

ON BEING HUMAN

THERE may be people who feel no doubts about themselves, and who are content to remain exactly as they are, but if such people exist, and if their attitude of knowing what they are about and where they are going is stable and confirmed, and not a transient complacency, then it seems likely that either they are deprived human beings, cut off from the deeps of psychological experience, or they are some kind of gods masquerading in human form.

Various lines of thought lead to this conclusion. For one thing, the men who are honored for having reached to practical wisdom in human affairs seem to have begun by achieving an almost studied *uncertainty*. For Western man, the classical instance of this is Socrates, whom the oracle at Delphi declared to be the wisest man in all Athens. Yet Socrates, alone among the sophisticated Athenians, regarded himself as a woefully ignorant man. When he heard what the oracle had said about him, he decided that this estimate of himself could only mean that he was at least free from the universal tendency to self-deception, and this, it appeared, was the start of wisdom.

Lao-tse made similar reflections. In the final fragment of the *Tao Te King*, he declares:

Alas! the barrenness of the age has not yet reached its limit.

All men are radiant with happiness, as if enjoying a great feast, as if mounted on a tower in spring. I alone am still, and give as yet no sign of joy. I am like an infant which has not yet smiled, forlorn as one who has nowhere to lay his head. Other men have plenty, while I alone seem to have lost all. I am a man foolish in heart, dull and confused. Other men seem full of light; I alone seem to be in darkness. Other men are alert; I alone am listless. I am unsettled as the ocean, drifting as though I had no stopping-place. All men have their usefulness; I alone am stupid and clownish. Lonely

though I am and unlike other men, yet I revere the Foster-Mother, Tao.

There is a difference, however, between the uncertainty of a Socrates or of a Lao-tse, and our uncertainty. The mellow irony in Socrates makes you think he is holding something back—that underneath this fine profession of ignorance he knows something he won't or can't tell. And Lao-tse—well, Lao-tse may be alienated from worldly certainties, but he is somehow able to lean back upon the ocean of Life. The Foster-Mother, Tao, is his comforter. So we find it hard to *believe* what he says about himself.

The trouble with those men is that they aren't like us—they don't have our problems and responsibilities. Even Thoreau, to take an example from very nearly modern times, seems separated from us by his curious unrelatedness to the affairs which engrossed other men. Thoreau didn't really *do* anything. He avoided the "rat-race" entirely, so you can't take *him* as a model.

This, you could say, is a typical reaction to the idea of looking for help in the example of wise men of the past—typical, that is, the first time around.

But we still have our problems. We still feel the existential pain which comes from wondering why there is such an enormous gap between our vague intuitions about the dignity of human life, and how to realize it, and our negligible performance.

There are two main sources of disenchantment for human beings, just as there are two main sources of inspiration and encouragement—ourselves and our culture. Cultures, like human beings, have their upward-and-onward cycles and their periods of depression and defeat. Men tend to be lifted out of themselves during an age of progress, or apparent

progress. Then the historical situation seems far more important than the existential situation. The march of events takes command of human life and dictates the challenges and the responses. In such an age, we look askance at unbelievers like Thoreau. Can't he *see* all these things which need to be done?

But when the times change, when circumstances become forbidding and narrow the gates to the future, the springs of cultural inspiration begin to dry up. We are no longer able to feel the impetus of drives which moved our ancestors, and we wonder whether what they felt was not some kind of delusion, since, however positive their emotion, and however constructive their intentions, the sterile present is the result of what they did. So we ask the question: Do *historical* achievements really exhaust the potentiality of human beings? What about the life of a single individual, considered apart from his times? Is something important being made there, regardless of the historical fruit of what he does?

This kind of questioning, when it becomes serious, brings moments of dread. For it requires a consideration of matters which have been tabled for generations, or left in the inadequate care of clichés and commonplaces. What has happened to precipitate such inquiries for us is the death or disappearance of the new god, Posterity. It was the vision of serving Posterity which has made self-questioning unnecessary since the eighteenth century. Why bother with morbid imaginings about ourselves when there is so much work to do? Religious neuroticism of that sort was for a static world which was going no place, and for men who wanted to go no place except Heaven—a vain and humanly useless intention. But when historical fulfillment loses its promise, then *who are we?* And the question of what we are working for needs answering all over again, since the answers we have accepted in the past are rapidly losing their power to convince.

So we return for a second time around with men like Socrates, Lao-tse, and Henry David

Thoreau. Their thoughts are like our own in the declaration of uncertainty, but they are unlike us in their calm and measured acceptance of it. They did not seem to fear as we do the dark in which they lived. From this we can conclude one of two possibilities. Either their darkness was not of the same threatening sort as ours, or they did not ever come to grips with the personal need for achievement that overwhelms us with disappointment and desperation when it is not fulfilled.

This comparison often persuades the perplexed men of our time to abandon any questioning of the Philosophers, leaving them no alternative but a return to further attempts at historical self-realization. Even if they can find little to do as "builders" for posterity, there is a great challenge in what may be called "salvage" activities. A man can forget his own self-doubts in healing the sick and feeding the hungry. This is a kind of "holding action" against the menace of the future. But even here there are psychological problems. The sick, it turns out, are often more sick in mind than in body. And the sickness of mind, on the gross scale by which such things are measured in a mass society, shows an unmistakable relation to the new questions about meaning. When these questions are not grappled with as philosophical questions, they turn into dead-ends of motivation, and then the restless energies of men who ought to be building something, but cannot see what to do, are poured into self-destructive activities. Gradually, by these obscure processes of frustration, the whole society becomes sick.

An observer of these developments might propose that, in such a period of history, there is a plain conspiracy of "things" to turn a man's thoughts inward and make him question himself. But whether or not there is a moral law which operates in this fashion, it is true that it has become increasingly difficult for anyone to obtain full human satisfaction out of labors in behalf of "posterity." The very historical processes, which

once held such promise, seem themselves to have turned into mechanisms of betrayal. When, despite their limitations, these processes are *made* to work by a ruthless compulsion, they do not work for good, and when we turn away from them in disgust, the decay we fear takes over with furious activity.

Before going back to the Philosophers a third time, let us examine more closely the historical or material progress we have so much admired. This having been the only kind of progress we admitted to be real, we gave it all our devotion. With a fervor once reserved for spiritual or religious undertakings, we announced that there could be *no limit* to the goodness of the world we would bring into being by our wonderful techniques of discovery and application of what we find out. While we proposed finite examples of the blessings that were to come—hunger, everywhere, would disappear; disease would be forgotten; poverty would be replaced by comfort and plenty—the principle we heralded was one of infinitude—an endless piling up of all the decencies and then the goodies that anyone might imagine. That's what we could and would do.

The production line for this material Utopia didn't ever break down, but we found ourselves making horrors as well as goodies, and with the same incredible efficiency. We learned that the economists, whom we didn't quite believe, were right when they said that the sum total of human desires is *insatiable*, and that there is no natural tapering-off point for the appetites of modern man. And we found that the idea of material advance without limit meant, in practical terms, the buying of more goods without limit, lest a sloth in consumption cause a stop in production, making the whole vast mechanism of Progress lose its accelerating rhythm and go out of control on a down-hill grade.

The conclusion that we are leading up to has some subtlety. It is that the Philosophers, who were never concerned with the fruits of a hypothetical "infinite" progress, but sought

understanding of "the infinite" in another quarter, had no infinite vacuum to fill in their own lives when the system of material existence or historical progress in which they participated showed signs of breaking down. Never having been True Believers in the total fulfillments of the external world, and being satisfied with the most finite of satisfactions in this department of their lives, they could hardly be upset by economic or historical dislocations.

If you tried to adopt their standards and to describe their relationships with life, you might say that they accepted the finite world in its own terms, on a finite basis, and sought the infinite with a patience appropriate to this paradoxical quest, and in an area where there was at least some possibility of its being found.

But what a terrible switch it is to ask a man of the modern world to interest himself in the example of Socrates! By any current and going standard of the good life, Socrates was only playing around. He is said to have been a stone mason, but this is only a legend, a superficial gesture in the direction of sound citizenship and productive respectability. The guide books on Athens never say anything about any walls or fireplaces he installed. Mostly he hung around on street-corners talking to youngsters who might better have been at work—rich kids with nothing to do.

If anything, Thoreau was worse. When he worked, he worked as a common laborer. He seemed to have no hunger to leave some tangible mark in the world.

This is not quite the same as arguing that the philosophers were impractical men and dreamers. Even if we accept the fact that they were valuable citizens because of their profound thoughts and their legacy of principle to subsequent generations, there is still the problem of how to *identify* with them. About all you can say, in a spirit of helpfulness, is that these men became preoccupied with the question of meaning before their careers in the world were launched, and so

they could never become seriously involved in anything else. They did what to them seemed important, and let the rest go. They can hardly be criticized for this, although their lack of interest in practical achievement makes them difficult for us to understand.

It is of interest to note, in passing, that the religious tradition of India gives direct attention to this problem. In the third discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Krishna, the spiritual teacher, explains to Arjuna, his disciple, that while the wholly wise man "has no selfish interest in action," and is free of any interest "either in that which is done or that which is not done," he will nonetheless live out his life as an example to others. The good of mankind calls for a full performance of duty, "for whatever is practiced by the most excellent of men, that is also practiced by others. The world follows whatever example they set." Krishna, as both man and god, uses himself as an example:

There is nothing, O son of Pritha, in the three regions of the universe which it is necessary for me to perform, nor anything possible for me to obtain which I have not obtained; and yet I am constantly in action. If I were not indefatigable in action, all men would presently follow my example. . . . as the ignorant perform the duties of life from the hope of reward, so the wise man, from the wish to bring the world to duty and benefit mankind, should perform his actions without motives of interest. He should not create confusion in the understandings of the ignorant, who are inclined to outward works, but by being himself engaged in action should cause them to act also.

Perhaps Thoreau could be defended for his neglect of "outward works" on the ground that his contemporaries, far from needing encouragement in doing this sort of "duty," were already too much involved in the spurious religion of material acquisition and personal enrichment, so that his refusal to take a place beside his industrious brethren was itself a gesture of instruction to his time. In any event, if we are going to look to Thoreau in order to learn from him, it is probably advisable to suspend criticism until we understand him better.

Turning back to ourselves, what are some of the forms of the frustration that is overtaking modern man? Well, take for example an industrialist who happens to be a man who is disinclined to regard other men as means to his ends. He would like the people who work in his plant to have some kind of individual fulfillment in their lives. But this, he finds out, is extremely difficult to accomplish. He knows, let us say, that no individual can "arrange" any sort of self-realization for others, yet common sense tells him that some environments are better than others for this purpose. He does what he can, perhaps suffering the bitter taste of rejected paternalism, but basically he finds out that the departmentalized responsibilities of the division of labor on a modern assembly line in a plant, say, employing three thousand people, present a situation that is inherently alien to the kind of participation he would like to make possible. The grain of the culture is against him in this and in other ways. The psychology of collective bargaining contributes little or nothing to a mood of cooperative achievement and fulfillment, and while this obstacle can be overcome in small organizations, the impersonal relationships of large industrial operations are almost always managed by a delicate balance of the partisan ends of organized groups. Most obvious of all the degradations of modern "progress," however, are the devices of vulgarization and deception that have crept into the techniques of mass distribution. The media of mass communication have become mere accessories of the economic processes of modern life. They have no independent validity, no hope of survival except in this subordinate function. They are markets in fact, and in name to their proprietors. There is nothing wrong, of course, in having market places. People need goods and they need to buy services. What is wrong is the presence that the market is also a place that enriches man's higher life. What is wrong is the displacement by these functions of anything that resembles true cultural activity, and the dull betrayal of millions of people

who are made unable to distinguish between a marketing process by which they are sold something and the act of learning something important that is useful to them as human beings. Meanwhile, all these monstrous adulterations and substitutions are justified practically and ideologically in the name of progress and freedom.

What amounts to the *coup de grace* in this *denouement* is the courtship of the harlot of an insane nuclear arms race, who is made up to look like a respectable girl by the apparently rational vocabulary supplied by a scientific elite. The theologians of the past violated the integrity of the human mind by pretending to step down the awful mystery of Deity to the folksy level of a god that could be prayed to, and who might be prevailed upon to rearrange the cosmos and its divine order whenever there was need to accommodate the special interests of some true believer. But now the practical world is haunted by the "unthinkables" of nuclear war, and another group of manipulators of symbols is attempting to make us feel reasonably comfortable about the future, not in the next world, but in this one. How long we shall be able to survive on this diet of rationalized insanities is a serious question.

For any person with even a small amount of perspective on the modern world and the way it is going, the upshot is that we are not creating any kind of a good life in the present or for any conceivable future, that the historical fulfillment of human purpose is, plainly, a fraudulent hope at least, in the way that we have been going at it—and that any "social" formula offered to us as a program for total human good is at best misleading, at worst, a deceptive exploitation of man's highest aspirations. So, even if this is an exaggeration of the articulated distrust of the direction of our present civilization, and of its until recently unquestioned assumptions, there is not much doubt about the fact that many individuals are looking at themselves rather carefully, to see what other sort of "good life" remains possible.

There are several aspects to this consideration. An obvious one concerns the more or less fragmentary character of a single existence in any period of history. If a man is to be a "whole" all by himself, or, if this is impossible, to have some element of wholeness as a part of his inner experience, how shall he conceive his own being? Is there an end for one individual that has meaning? What meaning has "meaning" in this context?

Reflections along these lines have obviously been going on for quite a while, with their fruit appearing in the expressed longings of people for some kind of "creative" activity. This is at least individual; creative work can be begun, worked on, and completed by a single person, and often has a value which is independent of the cash nexus. The question, now, is whether a life can be viewed in the same way.

The question has deep religious implications. A whole life does not get its integrity from the outside, but from within. This means that the crutches of the environment, with its familiar sources of status and reassurance, are no longer available. One judges oneself by subjective, intuitive standards. It may suddenly become evident to an individual that he has been treating whole sectors of his acquaintances as means rather than ends—he has not seen them as human beings with hopes, fears, and longings, like himself. He begins to see that in manipulating them for his purposes he has been dishonoring himself. Now he must live with the continual chagrin of finding himself out. The pain does not go away unless and until he changes.

But he wants to be *sure* about these things, and his only monitor is the flail of conscience. There are now all those terrible empty spaces in his life—spaces no longer filled up by the illusion that he is making or contributing to "progress." And now he may go back to Socrates, to Lao-tse, and to Thoreau, or to some other mentor of his choice, for the third and last time. These men, he finds, have asked his questions and thought his

thoughts. From them he may begin to get hints of how to learn from himself to make his disappointments finite, and therefore bearable. It was the terrible void in that region of his life where his old idea of the Infinite used to be, that he could not tolerate, that was threatening his sanity. But now he knows that his mistake was not in seeking the infinite, and in failing to find it, but in looking for it in the wrong place and *expecting* to find it. He is slowly reaching to the basic position of Socrates at the beginning of his life as a philosopher—when he stopped looking in the wrong places for certainty and security, when he started living as a whole man, not dependent upon others or the opinions of others, but determined to find out the truth in himself, even if it killed him, as it finally did.

We should take note of the fact that the life—and death—of Socrates had a far-reaching social consequence. The story of Socrates, of his celebrated "ignorance," of his blithe unconcern with trivial affairs, and of his determination to keep open matters which cannot be settled with any certainty—this story has made countless men and even governments honor, not the truth, which remains uncertain, but the *search* for truth, which is the breath of life for human beings.

So this old question of what a single man can do has an answer. It has the answer that Socrates gave in the *Apology*, that Tolstoy gave in his *Christianity and Patriotism*, that Thoreau gave in his *Essay on Civil Disobedience*, and that has been given many times over by all the men who by some private means found the secret of wholeness in their lives.

REVIEW

INTELLECTUALIZING WAR

IT hardly needs pointing out, any more, that organized combat between men as a thing of high passion belongs to the past. Though demagogues and heresy-hunters still beat the throbbing drums of emotional response to real or fancied threats, those who actually prepare for war now have to *think* as systematically as possible, but *feel* as little as they can, to keep their minds clear. Every conscript now needs to become a professional soldier—schooled in dispassion, impersonality and business-like calculation.

But there is another thing that has happened during the long historical process of intellectualizing war. Thinking *about* war may lead to reasoned rejection, and at least 99 per cent of modern novelists as well as serious writers have reached this stage. This is also true of the scientists who are primarily intellectuals, but it is not true of those scientists who are primarily technicians. Just as there is no manifestation of conscience in the man ruled by passion, so is there no manifestation of conscience in the man who has no concern with passion at all. Psychologist Carl Rogers, in his essay on the diminishing "Place of the Person" in contemporary society, mentions this distressing eventuality in a short paragraph:

It seems likely that behavioral scientists, holding their present attitudes, will be in the position of the German rocket scientists specializing in guided missiles. First they worked devotedly for Hitler to destroy Russia and the United States. Now, depending on who captured them, they work devotedly for Russia in the interest of destroying the United States, or devotedly for the United States in the interest of destroying Russia. If behavioral scientists are concerned solely with advancing their science, it seems most probable that they will serve the purpose of whatever individual or group has the power.

Now let us turn to what may be called the last days of passion in connection with war in the Western world. A recent review of Alistair Home's *The Price of Glory* (*Time*, Feb. 22)

devotes considerable attention to a renewed European interest in the bathos of World War I. The battle of Verdun was the most destructive battle of the first world war, but now, as we approach its fiftieth anniversary, the memory of this contest is beginning to generate sentiments similar to the "glamor" of recollections of our Civil War. World War I had its poets, fighting on both sides. Mr. Horne quotes Scott Fitzgerald on what happened to them:

This Western-front business couldn't be done again. You had to have a whole-souled sentimental equipment going back further than you could remember. You had to remember Christmas, and postcards of the Crown Prince and his fiancée, and little cafés in Valence and beer gardens in Unter den Linden, and weddings at the Mairie . . . and your grandfather's whiskers. . . . This was a love battle.

Such was the sentiment which did not see that the *machinery* of war had already taken over. The *Time* review begins with a searing paragraph of actual description of the battle:

Around the town, in an area not much larger than a small college campus, nearly half a million men died. Under the ceaseless shelling, whole companies sometimes disappeared without a trace. Even when the dead were found and buried it sometimes did little to combat the pervasive smell of rotting human flesh. "The shells disinter the bodies, then reinter them," a young French soldier wrote, "chop them to pieces, play with them as a cat plays with a mouse."

The battle came about largely through mischance. Initially the Germans did not intend to take Verdun. And the French could have abandoned it in the early stages without too great a strategic loss. But soon the possession of the small provincial town on the Meuse came to be a symbol of national resistance. As a result, the fighting crept bloodily on for ten months—from Feb. 21 until late December of 1916. When it was over, Germany had lost its last chance of winning the war. The French army and France itself, Horne argues, may not even today have recovered from Verdun.

The Nazis tried with some success to revive the emotional vindication of war, waving primitive, "mystical" passions like a battle flag, but they approached the actual fighting as scientists—

behavioral scientists, one might almost say, of the sort singled out by Carl Rogers. And the majority of other Germans felt very little—till later. Turnley Walker's *The Presence of Mine Enemies* contains one memorable passage concerning the thoughts of a German woman doctor, whose whole family had been caught in the holocaust:

She crouched forward, clutching herself, rocking, moaning, as the memories cut icily through her and became the dreadful, ice-cold rush of the familiar nightmare: her husband killed somewhere in the war . . . their one child killed in a bombing . . . somewhere . . .

Her beloved father, also a doctor and her ideal from the beginning of all things, was telling her, going on and on, trembling, his eyes filled with self-loathing as he spilled out to her the unbelievable horror of the experimental work into which he had been led by slow degrees, her beloved father spilling on and on, a weirdly uncontrollable hysteria, although she shrieked at him to stop and held her ears so hard her whole head throbbed . . . *as now . . . as now . . .* and then when she could give back only her own loathing where he pled for pity and forgiveness, her father dead in another room from a bullet his own hand had directed, the first, no the second of the unending deaths . . . and no comfort for her in home and mother because after another screaming, shrieking, howling night of aerial bombardment, there was no home and no city and no mother, although she might have been one of the charred fragments which were plentiful . . . *and she worked and rocked in icy cold, as now, as now . . .* and then her work where the huge death was being manufactured, as close to it as possible, perhaps to find some meaning in it, or relief from any meaning, as a doctor . . . *a doctor . . .*

Significantly, a French author, Pierre-Henri Simon, would easily understand the plight of the German woman as well as she does, because it is also his own. In his novel, *Portrait of an Officer*, these passages appear:

The vast majority sinned only by omission, most of them knew nothing because they did not want to know; and those who did know could do nothing because it was too late and the mistake had already been made of handing the nation over to madmen. Once that had happened, the nation could do nothing

but obey, and it did so with a submissiveness which it is nevertheless far too simple to camouflage as virtue.

Has any nation in the last thirty years disobeyed in the name of morality? When the Italian airmen were dropping napalm bombs on the Abyssinians, who in Italy protested? Not even the priests. Alas, there were more priestly hands hastening to bless than consecrated lips crying the wrath of God! After a discreet attack of nausea, puritan America succeeded pretty well in digesting the Hiroshima bomb. Not to mention the communist intelligentsia who will approve any crime, if the infallibility of the Red Pope is in question.

And what of the future? *Portrait of an Officer* continues:

"You see, Larsan, though the character of a nation is no doubt a factor in its political behaviour, it is of less importance than its ideas, less decisive than the metaphysics on which its actions are based. In the last analysis, the problem is to discover where you place the absolute: if it is in a spiritual God there is a law of God and an order of the world; if it is in the conscience of man, compassion, love and human justice can exist; but, if it lies in some historical creation, in some exclusive entity erected into an idol, whether it be a nation, a race, a class, a party or even a religion, there's no hope of anything but slavery and brutality. It's humanity that's sick today, Larsan; we're submerged in a vast heresy, and we're all submerged in it; we may be more or less guilty, but there are no innocents any more."

"That's perfectly true; there are no innocents. I can't tell you with what appalling clarity that has become evident to me. Shall I admit to you that, in my more gloomy hours, I have even placed my hopes in the very people it was my job to fight—those Asians and Africans, who are old in the antiquity of their origins, but young in the newness of their thought which, awakened not so long ago by us, has a greater ardour and passion than our own? Well, both experience of the facts and contact with the people disappointed me there too. Because they are fighting to break their bonds and recover their pride, the countries who have rebelled against European rule have the benefit of prejudice on their side, as if they were refractory slaves or innocent children. In fact, they are infected with our heresies, as you call them, and have no antidotes. We have breathed our germs into the mouths of children .

COMMENTARY

THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

IN a press release dated March 1, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a 48-year-old Christian pacifist organization, disclosed that it has been deprived of tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The reasons given for this revocation of federal tax exemption, afforded to FOR supporters since 1926, were, in summary:

(1) The pursuit of peace, disarmament and the reconciliation of nations is not religious activity, but political.

(2) The Fellowship's objective—world peace—can be secured only by the passage of legislation; hence, FOR falls into a recently created category of "action organizations," excluded by IRS regulations from the right to tax-deductibility.

The practical effects of this decision are twofold. The first effect is that supporters of the FOR will be penalized by not being able to deduct the amount of their gifts to this organization from their taxable income. In many cases, this can only reduce the size of the gift, with the result that the FOR will have less money to carry on its activities.

The second effect, which may in the long run be the more important of the two, is an almost inevitable disillusionment on the part of Christian pacifists, who will now wonder what has happened to the United States, that its Government can find reason to declare that conscientious labors for world peace are disqualified as a religious activity.

Effective work for peace cannot help but have political consequences. The resolve of men to be free in mind and spirit has political consequences. The determination of the Pilgrim Fathers to practice the religion of which they were convinced had political consequences. The fundamental conceptions of the political order of the United States bear the imprint of religious and philosophical thinking on the part of men who brought this nation into being. One must suppose,

from the decision of the Internal Revenue Service, that this kind of thinking is now held to be unrelated to the public welfare, if not actually "undesirable," by the officials who shape the policy of this branch of the Treasury Department.

What has happened, of course, is the exercise of a kind of censorship by the Internal Revenue Service. The FOR has been told that its activities are political, not "religious," and that the Federal Government will now make it difficult, instead of—we will not say "easy"—less difficult, for the FOR to secure financial support. Possibly the IRS does not directly intend to exert pressure or to modify the activities of the FOR. It would hardly admit to a desire to edit the Gospels or to issue directives to the Christian conscience.

But since the survival of a non-profit, philanthropic institution in the United States, in these days of spiralling costs, is peculiarly burdensome without tax exempt status, the objective effect of this decision is barely distinguishable from effects which might arise from just such intentions. As Alfred Hassler, Executive Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, has said in a memorandum on the decision:

Is the American church willing to accept the dictum that it must stick to its worship and sacraments with no word of judgment for the state, nothing to say concerning political decisions that affirm or violate our most profound religious teachings? Americans deplored this impotent role of the church in other countries; yet this is clearly the meaning of the first reason given by IRS for its ruling: that these issues are outside the concern of religion; the Church shall be penalized if it dares to preach the Sermon on the Mount and its relevance in today's world! . . . Is this kind of activity to be harassed and frustrated? Is the religious and humanitarian conscience of the country to be declared less worthy of public support than the charity that begins and ends with baskets of food to the poor?

The ruling is apparently based upon a lengthy report on the FOR which, save for four brief quotations, FOR representatives have never been permitted to see, and no opportunity has been given to the FOR to reply to its contentions. An effort will be made by the FOR to have this ruling reversed. Aid is sought for this purpose, on the wholly justifiable ground that if the Christian community of the United States accepts this ruling without protest, "it will have abandoned the challenge to be a living and vital force in our present world, bringing its conscience to bear on issues that affect the destiny of mankind." The address of the FOR is Box 271, Nyack, N.Y.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves SPEAK TO US OF RELIGION

A CONCLUDING chapter of the above title in *Consider the Children* (Beacon, 1960), by Elizabeth Manwell and Sophia Fahs, continues the trend of the Unitarians to become more Emersonian with each decade—taking religion away from the traditional "fear of God" approach. In this case, Manwell and Fahs undertake to show why there is both danger and confusion in trying to teach children about God, principally because big abstractions seem essentially unreal to the child, thus preventing later on the kind of philosophical thinking necessary to religious understanding. We quote:

The ability to express one's religion in words is the fruit of maturity rather than a gift which can be added to a young child's thoughts.

Most religiously minded parents and teachers, however think that very young children should be told the one most inclusive and all important idea (usually contained in a religious philosophy of life): namely, the idea of God. This procedure is advocated, even though the idea has to be simplified and sometimes even changed from a big idea into a little one in order to fit into the consciousness of a small child. Such an approach is based on the conviction that young children need to believe in God as a source of security and as an authority for living a good life. Some advocate the use of the word God, even though it may have no meaning at all, because of the value of participating in the religious ceremonials of the family.

Such a process of child guidance is just the reverse of the process we have attempted to set forth in this book. Instead of first giving the words and the forms of rituals, which in themselves have no meaning for the child, we would begin with the kinds of natural experiences that *can* have meaning to the child, and the kinds of words that *can* be understood, and the kinds of rituals that *can* express the child's true emotions. From these experiences we would lead the small child step by step toward a reasonable and emotionally rich philosophy of life. This is the natural way of religious growth in contrast to the long prevailing way of adult instruction which fosters

unthinking participation in the cultural ceremonials. We cannot endorse any philosophy of child guidance that demands of children conformity to outward acts and forms that are "pointless" to the child.

Last week we looked at contemporary anarchist arguments against war, based on a review of John Rae's pamphlet, *Children and the Myths of War*. A passage in Sophia Fahs' *Today's Children and Yesterday's Heritage* (Beacon, 1961) illustrates how traditional Western religion contributes to "the myths of war":

Let us consider an implication in that old Story of Salvation. How long does this division between the good and the bad last? The answer is "forever." And how does the warfare end? The answer is "By the unconditional surrender of the wicked." They are crushed under the heel of the Messiah; they are cast forth, even out of the sight of God. The Christian tradition gives no hope of a united humanity even in eternity. . . . Instead of there being one God for all life and all humanity, there comes to be one god of the good and another god of the bad.

To convince ourselves of the extent to which we are still influenced by this warring concept of life, we need but to examine our hymnology and our prayers. "We must fight the good fight." "We are soldiers of the cross." "The Son of God goes forth to war, a kingly crown to gain. His blood-red banner streams afar. Who follows in his train?" "Who is on the Lord's side?" "Christ is our captain in the well-fought fight." How frequently in our conversations and in our public addresses relating to modern social and political problems we use the simile of war. "We must fight for this reform." "We must fight against this other party or group." We must even "fight for peace"!

So much for the crudities of uncritical religious belief. Now let us turn to Erich Fromm for the debilitating psychology which goes along with it:

Such an attitude makes it inevitable that we divide the people of the world into two camps—the good and the bad, our friends and our enemies.

The more perfect God becomes, the more imperfect becomes man. . . . But this alienation from his own powers not only makes man feel slavishly dependent on God, it makes him bad too. He becomes a man without faith in his fellow men or in himself, without the experience of his own love, of his

own power of reason. As a result the separation between the "holy" and the "secular" occurs. In his worldly activities man acts without love, in that sector of his life which is reserved to religion he feels himself to be a sinner (which he actually is, since to live without love is to live in sin) and tries to recover some of his lost humanity by being in touch with God. Simultaneously, he tries to win forgiveness by emphasizing his own helplessness and worthlessness.

The vestiges of this all-seeing, authoritarian God still linger in some homes and churches, the All-Seeing Eye observing every small child's every sin. No wonder that William Saroyan (in *My Name is Aram*) could stand only so much of this: one day, when *he* was a small boy, he stuck his rifle out of the window and shot God! After all, back in Biblical days God shot a lot of people with thunderbolts and such. For God had an implacable enemy called the Devil who, although he could never win, was bound to corrupt sin-prone mortals. Small wonder that those who believed they were especially close to God also felt able to loose thunderbolts of their own, for the people the Devil could influence were *their* enemies, too.

Erich Fromm brings this point clearly into focus:

Traditional theories took as their basic data in the study of man's mind his own ideas about himself. Men were supposed to start wars motivated by their concern for honor patriotism, freedom—because they thought they did. Parents were supposed to punish children out of their sense of duty and concern for their children—because they thought they did. People were supposed to kill unbelievers prompted by the wish to please God—because they thought they did.

Perhaps the clearest charge one can bring against traditional Christianity—as conceived in theological terms—is that everything about the Old Testament fomented partisanship. Salvation could be obtained by the few, even at the expense of the many—and it even came to seem that the many must fail in order for the few to be saved. Joseph Campbell's discussion of Christianity on this point is impressive:

God himself, at a certain point in the course of time, out of his own volition, moved toward man, instituting a new law in the form of a covenant with a certain people. And these became, therewith, a priestly race, unique in the world. God's reconciliation with man, of whose creation he had repented (Genesis 6:6), was to be achieved only by virtue of this particular community—in time: for in time there should take place the realization of the Lord God's kingdom on earth, when the heathen monarchies would crumble and Israel be saved.

The question arises in the world dominated by the Bible, as to the identity of the favored community, and three are well known to have developed claims: the Jewish, the Christian and the Moslem, each supposing itself to have been authorized by a particular revelation.

Well, we had better rest our case with these scattered quotations. In any event, it takes a long time to undo twistings of the psyche caused by religious aberration. It is easier, in short, to fix up what environmental circumstances have done to a man than it is to correct his self-righteousness, eliminate his desire to succeed at the expense of others, or to prove himself holy by counting the heads of others who are unholy, and publishing their names in some kind of "black list."

FRONTIERS

The Complete Personality

YOU are watching the gray-haired fellow bracing a shrub. It is one of his innumerable minor tasks for the municipal building where you stopped in your hurry before entering. Once again you catch the fellow at one of his "humdrum" activities and wonder . . . How is it that this man can make you feel like an artisan rather than an artist, by comparison, in life-craft? He is lifting his head, "G'morning!" He nods to you.

"He's placid," you think. "*Born* placid—he's . . . he's. . . ." You fish for a word because you know he's not stupid. In fact, you have a little pen and ink sketch he did hanging in your den. What absorption has he in these "humdrum" activities? What in this daily "slavery" makes his radiance or serenity, depending on degree, noticeable enough to distract from your hurry, every time?

You're not stupid either! You know the complete personality is the poem of itself. It has unified its desires so that its actions and meditations are not only an improvement of humanity, of which it is part, but a saving of individuality, which is the particularization of the divine spark. For years now you have recognized, intellectually, that the completeness of personality is not gathered as a tourist collects objects. It is a patient absorbing of truths as heterogeneous collections of unrelated inharmonious parts are discarded. Like the tree, the complete personality takes what wisely feeds it and in quantities it can safely assimilate. Its growth, like that of trees, is conditioned by a rhythm which provides repose. The key to growth is a harmony with the Spirit that provokes life and growth. Someone once told you (for you have been in a hurry a long while): "A man in haste has forgotten something or undertaken more than he can execute." A personality divided in aim reacts excitedly or indiscriminately, and the results are all derivative, not created from the stuff of one's own feelings.

Such a man cannot blame his occupation. He cannot berate time or his contemporaries. He simply has to avoid fastening upon his soul the inharmonious assortments of trivia, whether of events, places or ineffectual personalities that do not nourish life. He must allow periods of repose. It is adjustment to conditions of life as a tree not always in leaf.

* * *

As a complete personality, a man does not say, "Because of my work, of my hair, of my nose, of my house, of my lack of money or presence of it, I cannot." *Because*—and you look at the man bracing the shrub—*the degree of his citations in this world is not a contention of his completeness; it is always a condition with which he works successfully.*

But now you philosophize about the fellow and yourself —"*He* doesn't have your stress and strain!" Nice you brought it up. What happens to the mystical part of a man that makes his personality develop pathological lesions? Isn't there a truth in the old adage, "Our friends are those who make us do what we *can* do?"

There is neither paradox here, nor untruth. Stress and strain, if properly understood, can be friends. But when the personality has omitted anti-toxins to its stresses and strains, there has been a lack which medical science concedes can disintegrate personality, despite plumbing, sports, hygiene, diet, ventilation, etc.! What has happened to the mystical part that goes into personality in such a case? It has omitted a certain *mental attitude and substituted simply action*

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The integrated personality develops not by action alone, but by meditation, by invocation. Thus morale is attained to season surroundings. This mystic addition to personality becomes *behavior*. The individual is more aware of the invisible stratum of his universe. He knows he is sustained. And he realizes he cannot (because he

thinks with all his organs) go gulping down all truths, everybody and everything he meets. He needs repose to make secure his special collection of treasures . . . some of which may have even cost something of his ego. But—he has assimilated them. He now has communication with his spirit, *which means daily relationship with his aims*, and being sustained in all good and constructive ideas. *This* mental attitude, bringing balance to his ego, makes him a complete personality.

Important is not the success of his desires, but the unification of them, which persuades completeness to be in his person. This kind of unification keeps him from lesions, even when events bounce back and deflate his ego all over again.

Man's history of achievement is one of an unbroken story of freedom of self. We have to see how days teach us the poetry of time; time teaches us to be unwilling to hide behind ignorance or half-knowledge.

Every day urges us to discover the difference between "toil" and "work." To see what it does for free selfhood . . . ours, and the fellow doing the "humdrum" work with glow. We find harmony between self and task. This adjustment lives in the mind that has won itself from division and is ready to face the wonderful adventure of life.

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