgement of American liberties in the name of "security." The tide, the *CC* editorial writer rejoices, is turning.

The other article reports the refusal of the officials of a California church in San Leandro to sign a loyalty oath in order to protect its tax-exemption status. This is quite a "calculated risk" for a religious institution to undertake, since support of the church may suffer seriously if the tax-exemption status should be revoked.

This is the sort of uncompromising spirit of which Christians may well be proud.

REVIEW

WHAT IS THE GOOD LIFE?

A BOOK by Scott Nearing is always a pleasure to read and review. His purposes are constructive, his meanings clear, and his methods revolutionary in the best sense of the word. The present book is *Man's Search for the Good Life*, issued by the Social Science Institute, Harborside, Maine. A companion volume, *Living the Good Life*, by Scott and Helen (Mrs.) Nearing, tells the story of their efforts in this direction, but we leave an account of this book to another time.

Like all of Nearing's work, *Man's Search for the Good Life* is written in a tersely definitive style. The book has an austere, New England flavor, yet is tempered by the warmth of a man who has devoted his entire life to seeing as clearly as possible the meaning of what is going on about him, in order to be of the most practical use to his fellows. Scott Nearing has one unique distinction as an American radical—he has *two* theories of human betterment, an individual course to follow as well as a community course or social program. And he is about the only non-anarchist radical we know of who has practiced in his personal life what he preaches in his books.

We have one thing more to say about Nearing as a man before we examine his text. It is that he has for some thirty-five years observed the American and the world scene from a position avowedly dissociated from the conventional attitudes of the twentieth century. When the United States entered the first World War, he composed an analysis of the causes of war entitled *The Great Madness*. This work brought a federal indictment charging him with obstruction of the recruiting activities of the Government. While he was acquitted by a jury, American society responded to his protest "by taking away his means of livelihood and stripping him of influence and respectability."

Nearing may have lost his respectability in 1917, but he retained his integrity and his vision.

The real losers in what happened to him are the "respectable" people who are unable to grasp the validity of what he says.

This book is largely devoted to setting forth the sort of world we live in. It is primarily a socio-economic analysis, since this is Nearing's field. Fundamentally, however, it is a humanitarian volume, since its interest is in the good life for human beings. For the larger picture of our society, Nearing leans on Arnold Toynbee's diagnosis of Western civilization—which is that societies involved in militarism are on the road to national suicide. In Nearing's words:

Our conclusion is the same as that reached by other students of the history of civilization. The flower of civilization is not the good life but untimely, violent, individual and collective death.

Inhabitants of a civilized community who have been taught from their cradles to regard the institutions and practices of civilization with a respect bordering on reverence, may shrug off this conclusion. Civilization, to them, is the best way of life—the only conceivable culture pattern for rational beings to follow. . . . [yet] the pattern of social life which is now being followed by the West is economically inefficient and superfluous, socially corrosive and disruptive, and morally indefensible.

Nearing begins his critical study of recent events with a review of history since the early years of the twentieth century. The accumulating profits of this period brought new capital enterprise and the flow of money to foreign investments. The need for wider colonial markets grew apace. Then the wars of the century began:

Economic disorganization, dislocation and disruption rose to new levels of destructiveness during the general wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45. Not only were the normal processes of production, trade, commerce and finance hampered or suspended during these shooting wars, but the capital plant of European economy,—mines, factories, warehouses, locomotives, steamships,—was damaged or gutted by combat, and by artillery and aerial bombardment behind the lines. Great damage was done to housing and other forms of consumer capital. Scientific and technical skills were turned from production to destruction. Millions were killed. Families were

broken up. Multitudes were displaced by the tide of battle and by redrawing of frontiers. The Treaty of Versailles in 1919, and the decisions at Potsdam in the summer of 1945 confirmed and magnified the disastrous consequences of yearlong, mechanized warfare.

Unrest and revolt found expression in Mexico's 1910 and China's 1911 revolutions. It reached a high level in Europe during 1917-19. From 1922 to 1931 it subsided under fascist counter-pressure. In 1931 it began to rise once more, first in Spain and China, then, after 1944, throughout great portions of East Europe and Asia. The revolutions associated with the War of 1914-18 and its aftermath were confined chiefly to Europe. Those associated with the War of 1939-45 transformed the social relations and institutions of East Europe and large areas in Asia and began a chain of like causal developments in Africa. Throughout both periods the drive toward colonial independence and nationhood was combined and intermingled with the passion for social transformation.

Depression, war and revolution brought disaster to the 1910 life-patterns of Europe. They bankrupted its economy, redrew its frontiers, crushed its empires, altered its world outlook. Between 1910 and 1950 every one of the major European countries experienced budget unbalance, inflation, currency devaluation and/or some form of debt repudiation. The ruling dynasties of Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Italy and Spain were swept from power. Inflamed by the wave of nationalism and led by the revolting colonials of Asia, the satellites and dependencies of the chief European empires broke their bonds of allegiance and secured varying degrees of autonomy and independence.

Nearing chronicles the dramatic rise to military power of the Soviet Union, showing that, by 1950, a third of the world's population had become part of a social order competing with capitalism. Meanwhile, the United States had evolved into the greatest military power in history. The author takes from Toynbee the account of how military dominance slowly absorbs the constructive energies of a nation:

The war pattern does not reveal its malignity until the civilization of which it is taking control has developed large productive enterprises and has adequate man power. Step by step the military secures a larger share of the national product and the

national income, meanwhile selling itself to the populace through skillful propaganda. At the appropriate time the military assumes the direction of public affairs and the war pattern "reveals itself as a cancer which is bound to prove fatal to its victim—since its malignant tissues have now learnt to grow faster than the healthy tissues on which they feed."

Toynbee then discusses the relation between the wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45, pointing out that they are not isolated instances of war making, but are parts of a series which, if continued, must end in "the self annihilation of the war making society." . . . "War has proved to have been the proximate cause of the breakdown of every civilization which is known for certain to have broken down." Western civilization is following along the blood-stained militarist path taken by its forerunners in the attitudes, practices and institutions of civilization.

Who, then, is responsible for all this? We of the West, Nearing points out, have been adept in finding scapegoats. First the Germans were blamed for 1914-18. Then the Nazis and the Fascists and the Japanese were tried and found guilty. Now it is Russian and Chinese Communism. Nearing comments:

No one people or nation or empire has been distinctively responsible for designing and producing the social pattern under which we live. Rather, western civilization is a joint or collective product. How ridiculous, therefore, to point the accusing finger hither and yon, with the charge,—"They did it." Nonsense! We all did it. We all took part in the planning and execution of the plan. The responsibility for western civilization as it exists today is a joint responsibility. . . .

From this retrospect and the accompanying ominous prospect, Nearing draws back, as everyone who can look with impartial eye should draw back. Can this be "the good life"?

The Good Life, according to Scott Nearing, realistically defined, means "living sanely and constructively through a social crisis"—the sort of crisis now overtaking Western civilization. The first positive proposal is for the individual to "find" himself, to assess his position in relation to the modern world and to decide upon the

relationships which he wants to prevail, so far as his own existence is concerned:

An adult human being must study himself, understand himself as far as may be, rule over his slothful body, his rebellious passions, his errant mind, and keep these various and often conflicting elements moving toward his chosen goals, in a manner that will preserve his self respect, and in the course of his experience enhance his capacity for self-control and self direction. . . . the "I" must keep up courage, preserve the faith and remain true to the vision of its Destiny.

The philosophic background of Nearing's approach to the Good Life is set forth in passages which seem to us a contemporary expression of ancient pantheism:

The universe is set up, ordered and maintained in accordance with certain purposes, one of which is the unfoldment of life. Being, vibration or motion, variation, change, evolution, growth and becoming or fulfillment are aspects of the life process. Through the functioning of these purposes each particle in the universe is aglow with the life and love of the whole. There is a margin of choice, varying in accordance with the development of the chooser. It is a universe growing and evolving according to a pattern of which each particle is more or less clearly aware. It is a universe in which action and reaction tend to be sufficiently in balance to permit of continuity and sufficiently out of balance to necessitate change.

Humanity is one aspect of the universe, one manifestation of universal purpose, one expression of universal energy, one part of universal affirmation. Human beings are advancing toward a level of development at which they can catch clearer glimpses of the purpose and share more consciously in the affirmation.

The Good Life itself is defined in general terms. It is the best life "of which one is capable in a particular set of circumstances." Hence the need, first, to understand oneself, to formulate purpose and objective; and, second, to study the circumstantial environment. Nearing's book is primarily a study of the latter field, since the facts of the modern world environment are of public record and available for analysis and interpretation. The endeavor to meet both these needs, however, has the effect of pinning down

the idea of personal responsibility to particular judgments and decisions. It leads, if pursued consistently, to a life of beneficent action. In Nearing's words:

The good life is not to be surveyed, vivisected, examined, discussed. It is to be lived. Where? Everywhere. When? Now. By whom? Any being who is willing and able to make the effort. On what terms? By understanding, discrimination, willingness to assume responsibilities and to take consequences.

Nearing is one writer on the good life who will not have very much patience with those who explain that they would *like* to live the good life, but that circumstances—the "system," for example—prevent them. In such case, he would say, the good life consists in bucking the system, refusing to conform to it, finding ways to live outside the scope of its tyranny. To read Nearing on this subject is necessarily to ask oneself whether one's interest in the good life is real or pretended. If it is real, excuses for failure will not be sought, but means to achievement. Nearing proposes:

Doing right involves a feeling, understanding and appreciation of what is right, plus the capacity to translate the feeling, understanding and appreciation into action. Doing right presents us with three choices...—(1) compromise, (2) perish, (3) change the social pattern.

He speaks of the elements which obscure the issues unclear decision:

Survival, advancement, convenience and comfort ordinarily preclude any clear-cut pursuit of right in the abstract, or right as determined by an authority above or beyond the individual making decisions.

We are far from thinking that anyone who accepts these principles and goes to work to apply them will duplicate the career of Scott Nearing. The infinite variety of the world is such that human integrity may find many differing expressions, all equally valuable in the sense that it is the integrity which really counts, which constitutes the great transforming, educational force. There is always a *general* similarity in the

lives of men of integrity, but seldom anything which can be named "sameness" in particular ways. If there is a weakness in this book, it is the faint presence of a mood suggesting that certain conclusions will inevitably be arrived at by all men of integrity. This may be true, but we are inclined to doubt it.

Writing on the need for change of the social environment, Nearing says:

We believe that the correct procedure, under these conditions, is to enlist in the public service a body of competent social engineers, give them general directives, accept and follow their programs and plans, in the same way that a city in need of an improved water supply or of more adequate education turns to technical competence in each field for information, suggestion, plans, construction and administrative direction.

This sounds a bit over-simplified. For what sort of people will the "social engineers" design the improved society? People like the Nearings? People like those citizens of Los Angeles who a couple of years ago forced the Board of Education to remove from the curriculum of the city schools an inoffensive booklet on Unesco? There is a crucially important variable in all such equations involving the betterment of the *social* environment—the variable of human motivation and attitude. The best social engineers will break their hearts trying to get their plans and programs put into effect, if the central problem of education is not dealt with first, or at least concurrently, with sufficient effect to make initiation of the plans and programs at least a political possibility. (The best book we know of on this general problem is Arthur Morgan's life of Edward Bellamy, since Bellamy probably deserves the title of "social engineer" as much or more than any other American.) Nearing, however, adds:

Sooner or later social scientists and social engineers will develop a technique that will make it possible, by orderly procedure, to modify or eliminate an outmoded social apparatus in the same way that a modern community eliminates a fire, health or safety hazard embodied in an outmoded building.

We must ask, are such changes really a matter of "technique"? Ought we to admit or require that human beings should submit to "techniques" of social change? Technique commonly means skill in the manipulation or fabrication of materials. If, in social engineering, technique means the devising of ways and means to reach objectives which are already on the way to becoming matters of common assent, then we have no objection to the term, nor to Nearing's use of it. But the real task, it seems to us is to gain the assent; for then, we are confident, "techniques" would really play a very small part in the changes, since the assent would itself involve the arousal of individual initiative and inventiveness in respect to relationships which are today problems chiefly because of apathy and indifference to far-reaching moral issues.

Actually, a major excellence of Nearing's book appears to us to lie in the fact that he seems fundamentally aware that the reshaping of individual attitudes must come first. He writes:

Underlying these social tasks, behind and beneath all of these frontiers, is the last frontier,—man himself. Each man faces this formidable assignment,—to understand himself, to stabilize himself, to discipline himself, to mobilize the immense energy funds lying within himself, to utilize his all-but-unlimited capacities, capabilities, talents and skills for his own evolution and ennoblement, for the service and advancement of his fellows, in tune with the universal pattern and the Great Purpose. To the margins of infinity this frontier will offer man his ultimate opportunity for pioneering.

How the Nearings attacked this assignment is the subject of their other book, *Living the Good Life*, to be reviewed at a later date.

COMMENTARY
"RATIONAL INTELLIGIBILITY"

WHAT is the limit of "rational intelligibility"? Reinhold Niebuhr uses this expression in a *Saturday Review* article in a way that gains what seems justifiable censure from this week's *Frontiers*. God, says the learned theologian, is "the Almighty maker of heaven and earth" and "a mystery beyond every rational intelligibility, though it is the capstone of every meaning."

The writer of *Frontiers* wants to know how something beyond rational intelligibility can be a capstone of meaning, calling Dr. Niebuhr to account for this contradiction. Wondering if there were any justification for Niebuhr's phrase—apart from its context—we thought of the notion of the *self*. The idea of the self is surely the capstone of every meaning, for the self, on any hypothesis, is the perceiver of meaning, but is the self a rationally intelligible notion?

Stripped of all attributes, all qualifications of degree, the self remains as bare subjectivity or naked awareness. But this, we concluded, remains an intelligible idea. There may be a sense, however, in which all final causes are beyond definition—since a *final* cause cannot be referred to some prior cause, but can be defined only in terms of itself.

Is this a rationally unintelligible idea? Not entirely, it seems, since some of the greatest minds known to history have been driven by the processes of reason to arrive at some such account of the highest reality—whether the *Sat* of Indian philosophy, the *Tao* of Lao-tze, or the Absolute of Herbert Spencer. And in every case, this idea of ultimate reality has provided the capstone of meaning to the system. It may be called rationally intelligible, if only because the idea seems inescapable to philosophic minds.

Even so, a case might be made out for Niebuhr's use of the expression, save for his curious identification of an idea which ought to be a supreme abstraction with "the Almighty maker

of heaven and earth." This not only places the idea beyond rational intelligibility, but makes sheer nonsense of it as well. Here is a Deity who, uncontent with being the "capstone of the system," mixes extensively with the particular causal sequences of the world's existence, yet "transcends" them. You can't be both "unintelligible" and active in intelligible processes and affairs.

Is it any wonder that "Materialism" remains so popular, when Protestant Christianity's leading apologist in the United States makes such claims in behalf of orthodox belief?

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

"WHY don't parents let us make up our minds for ourselves—about religion, about what's good and what's bad, etc.?" This question, recently delivered by an adolescent, is as good a point as any to renew exploration of why it is that the parental desire to protect and constructively mold, and youth's desire to establish freedom of individuality, come into such frequent conflict. A further comment by this youthful questioner points the matter up more specifically. "Look," she said. "What parents do is, they treat you like an adult when they want you to be 'responsible' around the house, but when *you* want to do something, you're a child again. Pretty sneaky. They get you both ways."

Well, things are tough all over. From the parents' point of view, this "sneaky" form of behavior is quite rational: For how is one ever going to tell that a child has become "an adult" except when adult responsibilities have been satisfactorily assumed over a period of time? Why shouldn't responsibility come before freedom? Nobody ever gets into trouble trying to fulfill responsibilities, but a great many adolescents do get into trouble while trying out their notions of "freedom." So, though this may simply be a sign of advancing age on the part of the writer, we take sides with the sneaky old parents on this particular point.

But there is another side to the question, involving something more than abstract argument about the importance of learning to perform practical responsibilities: an adolescent should *not*, we think, be talked to or treated in two different ways. He, or she, is the same person all the time—or about as much so as most adults, anyway—and the real need is for development of an atmosphere of family understanding which puts both "responsibilities" and "freedom" in a rational context. A measure of freedom should, we might think, always be integrated with the way in which

any particular "responsibility" is supposed to be fulfilled, and a measure of responsibility should go hand in hand with corresponding freedom.

Going back to those nice, simple, old days for a moment, the youth who decided to take a long ride across country to squire a girl, or attend some other family's festivities, probably rode a horse he had helped raise from a colt. The care of the horse and the freedom to ride went hand in hand. But this is a horse of a different color from the aquamarine Oldsmobile in the family garage—about two hundred horses different, as a matter of fact—which serves to account for two powerful factors usually figuring in the "little freedom to roam" policies established by parents. Roaming in expensive cars is expensive, can be dangerous, and elevates a "child" suddenly to a world of power and money which he may accept with the most casual ignorance concerning the wherewithal which produced the mechanical intricacies and also the wherewithal making possible its purchase.

In other words, it is neither our children's fault nor our own that privilege should so far outrun responsibility; the world simply runs that way at the present time. But it may indeed be considered our fault, as parents, if the situation is not thoroughly grasped, and if no intensive and persistent efforts are made to restore as much of natural balance as is possible. The safest rule to follow—though it must be admitted that circumstances alter cases here as elsewhere—seems to be to allow adolescents to earn their own special belongings and expense money. You can't keep young people "out of trouble," but it is possible to see that their troubles are integral to their own productive capacities, and to the sophistication organic to their brief years of experience. Washing dishes and mowing the lawn at home do not logically qualify any youngster for a car on his birthday, nor for receipt of an "allowance" beyond his present capacity or inclination to earn by independent efforts. Parents, in our opinion, give children entirely too much for the good of either party concerned. We

recall a passage from the *Bhagavad-Gita* wherein Krishna warns strenuously against "gifts given out of season." Such gifts, he says, tend only to confuse the relationship between giver and recipient, and bring about unnatural consequences. The gift which is always natural is the gift—whether it be of time, money or whatever—which *assists* the recipient in a project already responsibly undertaken.

Our encouragement to adolescents should, on this view, begin with creation of a home atmosphere calculated to bring appropriate projects into being. A child is not a child when he initiates a long-term project—he is an adult, doing what all adults have to do if they are ever to reach psychological maturity. It is when the youngster falters, finding himself unable to keep his objectives clearly in mind, that he shows childishness. But we need think of him neither as "child" or "adult"—but simply as a person who is doing enough on his own responsibility to awaken our desire to help, or one who no longer manages to make us believe in his intent.

It occurs that the same psychology here outlined can be applied to worries about involvement between the sexes. Once again, in "the old days," the consequences of liaisons had to be met in large part by those who initiated them. Not so at the present time. An early marriage does not fall back on the land and upon hard work, but upon parents' pocketbooks—sometimes on their physicians. The young person who anticipates the vast responsibilities various forms of romance can entail is more surely checked in premature leanings than he can ever be by verbal admonitions in the home. But these responsibilities are remote—completely unreal—unless the value of money and the cost of a home are learned through participatory earning.

Sociology teaches us, if it teaches anything, that societies gravitate to extremes of behavior—sometimes, in a comparatively short span of time, even carry through a pendulum swing to opposites of attitude. Thus, while youths were once

regarded *as* responsible because this was *required* of them, today our expectation is rather the opposite. The weird American idea of "college days" fits into the pattern here, with emphasis on the "best days of one's life" being *during* this time of comparative irresponsibility. Parents who themselves believe this nonsense indulge their young in the belief that they "shouldn't miss out." Europeans have monotonously remarked that Americans worship the cult of adolescence, and this isn't far from the uncomfortable truth. Causes? Well, when money-earning began to be more and more a thankless chore rather than a kind of enjoyable fulfillment—assembly lines and all that—one's youngest days *did* seem the best of all possible times. Why? For one thing, youth itself is wonderful, and few have discovered how to maintain the level of physical exuberance and psychical magic in things heard, seen and felt. Second, youth has always been privileged to spend at least part of its time in receiving instruction. Going to school comes closer, we might say, to what a man ought to be doing, any time, than raising and lowering a drill press, or fighting other white-collar workers for raises and the bosses' commendations.

But highschool and college youths have a good time, not because they are so often allowed to be irresponsible—rather in spite of that fact. Those who spend part of their time earning their way may, indeed, have the best time of all—and frequently do. These few, at least, are thrice blest—they are learning, they are young, and they are proving their emerging adulthood by discharging an appropriate measure of responsibilities in the adult world. If they are serious enough, if they accomplish a sufficiency in academic work and later require more time for further intensive study, the prospects of receiving help from one of several quarters are good. So, parents, whatever you do, don't get rich. It's apt to foul everything up for your children. Only slightly less bad is pretending affluence when the loan company is really the one ahead of the game.

FRONTIERS "Christ vs. Socrates"

WHEN the *Saturday Review* prevailed upon Reinhold Niebuhr to do an attention-getting lead article for the Christmas issue, the famous man from Union Theological Seminary responded with the above title—ensuring, we must admit, the maximum of attention for what he had to say. For, as Niebuhr shows, Socrates is a very popular man among Westerners, and intellectuals have shown considerably more interest in him than they have in Jesus of Nazareth. As an exceptionally articulate defender of traditional Christianity, Dr. Niebuhr loses no time in arguing that, *pari passu* with this fact, things seem to have been going from bad to worse in the West, both politically and socially. While the learned theologian has nothing against Socrates personally, he feels that the Socratic doctrine has been a prime source of dangerous delusions: *i.e.*, whenever we maintain, with Socrates, that evil is the result of ignorance—that men "would do the good if only they knew it"—we forget that the real enemy of goodness is sin and corruption within each human personality, and that man, striving for virtue unaided by superhuman power, fails.

Dr. Niebuhr renders a service in stating the metaphysical assumptions of traditional Christianity so explicitly, for, in the process, he frames a context for debate which is apt to challenge any good Socratic. At any rate, the case for Christianity, as Niebuhr states it, is at least arguable:

Through all ages men have wondered about the divine mystery which hovered over the strange drama of human history and was obviously more than the mystery of creation. They felt that the meaning in the mystery obviously spelled judgment upon evil, but they wondered how mercy and forgiveness were related to the judgment.

It was to these questions that the revelation in Christ offered the definitive answer. The Church was founded on the faith that this revelation was final and definitive. The drama of Christ's life was seen by faith to be more than a drama in history, and therefore Jesus was more than a revered historical martyr. This drama furnished the clue to the ultimate mystery. Through it faith was able to discern that the power of God and the love of God are one; and that the love of God contains both the severity of his justice and the kindness of his mercy to those who

contritely acknowledge their sins and cease to pretend that men are virtuous and possess a "dignity" which is not contaminated by the false and idolatrous use they make of their freedom. The Christian doctrine of the "Atonement" asserts that judgment and forgiveness are contradictory, yet two facets of the same divine love. Those who recognize this clue to the mystery will stop pretending they are more righteous than they are; and will, with broken spirit and contrite heart, be enabled to live charitably with their neighbors. . . .

To assert that the Jesus of history is the Christ, and that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," is an affirmation of faith which insists that the variance between man and God cannot be finally overcome by the virtue of man. All human virtue remains ambiguous to the end. It can be overcome only by a "suffering" God who takes the sins of the world upon himself.

The key sentence in the above, we believe, is that which asserts Christianity to be "an affirmation of the faith which insists that the variance between man and God cannot be finally overcome by the virtue of man." Much of the difference between the Christian and the Socratic positions may be held to result from contrasting points of emphasis, but here, no mistake about it, we have a most un-Socratic doctrine.

Of course, Socrates was a mystic, a believer in the existence of intelligence beyond his own in the universe. He listened to his *daimon*, as Jesus listened to his "Father within." But this voice, for Socrates, was the voice of further enlightenment, not the voice of protection against evil—except in so far as enlightenment might reduce the likelihood of his choosing a harmful path. Socrates believed, to put the matter in another way, that it was necessary to feel humble in one's ignorance, but unnecessary for the good man to feel "sinful" or guilty.

We now turn to the logic of Dr. Niebuhr's claim that the traditional Christian "analysis of the human situation... any thoughtful observer must recognize as being more illuminating about man, particularly man in the contemporary setting, than all the Socratic interpretations which try to derive virtue from intelligence." He continues by saying that this superior doctrine "does not equate God with cosmic reason any more than it equates the self with its own reason. . . . The worship of God is thus in the first instance the worship of 'God, the Almighty maker of heaven and

earth,' the mysterious power transcending the causal sequences and coherences of the world. . . . This divine source and end of all things is a mystery beyond every rational intelligibility, though it is the capstone of every system of meaning."

Because of Dr. Niebuhr's polemical astuteness and usual semantic care, we are surprised by the assertion that something "beyond every rational intelligibility" can also be "the capstone of every system of meaning." A system of meaning, one must take it, is "intelligible" by definition; the capstone of a system belongs to the system, and, if it has an entirely independent existence, it is not a capstone. Another logical difficulty which presents itself concerns Niebuhr's denial that virtue can be derived from intelligence. If this were literally true, would not animals, birds and reptiles be better candidates for virtue than man? After all, they are "God's creatures," too. Intelligence is so dynamic in any of its forms that it can hardly be regarded as neutral in its effects on ethics. Thus, intelligence either assists or obstructs "virtue," and to maintain that it does not *contribute* to ethical improvement is the equivalent of saying that intelligence obstructs virtue—a tough conclusion for a man of Dr. Niebuhr's education to swallow.

We may here be taking unfair advantage of him, as is always easy by selection of particularly liable words and phrases. But it seems legitimate to suggest that the *sort* of argument he attempts inevitably results from discounting the role reason can and should play in the discussion of religious questions. Reason, denying its own rationality, can hardly fail to stumble into traps, particularly if rational argument is employed in respect to other points a protagonist wants to make. When Niebuhr argues against the Socratic maxim, that men "would do the good if only they knew it," asserting that this view does not take into account the problem admitted by the Pauline confession—"the good that I would do I do not do and the evil that I would not, that I do"—he is on solid enough ground. But to talk as if *no* truth exists in the Socratic emphasis is something else again. When he arrives at this point, Niebuhr deserts reason, simply affirming that consciousness of one's sinful propensities is the key to virtue. Why not consider awareness of personal weakness *one* key, with the door to the admirable qualities of a Christ—or a Socrates—protected by a double padlock? Humility

plus the thirst for greater understanding is the combination present in men we admire the most.

And there are two kinds of humility. Socrates was humble in the thought of all he did not yet know; but one who abases himself in the thought of all he *cannot* know, easily becomes abject, dependent upon priestly authority. The Socratic belief that knowledge and virtue are, at root, indistinguishable, is not simply a way of saying that people must read good books, or gain an education somehow or other. Knowledge, for Socrates, included only that which a man knew through direct experience. Since no one fully "knows" anything to be true until he has tried it, it can be argued that Socrates would insist that men *knew* virtue only when they practiced a virtuous way of life.

In this light, the distinctions between the Socratic and the Christian views become largely tenuous—chiefly, as we have said before, a matter of emphasis. Our preference for a Socratic formulation, at least in this day, originates in the thought that "brotherly love" is much more apt to burgeon in our breasts when we think those whom we dislike to be ignorant than when we think them to be evil. If more understanding is what men need to help them become "virtuous," we can at least try to help; we may, with a certain amount of effort, attempt to supply the sort of psychological environment which affords the opportunity for learning something better. We don't condition people into virtue—something we suppose Socrates knew just as well as Dr. Niebuhr—but, once in a while, you know, someone does *learn* the qualities of nobility from others. Our sins all have to be exorcised, right enough, and by ourselves, yet why belabor this point, since the exorcising so obviously depends on self-induced and self-devised efforts? So the words "education" and "philosophy" still sound better to us than the word "religion," and until a synthesis is achieved between what Niebuhr characterizes as the Christian view and our notion of the Socratic, this preference is apt to continue.