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IS IT "RELIGION"?

THE proudly hailed "return to religion," demanded by evangelists, confirmed by church statisticians, and pointed at with pride by American politicians, has begun to trouble thoughtful Christians. Some of the latter are far from sure that it is really "religion" that the American people are turning or returning to. Intellectually acute Bernard Iddings Bell, a stalwart among Christian thinkers, suspects that the wave of American religiosity is no more than a fad. Last year, William Lee Miller, who writes on religious subjects for the *Reporter*, exposed to scorn the recently acquired ostentatious religion of Washington politicians. More recently, in the *Reporter* for Jan. 13, Mr. Miller gave attention to the ministrations of "America's most successful Protestant minister," Norman Vincent Peale, with conclusions less than complimentary. Even *Life* Magazine (for April 11) has climbed on the critical bandwagon, hiring the *Christian Century* editor, Paul Hutchinson, to do some "negative thinking" on the modern "cult of reassurance." While Mr. Hutchinson's review of Dr. Peale's version of "religion" is less barbed than the Miller appraisal ("Dr. Peale is the rich man's Billy Graham"), both critics arrive at the same general conclusion: The "cult of reassurance" plays down some basic Christian tenets.

It seems clear enough that what Dr. Peale has done is to enlist the services of God in behalf of the objectives of the "self-help" books of a generation ago. "With God on your side, you can't lose," is not a Peale slogan, but it might have been (except that it's negatively tainted with "can't"). Much of Mr. Miller's article is devoted to reporting the incredible sales of Dr. Peale's books *(The Power of Positive Thinking* has been on best-seller lists for years), and his other successes in radio, as a columnist, with long-playing records of sermons, and in television. How does he do it? Miller has a clear explanation:

> The idea is that affirmative attitudes help to make their own affirmations come true. Dr. Peale takes the obvious but partial truth in this idea and builds it into an absolute law, he erects on it a complete and infallible philosophy, psychology, and religion, so that he can solve every problem just by denying it really exists and promise that every wish can be fulfilled just by "thinking" it. . . .
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> All this is hard on the truth, but it is good for the preacher's popularity. It enables him to say exactly what his hearers want to hear. He can say it constantly, confidently, simply without qualification and with the blessing of God. He need say nothing that might cut across his hearers' expectations, challenge the adequacy of their goals, or make demands of them. Instead, he can affirm and reaffirm that it is simple to be exactly what they want to be, to have exactly what they want to have.

Mr. Hutchinson is gentler with Dr. Peale—who is, one learns, a really nice man and "reasonably" humble but the *Christian Century* editor drives home his critical point:

> With all possible recognition for the good it may be accomplishing among those who need a restoration of hope and self-confidence it has to be granted that this cult of reassurance is not Christianity in its classical sense or Judaism in its highest conception. It lacks—at least in most of its literature and in the popular understanding of its message—vital elements in the Christian doctrine of salvation. That doctrine has always held that man, the sinner, can only be saved by a great redemptive act on the part of God to release him from his guilt and to free him from his addiction to sin. Protestants and Catholics differ as to how man is to appropriate the benefits of God's redemptive act, but on the core of their belief in the doctrine of salvation they are at one.

Perhaps we should add that Mr. Hutchinson includes several others besides Dr. Peale among the advocates of "reassurance." Joshua Liebman's *Peace of Mind* was an early expression of the endeavor to unite religion and the insights of

psychology, in order "to relieve modern tensions," and there have been other volumes in about the same category. Some church leaders feel that such books lead people to try to use religion as a kind of "magic" to help them escape from their frustrations and insecurities. This, it is claimed, is not the purpose of religion.

Hutchinson says that Peale and his reassuring colleagues ignore the fundamental conception of salvation as redemption by God. Miller pursues the analysis more searchingly:

> Dr. Peale's idea . . . allows him to go completely over into that situation of which liberal Protestantism always is in danger, where the desires and notions of a traditionless congregation determine absolutely what gospel shall be preached. In this again, Dr. Peale differs from other leaders of the popular religious revival. Someone like Bishop Fulton J. Sheen has obligations to Catholic dogmas that prevent him from fashioning his message entirely according to popular preference; Billy Graham, too, has some restraint upon him from the more or less fundamentalist gospel to which he is committed. But Dr. Peale is apparently free of obligation to any intellectual tradition or framework of interpretation antecedent to that which he works out to correspond exactly to the climate of opinion and desire in which he preaches. It is quite difficult to find any place where the more profound claims of historic faith have affected his vigorous, beaming, eminently successful, and resolutely cheerful message. . . .
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> There is no real *content* to Dr. Peale's preaching, in the sense of some vivid objective interest: a job to be done, a cause to be joined, a truth to be understood. The transaction is entirely within the reader. There is a complete absence of any really concretely interesting and exciting world, which might bring out the reader's vital responses (and overcome his boredom, which must be immense). There is no such world because to see it, to be interested and excited by it, and to respond to it would require effort, and Dr. Peale's "amazing results" never require any effort.

Quite apparently, the cult of reassurance seems to offer a way to "feeling "good," and this accounts for its amazing popularity. And since there has been very little serious thinking about religion in the United States for generations, the readers of such books have no means of discovering or taking note that this "spiritual" sort of self-help has very little to do with authentic religion. While it is served up, as Paul Hutchinson remarks, "with a dusting of Christian or 'religious' phrases," and borrows a good deal of the jargon of psychology, its chief emphasis is on getting rid of problems which haunt and bedevil the individual.

One may ask, however, *why* the traditional "framework of interpretation" has no hold on the American people, while a book by Norman Vincent Peale will outsell everything but the Bible. It seems likely that the purveyors of reassurance have inherited as a stock in trade the distrust of the common man in the explicit claim that his fate is in the hands of someone else—in this instance, God. A case can be made for the view that traditional Christian dogmas require an abnormal pessimism, and that human beings will welcome an escape from the gloomy doctrine of sin, suffering, and failure which was spread by the Puritan heritage—even if the escape comes through the superficial teachings of the cult of reassurance.

The question which needs examination, then, is whether the pessimism of Christianity is justified. Mr. Hutchinson, naturally enough, as a spokesman for Christian orthodoxy and a critic of "reassurance," thinks that it is:

> . . . what today's cult of reassurance most lacks—and indeed disavows—a sense of life's inevitable failures. Here is the point at which it stands in starkest contrast to the teachings of America's most searching contemporary theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr. Many say they find Niebuhr hard to understand, but there is one central idea in his writing which should be easy to grasp, for it is validated by universal experience. This is his contention that all human effort, however noble, however achieving, contains within it an element of failure. Perhaps one reason why Americans say they cannot understand Niebuhr is because their minds simply will not harbor this fact that all success is dogged by failure. We American's *must* succeed. We cannot approach life with any other expectation. But

Christianity, in the most profound sense, is a religion for failures.

The Joshua Liebmans and the Norman Vincent Peales have apparently caught Americans on the rebound from their first great disillusionment, which came to them nationally or rather culturally when they began to suspect that the scientific utopia that had been promised to the West ever since the French Revolution was not going to come about. It took centuries for modern man to throw off the dark dogmas of medieval theology and to learn to walk in the sunlight of hope of progress. But war and economic depressions, mental disease, alcoholism, and "nervous tensions" have exacted a heavy toll of human confidence. Perhaps Psychology (and this new "religion") will help us to recover our old "zip" and happy optimism. The Babbitts, in short, still want to be Babbitts, and with Norman Vincent Peale to help them they feel that there may still be a chance to be happy on Main Street once again.

The Christian critics of "reassurance," it seems to us, are both right and wrong: Right in pointing out that shallow oversimplifications offering "Ten Easy Rules for Success" make no essential contribution to understanding the bewildering problems of human life, and do much to trivialize the essential issues of religion; but they are wrong in assuming that the Christian "religion for failures" is the proper alternative. Not that the phrase, "religion for failures," ought to be seized upon and exploited with a fine humanist disdain. The point, here, is that neither the scientific revolution nor the "reassurance" phase of the return to religion takes any real account of the presence of evil in human experience, as a *moral* reality. Scientific utopianism got rid of the idea of evil by suggesting that evil is entirely produced by circumstances—and these circumstances, it proposed, will be either removed or changed by advancing technology. Dr. Peale replaced the fading hopes in scientific technology with his persuasive claim that a bit of "mental technology" ("Positive thinking") is all that has been lacking.

Meanwhile, Christian theologians like Niebuhr are able to point to the implacable presence of evil in every society, technological or not, and to suggest that "sin" or "failure" is an inevitable component of human experience—a situation which can only be rectified by balancing the human equation with the power of God. Let us say, then, whether or not Christianity is "a religion for failures," it is at least a religion which takes account of the reality of failure, and its psychological force in human life. But it does not necessarily follow that the Christian account of the meaning of failure, or even "sin," is the only one that should be considered.

True fulfillment of life, according to the Christian tradition, comes from discovering and embodying "the purposes of God." But it could be argued with equal force that the fulfillment of life might be otherwise defined—in terms of, for example, the fulfillment of its own purposes. Quite possibly, the "purposes of life"—to use a somewhat anthropomorphizing phrase are rich enough in content to encompass the highest human aspirations and ideas of nobility. The difficulty one finds in Christian assumptions is the belief that God and man are separate and that man is dependent for his good—but not, curiously enough, for his evil—on a great "being" outside himself. This assumption, furthermore, creates a host of intellectual difficulties which have troubled not only philosophers but the Christian theologians themselves. Why did God, the all-powerful, create a being like man, who, according to the doctrine, is impotent unless he abandons himself to God's mercy? And why give that man an independent mind if, in order to save his immortal soul, he must subordinate that mind—indeed godlike—to the shackles of orthodox belief? And why, finally, since God ultimately has all the power, charge human beings with being "sinful" and exact from them an almost endless suffering in punishment?

These are the questions to which theology has no truly *rational* answer.

We do not pretend that the problem of evil is not involved in mystery. But it seems likely that the Christian explanation involves us in far more mystery and failure than are necessary. On the "cult of reassurance," Paul Hutchinson has this to say:

> Reliance on a set formula for dealing with the infinite evils which distress mankind exposes religion to the consequence when the formula does not work. When the "10 easy rules" fail to accomplish all that is promised, what happens? The reaction may be a little while coming, but look out when it does.

This logic can be turned about. What are the consequences of the Christian theory of "redemption"? With some of them we are already familiar. We know what happens when one group of interpreters claims to have control of the only channel to the ear of God and the only means to His Redemption. It seems fair to say that atheists by the million are the consequence of a doctrine of salvation which takes away from man the power to save himself, giving it to God, or rather his clergy.

How, then, shall we "explain" evil, if it is not a vicious propensity which rules all human beings who refuse to accept the sovereignty of God?

Evil, we might argue, with Socrates, is nine-tenths ignorance; for wise men, though they may suffer pain, seldom suffer from evil. Evil, according to this way of defining it, is what is left in the world to make men unhappy after a hypothetically perfect technology has solved all earthly problems; and, in these terms, evil remains as whatever blinds us to truth or inclines our will or intentions to objectives which are less than the worthiest of which we can conceive.

Letter from
CENTRAL EUROPE

SALZBURG.—This happened a few weeks ago. The boys of a high school arrived at their classroom, one by one, as usual, and were having some fun before the teacher came. Shouting and joking was going on, until a blond youngster—let us call him Hans—had all the laughers on his side.

On one of the walls was a photo of the President of Austria, General Körner. It was an unassuming picture in a modest frame, hanging where Dr. Renners', his predecessor's, portrait had hung before, and where in Germany Dr. Adenauer, in Russia Bulganin or Stalin, in Great Britain Queen Elizabeth, and in the USA perhaps Eisenhower or Roosevelt would have their pictures displayed. Anyhow, the boys were still laughing about the moustache and the nightcap, of chalk, with which Hans had decorated the venerable gentleman, when the teacher unexpectedly entered. This teacher was a serious man. He reported the case to the principal. After Hans had admitted to being the culprit, the CID was informed. Hans was taken away by two policemen. He was interrogated several times, the officials being determined to regard the case as "political." They tried to find out the supposed "group" which stood behind Hans, instigating his "subversive" coup. Finally, when no such group could be found, the council of teachers decided to dismiss Hans from school. . . . One was then supposed to assume that the Austrian Republic and thus democracy had again been saved from disaster!

While this incident may seem of no importance, it contains a number of possibilities. First, Hans and his comrades—all about 14 or 15 years old—who have never had anything to do with politics, are suddenly stamped as "criminals." They will probably be perplexed by the attitude of their country, or better, of the authorities of their country. There is even the danger that they will not forget the incident, and, later on, be more attracted by the persuasions of a subversive group.

Then there are the boys' parents, relatives, friends, and other citizens who learn about this act of the "Republic." Most of them can remember what little punishment they used to receive for similar pranks in school. Nobody was ever taken by the police and subjected to examination to obtain an admission that they had been members of a group who wanted to overthrow the elected government. Some of them will recall that the teacher warned them not to do that again, and had taken the opportunity to offer them some rules for their future life; meanwhile, others will remember their life under a dictatorship, suspecting, perhaps, that the republic has even less stability, if its authorities are afraid of the chalk-beard and nightcap of a sportive boy.

As the press was not informed of the "case" by the authorities, the public only learned about it from a "Letter to the Editor," in which the writer announced that a copy had been forwarded to the President of Austria, General Körner, himself.

There can be little doubt that General Körner, an octogenarian and a man of wisdom, will reject the action of the officials and put everything right again. But the possibility remains that petty authorities will continue to prove their "loyalty" or show their growing power over individuals by such means.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
NOW IS THE TIME

UNDER this title Lillian Smith expands the Supreme Court's 1954 decision to outlaw racial segregation into an inspired treatise. This book packs into 120 easy-to-read pages percipient discussions of the central problems involved in reorienting American thinking about "color"—especially in the South.

Herself a Southerner, Lillian Smith has devoted more than fifteen years to writing in behalf of American Negroes. Her novel, *Strange Fruit*, published in 1944, aroused latent consciences throughout the United States, and, as her publishers have noted, "catapulted her to international fame." More than two and a half million copies of this book were sold in the United States, and it has been translated into fifteen foreign languages. Small wonder, then, that she writes of the historic Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, with a deep sense of impersonal pride.

Much more than the decision itself was involved. The basis upon which it was made, evident from Chief Justice Warren's opinion, was also of considerable significance. The account of the decision provided in *Now is the Time* is an excellent illustration of the quality of Lillian Smith's thinking, and of the directness, simplicity and profundity of the rest of the book:

> We knew what the decision would be. The necessities of our times had clearly determined it: not alone the world situation but the human situation here at home, in our children's lives, in our own hearts and minds, made it imperative that the highest authority in our land say clearly that there is no place, today, for legal segregation in a free and democratic nation. We knew. But we wanted to hear it said aloud. And when the words came, simple and plain, a deep pride swept across America.
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> Chief Justice Warren, who spoke for a unanimous court did not clutter his pages with legal precedents. He based the decision on a truth more important than precedents: a child's right to learn. He stated, for the first time in the history of a country's highest court, that a child's feelings are important to a nation; that shame and rejection can block a mind from learning, hence segregation is a barrier to human growth which no state in our democracy can maintain legally in its public school system.
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> For a little while, that day, we forgot Asia and Africa. We were thinking of children. Of their needs. Bread, books, shoes? These we have tried to give them. But to grow as human beings they must have esteem, they must have belief in their own worth and the worth of others. Now they would have a better chance to grow. Every child could begin to feel at home here, knowing he is accepted in the American family. From this time on he will be safeguarded from those who do not care: from the bullies and the haters and the sick minds and the political opportunists who, in their greed, are willing to feed on our children's future to make their own present big.
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> White children were not mentioned in that remarkable document, but they too are deeply affected by it. For race segregation is a cruel frame that twists and misshapes the spirits of all children, no matter which side of it they are fastened to. Arrogance, complacency, blindness to human need: these hurt the heart and mind as severely as do shame and inferiority. We hardly need to remind ourselves of how the little Nazis' moral natures were maimed by Hitler's ideas and laws to know this is true.
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> White Southerners know it so well. As we listened to the decision, many of us were suddenly back in childhood, quietly walking through its years, remembering its beauty, its tender moments, its sudden joy and wonder—and its walls. Those invisible walls which we plunged against a thousand times as we stretched out to accept our human world. Walls that stopped our questions—and our dreams. We were so free . . . but we did not have the freedom to do right. For there were laws in our states that compelled us to do wrong.
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> Now the Supreme Court's decision would give this freedom back to the white child of the South. It is a very big gift, for which many of us are deeply grateful.

Now is the Time also provides an illuminating summary of the long struggle to end segregation *thinking* as well as segregation in fact. The author tells, for instance, how, at first, writers speaking for the reactionary press attributed all such efforts to the Communists. Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt who, to her eternal credit, braved southern disapproval in staunchly championing the cause of genuine equality for the Negro, was labeled a "Red"—along with other

courageous people less well known. As Lillian Smith remarks, "It is strange how many Americans will not give democracy or Christianity the least credit for the good things done in our country. Always they credit 'the Communists' with our nation's finest acts." However, the forces of genuine democracy were gaining momentum, and no amount of name-calling could stop them. The Federal Council of Churches spoke out firmly against every form of racial discrimination. Fact-finding sociologists contributed their efforts to building the case against segregation, while respect spread through the country for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and its Legal Committee made remarkable progress. All this prior to the war; then the war itself caused many previously prejudiced minds to realize that the Negro who fought and died for the United States deserved an equal stake in American freedom. Meanwhile, criticism of our segregation policies by the colonial peoples of the world, at a time when our politicians desired fervent support against Communism, was an important factor. So, even if we all knew what the Supreme Court decision would be, and some of the reasons compelling it at this particular time, it came from a desire for self-preservation as well as from the spirit of universal brotherhood. All this makes the story of the struggle against segregation the more instructive and important for reflection.

Now is the Time was written because Lillian Smith knows as well as any one that the full transition will take time. Her book is designed to aid those who want to help toward this end. The closing section, for instance, is devoted to twenty-five questions and answers—the questions being the time-dishonored ones that have won elections for politicians of the South for more than a hundred years. They are difficult as well as trouble-making questions, but all of them, as Lillian Smith shows, are based upon "a few false assumptions whose roots go deep into old superstitions."

These questions are taken up one by one in the last chapter and, in our opinion, the answers given deserve reading in every schoolroom in the United States. The author dodges nothing; the issues of "blood," inheritance and mixed marriages receive impressive attention. We like particularly a passage addressed to Question No. 9, which reads: "Isn't the Supreme Court playing politics when it reverses itself? In 1896 in the Plessy decision the Court decided that 'separate but equal' was constitutional. Now the Court rules that legal segregation contradicts the Constitution. Should it not be consistent?" Here is Lillian Smith's answer:

> Consistency is comfortable for those who do not like to change their minds. It is rarely a virtue, for it hardens quickly into the authority of "tradition."
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> The law is not an embalmed corpse: it is a living thing, changing as human conditions change, growing as man's conscience grows.
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> "I have grown to see," wrote Justice Benjamin Cardozo, "that the (judicial) process in its highest reaches is not discovery but creation; and that the doubts and misgivings, the hopes and fears, are part of the travail of mind, the pangs of death and the pangs of birth, in which principles that have served their day expire, and new principles are born."

In closing, we quote from the last page where, in answer to the question, "What is wrong about a 'separate but equal' way of life?" Lillian Smith replies, "There would be nothing at all wrong with it if we were automobiles or refrigerators. But we are human, we hunger for esteem and acceptance and recognition as achingly as we hunger for food and drink and warmth." She continues:

> *Separate but equal* are strange words when one thinks about them a little. We human beings cannot live separate from each other, if the separation is prolonged; and we can never be equal. *Separate* and *equal* are words that have relevance only for things, not for children. What we want for children is a good growing climate where each has the right to be different, and to relate himself to his world freely and fully; where he has tenderness and care, and esteem, and the opportunity to learn the meaning of being human; and where he can acquire the strength to accept the responsibilities that go along with his human status. Equality before the law, equality in the eyes of God, equal rights as citizens, equal opportunity to develop our potentialities are valid concepts. But men are not equal as individuals: they are different. We should not tolerate, we should treasure these differences for in them lie the seeds of new growth, new possibilities for the human race. Isolated permanently from his community, a human being can never develop fully and happily; nor can the community which isolates him. Each needs the other.

COMMENTARY
PURPOSE IN NATURE?

ONE thing that emerges from Arthur Morgan's book, *Search for Purpose* (see Frontiers), is the centrality of the question of a general purpose in nature or life, as considered apart from manifest human purposes, hopes, or aspirations. For it is on the answers proposed to this question that the differences between orthodox religious faiths and the freethinking philosophical inquiries of men with scientific background become acute.

The religious assumption that there is a general purpose, and that it is known through revelation from on high, is one way of obtaining unity for ethical thinking. Thinkers like Dr. Morgan feel, however, that the satisfaction of the longing for unified ethical theory by means which require the abandonment of rational methods (belief in religious dogma) comes at far too high a price. Better the ignorance and uncertainty of the agnostic than the security of a closed system of belief obtained at the cost of intellectual integrity.

Unlike the majority of scientific thinkers who have addressed themselves to this question, Dr. Morgan is nevertheless unwilling to enter a flat denial of universal purpose or meaning. The tendency of the scientific opponent of religious belief to deny a purpose in nature seems to him to resemble the theologian's insistence upon a "divine plan." Neither one has sufficient evidence to support his claims. Morgan explains that he is unwilling to be called a "Humanist" for the reason that Humanists too often manifest a "cocksure" certainty in their rejection of universal purpose.

Yet, despite the difficulties surrounding this question, there seems to be a fundamental tropism in the human mind (or mind and heart) which requires that we wrestle with this mystery. Whenever a man tries to reach beyond the horizons of everyday life and its practical objectives, he encounters the invitation to philosophize about his relation to nature and his linkage with all the vast variety of life. This is the fundamental content of all Eastern mysticism, and, we think, of that division of Western mysticism which has broken through the limitations of religious orthodoxy to arrive at a pantheistic sense of the meaning of things.

Books like *Search for Purpose* emphasize the importance of open-minded questioning of all sources of guidance in pursuing this great question.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

BEFORE attempting comment on problems raised in last week's discussion of "reading readiness," involving the relative value of teacher's and parent's instruction, we should like to approach the topic from another tangent. It is often assumed—sometimes by teachers as well as by parents—that *all* of education might be better accomplished in the home, if parents had the leisure and ability for it. On this view, the classroom is a necessity imposed by the economic circumstances of our society, which make it impossible for most parents to spend the ordinary "school hours" with their children. On the other hand, schoolroom teaching may have independent value, constituting a needed aspect of the child's total instruction.

Turning to Plato, we find the suggestion that children need the *impersonal* approach to basic instruction. After all, learning is not simply a family affair. In the bosom of the family a child encounters the way one or two people choose to read—or learned to read—and are impressed by all the parental peculiarities of temperament, expression, bias, etc. Thus the schoolroom, by contrast, may play an important *ideal* part in introducing children to the world of thinking. So we feel there are grounds for challenging the fairly common assumption that teachers who wish a free hand with the children are usurping a responsibility not ideally their own. Moreover, and moving away from the ideal to the immediate and practical, we must recognize that parents are often likely to be less patient than the teacher in dealing with a child who has difficulty in acquiring a new skill. The teacher knows that a large part of her work will depend on the degree to which patience becomes second nature. Parents, on the other hand, are more apt to be in the egocentric predicament: "Is *my* child learning rapidly enough to be a credit to his family?"

The teacher who offered a firm "directive" against parents attempting to teach their children reading probably had in mind another aspect of this same psychological situation. Doting mothers and fathers often wish to see their children "at the top of the class." Early reading instruction at home with this motivation may be dangerous. If "taught" by one method at home and shortly thereafter instructed by some other means at school, the child may become confused and lag *behind* other members of the class. Then the teacher who confers with parents to discover the difficulty may unwillingly stir up two forms of annoyance in the home: the parents might resent the teacher's suggestions as to methods, and might also feel annoyance because the child has not converted their own supposedly good work into creditable results. Now, reading should be a pleasure. Most modern teachers conceive it their task to introduce reading in just this light. Yet the parent who becomes too involved with his child's progress may create a quite different atmosphere, and a child who encounters strain or meets disapproval for failure may not come to true reading enjoyment for a long while.

Turning to the other side of the question, and risking the disapproval of some educationists, we should like to suggest that a point in favor of parents who would like to do a little teaching by way of the "old" alphabetical method is that learning the English language *is* partly a matter of dogged discipline. As is the case with any science, some memory work has to be done, some building of the materials with which the final structure of fully aware reading can be erected—and we are not sure that it is always wise to protect the child from irksome discipline in his learning. May not the child who learns only what is "fun," and when it is fun, fail to discover that discipline, however annoying, can *lead* to enjoyment? To miss knowing this is to miss a good deal.

It seems to us that the ideal method for mastering the English language is a combination of all methods. Reading should be fun, and at times it should be work—the last preferably when the child is encouraged, by the quality of stories read to him, to master reading for himself. This brings us to one of the most obvious aspects of the parent-child relationships in regard to reading: the greatest help on the part of the parent will come from his own participation in good literature, and from his reading

to the child. On this both parents and teachers—even "modern" teachers—can agree.

A recent conversation with a ninth-grade teacher further highlighted these conclusions. When first encountering boys and girls of this age, she was appalled to discover that few of them had any idea of what reading meant. She further concluded that few had ever been *read to* by parents, and she discovered when she tried reading to them that they were capable of attention and desired to understand. The more we come to think about it, the more it appears likely that our present adolescents are suffering from a peculiar transition in the emotional and mental habits of adults. Whether motion pictures began it, with television bringing the change to a climax, or whether these are simply manifestations of some obscure psychic change that is taking place, there is little doubt that the modern approach to everything under the sun is far more "psychic" than "mental." Products are sold by methods which rely on vividness of impression rather than "logical" appeal. Novels too involved in thought do not sell well. Our speeded-up civilization offers little time to think, as noted by Norman Cousins in a recent *Saturday Review* editorial, but it does offer innumerable *substitutes* for thinking, and innumerable escapes from the disciplines of learning. We have no great love for a past wherein much of the reading at home was Bible reading, and that in a solemn, ponderous, or ominous manner. But, nevertheless, something was gained, perhaps, even in this instance, by insistence that the child memorize the alphabet and follow words closely.

It is our somewhat mystical contention that, though children are chiefly "psychic," anyway, they very badly need to live in an atmosphere of mental activity. If parents do not read, do not reason, and do not discourse with any preciseness, natural encouragement to development of thinking ability is not available. So, in our opinion, frustrated parents and teachers who discover that high school graduates are often poor spellers and confused readers, should recognize that an exclusive method of simply bunching or "psyching" words has serious limitations. Those who have learned to "read" with copious visual aids, such as motion-pictures designed to stimulate learning by association, will get a great number of *impressions* from any vivid page—but these impressions are likely to be vague or confused.

In conclusion: the debate between the "phonic" method and the "word" method needs to be resolved through synthesizing efforts, so that we can escape from so much factionalism, and more truly appraise the transitions in adult mentality that have taken place *pari passu* with audio-visual developments such as motion-pictures and television. A recent survey presented in *This Week* for June 19 offers sane comment on the usefulness of combined methods. The authors summarize:

> In many a primary-grade classroom we found boys and girls "sounding out" new words. But once they learned what they meant, they stored them away in their rapidly growing "sight" vocabulary.
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> Most good public schools, we concluded, agree with Dr. William S. Gray, of the University of Chicago. Dr. Gray has been a teacher of reading for nearly half a century and has recently completed a two-and-a-half-year study of literacy for UNESCO. He reports, "There is no best method. Neither can be used exclusively."
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> They agree, too, with the country school-master encountered by Fred M. Hechinger, Education Editor of the New York *Herald Tribune*, in the Lake District of England: "He showed me his library, and I was surprised to find some American sight-method primers. They had been left by an American exchange teacher, he said, and he found them very useful. 'But you know,' he added, 'I discovered that some children do better by the new way and others by the old. And so, according to the children's reaction, I use one or the other or a combination of the two, whichever is best for each child.' "

FRONTIERS

Lifetime Quest

SEARCH FOR PURPOSE, a new book by Arthur E. Morgan, is distinguished by two qualities which are uncommon enough by themselves, but, joined in a work of serious inquiry, make that work almost unique. First of all, Dr. Morgan is a man for whom deliberate ethical inquiry has been the predominating current of purpose in life—since his early youth, in fact; second, he is a man who seeks out the inconsistencies which seem to haunt nearly all cherished theories with the same enthusiasm that animates the search of other men for facts to support their theories. The result is a book which is hardly to be compared with other volumes on similar subjects, since it bears so strongly the stamp of the individuality of its author.

Search for Purpose is published by the Antioch Press, of Yellow Springs, Ohio. (One chapter in this book, concerned with Value, appeared in condensed form in MANAS for April 27, under the title, "Science and Value.")

Like some of Dr. Morgan's earlier writings, this book has an autobiographical quality which makes it considerably more than a treatise on ethics. It is a record of a lifetime of questioning, and some few answers that the author feels able to set down. Mostly, however, it is a spur to the reader to adopt the attitude which he has tried to practice throughout his life—an attitude of close examination of every phase of experience, and a testing of the adequacy of conventional beliefs.

We have for review three or four volumes on religion by Protestant laymen—two of them, interestingly enough, by scientists—which attempt to show how the Christian faith may be interpreted to provide a satisfactory philosophy of life for modern man—or, at least, for the writers of these books. Dr. Morgan's view of Christianity seems far more in touch with the realities of the present. He writes:

It is often said of Christianity, as of their own religions by the followers of other faiths, that its only fault is that it has not been generally applied. That, I believe, is not a sound opinion. There are vast and vital issues pressing on us today concerning which Christian teaching provides no direction.

For instance, there is the problem of population. Take the fundamental principle, all men are brothers.

Our fathers were the first to settle a nearly empty continent, and felt that the general interest justified them in pushing aside primitive people who did not use it intensively. Now, probably more than three hundred millions of our brothers in other lands, crowded in inadequate space, would eagerly welcome an opportunity to come here and share our abundant acres and our modern methods. Since birth rates where they come from are high, their places at home would soon be filled up with an equally dense population, as has been the case in the countries our forefathers left to come to America. Shall we let them come? Are the total values of life greater with our present average of fifty people to the square mile for the country as a whole and three to six hundred in our most populous states, and with space for breathing and freedom of motion, or is it our duty to our brothers to do unto them as we would have them in similar circumstances do to us, and adopt immigration policies that might result in our soon having a population of several times as many to the square mile, and in the dilution or submergence of our culture? Christian good will alone does not answer that question.

There are numerous issues which are—or should be—in the forefront of the world's thinking which are not dealt with or implied in Christian teaching, or in the teaching of most other great religions. What about eugenics, the scientific attitude, our responsibilities to other life than the human species? What about the disharmonies of religions, each holding that it is the one true faith by which men must be saved; religions which, while having much in common in morals and ethics, are exclusive of each other in their philosophies and theologies, and thus are sources of estrangement and antagonism among men?

The prevailing religious views of life are inadequate. Nor will liberal adaptations, while holding to the central theologies of the old creeds, serve our needs. The world requires new patterns for living, patterns growing in an atmosphere of full freedom from the compulsions of the past, along with concern for the significance of life.

The fact of the matter is, as Dr. Morgan points out, most Christians are Christians because their parents were Christians before them, and most Moslems Moslems, Hindus Hindus, for the same reason. Dr. Morgan recognized this as a young man, and resolved to free himself of the cultural conditionings which determine the faiths and beliefs of the great majority of men. This was the position he arrived at:

> In determining what to believe I would try to look at the beliefs in which I grew up in the same way in which I would look at the other beliefs in which other people had grown up. I would look at my own inner sense of assurance critically, from the outside, as I would look at the inner sense of assurance of a person of "alien" faith. I would look at its sources, the circumstances of its origin, and its characteristics. I would ask myself, not "How can I justify and strengthen the beliefs, attitudes and doctrines I have come by?" but "Are they the most reasonable beliefs?"
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> I do not want to hold any belief because it is perhaps true or probably true. If something is perhaps true I would think of it as a possibility; if it is probably true I would think of it as probability. If I have no reasonably conclusive evidence for or against something being true I prefer to say—and think—I do not know.

Dr. Morgan says "I don't know" in a number of places in this book and a critic might possibly remark that a man with so few certainties must find it difficult to get very much done. But the critic would be quite wrong. Accomplishment in life is far more the fruit of a mood, an attitude of mind, than it is of tightly held certainties. To live without certainties is to live in an atmosphere of suspended judgments, and this means that the mind remains open, eternally inquiring, without inherent inclination to accept or reject; the inclination is rather to *weigh.*

This is perhaps an appropriate place to take note of some of Dr. Morgan's achievements, which are various. He is first of all an educator, known to the world as the resuscitator of Antioch College, and the practical organizer of the Antioch Plan. Something of Dr. Morgan's untiring idealism has been felt by the thousands of young men and women who have gained and in some degree earned their education at Antioch College. He is also a leading flood control engineer and was the first Chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The underlying interest of his life, however, has been the study of the formation of human character. This concern led him into education, and it also directed his attention to the subtle influences of community life, and into the large field of rural sociology. For something like fifteen years, he has headed an organization called Community Service, Inc., a foundation devoted to the problems and values of the small community. The same interest caused him to write a full-length biography of Edward Bellamy, the great nineteenth-century social reformer, author of *Looking Backward,* and founder of the Nationalist Movement, and to compile a fascinating study of the literature of utopias—*Nowhere Was Somewhere.* Finally, a small volume, *The Long Road,* unfortunately out of print, should be mentioned as bearing the seed of Morgan's lifetime inspiration.

The influences exerted on Arthur Morgan during his boyhood were those which many readers will recognize as a part of their own youthful environment. There were those of staunchly orthodox faith whose personal lives seemed a vindication of their almost primitive beliefs; and there were also the freethinkers who read the scientists, the historians and the philosophers, and remained outside the fold of any religion. One might say that these influences have been commonplaces of the American scene for the past seventy-five years; they are interesting, here, for the reason that they brought to Arthur Morgan a feeling of crisis, and of necessary decision.

Nominally, the drifting or indifferent mind may confess to about the same inventory of ideas as the deliberately skeptical mind. There are probably thousands of people who could be persuaded to say, after reading this book, "Yes, that is about what I think." The point is, they have not really thought it, nor have their half-

shaped opinions and convictions become in any sense a mandate for action. In the case of Arthur Morgan, one finds the discipline of indecision on matters undecided, and a life of extraordinary commitment in those directions in which finalities are of very little assistance.

A large part of this book is given to review of the paradoxes which emerge to trouble any "systematic" or metaphysical interpretation of nature and man. If, for example, it be claimed that some "larger purpose" pervades the natural world, endless illustrations can be provided to show how "nature" is continually frustrating its own ends. It becomes a question whether we are really well enough informed to speak of the ends of nature with any familiarity. On this point, Dr. Morgan gives as one possibility the view of Mrs. Morgan, to whom "the living world, so small in the universe, seems to be like a research laboratory for the development of 'soul material'." Perhaps, the suggestion is, a larger scheme of meaning is working out behind the visible scene, with the trials and failures of human kind but minor incidents in a process of development that is by no means measured according to the more obvious, immediate ends of human existence: "Perhaps a less than omniscient deity by exploration and research is seeking a good way of life. Perhaps the frustrations, defeats and evils men experience are but necessary items in that process."

Search for Purpose, then, has the peculiar virtue of being a book without "authority," save for its capacity to encourage the reader to undertake a similar pilgrimage