VOLUME XXXII, NO. 23
JUNE 6, 1979

NOT MATTERS OF BELIEF

THERE is no need, now, to gather evidence in support of the claim that the modern world is in the midst of a revival of religious feeling. Scores of recent books describe this development. A hunger of the heart is at work, with resulting cultural changes to be seen on every hand. The new search for religious truth is identified by Jacob Needleman in *The New Religions* (Pocket Book) as in part a product of the rejection of traditional faiths in the West. He says:

> The contemporary disillusionment with religion has revealed itself to be a *religious* disillusionment. Men are moving away from the forms and trappings of Judaism and Christianity not because they have stopped searching for transcendental answers to the fundamental questions of human life, but because that search has now intensified beyond measure. . . .
>
> Nor does the phenomenon give signs of slackening. Bookstores are crammed with Eastern sacred texts, studies of astrology, reincarnation, states of consciousness, and the like. Students across the country are demanding courses in Buddhism, Hinduism and mysticism, often forming their own "free universities" to study these subjects. Moreover, psychiatrists, psychologists, and clergymen of all faiths are joining the younger generation in this pursuit—not only in order to understand the inclinations of the young and the interests of their patients or the members of their congregations. They are turning to these areas to see for themselves if the East has a knowledge to offer our threatened society and our tormented religions.

The disillusionment here spoken of began a long time ago. A dramatic breakdown of belief in religion took place in the eighteenth century. An early *philosophe*, Julian Lamettrie, in *L'Homme Machine* (published in 1748), made his spokesman say:

> "If Atheism were universally disseminated, all the branches of religion would be torn up by the roots. Then there would be no more theological wars: there would no longer be soldiers of religion, that terrible kind of soldier. Nature, which had been infected by the consecrated poison, would win back her rights and her purity. Deaf to all other voices, men would follow their own individual impulses, and these impulses alone can lead to happiness along the pleasant path of virtue."

Lamettrie's arguments, hardly popular in his day, proved exceedingly persuasive in later years. The French Revolution was securely mounted on the platform of Materialism, and before long the hedonism of the revolutionary thinkers was widely embraced. Only a little more than a century later, Darwin published *The Origin of Species* (1859), with an outcome, over the years, familiar to all. The transformation of informed opinion is well described by Bertrand Russell (*Nation,* Jan. 9,1937):

> Throughout the nineteenth century, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful preserved their precarious existence in the minds of earnest atheists. But their very earnestness was their undoing, since it made it impossible for them to stop at a halfway house. Pragmatists explained that Truth is what it pays to believe. Historians of morals reduced the Good to a matter of tribal custom. Beauty was abolished by the artists in a revolt against the insipidities of a philistine epoch in a mood of fury in which satisfaction is to be derived only from what hurts. And so the world was swept clear not only of God as a person but of God's essence as an ideal to which man owed an ideal allegiance; while the individual, as a result of a crude and uncritical interpretation of sound doctrines, was left without any inner defense against social pressure.

In the sixties A. H. Maslow wrote somewhat colloquially on this breakdown in relation to the practice of the arts:

> We have no shared values any more. I don't bother to read music criticism. It is useless to me. So is art criticism, which I have also given up reading. Book reviews I find useless frequently. There is complete chaos and anarchy of standards. For instance, the *Saturday Review* recently carried a favorable review of one of Jean Genet's crummy books. Written by a professor of theology, it was total

> confusion. It was the approach that Evil has now become Good because there is some kind of paradox while playing with words: If evil becomes totally evil, then it somehow becomes good, and there were rhapsodies to the beauties of sodomy and drug addiction which, for a poor psychologist who spends much of his time trying to rescue people from the anguish of these kinds of things, were incomprehensible. How can a grown man recommend this book as a chapter in ethics and a guide to the young?

Since Maslow played so large a part in the turn-around of modern thought, it is appropriate to quote him on the change in attitude that Mr. Needleman and others have been writing about so extensively:

> . . . many people are beginning to discover that the physicalistic, mechanistic model was a mistake and that it has led us . . . where? To atom bombs. To a beautiful technology of killing, as in the concentration camps. To Eichmann. An Eichmann cannot be refuted with a positivistic philosophy or science. He just cannot; and he never got it until the moment he died. As far as he was concerned, nothing was wrong; he had done a good job. I point out that professional science and professional philosophy are dedicated to the proposition of forgetting about values, excluding them. This, therefore, must lead to Eichmanns, to atom bombs, and to who knows what!

In his discussion of the meaning behind the People's Temple massacre (or mass suicide) in Guyana last year, Theodore Roszak continues the indictment:

> Since the Age of Reason, the most gifted talents of the Western world have been predominantly invested in the proposition that nothing is sacred, that knowledge is bounded by numbers and empirical fact. All of us who have passed through the standard curriculum of higher education have learned the lesson . . . the very meaning of "enlightenment" in the modern Western world is to insist that reason and intellect are the hammer of all absolutes, instruments of radical doubt and critical subversion. . . . a courageous air of cosmic abandonment passes for the leading fashion of the day, and conducting autopsies on dead gods is a freshman philosophy assignment. As long as this remains the prevailing intellectual posture, what else can we expect but that those who lack the necessary stoic fiber to hold the stance for a lifetime will take their spiritual needs to "anti-intellectual" sources for gratification? Nor should we be surprised that demagogues and commercial opportunists rush forward to exploit the situation, for those needs are power lying in the streets waiting to be seized. . . . By indiscriminately denying the validity of all the absolutes to which spiritual need would offer its allegiance, secular skepticism leaves the field open to quacks and rascals. The quacks and rascals are then free to announce the futility of intellect and to appeal to blind faith and gut feeling. Which in turn confirms the skeptic's position that religious conviction is intellectually squalid and socially dangerous. It is as Yeats warned: where "the best lack all conviction, the worst are full of passionate intensity" (MANAS, March 7.)

Telling this story of two great transitions—from belief to unbelief, and back again—partly through quotation from major actors in the change has a particular value: we see directly what the change-agents themselves thought and at the same time obtain a sharp outline of the changes. One comment cries out to be made, and that is that the leaders were practically all intelligent and well-intentioned men who served their times as well as they knew. In the eighteenth century, to be a Materialist was to be a champion of the *spiritual* value of human freedom and freedom of mind! Until they won their battle, the quality of heroism seemed a basic ingredient in the makeup of the materialists. They were fighting obscurantism and the deception and exploitation of the people on a mass scale.

But now the balance has changed. The materialists are themselves on trial and are being found wanting. This change in roles, if it does nothing else, should make us suspicious of *inherited* causes. It may be that the only actual virtue in the stance of the materialists was the element of strong moral emotion—a devotion to the good of humans generally and their opposition to tyrannical religious and political establishments. While we must assent to Mr. Roszak's characterization of the Age of Reason, we need to remember that this is also the title of a great book by Tom Paine, who wrote much of it in a French

prison under threat of execution during the Reign of Terror.

Why was it that Reason eventually became a weapon of the materialists alone? Where, in any time of change, does responsibility for *balance* lie? How, in other words, shall we account for the wholly unexpected and radical change which William Barrett describes in *The Illusion of Technique:*

> Two centuries ago, a century ago, men thought of themselves as the masters of history; today we are more likely to think of ourselves as its victims. The literature of the twentieth century is largely a lamentation for ourselves as victims. And in nothing are we more victims than in this: that we have to cope with the same life as humankind in the past but without its most potent means of doing so. We cannot will back a faith that has been lost. We shall have to live back into that way of being in whose ambience the religious once drew breath.

In Mr. Barrett's last sentence is the all-important question: How does one "live back" or "live forward" to the essential quality of life that may be called true religion? We might be better off if we didn't have so many books telling us what to do! There are not dozens but hundreds of purveyors of doctrines and teachings of religion for today and tomorrow.

In them all one senses the presence of underlying truth, but on the surface they seem too "easy" a means of finding our way. This plethora of competing doctrines makes a tropical jungle of possible beliefs. And we suffer also from the tendency that Jacob Needleman has well described:

> We are so accustomed to believe that great truths need only to be put before us and they will have a beneficent effect. But I wonder if there is not something exceedingly naive in this assumption, some naive estimation of our unaided ability to be what we know, some failure to realize how swift and subtle is the passage from seeing the darkness to dreaming of light.

Mr. Needleman says something else worth repeating. There is always, he warns, a "secret," something held back or undescribed in any wise teaching, for the reason that in all human beings there is that "which seeks only to believe and explain and to manipulate, rather than to understand." How can we cure ourselves of this vice, instead of impatiently asking of some presumed instructor, "Well, what is the secret? Tell me! I want to know!"

One aspect of this tendency or puzzle is amusingly described by John Toland (1670-1722), an Irish writer who is said to have been the first man called a "free-thinker." In a work titled *Clidophorus* (Key-Bearer), he related:

> This puts me in mind of what I was told by a near relation to the old Lord SHAFTESBURY. The latter, conferring one day with Major WILDMAN about the many sects of Religion in the world, they came to this conclusion at last: that notwithstanding those infinite divisions caus'd by the interest of the priests and the ignorance of the people, ALL WISE MEN ARE OF THE SAME RELIGION; whereupon a Lady in the room, who seem'd to mind her needle more than their discourse, demanded with some concern what that Religion was? To whom the Lord SHAFTESBURY strait reply'd, MADAM, WISE MEN NEVER TELL.

Toland agrees, but thinks he has a solution, proposing:

> Let all men freely speak what they think, without ever being branded or punish'd but for wicked practices, and leaving their speculative opinions to be confuted or approv'd by whoever pleases; then you are sure to hear the whole truth, and till then but very scantily, or obscurely, if at all.

Toland was unable to secure for himself this hoped-for tolerance, and his final work, *Pantheisticon* (1720), brought raging criticism. In his *History of Materialism,* Frederick Lange, summarizing its contents, shows why:

> He demands in this treatise the entire laying aside of revelations and of popular beliefs, and the construction of a new religion which agrees with philosophy. His God is the universe; from which everything is born, into which everything returns. His cultus is that of truth, liberty, and health, the three things most highly prized by the wise man. His saints and fathers are the master-spirits and most excellent authors of all times, especially of classical

> antiquity; but even they form no authority to chain "the free spirit of mankind." The president cries in the Sokratic liturgy, "Swear by no master's word!" and the answer comes back to him from the congregation, "Not even by the word of Sokrates!"

Lord Shaftesbury's caution has been practiced all down the centuries. Even in free America, Thomas Jefferson found it advisable to keep his personal convictions confidential. In 1803 he sent to Dr. Benjamin Rush a comparison he had made of the moral doctrines of Jesus with those of ancient philosophers, saying to Rush in an accompanying letter:

> . . . in confiding it to you, I know it will not be exposed to the malignant perversions of those who make every word from me a text for new misrepresentations and calumnies. I am, moreover, averse to the communication of my religious tenets to the public, because it would countenance the presumption of those who have endeavored to draw them before that tribunal, and to seduce public opinion to erect itself into that inquest over the rights of conscience, which the laws have so justly proscribed. It behooves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself to resist invasions of it in the case of others, or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own. . . .

Times have changed, and today scores of writers are rushing into print, many of them putting the adjective "esoteric" before whatever brand of religion they expound, often failing to point out that an *esoteric* teaching is precisely the sort of material which suffers vulgarization and distortion by being put into words. In short, it is a teaching that is not likely to survive verbal expression, or was so regarded until recent times. Today "esoteric" has become practically a "selling point" in the consideration of such matters, and this is certainly a confirmation of Mr. Needleman's warning against our "failure to realize how swift and subtle is the passage from seeing the darkness to dreaming of light."

We have, meanwhile, a vast assemblage of the various teachings of the world religions, collected in dozens of anthologies, textbooks, and survey courses in comparative religion—an embarrassment of riches—yet at the same time little real help with the project set by William Barrett: learning to "live back into that way of being in whose ambience the religious once drew breath." Instead, then, of attempting to sift and test one doctrine or stance after another—the task of several lifetimes!—it might be better to take a long look at a past generation of inquirers, serious inquirers, whom we respect, in an attempt to understand how they shaped their religious beliefs. The concern is not with their opinions, but how they shaped them. Not the credos they adopted, but the temper of mind which determined their formulation.

A book which serves this purpose admirably was put together by Norman Cousins in 1958—*"In God We Trust"* (Harper), being "The Religious Beliefs and Ideas of the American Founding Fathers." What did men such as Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, John Adams, Samuel Adams, John Jay, and Thomas Paine believe, and how did they reach the conclusions they adopted? What use did they make of the materials available to them on the subject of religion? We are much richer than they in possible ingredients, but are we able to do as well?

Is it really the "teachings" which make a human's religion, or is it the quality of the individual which determines what he will finally—or tentatively—believe?

The concluding section of Mr. Cousins' book gives the thought of Tom Paine a year before he died. Paine, called a "dirty little atheist" by Theodore Roosevelt, in his later years wrote much to show what he believed was the foundation in religion of the principles of social order he had worked all his life to establish in the world. In these "Private Thoughts," published in a pamphlet in 1807, he said:

> The book called the New Testament, which I hold to be fabulous and have shown to be false, gives an account in Matthew XXV of what there is called the last day, or the day of judgment.

> The whole world, according to that account, is divided into two parts, the righteous and the unrighteous, figuratively called the sheep and the goats. They are then to receive their sentence. To the one, figuratively called the sheep, it says, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." To the other, figuratively called the goats, it says, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."
>
> Now the case is, the world cannot be thus divided: the moral world, like the physical world, is composed of numerous degrees of character, running imperceptibly one into the other, in such a manner that no fixed point of division can be found in either. That point is nowhere, or is everywhere.
>
> The whole world might be divided into two parts numerically, but not as to moral character, and therefore the metaphor of dividing them, as sheep and goats can be divided, whose difference is marked by their external figure, is absurd.
>
> All sheep are still sheep; all goats are still goats; it is their physical nature to be so. But one part of the world are not all good alike, nor the other part all wicked alike. There are some exceedingly good; others exceedingly wicked.
>
> There is another description of men who cannot be ranked with either the one or the other—they belong neither to the sheep nor to the goats; and there is still another description of them who are so very insignificant, both in character and conduct, as not to be worth the trouble of damning or saving, or of raising from the dead.
>
> My own opinion is, that those whose lives have been spent doing good, and endeavoring to make their fellow-mortals happy, for this is the only way in which we can serve God, will be happy hereafter; and that the very wicked will meet with some punishment. But those who are neither good nor bad, or are too insignificant for notice, will be dropped entirely.
>
> This is my opinion.

Conceivably, Paine did violence to the New Testament text. There may be better readings. But the real question is, how well did Paine live his religion? He used his reason as well as he knew how, and then made it the rule of his life.

Also in Mr. Cousins' book are selections from the Jefferson-Adams Letters, showing how these two used the materials of religion in their time—how they applied their intelligence to the great questions. Not which are the "true ideas," but the dignity and seriousness with which one looks for them, decides upon them, take on paramount importance for the reader. These are not matters of belief.

REVIEW
ON AFFORDABLE REFORMS

IN an old book—well, fifty years old—about the benefits of fasting, the section on habits, bad habits like drinking alcohol, seems pure common sense. Herbert M. Sheldon, in *The Hygienic System* (1934), maintains that if drinkers fast they lose their taste for liquor. The tissues of the mouth are refined by abstinence and the nervous attraction of drink dies away. Finally it tastes no better than the *first* drink of years before, which was almost certainly harsh and unpleasant. Some people, probably, will ridicule the claims of this writer, yet his argument leads to conclusions about habits and habit-formation that seem close to irresistible.

Between the lines he seems to be saying that while man is a free soul who is able to live as he chooses, he is also a habit-forming animal. Often he mistakes the shape of his habit for the definition of his freedom. The result is some sort of voluntary slavery. This is not of course a new idea. The Buddha devoted his whole life to explaining the means of release from such voluntary slavery.

A question, however, remains. Aren't there any *good* habits? It seems true enough to say that we are finished when we become entirely creatures of habit. Yet the organism we use to get in touch with the world around us is absolutely dependent on habit. The organs, muscles, and tissues of the body need to do exactly what they are supposed to do. When they don't, our lives are interrupted by some bodily ill. When the body has good habits we can practically forget about it. A healthy body implements instead of getting in the way of our freedom. Fasting, we gather from this book, is a way of allowing the body time to re-establish the good habits which belong to it naturally.

But we have to eat to live, don't we? It's not good sense to be against eating. Besides, not eating makes you uncomfortable. Well, there are common-sense things to be said in reply, obvious things such as the idea that fasts are not against eating but intervals between eating—a part of eating, how to do it. Who could eat all the time?

A book we have been putting off giving attention to is really another book about fasting—*Less Is More* (Harper & Row paperback, 1978, $4.95), edited by Goldian Vandenbroeck—a collection of fine quotations in behalf of voluntary poverty. (Curiously, Richard Gregg's essay on this subject is not quoted, but the book is nonetheless good.) Why did we put off speaking of it? Mainly because there is *so much* said about the merits and blessedness of choosing to be poor. One can have indigestion from too much of anything, even wise advice, which is doubtless why the best books administer their correctives and preachment sparingly, and even unconsciously for the best effect. No one with any spunk wants his virtue to result from someone else's didactic instruction. Second-hand virtue has few attractions. A book on being good tends to be too much of a good thing.

This is a trouble with many anthologies. And yet, like indexes and catalogs, they have their uses. If you feel in need of a little preaching, the material is there. On that basis, then, *Less Is More* is a useful book. In his opening essay the editor says:

> In *The Other America*, Michael Harrington speaks of the intellectual poor, "those of talent and insight who are driven to prefer poverty, to choose it, rather than to submit to the desolation of empty abundance." Yet he points out that in this segment of our society, people have chosen their lot only on a temporary basis, to afford time for their creative aspirations, until they have gained a measure of recognition, or merely to take time off before returning to their place in the society of their fathers. They do not truly choose poverty as the end in itself, as the creative activity per se.
>
> Thus it is by no means an abolition of possessions as such that is desirable, but merely a redefinition of the notion of fortune in men's lives. That the time is ripe for such a reevaluation can be seen in the increasing scarcity of those aspects which

> money *cannot* buy: fresh air, clean water, silence, peace of mind, health, and, above all, freedom in the largest sense of the word. Wealth as a rule is tied to cities, and the pursuit and maintenance of wealth entails participation in their condition. Wealth creates dependency and preoccupation with the fluctuations of markets and currencies, factors beyond any one man's control, and sources of worry concerning loss. Disease trails in the wake of opulent living, of overeating and self-indulgence. Such miseries are known only to the wealthy, and they are relatively absent from the life of good fortune. For this wealth, which we could qualify as inconscient, refers to the possession of goods, property, and money; fortune, to those uncertain benefits of human life which money alone is incapable of insuring. A fortunate man need not be burdened by wealth, and the wealthy are more often than not seen to lead unfortunate lives.

Some of that burden, one may say to oneself, would be most convenient right now. And if a writer in this book tells you that getting wealth becomes addictive before you know it, the argument for sensible management may seem an adequate reply. The only trouble is that statistics show how rarely good management plays a part. We come down to the reality that only the exceptional few will remain free while wealthy. And a paradox ensues, since those few would probably remain free in any condition. Money has little to do with it.

What kind of logic is persuasive in such psychological circumstances? E. F. Schumacher, who writes the Preface to *Less Is More,* has an answer. "Curved logic," he says, is the foundation of good management. The curve which turns truth back on itself adds sense to management.

What needs management? The habit-forming side of us requires it. Without managerial restraint, driving activities shaped by habit go crazy. In humans they lose their form. Free souls don't need management. Management insults the soul. The need of the free souls is to become proper managers, not to submit to orders from below. Logic verbalizes the law of habits, and curved logic adds the balancing insight of consciousness, which is what free souls have to give. As Schumacher says:

> Logic does not do much for our personal and suprapersonal relations. But it is, all the same, an indispensable tool for our *material* relations—how to keep the wolf from the door and how to gain a modicum of material security in this uncertain world.
>
> So there is, unquestionably, *straight-line* logic which we need for living. But there is also a kind of *curved* logic—whereby things require "measure," or they turn into their opposites to make the living worthwhile.

What does he mean by this? Since Schumacher was an economist who thought about the good of whole societies, his explanation is in socio-economic terms, but the individual applications of the same ideas are all through the content of the book. On the basis of curved logic, he says:

> Self-imposed limits, voluntary restraint, conscious limitation—these are life-giving and life-preserving forces. The *New Economics* of which we stand in need would be based on the recognition
>
> —that economic progress is healthy only "up to a point";
>
> —that the complication of life is permissible only "up to a point";
>
> —that the pursuit of efficiency or productivity is good only "up to a point";
>
> —that specialization is compatible with human integrity only "up to a point";
>
> —that the substitution of "scientific method" for common sense is bearable only "up to a point";
>
> and so on and so forth, never forgetting that all these "points" lie far lower on the scale than most people dare to think.

Practically everybody good to read is in this book, from Socrates to Ivan Illich. The index of contributors occupies six pages of small type. Even MANAS is in it!

Since literature is an art, and since poets and painters are artists, we take some sample quotations from the section on "Creative Poverty." First, from the painter, Robert Henri:

> Things being as they are, the life of an artist is a battle wherein great economy must be exercised. The kind of economy which will result in moments of the purest freedom in spite of the world's exactions.
>
> If one is a painter this purest freedom must exist at the time of painting. This is as much to say that a painter may give up his hope of making a living as a painter but must make it some other way. This is generally true, although some do, by a freak of appreciation, make enough while going their way to live sufficiently well. Perhaps this happens, but I am not sure but that there is some curtailing of the purity of the freedom.

Then there is this by the Irish poet, "A. E."

> We are all poor in Ireland. . . . so many artists want a motor car, a house, to give parties, etc., that they sell their genius for cash. They should take the vow of poverty that *is an inside vow.*

It may be said that the artist has a right to a good living, since he sheds so many blessings on society. No doubt he does. But whatever *we* say about it, if the artist thinks more about his rights than about the obligations of creative intelligence, his art will decline. Perhaps teachers should be included, too. The Brahmins, in Hindu tradition, are beggars. Their one obligation is to teach. The people have an obligation to support the teachers. Everything is voluntary, based on trust. All teaching requires mutual trust.

Think what would happen in a society where no creative or benevolent act was paid for with money! Only bread labor would be compensated, everything else would be free. How many great reforms would immediately result?

COMMENTARY
CARLO LEVI'S BOOK

WHEREVER you go—whether in time or space—you find the same fundamental problems and the same neglect of fundamental solutions. We happened on a soiled and dog-eared paperback edition of Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* and before reading many pages began to think that this was a book that should be available to all the young in a beautiful edition that does honor to the content.

Here was a young man, a physician, who could not suppress his feeling about the crimes and stupidities of Fascism. So he was put in prison and then sent to spend—only a year, as it turned out, although his sentence was for three years—in the impoverished province of Lucania, under the restricted conditions of a political prisoner. He was released as part of the general celebration of Italy's "victory" over Ethiopia (the time was 1935-36).

The title of the book tells how the people of Lucania felt about themselves. The legend is that Christ, when visiting Italy to bring salvation and truth to the people, went no further south than Eboli. So the people south of Eboli felt that they were not Christians—which for them meant human beings. It is the story of the forgotten and forsaken peasants of all the world. Levi says in his introductory chapter:

> Christ never came this far, just as the Romans never came, nor did time, nor the individual soul, nor hope, nor the relation of cause to effect, nor reason, nor history. Christ never came, just as the Romans never came, content to garrison the highways without penetrating the mountains and forests, nor the Greeks, who flourished beside the gulf of Taranto. None of the pioneers of Western civilization brought here his sense of the passage of time, his deification of the State or that ceaseless activity which feeds upon itself. No one has come to this land except as an enemy, a conqueror, or a visitor devoid of understanding. The seasons pass today over the toil of the peasants, just as the did three thousand years before Christ; no message, human or divine, has reached this stubborn poverty.

Levi arrived there under guard, wearing handcuffs, lived there for his year, doing what little he could as a doctor for the people. At the end he set down his feeling that there was only one way out for the peasants:

> The name of this way out is autonomy. The State can only be a group of autonomies, an organic federation. The unit or cell through which the peasants can take part in the complex life of the nation must be the autonomous or self-governing rural community. . . . But the autonomy or self-government of the community cannot exist without the autonomy of the factory, the school, and the city, of every form of social life. This is what I learned from a year of life underground.

Levi's sophisticated friends could not understand what he was trying to tell them.

> At bottom, as I now perceived, they were all unconscious worshippers of the State. Whether the State they worshipped was the Fascist State or the incarnation of quite another dream, they thought of it as something that transcended both its citizens and their lives. Whether it was tyrannical or paternalistic, dictatorial or democratic, it remained to them monolithic, centralized, and remote. This was why the political leaders and my peasants could never understand one another.

A careful reading of *Christ Stopped at Eboli* would make a lot of other reading unnecessary.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A COUPLE OF ISLANDS

TEACHING, says Eliot Wigginton, founder of the Foxfire project in northern Georgia, is using the elements of everyday experience to develop the skills that everyone must learn to use in life. Mr. Wigginton is now going around the country, lecturing to teachers and educators on the methods he developed in the Rabun Gap High School, which publishes *Foxfire* magazine, written by the students. The magazine began as an activity of Wigginton's English class which, ten or twelve years ago, was languishing, dull and unmanageable. He got the idea of doing a magazine on the lore of the mountain people, and *Foxfire* was the result. Some four quite successful books (Doubleday) embodying its contents are available. *Moments,* Wigginton's book on teaching, is filled with practical advice to teachers. (We bought three copies to give to friends.)

An article in the last Nov. 13 *Christian Science Monitor* by James M. Boushay describes the programs he is putting on at educational conferences:

> He does not just talk about the Foxfire concept, he shows the group members by leading them through a series of practical exercises. He does what he teaches. For example after making a field trip to a local auction the workshoppers regroup for a debriefing session. They discuss the auction's educational implications as well as examine practical ways of using in the classroom what they've observed there.

To the advocates of "back to basics"—now a strong movement in the U.S. public school systems—Wigginton points out that the basics can all be taught out of experience with some area of interest. He illustrates this with the theme of puppies, which "serves as a catalyst for obtaining other kinds of information."

> "Each of the major skills is easily tied on to a concept—for example, reading stories about dogs, writing personal essays about domestic pets, gathering statistics on the world of anti-cruelty organizations. . . .
>
> "Anything I do has got to be scaled down to size to meet a specific situation or problem. You can't spend a whole lot of emotional psychic energy worrying about the national scene and what's wrong with education.
>
> "I really don't know what's happening nationally with education," he says, insisting that his primary concern is with his own school in Georgia.
>
> As an example, he relates the advice of long-time friend Miles Horton of the Highlander Center in New Mexico, an institute conducting teacher-training seminars on experiential or alternative educational approaches. "Miles recommends that we try to create 'little islands of decency' wherever we can." In this way, Mr. Wigginton suggests, his reform efforts are kept manageable and workable.

Arthur Morgan, a great educator of a past generation, spoke (in *The Long Road,* still in print, and available from Community Service, Inc., Yellow Springs, Ohio) of creating "islands of brotherhood" as the goal of a constructive human life. William James declared for "those tiny, invisible, molecular forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride." This idea is at the foundation of all real educational undertakings, and real teachers know it well. They are not to be distracted by grandiose plans and programs.

The *Monitor* writer continues:

> What advice does he [Wigginton] give teachers discouraged or dispirited by outdated, unresponsive educational methods? He tells them that creating effective teaching strategies is a matter of "proposing well-thought-out programs. Don't go to the principal unless you've done your own homework and can explain in detail the rationale for any innovations you'd like to try."
>
> But for anything proposed, and here Mr. Wigginton grows subdued and deeply reflective, "you've got to know kids personally. It doesn't make any sense for me to work with a student if I don't

understand and take into account, say his family's history and how it affects him."

Knowing students personally is a major theme of a teaching strategy book he is writing, which will be published next year [this year] by Doubleday.

John Holt has a Corsican feud with ostentatious talk about "learning," and some of the things he said five years ago (in a *Monitor* article, April 8, 1974) are recalled by Wigginton's common sense. Holt began:

We hear much talk these days that the society of the future will be a learning society. Not long ago some of this talk put a thought in my mind about "learning." Suppose we were in the midst of a group of people, and found after a while that most of their talk was about breathing: "You are breathing very well today." "He breathes wonderfully, don't you agree?" "I am breathing better, but not as well as I should." "How can we all improve our breathing?"

Would we not soon think that these people must all be sick, or just recovering from some trouble with their lungs? Otherwise, why make such a fuss about what healthy people do naturally?

If we could visit human societies in their most vigorous and creative periods, when most people were growing most rapidly in understanding, competence, and skill—say classical Greece, or 18th-century New England—we would probably hear very little talk about "learning." People were learning a great deal because they were doing a great deal, because their lives made demands on, and opportunities and rewards for, their ingenuity and intelligence.

People who are wise have no need to talk about "wisdom." What has been internalized doesn't need a lot of discussion. There would be something "sick" about it, as John Holt says. His recognition of this has made him a useful iconoclast:

It now seems to me vitally important that we understand that this process, which we call learning but I call "doing," is very different from and indeed *the opposite of* the process we call education. By "doing" I mean the things people do in their own time and their own way, for their own reasons, purposes, and satisfaction, with no more help than they want and ask for, to explore the world around them (in time as well as space) so as to gain more understanding, competence, freedom, control, and joy within it. By "education" I mean a process in which some people decide that *other* people ought to be made to know, believe, and want certain things, and try to find ways to do this. I mean, in short, a process in which some people set out to *shape* other people.

Well, don't we have to do *something* in the way of "shaping" the young?

No doubt we do, but our competence is at issue. Are we going to try to make them like ourselves, and is this a really good idea? Well, we can at least give them "the tools." Yes, we can do that, and Eliot Wigginton and John Holt have been successful at doing it. But by "shaping" them, Holt means something quite different from placing the tools at their disposal. And he means that the tools of the mind are acquired by getting to work using them, which for human intelligence comes as naturally as breathing. Teachers—good teachers—learn very early in their careers that people who don't learn to shape themselves never turn out well. And they find that the hidden curriculum of most schools is designed to keep the young from shaping themselves. This makes Holt a "radical":

I am wholly against this process, however carried out, and the system of credentials and compulsory schooling, carrot and stick, which we use to carry it out. . . . I do not believe that this process of education, which in rival societies we quite rightly call brainwashing, can be wisely and humanely carried out. . . . Nor do I think that schools, as long as they are run by and work for educators rather than do-ers, can be made into places that are good for people, young or old. The only "educational reform" that seems to me serious is the task of taking the schools away from the educators and putting them at the service of the do-ers.

What is John Holt doing in this direction? He is using the method proposed by William James—working with and encouraging those "tiny, invisible, molecular forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world."

FRONTIERS

Evolving a Language

IT is a major irony of modern life that the specialists—on whom we rely for crucial understanding of how things work—have great difficulty in making themselves understood when they make important discoveries. What is a really important discovery for a specialist?

At this moment of history we are realizing that a specialist becomes most valuable to us when he becomes less of a specialist. This happens when his area of expertise spreads out to include other fields to which he has in the past given little or no attention. Rachel Carson was such a specialist. So is Barry Commoner. E. F. Schumacher was probably the best known economic specialist who recognized that the science of economics must submit to ruling principles originating in the moral nature of man. His fundamental message was that scientific method is only technique, and that when technique is used without guidance from moral intelligence, the resulting disaster finally disrupts even the practice of science.

When *this* happens, people start asking questions which few specialists can answer. They don't like such questions, which challenge the autonomy of their discipline, and for answer require use of the common speech.

Specialists are usually alienated from the common speech. Schumacher, however, was an exception. He translated his discoveries as an economist into language we are all able to understand. What he said makes such complete sense that he is not often "attacked" by other economists. But he is very largely ignored, except for the few economists who, by and large, agree with him.

This is a time, then, when the best specialists are learning the importance of becoming generalists and making themselves understood,. and when the best generalists—or simply intelligent humans—are learning to understand and look through the eyes of these self-reformed specialists, developing a common tongue for communication to the world. In short, it is a time of *philosophic* discovery, which must now take the place of technical discovery. The transition is painful, but also exciting. We are learning about the world in a new way. We are studying meaning instead of mechanism, or mechanism alone.

Our best instructors are probably the specialists who are nature lovers. Nature is the most inclusive specialty of all, so that good naturalists most naturally become generalists. We therefore understand ecologists better than we understand chemists and physicists. Ecologists inform us of the relationships within the community of life. Being alive ourselves, we intuit their meanings. Living includes *everything*, so that ecological science has a tropic tendency to grow philosophical. But practically all the sciences have aspects which relate them to ecological meaning, so that when other specialists begin to think ecologically, they too grow philosophical. They discover undercurrents of ethical and moral significance in their specialties, and a wonderful hybrid language emerges—loading scientific terms with moral resonances.

An illustration is available in a paper by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, a distinguished economist, titled "The Steady State and Ecological Salvation: A Thermodynamic Analysis" (*BioScience*, April, 1977). This writer concludes:

> The overpraised and oversold technological developments of our own era should not blind us. From the viewpoint of the economy of terrestrial sources—the basis of mankind's industrial mode of life—most innovations represent low entropy squandering. The razor that can wholly be tossed away when the blades become dull or the mountains of photocopied material discarded without even being glanced at pale in comparison with mechanized agriculture and highyield variety. "Bigger and better" automobiles, golfcarts, lawnmowers, etc., forcibly mean "bigger and better" resource depletion and pollution. . . .

> Economists have preached for too long that we should maximize our present gains. It is high time that people realized that the most rational conduct is to minimize regrets. Any piece of armament or a two-garage car means less food for the hungry of today and fewer plowshares for some future (however distant) generations of humans like ourselves.
>
> A new ethics is what the world needs most. If our values are right, everything else—prices, production, distribution, and even pollution—has to be right. At first, man has heeded (at least in large measure) the commandment "thou shalt not kill, and later "love thy neighbor as thyself." The commandment of this era is "Love thy species as thyself."

How do people come to think in this way, naturally or spontaneously? The ethics the world needs most won't develop until we do.

This question has no direct answer, but there are some wonderful examples. There is the thinking of Aldo Leopold, whose influence on the side of life has been immeasurable. In *A Sand County Almanac* he tells about a time he was cruising timber in the Apache National Forest (Arizona) near a mountain called Escudilla. An old grizzly bear inhabited the mountain, and once a year he killed a cow and ate it. One spring a government trapper came to the region and asked if any destructive animals needed elimination. The ranchers wanted the grizzly slaughtered so the trapper went to work. Snares and poisons failing, he rigged a shotgun in a tree, with a string attached to the trigger stretched across the bear's path. A month later the trapper came back with a "foul, patchy, and worthless" pelt on his mule. The bear had shot himself. Leopold muses:

> The government trapper who took the grizzly knew he had made Escudilla safe for cows. He did not know he had toppled the spire off an edifice a-building since the morning stars sang together.
>
> The bureau chief who sent the trapper was a biologist versed in the architecture of evolution, but he did not know that spires might be as important as cows. He did not foresee that within two decades the cow country would become tourist country, and as such have greater need of bears than of beefsteaks.
>
> The Congressmen who voted money to clear the ranges of bears were the sons of pioneers. They acclaimed the superior virtues of the frontiersman, but they strove with might and main to make an end of the frontier.
>
> We forest officers who acquiesced in the extinguishment of the bear, knew a local rancher who had plowed up a dagger engraved with the name of one of Coronado's captains. We spoke harshly of the Spaniards, who, in their zeal for gold and converts, had needlessly extinguished the native Indians. It did not occur to us that we, too, were the captains of an invasion too sure of its own righteousness.

Leopold's rich melancholy has a self-reproductive effect on the thought of the reader. He heads one section. "Thinking Like a Mountain." This is what the ecologists are doing—helping us to think like a river, a continent, an ocean, a stream, a planet, and all humanity. This is the reason for keeping Leopold's seminal thinking alive.