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THE HUMAN SITUATION

ANIMALS have no problems. They pursue food, propagate their species, obey their instincts, vanquish or are devoured by their enemies—but they have no problems. We can't say much about how it feels to be an animal, for the reason that speaking of how it feels to *be* is a human capacity and not an animal capacity. Animal behavior, on the whole, seems to be an unreflective response to the environment, and men are animals to this extent; but men, in their capacity as men, are obliged to cope with problems.

A Problem, by dictionary definition, is "a perplexing question demanding settlement, especially when difficult or uncertain of solution." Why are men confronted by problems? There have been dozens of answers to this question, from Original Sin, to the unfinished state of modern scientific knowledge, but they are all arguable. If they were not arguable, we should have no problems, but a clear and unmistakable course to pursue.

Our problems, no doubt, are of two sorts. First, the problems inherent in the human situation to begin with; and, second, the problems which arise from our thinking and our theories about the initial problems.

From the disagreements and confusion which arise from attempted solutions of our problems, come periodic waves of disgust and revulsion which make men declare dramatic revolts against *all* theories of solution. They say that we must "go back to Nature"; or that we must obey the admonitions of our primal organism; or that words are traps which ensnare the intelligence with unmeaning abstractions. Wondrous slogans grow from these "naturalist" movements. "Consciousness does not exist" was the first principle of the Behaviorists. A Nazi leader was in the habit of saying, "When I hear the word culture I reach for my revolver." In the early days of the enthusiasm for semantics, a literate champion of this movement asserted that "Blah" is the meaning of all words which do not have concrete, observable referents.

These are the angry Procrustean solutions which would make an end to human problems by denying or abolishing the qualities in man which produce them. That they are also the qualities which make man man, is something that is overlooked. The duration of their neglect, however, is always short, since men do have these qualities, and the reform is obliged to acknowledge them by giving them new names and trying to direct their expression in controllable directions. By such means you get *Soviet* science, and you get *Christian* religion, and you learn to recognize the truth by knowing who says it instead of what it says.

There are other periodicities in the study of human problems. Throughout a long epoch the problems may be conceived and defined entirely as individual difficulties. During the Middle Ages, the official account of the human situation related to individual salvation. Nothing else was deemed worthy of questioning or was questioned. All the arrangements of the world were held to exhibit the grand focus or setting supplied by the Deity for the working out of the problem of salvation. The arrangements were not to be doubted or questioned.

When, finally, the questions that arose were so urgent that men sought new authorities to obtain answers, there was no stopping of a great revolution. With the revolution came a new approach to human problems. Now the central problem was no longer a problem of individuals, but of all men. The good of the individual would now be obtained by securing the good of *all*. The

logic of this was plain, for the abstract idea, The Individual, means all individuals, and the good of all individuals leads directly to the conception of universal justice. Accordingly, the new approach to the solving of human problems concentrated on devising systems of justice for all. And since the idea of "salvation" had become associated with intolerable social abuses, this idea played only a nominal part in the conception of what justice involves. In fact, it is difficult to see very much relation between the idea of salvation for the soul and a just distribution of the rights and other "goods" of this world, unless it be in the right of each individual to choose his own idea of salvation, should he want one.

The great enthusiasm of the eighteenth-century revolutions was for collective (political) arrangements which would establish the conditions of justice and freedom for the individual, and thus, if not solve all human problems, at least bring these problems within the range and competence of men to solve them for themselves.

So, for nearly two hundred years, we have been working at these collective arrangements, trying to improve them, trying to evolve more effective definitions of human problems so that we can set about solving them. One theory of improvement, since put into practice, was the idea that the collective arrangements of the eighteenth century were not collective enough. The State, it was held, should not only define and secure human rights; it should also pre-empt and then apportion property, holding it secure for all by taking it away from each. This experiment is still going on, with results for the individual regarded as very unsatisfactory by those who are not a part of the experiment. What the individuals who are a part of the experiment think remains obscure, since free individual expression is not one of the privileges or rights allowed by the managers of the experiment.

Just about now, as the result of the experience of the past two hundred years, the suspicion is dawning that perfect arrangements are not possible; or, at any rate, that an excessive zeal in designing ideal collective arrangements may be a factor in creating a situation increasingly oppressive to the individual. We hear cries of protest and a petulant rattling of the chains of the collective arrangements. There is growing horror at the universal menace in the "security measures" which have been adopted to preserve one set of collective arrangements against the aggressions of other groups. In the world of the arts and literature, there is much despair and wondering about the nature of human identity. There is, in short, a psychic sickness in modern society which is rapidly reaching epidemic proportions.

It is not difficult to see what is happening: a return to the problems of the individual and a new effort to define problems in individual terms. What this will mean for our collectivist arrangements, the world over, is, however, difficult to see.

The symptoms of this return to individualism in social thought are bewildering to the managers of our collective societies. One type of symptom of unrest they understand very well—the symptom which gives evidence of a preference by men for a different sort of collective system from the one which rules over them. The men who manifest these symptoms are called subversive characters and they are variously penalized and dealt with.

But now we have a new kind of symptom—a disturbance growing out of the feelings and expressions of people who have become basically suspicious of *any kind of collective arrangement.* These are people who have broken out of the context of belief in collective arrangements, and in the light of that context of belief, they seem quite mad. They are like people who have decided that the time has come to step off the edge of the earth; or, like people who wrap themselves up in white sheets and go on top of a hill to wait for the Second Coming. That is the way it seems, but it is not quite like that.

Within our experience or memory, there have been two views of social or collective arrangements. The first was that the arrangements were designed by God. This belief held the arrangements together for a long time—too long, in the opinion of the men who finally changed them. The second view, now current, is that the arrangements *are* God—that is, that they represent the highest good, and that it is impossible to imagine anything better. This must be the contemporary view, for how else can you explain the readiness of men to set loose against anyone who would want to change those arrangements a great cloud of intercontinental ballistic missiles which will kill hundreds of millions of people immediately and probably poison everyone else, including themselves, with lethal atmospheric pollution in a matter of days or weeks?

By comparison with this attitude, a readiness to step off the edge of the earth seems a small and exceedingly harmless delusion, while going up to the top of a hill in a white sheet might be regarded as a symbolic gesture of far more importance than some other summit meetings one hears about.

But the symptoms we have been talking about are by no means so eccentric or "radical" as these activities would be. The people who are suspicious of collective arrangements *per se* are people who are asking very simple questions. They want to know what is good for man, since they have become very sure that the collective arrangements we now have are *not* good for man. These people are taking what means they can find to announce their distrust and even their rejection of the arrangements we have.

There is one obvious conclusion from this development. It is that there is a delicate balance between individual good and collective good which must be maintained at any cost, for if it is not maintained, you get neither—neither individual good nor collective good. It is of course nonsense to speak of collective good without any attention to individual good. Good is realized by individuals, although it may be enjoyed in concert. Collective good is really an empty abstraction. What it means, when it means anything at all, is a *general condition* of individual good. It is a collective good when that condition exists for all.

Nor is there any reason to suppose that the conditions of good for all are a guarantee of the *good* for all individuals. The good of the individual, ultimately, is something that he creates for himself. He can and often does make a mess of his life under what some people believe are the best of conditions.

So, at this juncture of history, all signs point to the fact that we do not know, or have lost track of, if we ever did know, what is the good of the individual and how it is obtained.

It seems to be the lot of human beings to make discoveries of this sort just before some great battle is about to begin. It happens when *we don't have time!* Perhaps this is because the extremity of the situation has a tendency to wake us up. Perhaps this sort of discovery is the higher synthesis Hegel was talking about, that is supposed to be born from the struggle between thesis and antithesis. It is a terrible thing to have to consider that maybe all the shooting is irrelevant, that the forces are drawn up on the wrong battlefield, that if the war should continue, no one can win.

Yet the evidence is all around us—we have lost track of the essential human problems.

No extensive program of research is needed to make it clear that the delineation of essential human problems has been confused by revolutionary emotions. Passions nurtured by long centuries of oppression have had a large part in establishing the sort of problems which are said to require immediate and primary attention. An unrelenting anger, from Rousseau to Marx, has combined definitions of human need with feelings of righteous indignation, so that programs of action have been more devoted to the correction

of historical abuses than to searching inquiry into more fundamental aspects of the question. The conceptions of philosophers who sought a more symmetrical approach were twisted into justifications for revolution, as for example, the transformation of the Hegelian dialectic into Dialectical Materialism. It is not that these revolutions—or some of them—failed to cover themselves with glory as testaments to the human spirit. As a matter of fact, what we know of heroism within our own historical period is largely from the record of revolutionary action. Our classics of human expression often have to do with declarations of rights and independence, the ideal of human solidarity, the ultimate value of freedom and justice.

These are all authentic visions of the human situation, and clear accounts of certain aspects of human need, and the intuitive response they gain from the great masses of mankind are sufficient evidence that they touch the heart of the matter. And yet they have not been enough to shape a conception of human society that is *functional* in relation to human needs. The shortcomings of European revolutions were clearly stated by Mazzini more than a century ago. In a paper, "Europe: Its Condition and Prospects," published in the *Westminster Review* for April 2, 1852, Mazzini wrote:

> The great social idea now prevailing in Europe may be thus defined: the abolition of the proletariat; the emancipation of producers from the tyranny of capital concentrated in a small number of hands; re-division of production, or of the value arising from productions, in proportion to the work performed; the moral and intellectual education of the operative; voluntary association between workingmen substituted, gradually and peacefully, for individual labour paid at the will of the capitalist. This sums up all the reasonable aspirations of the present time. It is not a question of destroying, abolishing, or violently transferring wealth from one class to another; it is a question of extending the circle of consumers; of consequently augmenting production; of giving a larger share to producers; of opening a wide road to the operative for the acquisition of wealth and property; in short, of putting capital and the instruments of labour within reach of every man offering a guarantee of good-will, capacity, and morality. These ideas are just; and they are destined eventually to triumph; historically, the time is ripe for their realisation. To the emancipation of the *slave* has succeeded that of the serf; that of the serf must be followed by that of the *workman.* In the course of human progress the patriciate has undermined the despotic privilege of royalty; the bourgeoisie, the financial aristocracy, has undermined the privilege of birth; and now the people, the workers, will undermine the privilege of the proprietary and moneyed bourgeoisie; until society, founded upon labour, shall recognize no other privilege than that of virtuous intelligence, presiding, through the choice of the people enlightened by education, over the full development of its faculties and its social capabilities.

Mazzini's thought is distinguished by his capacity for evaluation and criticism. In the perspective of the century since it was written, the foregoing is an astonishingly accurate and prophetic account of the fruits of the revolution of the eighteenth century. But his awareness of the limitations of the revolution is equally acute. In the following passage, Mazzini founds his judgments mainly upon conditions in France:

> French Socialism has forcibly stirred men's minds, it has raised up a number of problems of detail of which there was no suspicion before, and of which the solution will have a certain importance in the future; it has—and this is a positive benefit—excited a searching European inquiry into the condition of the working classes; it has uncovered the hidden sores of the system founded upon the spirit of caste and monopoly; it has incited the bourgeoisie to a reaction so ferocious and absurd, that its condemnation, as a governing caste, is consequently assured at no distant period. But it has falsified and endangered the great social European idea, raised up innumerable obstacles to its progress, and aroused against it furious enemies, where it ought naturally to have found friends—in the small bourgeoisie; it has kept numbers of intelligent men from entertaining the urgent question of liberty; it has divided, broken up into fractions, the camp of democracy, for which, if unified, an ample field of conquests, already morally won, was assured. The French socialists deny this; but for every impartial mind the state into which France has fallen admits of no reply.

Now comes a kind of criticism for which there was little audience a century ago, yet today seems more pertinent than it was then:

> France is still profoundly materialist; not in the aspirations of her people whenever they are collectively manifested, but in the majority of her intellectual men, her writers, her statesmen, her political agitators. She is so almost in spite of herself, often without even knowing it, and believing herself to be the contrary. She talks of God without feeling Him; of Jesus while dressing Him up in the garb of Bentham; of immortality while confining it to the earth; of European solidarity while making Paris the brain of the world. The philosophy of the eighteenth century still possesses her. She has changed her phraseology, but the thing, the parent idea, remains. She is still commenting, under one disguise or another, on the dogma of *physical well-being*, the law of *happiness*, which the catechism of Volney drew from Bentham.
>
> Analysis has almost destroyed in France the conception of life. The faculty of the synthetical intuition, which alone gives us the power of embracing the idea of Life, in its unity and comprehending its law, has disappeared with the religious sentiment; giving place to a habit of dividing an intellectual question into fractions, and of fastening by turns upon one of its manifestations only; thus taking a part for the whole. . . . Each secondary end becomes for it [French intelligence] the great end to be attained; each remedy for a single malady, an universal panacea. . . . It has torn up the banner of the future, and each school, seizing upon one of the fragments, declares it to be the whole. Each word of the device, *liberty, equality, fraternity*, serves, separated from the other two, as the programme for a school. Each of the two great unalterable facts, the individual and society, is the soul of a sect, to the exclusion of the other. The individual, that is to say, liberty, is destroyed in the Utopia of St. Simon, in the Communism of Babeuf, and in that of their successors, by whatever name they call themselves. The social aim disappeared in Fourierism; it is openly denied by Proudhon. It would seem that it is not given to the French to understand that the *individual* and *society* are equally sacred and indestructible, and that it is the discovery of a method of reuniting and harmonising these two things which is the aim of every effort of the present time.

Why had Mazzini practically no audience? Why was his revolution, if anything, even less successful than the others so that he died a bitterly disappointed and despairing man?

The obvious comment is that the shortcomings of the French political movement were not of a sort that can be corrected by *political* means. Meanwhile, the preoccupation of reformers was with the manipulation of power. There was no real understanding of the individual, but only a gross measure of his wants in material terms. The partisanships of Mazzini's time grew into the political excesses of the present, with their uncompromising ferocity and blind determination to acquire *absolute* power.

The role of the individual, his good, and the relation of that good to society, which is and can be nothing more than the condition through which individual good may be realized, are still essentially mysterious and unknown.

That we have achieved no real progress in this direction, since the revolutions of the eighteenth century, is the admission which must be made, before there can be even a general beginning to an understanding of human problems.

REVIEW
SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY

A SERIES of articles in the *Christian Century*, by John Dillenberger, examines the relationships between science and theology. This is a subject pursued in these pages from time to time, but seldom with especially satisfactory results. It is as though the area of relations between science and religion were condemned to an inevitable obscurity. The *Christian Century* series, while not exactly lifting the fog, does help to show why clarifying discussion of the subject so seldom occurs.

The third and last of Mr. Dillenberger's articles *(Christian Century*, June 17) outlines several areas of difficulty. In one paragraph the writer speaks of conferences which seek reconciliation between science and religion by bringing together representatives from both camps. He does not find these conferences very fruitful, for the following reasons:

> . . . by and large the predominant mood and intellectual outlook of the sponsors and participants are those of a liberal religion which has lost most of its relationship to the historic classical tradition, and of a science which would like also to be religious. As a result the toughness of both the theological and the scientific tradition does not really come to the fore at those conferences. It is doubtful whether such discussions will substantially help either the church or the academic community.

Elsewhere Mr. Dillenberger is concerned with the terms of God's "entry" into history. This, of course, is the area where science and theology are in direct and manifest conflict, since history is a domain of science. What Mr. Dillenberger calls the "historic classical tradition" of Christianity concerns specific happenings on the historical scene, such as the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ, described by the writer as "God's unique action in history." In this area, science contests the validity of the Christian tradition. Regarding such difficulties, Mr. Dillenberger observes:

> While the older theologians who defined God's breaking into the order as the manifestation of another order were incorrect in defining the problem in the ways in which it had been presented to them, they nevertheless sensed that God's relation to a world is not to be defined by order and disorder, but by the manifestation of God's presence and mystery in the midst of a world described in various ways. In a world which has lost that sense of mystery needed in theology, it is all too tempting to accept the presence of mystery in areas where science is baffled by lack of knowledge. But such lack of knowledge is potentially more open to correction or completion than is the essential mystery of revelation. The latter is of another order. It should not be defined in terms of another order nor should it be defined without reference to that order.

This subject is plainly an easy victim of obscurantism. What Mr. Dillenberger seems to be saying is that it would be a great mistake for theologians to assume that they can occupy without fear territory which is still mysterious to science, for science may eventually turn *that* terra incognita into well-charted country, and what then becomes of the religious mystery?

Three kinds of "mysteries" seem to be involved in this discussion. First, there is the mystery which simple intellectual and scientific progress is capable of brushing aside. The circulation of the blood was once a mystery, but no longer. One could say, of course, that the heart is truly a miracle and a mystery on its own account, but this is another sort of mystery requiring attention at another level of investigation.

Our first sort of mystery, then, is the mystery which is removed when we are able to explain its visible elements in terms of cause and effect. This is the kind of mystery Mr. Dillenberger wants theologians to beware of as a resource for those who seek a place "in history" for the works of God.

Another sort of mystery might be said to lie in subtlety of conception. Refinements of thought may involve mystery, but not impenetrable mystery. Finally, there is the mystery which is

impenetrable because it offers no point of contact with rational deliberations. Of this mystery, skeptics are entitled to say that it is an intellectual fraud—or becomes an intellectual fraud when it is dressed up with the vocabulary of rational discourse, yet nowhere offers anything but an obstacle to rational understanding.

What sort of a mystery are we trying to understand, or assign a role to, when we consider the idea of the entry of "God" into history?

History is the region of finite experience. It is composed of events which are capable of definition.

"God," at the very least, implies the reality of the Infinite. So, in the situation proposed by theology in respect to God's entry into history, we have, in principle, a historic conjunction of the finite and the infinite. What sort of relations can there be between the finite and the infinite?

This question, it seems to us, cannot be answered, since it is a contradiction in terms. The infinite cannot have *relations.* There can be, perhaps, something that might be spoken of as a constant and eternal aspect within and pervading all finite things, as the ground or field within which all relationships exist. But this is an immanent, unchanging reality.

What, then, of the undeniable fact of sublime religious inspiration, through which men become aware of the idea of an unchanging reality, sometimes spoken of as God, but also intimated by terms less suggestive of limiting personification?

Here, it seems, is all we really know of "God" in history. The moment God becomes a busy "creator" or uniquely incarnated "Son," he is a fair object for scientific examination and analysis. Whatever operates in the theater of finite events must submit to the rules which govern the motions and actions occurring in the world.

Some of those rules may be extremely difficult to understand, but both theologians and scientists should stipulate that if they are rules, they can be understood. We can abide a mystery which is mysterious because it is unknowable in intellectual terms—because it is the undivided and omnipresent reality which supports our lives without suffering any limitation of being. But we cannot abide a mystery which moves in upon the finite world at the command of some men who call themselves theologians and who insist that we alternate between rationality and irrationality to suit the requirements of an event which is incomprehensible precisely because it is unique.

Mr. Dillenberger has an interesting paragraph on another sort of difficulty which the uniqueness of the Christian Event presents:

> In maintaining that the historical drama stands at the center of Christian understanding, it must not be forgotten that there may be other planets which have life in forms not dissimilar to ours. Such an opinion has a long history, and we must be open to it. Certainly God's creative relation to a cosmos which for all practical purposes borders in infinity is more extensive than the puny imagination of most Christians conceives. At the same time, it must be recognized that for the Christian the statement that God is related to the world follows from his conception of God as Creator. But it was precisely this which tempted scientists and theologians alike to stress the Creator rather than the Redeemer, and to return again to nature rather than to history for the clue to their understanding. And it is just as plausible to speak of God's relation to the history of other worlds as it is to speak of his relation to them as Creator. In the meantime, God's relation to our world may be no less or no more unique than his particular relation to the revealing history in Israel and in Jesus Christ.

The problem of the relation of the Deity to other planets does indeed have a long history. It was raised by the doctors of the Church when Galileo threatened the uniqueness of the awful drama of the Crucifixion by suggesting that there were other planets like the earth. Did Jesus, it was asked, commute from planet to planet, in order to accomplish the salvation of *their* inhabitants, too? The Church did not really care much about the facts of astronomy. What it

worried about was that this new Sampson of science was about to shake down the walls of the temple—he threatened the sacred drama by implying the possibility of others like it!

Christianity has always suffered threats to its uniqueness. Early apologists thought themselves very clever in proposing that the Devil arranged that pre-Christian pagan religions should anticipate elements of the Christian belief in order to shake the faith of true believers. The unfortunate Abbé Huc, first of the Christian travelers to Tibet, was unfrocked because he dared to point out curious similarities between the Christian and the Lamaist religions.

Mr. Dillenberger takes note of the trend "to stress the Creator rather than the Redeemer, and to return to nature rather than to history for the clue to their understanding." This is not remarkable. Creation can be thought of as an eternal, ceaseless process. Nature incessantly repeats herself. The mind can encompass these ideas. Every effort at understanding includes the attempt to reduce particulars to general ideas, to principles. But this stubborn mystery of a single "Divine Incarnation" will not submit to generalization. It sticks there in history as something that happened just once, to mock those who came before and to puzzle those who came after.

The Jews have their succession of Messiahs. The Hindus have their Avatars. The Buddhists believe in a great succession of Buddhas—men who, at cyclic intervals, embody a vision of the potentialities of all men to triumph over suffering and illusion. With unreciprocated generosity, the Moslems honor Moses as a prophet who preceded Mohammed.

What might science contribute to this question? So far, the work of scientists has been almost entirely iconoclastic in relation to religion, save for the truly pantheistic mood which seems to pervade the reflections of many of their number. "It is a gain for theology," says Mr. Dillenberger "that many scientists have abandoned at least the doctrinaire and reductionist conceptions of life and the universe which once threatened the significance of theology and the arts." But is the gain really one for theology, or is it for non-specialized human beings, who are beginning to sense the opportunity for independent, intuitive and rational religion in a culture but lately released from the constraint to choose between irrational dogma and irrational materialism?

COMMENTARY
TWO KINDS OF FILTERS

ANYONE who has any kind of business relations with electronic technology is bound to acquire a healthy respect for the men Who Know How. Every year, or maybe every six months, they do it better, or they do something new.

Their achievements are far more than mere gadgetry. A visit to a hi-fi shop where they have the latest equipment can be practically a "spiritual" illumination, so far as modern electronic engineering is concerned.

So you are beguiled, you buy a set, and maybe a new television, too, with all of this week's perfections built into it. And you take it home and you look and listen.

Practically all the irrelevant noise has been filtered out. You see and hear just what the makers of programs want you to see and hear. There it is, standing in your living room, this monster of technical perfection—a twentieth-century *robot* with the rules of its obedience to your wish delicately embossed in tasteful typographic characters on a lot of little dials.

It's going to be hard not to believe in this machine. So you turn it on and wait. You get sound, you get pictures—you get a whole cathedral full of effects. The effects are great, but what about the *communication?*

A lot of the time, the communication is almost good—or, like the deacon's egg, good in spots. After a while, however, you begin to realize that some other kind of filter is at work. Intellectually and æsthetically, there is a process which corresponds to the process of modern technology, except that it works in reverse. It filters the goodness *out.* It filters it out, that is, if there was any good there in the first place. Some writers, of course, understand the process so well that they build the corruption into the original work, so that the filtering is hardly necessary.

In this week's Frontiers, responsibility for the filtering-out process is laid to the acquisitive motive which pervades all the activities of our commercial society. When you read people like Stanley Kauffman, Raymond Williams, and William Styron on this subject, you begin to understand how complex as well as how thorough the process is. There is, however, one "principle" which explains a great deal very simply. It is that the people who cause programs to be put on are people whose "interest is not intrinsic." They are not interested in the performance itself, but in its effect as an advertisement. Ultimately, the programs say, "Buy our goods." Everything else is just decoration, incidental, irrelevant, so far as the sponsor is concerned.

Authentic expression of the arts on this basis is absolutely impossible. The basis itself is one of betrayal and prostitution. Excusing the basis for the reason that, occasionally, something inherently beautiful happens to be presented by the producers of mass entertainment, is like excusing nuclear war diplomacy because the diplomats meet for their deliberations in a building that is an architectural triumph; or like admiring call girls because they speak good English and are tastefully clothed.

The situation is seriously confused by the fact that a lot of hard-working, decent people make their living by means of activities which depend upon this method of winning distribution. The craftsmen, the mechanics, the designers, the technicians—all the skilled workers are busy creating masterpieces of modern manufacturing which are sold by these means. For the few who see what is happening, it gets down to a point of desperation. Two comments (cited in MANAS in other connections) are pertinent here.

Speaking of the penetration of commercialism to the modern college, Bernard Rosenberg wrote in *Liberation* for last April:

> Since the corruption is so universal, we are close to the point where all that matters is which form of

> corruption pays the most—and to hell with the psychic income.

And David Riesman, writing of the general indifference to national policy, said in the May issue of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists:*

> It seems to me that one of our real dangers today is that the apathy of the public, its lack of response, tempts people to despairing courses of action which are eventually self-defeating.

Here, in these quotations, we have the substance of the really immediate problems of our culture. There is the problem of the despairing action of the man who gives up and hires out to the best-paying corruption; and there is the problem of the younger people who sense the indecency and uselessness of it all and join the "beat" generation.

A situation like this one makes it possible to understand the Children's Crusade—a medieval event which, in many respects, seems to have been the psychological opposite number of the Beat Generation.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE STORY OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

MANAS has often referred to St. John's College as an example of what can be achieved in the Higher Learning when "great books" discussion forms a grounding in the basic disciplines of the liberal arts and the tutorial method. Now, in an article by Loren B. Pope in the New York *Times* for May 17, we encounter a most interesting, comprehensive—if condensed—account of the progress of the St. John's ideal.

St. John's College is the third oldest college in the United States, and has been threatened with extinction several times since its founding as "King William's School" in 1696. Its policies varied through the years, but by the mid-thirties of this century St. John's had come "the American way" to the extent that emphasis upon athletics had resulted in its loss of standing as an accredited institution. Looking for a new administration, the board of governors found Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, both of the University of Chicago. Barr and Buchanan, like Hutchins, were all for revolution, and St. John's now provided its field.

The new administration installed one required four-year program with no electives for all students—study of one hundred of the "great books" of Western thought. The new heads held that each student should learn *how* to be really "elective"—in his own mind—and that freedom for discussion and the development of individual points of view are much more important than a wide choice of departments, vocational subjects, etc.

The present school year marks the twenty-first for this program. A few "great books" have been eliminated and some added, but the essential purpose of the institution is unchanged. On May 22, President Eisenhower dedicated a new building to house the increase of students, attracted, apparently, by St. John's declared intention to:

> 1. Pass on knowledge of the Western tradition.
>
> 2. Develop and "free" the mind under the discipline and enlightenment of this knowledge so it can be used as a tool of reason rather than prejudice.
>
> 3. Develop understandings or a philosophy of life by persistent questioning and discussion of the basic problems that face all men at all times.

The students spend a lot of time at their learning: a twenty-five-hour-a-week schedule in comparison to the usual twelve to fifteen hours. Mr. Pope relates:

> St. John's claims to be still alone in its devotion purely to liberal arts, with no concessions to vocational preparation. St. John's is also unique in that it requires its faculty of thirty-eight tutors, as all are called, to be as liberally educated as its students. No matter what his specialty, every tutor must sooner or later learn and teach everything—languages, music, sciences and "the books" seminars.
>
> This produces what Dr. Richard D. Weigle, who became president in 1949, calls "a community of scholarship."
>
> At the end of each semester each student gets an oral examination from a meeting of his seminar leaders who question him for a half-hour to find out how well he has been thinking about the things he has been exposed to. A few days later the student has another brief session with his instructors in which they diagnose, evaluate and prescribe his work.
>
> Annual essays and comprehensive oral examinations at the end of the sophomore and start of the senior years are required, and each senior does a final thesis on a subject of his choice, which he must defend against questioning from faculty, students or townspeople, in a public oral examination in May. Students say that after the first oral exam they actually look forward to them.

It goes without saying that St. John's easily regained its status as an "accredited" institution. Much more important, it is serving, unofficially, as a "pilot" program for interested colleges of liberal arts throughout the country. The vast debts of St. John's have been erased as enthusiastic well-wishers have contributed and as enrollment has

stabilized at whatever population the campus can accommodate. An endowment of five million has accumulated in the last ten years, and it now seems plain that this is one instance in which wealth is not going to ruin anyone, for the professors and administrators of St. John's, almost to a man, wouldn't exchange what they are doing for anything else.

Today there are over two hundred applications for the one hundred and ten places available in the Fall Freshman class. Many will be turned away, as the administrators feel that the college can handle no more than three hundred students in its "community of learning," simply because of the unwieldiness of numbers.

One hopes that virtual replicas of St. John's will gradually come into being throughout the United States, either as new institutions endowed by such benevolent organizations as the Ford Foundation or as developments within existing Liberal Arts or Humanities divisions in larger universities. To whatever extent this spread of the St. John's idea is realized, much of the credit will be due to its graduates, who are among the school's most effective champions.

It must be easy enough to misunderstand both the intent and the accomplishments of a college like St. John's, for a number of critics—including educators and especially including university administrators—have been doing so publicly for years. "Cloistered," "medieval," "not integrated socially," are some of the charges. As was the case during Robert Hutchins' administration at the University of Chicago, the teachers of St. John's have been accused of practicing indoctrination on their students—causing them to believe in an intellectual elite, and encouraging scorn for "practical" learning. A bit un-American, too, this insistence upon a single prescribed course for all students!

Well, the real point of the education advocated by men like Hutchins, Meiklejohn, Barr and Buchanan is that the democratic form will work successfully only when enough of the citizenry is enlightened concerning the principles upon which democracy is based. And behind principles are the ideas of value which principles are meant to embody. Ideas cannot be taught. What the educator can do, however, is help to create an atmosphere in which ideas are seen to be important. When the student begins to have ideas of his own, true education begins, and not before. So St. John's doesn't pretend to do more than help students to educate themselves—the best, the only lasting contribution, to a working democracy. And it is also the only sort of education which affords genuine protection against indoctrination.

FRONTIERS
TV Labyrinth

As a June *Encounter* article indicates, people are likely to be "Arguing about Television" for some time to come. While there is much about TV that is as old as commercialism itself, and while most network "art" is similarly hackneyed in its own dreadful way, certain considerations are emerging which present the problem to the public in a new context. For instance, as an article in one of the "family" magazines recently suggested, thousands of Americans are grappling with the problem of "breaking the TV habit."

In this discussion, the writer and his wife sounded like triumphant victors in an AA program. There was this difference, however, that after cutting down the TV watching to a small proportion of what it used to be—and consequently gaining a few friends and other interests—use of TV could be resumed on a rational basis. There are still those, of course, who firmly believe, after several years of TV use in the home, that the invention of video is the worst thing that ever happened to the world. And then, on the other side, are those who point with justification to the fact that excellent educational programs have been brought by TV to remote areas, proposing that the chief need is for improving quality and intention of TV production.

But there is a problem, beyond that of theory, involved in appeals for "better" TV. In a review in the June 8 *New Republic*, Stanley Kauffman explains why the early optimism in regard to diffusion of culture through TV has never been justified. Recalling that the best TV play he can remember was a very early production, he comments:

> There must be many still alive who remember the great days of television. Back in the early Fifties, hardly a Sunday went by without its article on the dramatic renaissance that was taking place in the land. The theory went that, if any medium demanded so much material, it must produce at least a small number of fine works. All we had to do was wait; among the TV oysters there were bound to be some pearls.
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> Those of us who doubted were called cynical or blind, but we thought there were two factors that made the theory dubious. First, commercial sponsorship afflicts the field doubly: editorially (references to Buchenwald's gas ovens are eliminated because the sponsor is the American Gas Association); and because its interest is not intrinsic, it is based on the effect of the plays as advertisements. (There are fewer serious dramatic programs on TV now not because there are fewer writers but because plays weren't selling cars and cigarettes.)

The *Encounter* article, by Raymond Williams, provides a thoroughgoing sort of discussion of the recent British research report, *Television and the Child.* Mr. Williams thinks that the report is excellently constructed and filled with valuable information, but he points out that the TV networks themselves have taken note of only such portions of the report "as would allow them plausibly to continue on their present course." His further comments are illuminating:

> The authors of this report deserve our respect and thanks; they have been careful, responsible, and humane. I am not competent to assess their methods, but I regret that they use at times, the vocabulary of a prostituted sociology. An effect is an "impact," and an audience becomes a "target," etc. This is the irresponsible, fundamentally aggressive pattern of a sociology influenced by dominative theories of communication, in particular that used by advertising. It could be set down as conventional usage if the authors did not also (in their recommendations to producers) suggest consultation on, among other things, "whatever emotional responses he wishes to evoke." This is orthodox, but damnable. Calculation of effect ("impact") is, at worst, consciously manipulative. The emotional responses of an audience are that audience's business, the producer offers what he must, and responds to the response. The idea of research aiding the evoking of particular emotions would surely, on reflection, be repugnant to these authors. Yet I note that one of the authors is described on the jacket as "now doing motivational research for the British Market Research Bureau, Ltd.," the subsidiary of an advertising agency.

The point here seems to be that the motivations of an acquisitive society and the goal of steadily improving TV programs are in opposition. For this reason, we suppose, Mr. Williams advocates some sort of public or state control—which would certainly create its own problems, but might help to clarify such questions as what is cultural value, what is propaganda, what the public actually wants, etc.

William Styron has a long letter in the *New Republic* (April 6) which seems to us to go to the heart of the matter, especially concerning the relationship between TV, art and the artist. Mr. Styron sold his short novel, *The Long March,* to CBS for production on "Playhouse 90," and lived to regret it. As Styron says, he has little justification for complaint from one standpoint, since he happily took the money and agreed that some rewriting could be done. He got what he agreed to, especially in relation to his descriptions of the military in general and the Marine Corps in particular. The total result was far more depressing than he had realized it could be. Whose fault was this? Apart from his own blame, Mr. Styron exonerates any single source of influence:

> The producer himself is an intelligent, decent, well-intentioned man, with many worthwhile things in television to his credit; honestly caring for my story as much as he did, it is difficult to believe that it was any such simple matter as a final lapse of taste on his part which caused the disaster.
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> But then who or what was the real culprit? The sponsors? The network watchdogs? Military censors? A combination of the three? I do not know. Nor do I know whether the downright badness of the script, with its military yea-saying, made approval by authority a foregone conclusion, nor whether a perfectly adequate script became perverted as it went through the labyrinths of sponsor approval and then through the Pentagon mill: either way, what happened to the story in its transformation from an artistic insight to a shoddy lie makes me realize that in the instance of *The Long March* something more dangerous was in operation than a mere failure of talent. Someone, somewhere along the line, messed it up because someone was afraid. . . . In the end the real culprit in television is not *just* sponsor approval or official censorship, but an ignorant fear of the truth which permeates all other aspects of our society too, and which poisons art at its roots. It is almost as ignoble a censorship as censorship itself.