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THE NEW MORALITY

IT is a matter of some moment that throughout the modern period it has been possible for the practical leaders of Western civilization to charge that moralists neither understand nor contribute to "progress." Having made this point, they go about their various enterprises feeling fairly comfortable in ignoring ethical issues. How are these men able to adjust so readily to the egotisms of their group, treating professional moralists with the easy ambivalence of prosperous rotary luncheoners toward the shy clergyman member they briefly encounter once a week?

The explanation lies, it seems clear, in the division of labor in being human. By common consent, the work of the world is "taken care of" by one group of institutions, while another group has nominal charge of right and wrong. Specialists invariably evolve a private language of their own, whether it be of science, industry, or theology, and the resulting isolation produces élitist vanities peculiar to each caste of specialists, with corresponding condescensions, either open or concealed, toward everyone who is not a member of the group. This is easy to illustrate. Once the idea of truth becomes subdivided and institutionalized—an inevitable result of the polemics between science and religion during the past three hundred years—the partisan methods of politics achieve respectability in intellectual matters. Propaganda and social pressure are accepted as the tools of righteous campaigners, who become immune to al1 but their own ideas. To the champion of science, for example, it seemed appropriate to show contempt for the sentimentality of religion, and if a natural tenderness should resemble the soft-headedness of believers, such qualities are rejected as persisting emotionalism and evasion of "reality." Acceptance of scientific truth requires tough ruthlessness and so a harsh, vulgarizing style becomes characteristic among men with educational responsibilities in certain of the sciences. A. H. Maslow writes revealingly on this in *The Psychology of Science:*

> I think I can best make my meaning clear by an example from my experiences thirty years ago in medical school. I didn't consciously realize it then, but in retrospect it seems clear that our professors were almost deliberately trying to harden us, to teach us to confront death, pain, and disease in a "cool," unemotional manner. The first operation I ever saw was almost a representative example of the effort to desacralize, i.e., to remove the sense of awe, privacy, fear, and shyness before the sacred and of humility before the tremendous. A woman's breast was to be amputated with an electric scalpel that cut by burning through. As a delicious aroma of grilling steak filled the air, the surgeon made carelessly "cool" and casual remarks about the pattern of his cutting, paying no attention to the freshmen rushing out in distress, and finally tossing this object through the air onto the counter where it landed with a plop. It had changed from a sacred object to a discarded lump of fat. There were, of course, no tears, prayers rituals, or ceremonies of any kind, as there would certainly have been in most preliterate societies. This was all handled in a purely technological fashion—emotionless, calm, even with a slight tinge of swagger.

It makes you think of a few marines walking on Riverside Drive in New York, expecting to meet the lesser breed of sailors, and setting themselves to give samples of their manifest superiority in lethal toughness, either by their cocky behavior or with their fists. Extrapolate this mood in various directions and you get the brash, if sometimes covert, admiration of a man like Hitler, who will probably fascinate a certain brand of tough-minded men of "action" for a long time to come. Hardly any large interest-group has rejected the help of specialists in violence. In Chicago during the 1920's, the unions thought they could use the terror inspired by gangsters to improve their righteous struggle with Chicago

employers. But within a few years, the gangsters were able to take over the unions, as Louis Adamic shows in *Dynamite.* (Illegal violence in the settlement of labor disputes was not of course an invention of the labor movement, but was first practiced by employers in the nineteenth century, as Adamic also shows.)

It is slowly becoming evident that the indifference of the specialist to general, human responsibility may be the death of us all. The egotism and the self-righteousness of narrow experts are phenomena so basic in human behavior that it is a great mistake to find them illustrated only in a particular kind of human association, since they occur wherever the lives of men are shaped by sectarian belief. A practical genocide was practiced against "inferior" races by European colonizers for centuries before the overt egomania of race and blood was rationalized in the insane ideology of the Nazis. And liquidation of vast numbers of mankind as the "final solution" is still found preferable among some of the men of power in the "Free World," when contrasted with the obligation to study and understand the moral causation behind the turbulent revolutionary tides which are rising all over the world.

When practical men speak contemptuously of the weakness of moral ideas, they overlook the fact that they themselves represent a driving energy in Western history which has habitually ignored for centuries all those larger views of life and mankind which are capable of bringing human behavior under the broad government of ethical principles. It was the sectarian spirit in religion which degraded philosophical moral conviction into institutional opportunism, and now the sectarian, specialist spirit in practical pursuits, whether of science or its application in technology, has blinded the modern world to the only resources for control of its destructive tendencies.

Fortunately, the progress of science is itself compelling attention to higher levels of awareness within the disciplines of scientific specialties, with the result that perceptive researchers are beginning to redefine the meaning of "practical" in relation to human welfare. As a result of the broadening inquiries of such men, there may soon come a time when recognition of the effects of sectarianism and exclusiveness in science meets and combines with the spiritual longing of the times, uniting in practical ways both the subjective and the objective modes of the pursuit of good and truth for human beings. Even the language of scientific research at this level is beginning to take on the tone of a latent morality, and the transition from an experimental to a metaphysical generalization about the relation of man to the world around him, and of men to each other, may be closer than we think.

Science and Survival, by Barry Commoner (Viking, 1963), is a work which clearly embodies this trend. Dr. Commoner is a plant physiologist (Washington University) who has given close attention to the unexpected effects of the practice of scientific technology. Early in his book he gives two dramatic instances of scientific remedies which backfired into serious disaster. The first involves his personal experience in a naval agency which developed the use of DDT to kill tropical insects that interfered with island attacks in the Pacific in World War II. He writes:

> Toward the end of our work, when the system was ready for fleet operations, we received a request for help from an experimental rocket station on a strip of island beach off the New Jersey coast. Flies were so numerous that important military developments were being held up. We sprayed the island, and, inevitably, some of the surrounding waters with DDT. Within a few hours the flies were dead, and the rocketeers went about their work with renewed vigor. But a week later they were on the telephone again. A mysterious epidemic had littered the beach with tons of decaying fish—which had attracted vast swarms of flies from the mainland. This is how we learned that DDT kills fish.
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> Such unexpected twists are often encountered when new synthetic substances are thrust into the community of life: a wholly unanticipated development wipes out their original usefulness, or sometimes creates a problem worse than the original

one. In one Bolivian town, DDT sprayed to control malarial mosquitoes also killed most of the local cats. With the cats gone, the village was invaded by a wild, mouselike animal that carried black typhus. Before new cats were brought in to restore the balance, several hundred villagers were killed by the disease.

In another part of his book, Dr. Commoner gets at the root of this sort of problem in a more general discussion of the philosophy of science. A chapter titled "Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts" examines the exciting claims of the new school of molecular biology, recently risen to fame through the "secret of life" publicity given to DNA research. Dr. Commoner looks at these claims with the sober view of a classical biologist, reciting the results of experiments which imply that the dynamics of living organism cannot be understood by means of an exclusively physicochemical approach. The *field* of life, typified by the cell, is an indispensable part of vital phenomena. As he puts it:

> The simple sum of separate molecular events is insufficient to represent the living whole. Some subtle cellular property is lost when, in the first step of a biochemical procedure, the cell is broken open and killed. . . . What the test-tube experiments tell us is that there is no single molecular message which determines the inheritance of the living organism. The beautiful exactness of biological inheritance depends on the precise interactions of many molecular processes. The message which controls heredity is not carried by a single molecule but by the whole living cell.

More broadly:

> . . . the apparent victory of DNA is not the successful resolution of the long debate. Instead the decision has been reached by the less arduous expedient of largely ignoring the basic theoretical question. This question has not really been answered by the new experiments, for they do not in fact support the idea that DNA is a "self-duplicating molecule."

From this criticism of the reductive tendency in biochemistry, Dr. Commoner moves to what he calls the "crisis in biology," growing out of "the conflict between the two approaches to the theory of life." One approach looks for a controlling, manipulative factor in the chemical reactions of particular ingredients of the cell; the other studies the complex interactions within the cell as a whole. The argument for the reductive approach is usually elated by the heady wine of manipulative success; but, unfortunately, the journalistic and even "promotional" mood of the reports of this kind of scientific and medical progress conceals its inadequacies and multiplying side-effects. Actually, Dr. Commoner says, the "familiar successes are marred by illuminating failures." Specifically:

> Insulin does indeed repair the major inadequacies in a diabetic, but the progressive disease which persists in many insulin-treated patients indicates that the whole story is much more complicated. Antibiotics do in fact prevent the growth of certain dangerous bacteria, but in practice many bacteria adapt to this insult and develop strains that are resistant to the antibiotic. Vitamins have surely cured pellagra and scurvy but our understanding of their full role in the body is so incomplete that the damaging effect of a relatively small overdose of vitamin D is only a very recent discovery. The modern search for new synthetic drugs, which is based on a similar philosophy, has had the same history of limited if important success and persistent—and too often ignored—failures. . . . The dominance of the molecular approach in biological research fosters increasing inattention to the natural complexity of biological systems.

It may seem a swooping simplification to pass from this conclusion to wider judgments, yet this, we think, is precisely what must be done if any antidote is to be found for the *basic* defect in our "theory of life." For actually, there are countless parallels to this fascination with the manipulative success of narrow specialists, by no means confined to scientific practitioners. A culture dominated by reductive solutions and the mystique of the "expert" inevitably becomes a culture of the passive mass, manipulated in various ways by its all-knowing specialists. It is a culture which, when it displays its achievements, carefully avoids what "the people" are doing, and endlessly dramatizes what is being done *for* the people. To the mechanisms of such a culture, an enormous

psychological *lumpenproletariat* becomes a practical necessity, and public management inevitably resorts to the skills of image-making and deceptive cajolery. We see the practice of these shady arts on every hand and in every relation, whether it be in tough-minded, condescending explanation of an unbearable foreign policy, or in the cosmic spectacular production of the astronaut heroes of space exploration. It is always *they,* the super-human specialists, who embody the glory of our civilization.

Perhaps we should look for the foundation assumption which underwrites this virtual "worship" of the specialist in that distant, external event on which the most important transaction in human life was long believed to depend—the salvation of our souls by a heavenly specialist in goodness, accomplished through a sacrifice which made all men forever dependent on an outside happening. The idea that men are impotent to save themselves has probably been the most important leverage in the thought-control practiced by priestly specialists in religion, and, psychologically speaking, there is hardly any difference between the compulsive effects of this emasculating conception and the corresponding influence of mechanistic psychology, which is again reflected in the apotheosis of the environment by the political panaceas of the twentieth century. The reflex to look for, depend upon, and fear above all the loss of, reliable external authority constitutes a cultural blank check to the psychological sovereignty of any and all specialists. In this case, the symbols of certainty may change with the vicissitudes of history, but the dynamics of submission to a reductive simplicity remain much the same. It is the operation of sectarian rubrics that we need to study, instead of taking sides in the competition between them.

The obvious and most frequently heard rejoinder to an argument of this sort is a reply which ignores its point. It is said that the diversity of natural phenomena and the complexity of human problems *require* the intensity of specialized research. No doubt. The point is that it is possible to be a specialist without loss of the holistic point of view. This is indeed Dr. Commoner's contention, and his book is an impressive study of what happens to both science and mankind when the holistic approach is sacrificed in order to obtain short-term "success."

Actually, the most exciting and encouraging current of thought in present-day scientific writing is the search for general, comprehensive, and even "moral" meanings in the work of men whom we habitually regard as specialists. What may turn out to mark a crossing of the Rubicon for scientists moving in this direction is Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (University of Chicago Press), in which an eminent practitioner of hard-core science shows the grounding of even the apparently "objective" conclusions of physics in human subjectivity. And Dr. Commoner offers in passing a quotation from George Gaylord Simpson on the DNA controversy which conveys the same idea in another way:

> . . . in my opinion nothing that has so far been learned about DNA has helped significantly to understand the nature of man or of any other whole organism. It certainly is necessary for such understanding to examine what is inherited, how it is expressed in the developing individual, how it evolves in populations, and so on. Up to now the triumphs of DNA research have had virtually no effect on our understanding of those subjects. In due course molecular biology will undoubtedly become more firmly connected with the biology of whole organisms and with evolution, and then it will become of greater concern for those more interested in the nature of man than in the nature of molecules.

Let us return to our initial question—the inadequacy of present-day moralists. The most pertinent comment must be that spokesmen for an institutionalized morality are *bound* to be inadequate. They can't help it. Morality does not submit to institutionalization. By primary definition, a moral act is the act of a man who follows his own light. No true moralist, therefore,

can speak about right and wrong except for himself, although there may be ways of doing this that help others to find their way. The expectation that institutions will take care of the moral problems and issues of mankind cannot help but result in the kind of moral and cultural lag which afflicts us today. "They"—the specialists in morality—cannot possibly think about *our* moral problems, simply because they are ours, not theirs. A world given over to the charge of specialists must expect to become subject to times of "agonizing reappraisal," and when specialization has gone too far the needed reforms may seem more than we can possibly accomplish.

The fundamental critique lies in Dr. Commoner's observation that the reductive approach "fosters inattention." In his last chapter, he puts this in other words:

> . . . the technical content of the issues of the modern world shields them from moral judgment. . . . The self-destructiveness of nuclear war lies hidden behind a mask of science and technology. It is this shield, I believe, which has protected this most fateful moral issue in the history of man from the judgment of human morality. The greatest moral crime of our time is the concealment of the nature of nuclear war, for it deprives humanity of the solemn right to sit in judgment on its own fate; it condemns us all, unwittingly, to the greatest dereliction of conscience.

A major irony of this situation is that those who resolve to devote their lives to correcting it are themselves forced into a specialist role—the role of the pacifist. The man who sees the horror of what goes on behind the shield of authority and the cosmetic prestige of specialization wants to act *now* to arouse the conscience of the public, but when he goes out into the world with his message of warning and moral responsibility, he finds himself confronted by a muting psychological reality—the incapacity of a great many people to grasp what he is saying. In the words of Lester Greenspoon: "People cannot risk being overwhelmed by the anxiety which might accompany a fully cognitive and affective grasp of the world situation and its implications for the future." Lifelong habits of the delegation of responsibility to others, in other words, have unfitted us for the responsibility which the mistakes of the specialists now thrust upon us. A very "special" kind of intelligence—typified in a Gandhi—is required to work constructively under such conditions.

REVIEW
THE COMING HUNGER

A REVIEW article in *Science* for August 25, by James Bonner, a biologist at the California Institute of Technology, may be prophetic of the forces which, during the next ten years, will dissolve the rhetoric of ideological conflict and confront all the peoples of the world with one basic and overwhelming fact. In Dr. Bonner's terse summary:

> The underdeveloped world is on a collision course with starvation. No technology short of nuclear warfare can be spread with sufficient speed to avert the catastrophe. The only remaining question for the United States and for the nations of the developed world is how to deal with the starving nations, when starvation comes.

The book under discussion is *Famine—1975!* (Little, Brown) by William and Paul Paddock. The authors have both spent much of their lives working in the underdeveloped countries and are acknowledged authorities. Dr. Bonner has also interested himself in the problems of world food supply and is in complete agreement with the Paddock brothers. He writes:

> All serious students of the plight of the underdeveloped nations agree that famine among the peoples of the underdeveloped nations is inevitable. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, for example, sees 1985 as the beginning of the years of hunger. I have guessed publicly that the interval 1977-1985 will bring the moment of truth, will bring a dividing point at which the human race will split into the rich and the poor, the well-fed and the hungry—two cultures, the affluent and the miserable, one of which must inevitably exterminate the other. The Paddocks are both more pessimistic and more realistic. They pinpoint 1974 as the year of onset of general, widespread famine, and round the date off to 1975 for convenience. . . .
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> That famine must come to the underdeveloped countries is self-evident because it is already there. Widespread famine has been averted in China, India, Egypt, and other countries only by the massive importation during recent years of grain from those few nations which still have surplus, the United States, Canada, Australia, and the Argentine.

Quite apparently, the impact of this book lies in its recognition that the emergency of inadequate food supply cannot be averted, but only partially met. The world paroxysm of starvation is an inescapable destiny, and those who still hold to a conception of moral law may feel that the nations now wasting their substance in military destruction will find themselves held accountable for deliberate inhumanity to unborn billions on a planetary scale.

Voices raised in behalf of the needs of the hungry peoples of the world are embarrassingly few. One thinks immediately of E. F. Schumacher, who has written frequently and effectively in criticism of the economic idiocy of much of the "aid" so far given by the wealthy nations to the poor—applications of high technology which ignore the essential requirements of farmers who need simple but better tools to produce more food. For copies of Dr. Schumacher's searching studies and practical recommendations, one may write to the Intermediate Technology Development Group Ltd. (9 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2), which was formed about a year ago to spread information about the practical needs of the food-producers in these countries and to increase the flow to them of assistance which can prove of immediate value in increased production.

One of the most shocking effects of reading Dr. Schumacher is the discovery that massive aid, in terms of dollars, when provided with a political orientation, does not go in any important measure to the people who ought to have it. This failure to do what we *say* we are doing—and what a poorly informed public thinks is being done is gradually becoming the characteristic pattern of all large-scale political action. There is a sense in which there is no real hope of genuine humanitarian help for the hungry unless aroused individuals begin to establish new patterns in privately initiated undertakings. What other way is there to break the molds of the highly organized and widely

stratified self-interest which shapes the policies of all the power-states of the modern world?

The fact is that "nations" do not really *care* about human suffering, and the "people" in the affluent countries do not really *know* that the suffering exists. Thus world hunger will continue and grow until, as James Bonner says, engulfing catastrophe results.

Unfortunately, while abstract statements like "famine in the underdeveloped nations" bring technical accuracy to coming problems, they bear little moral impact except to minds schooled in their use. Short of travel, which few can afford, there is no way to encounter the grim reality of hunger and destitution except by reading books. And, for this purpose, it would be difficult to find a better book than John Gerassi's *The Great Fear* (Macmillan, 1963), devoted to the human and social realities in the countries of Latin America. This book has its share of tables and other statistical information, but its chief value lies in eye-witness accounts by a man who lived and worked in Latin America for years as a *Time* correspondent. Following is a characteristic passage, taken from the first chapter:

> Three fourths of Latin Americans are constantly hungry. The average daily calorie intake is 1,200 when normal subsistency is considered 2,400 (and our average in the United States is 3,100). Many Latin Americans actually die from starvation. In Haiti peasants are forced to trap skinny pigeons for food. In Peru and Chile, many eat every other day, and often average as low as 500 calories daily.
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> In Coquimbo and Atacama provinces, the lower North of Chile, more than 400,000 goats, the chief source of food died in 1961 from lack of grass or feed. In central Colchagua and O'Higgins provinces, Chile's richest, known as *el rinon de la oligarquia* (the oligarchy's kidney), peasants are brutalized by police, penalized for self-defense by judges who are also major landowners, forbidden to attend political rallies, and forced to work six or even seven (illegal) days a week, 17 hours a day, for 70 cents daily paid to them in stale bread (*galletas*) and chits redeemable (at 80 per cent of their value) only in the *fundo* (large farm) stores.
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> In one 800-mile tour of these Chilean provinces, I talked to at least 300 peasants: Not one had ever been able to see a doctor during working hours without being docked for it; not one had received the legal minimum in cash, not one had been able to use the *fundo* phone even to call a doctor when his wife was about to give birth; not one was permitted to have his family live with him in his *fundo*-provided windowless mud shack unless each member over six years old contributed four hours a day of work free.

The Great Fear is a study of *why* human beings are condemned to living under such conditions, with searching attention to the role of the United States in relation to the practical efforts of Latin Americans to change them. The necessary background for understanding such questions is provided by Mr. Gerassi's first sentence—expanded and supported throughout: "Latin America's social and economic structure is decadent, corrupt, immoral, and generally unsalvageable."

A reading of this book is likely to produce in the average, conscientious citizen of the United States emotions similar to those felt by the men of the hanging posse in *The Oxbow Incident* after they discovered that in their angry, righteous emotion they had been *wrong.* The men they hanged were innocent. A case in point is the story of Guatemala, vaguely known to many Americans because of the press coverage of the "Communist" scare of about ten years ago. Mr. Gerassi exposes the false front of the propaganda which justified interference with the internal affairs of the Guatemalans, interrupting the work of fundamental and necessary reform undertaken by Juan José Arévalo and his successor, Jacobo Arbenz. The conditions they wanted to change are briefly described:

> No serious historian or sociologist questions the fact that Guatemala needed social change: before Arévalo the right of labor, whether in factories or fields, including United Fruit plantations, had never been recognized; unions, civil liberties, freedom of speech and press were outlawed, foreign interests had been sacred, their privileges were monopolistic and their tax concessions beyond all considerations of fairness counting each foreign corporation as a

person, 98 per cent of Guatemala's cultivated land was owned by exactly 142 people; only one third of the school children could attend classes—there weren't any more schools—and only 10 per cent did.

Educational reforms were tolerated, but when Arbenz in 1952 began the redistribution of land by a measure which a publication of the Twentieth Century Fund called "a remarkably mild and a fairly sound piece of legislation," a counter-revolution was soon arranged by the United States. "No land reform has been attempted since Arbenz' fall." The author of this book is obviously no purveyor of "propaganda." The facts are plain. As an anti-Communist professor at Columbia University said at the time: ". . . social-economic reform is absolutely necessary in Guatemala. To condemn it is to help Communism." The author would probably agree that various policies of the United States in Latin America have been "helping Communism" in this way for a long, long time.

But these political aspects of the troubles of Latin America, and American ignorance of the essential justice in nationalist revolts, are really of subordinate importance in contrast to the naked want they represent and the immeasurable feelings of suppression and indignity from which they draw support. Hungry people cannot help themselves without access to the land, and the hunger grows more widespread with every passing year. These are the basic equations of the present and the future. The over-all picture of coming world-wide famine may at least cause the thoughtful of the world to respond simply as human beings to this overwhelming need.

COMMENTARY
THE WISDOM REQUIRED

EARLY this year the historian, Lynn White, Jr., called attention to the worsening ecological problems which resulted from arming industry—including military industry—with the techniques of science. "Our present combustion of fossil fuels," he said, "threatens to change the chemistry of the globe's atmosphere as a whole." He added that with "the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul his nest in such short order." To end this careless ruin of the earth—as though the planet had no other purpose than to be exploited by man—Dr. White believes that a complete reform of our attitude toward nature will be necessary.

In *Science and Survival* (see lead article), Barry Commoner brings a biologist's testimony regarding the far-reaching effects on the biosphere (the region of life on earth) of nuclear testing, and the potential for further disaster in official denials of danger from nuclear explosions for "security" reasons. The comparative ease with which the technological society hurries along, like lemmings seeking the sea, never asking the right questions, and punishing the people who try to ask them, is in striking contrast to the stall and breakdown of efforts to cope with the ominous side-effects of technological advance. Years ago, J. Frank Dobie, writing in *The Voice of the Coyote,* made a generalization which applies here:

> It takes more power of thought to meet change than to make it. Eli Whitney's cotton gin made the Civil War inevitable. Compared with the amplitude and nobility of Lincoln in mastering the Civil War, Eli Whitney's genius measures no higher than a tinker's. No mechanical propeller of society into a higher standard of physical living George Stephenson, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and so on—has evidenced any power of intellect toward the conduct of society and resulting changes. . . . To make machines, money, wealth and war successfully entails a trivial exercise of the intellect compared with the wisdom required to meet the problems that machines money, wealth and war bring.

These problems were identified recently by E. F. Schumacher as the "neuralgic points" inevitably reached by blind application of technology. It should be obvious, by now, that the "wisdom required" to stop these devastating trends must be of another order than the familiar manipulative-scientific-technological expertise we have relied upon thus far.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A BROTHERHOOD OF SECTS?

AT a gathering of the Deputies of the Episcopal Church in Seattle earlier this year, a young graduate student, John Dillon, new chairman of the National Episcopal Student Committee, brought the assembled deputies, clergy, and laity to a standing ovation by asking that the voice of youth be heard in the church. He made no prepared speech. He told the Episcopalians to reach beyond the confines of their denomination. "Faith," he said, "speaks to us all, but the church speaks only to some." Calling attention to the antiwar activities of students throughout the country, he said:

> We speak of the Vietnam war because we are the generation most affected by it—that is where we may die.
>
> We want to build a new society. We want it to live, not to be exploded.
>
> We speak a new language, concerned with love, faith, hope, charity—the same language Christ spoke.
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> We do not ask a voice simply because of the Vietnam war, but because we are serious about basic things. We would like to have a voice in the church community, and we ask no less than that the church respect moral and spiritual leadership wherever it may be found. We are a new voice, speaking with a new commitment.

While the address of the young man won vigorous applause, one wonders how a powerful denomination of three and a half million members will be able to resonate with such non-denominational utterances. The best the churches seem to be able to do, when it comes to objectives like the brotherhood of man, is to make slow motion in the direction of a brotherhood of sectarian organizations. A visitor to the Episcopalian get-together, the Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke hopefully at a Seattle press conference of the growing cordiality between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church," despite "stubborn differences," going on to comment on possible mergers between various churches in both England and the United States—for example Methodism and Anglicanism in England.

An air of artificiality pervades such modest anticipations. Is it possible that a series of doctrinal compromises concerning matters which no one but religious organization men any longer understand, or even care about, can be mistaken for an authentic flow of brotherly love? The great to-do about the ecumenical movement hardly seems justified when the reconciliations on which it depends are matters of forgotten theological controversy. You wouldn't want to refer to it as a polite power struggle.

What, after all, is the origin of the multiplicity of sects in religion? Basically, they have arisen through conflicts of authority. Wars were fought over hundreds of years to decide which church had the "right answers" concerning the way to salvation. The churches of Western religion have not been places of wonder and looking for the truth, but dispensers of conclusions. The modern age has been a time of the gradual attenuation of any sort of spiritual authority, with creeds and dogmas gradually becoming less and less important, until, by a curious reverse in emphasis, the decline of religion in terms of believed and believable doctrine now may make possible a wider fraternity of religious organizations of little faith. One may legitimately wonder if this represents any kind of "progress" at all, or whether it ought to be seen, instead, as the actual disintegration of outworn institutions.

But, on the other hand, is a true impartiality of search in religion possible for human beings? Could a new church be formed which would have the same spirit, say, as a scientific society? Would this prevent sectarianism?

Not even scientific societies are immune to partisan temptations, despite their avowed determination to accept only the evidence of objective testimony. Subjective factors sneak into even equations, and the oppressions of

"establishment science" have been made well known by such books as David Lindsay Watson's *Scientists Are Human.*

So it may be argued that the periodic necessity for fresh starts in human associations of every sort—and more especially when they are devoted to the discovery of truth—is a part of the human condition and should be deliberately accepted. Perhaps all we can hope for is a more intelligent reception and encouragement of new beginnings. Better, of course, because less wasteful of past energy, would be a concerted effort on the part of established groups to evolve into the "self-regenerating institutions" of which one of the Founding Fathers spoke. This would mean a careful study of the history of institutions in relation to the idea of truth. The "safest" sort of institution, of course, is one which adopts the agnostic position. Agnosticism takes no risks. As a stance, it is something like empiricism in science, which does everything possible to avoid the commitments implied by theory.

But religion without doctrine or tenet, like science without daring hypothesis, never gets off the ground. And it is here, in the need to reach out for meanings not yet commonly accepted, for ideas of cause and synthesis not even guessed at by many, that the danger of sectarianism begins. The problem is to learn how to live with only attempts at crucial explanations, which means using our tentative thinking without letting it harden into dogma.

So far as ideas of truth or knowledge go, this is a basic dilemma. Recognizing the dilemma is not the same as overcoming it, but may be the next best thing, and all we are equal to, now. For the most terrible events of the history of Western civilization—which is brief enough compared to the total of human experience—have practically all grown out of attempts to resolve this dilemma with tough and decisive authority. Our most dramatic metaphors of horror grew out of the historical climaxes of these attempts. One was the institution known as the Holy Inquisition, with its persuasive flames and its tools of torture in behalf of the one true faith. Another came in the Moscow Trials of the 1930's, with their ruthless liquidation of political "deviationists." Lesser examples of thought-control are easy enough to provide, although these two, one representing "religious" authority, the other politicalized science, may be taken as archetypes of human failure to acknowledge the uncertainty of the quest for final truth.

It seems evident that the *creed*, whether religious or political, is the prime instrument of this failure. The creed or "line" is the authoritative means by which men are tested and found wanting in their conceptions of "the truth."

Could we, then, substitute the idea of "hypothesis" for the formulation of creed? The objection, of course, is that the tentative character of an "hypothesis" takes away the emotional charge of a declaration of faith. Religiously emotional movements get under way in a hurry, while the scientific spirit keeps on asking questions. And it is true that you can't move the masses by asking questions. In fact, it often happens that asking questions moves the masses in reverse. They turn against people who ask too many upsetting ones.

The present may represent this kind of "moment of truth" for every kind of sectarian church. If the members are indeed intending to speak "the same language Christ spoke," reflection along these lines is in order.

FRONTIERS

A Man of His Time

THOSE who read and are impressed—as will be every thoughtful person—by the three articles in the October *Atlantic* under the general heading, "Black Ghettos: The American Nightmare," might find it interesting as well as richly informing to turn to the life-story of a man who was one of the first regular contributors to the *Atlantic*, more than a hundred years ago, when it was first founded as a "literary and anti-slavery magazine." There is a direct continuity between the civilized moral intelligence which gave the New England Abolitionist movement its sustaining strength and the quality of these current discussions in the *Atlantic.* And the sense of continuing outrage and desperation which has broken out again and again on the American scene during recent months can be directly attributed to a failure on the part of the people of the United States to do what the best Abolitionist leaders knew would have to be done. All this is crystal clear from a reading of *Colonel of the Black Regiment*, a life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson by Howard N. Meyer (Norton, 1967, $5.50).

Born in 1823, Higginson was an athletic, outdoor man. He was also a good scholar, having a reading knowledge of six languages by the time he was nineteen. On his first job, teaching private school, he was often seen in the yard showing the boys how to box. He knew and admired Thoreau, listened to Emerson with rapt attention, and was animated throughout his life by the uncompromising idealism of the Transcendentalists. He combined his undergraduate work at Harvard with practical efforts to frustrate the capture of fugitive slaves. He told his calculus professor that if he was prosecuted for a particular effort to free a black runaway, he would use the time in jail to review his math. "In that case," the teacher, Pierce, who wanted to make Higginson into a mathematician, replied, "I sincerely hope you may go there." He took English with Edward T. Channing, French with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—and, one might add, conspiracy and revolt with John Brown, to whom he later gave warm support.

Higginson was radical even to dress. After graduating from Harvard Divinity School, and off to his first trial as a preacher, his sister said:

> "You aren't going to wear anything so unclerical, are you? It will ruin your prospects."

His mother interrupted:

> "Let him wear it by all means. If they cannot stand that clothing, they can never stand its wearer."

It must have been quite a family. After a Negro raising money for a school in Michigan for fugitive slaves had stopped at his home, Higginson wrote:

> He spent the night here and was very good company, told plenty of stories about slaves and slave-catchers. He was a man of superior intelligence, information, and humor. I entirely forgot he was black.

Higginson was as strong a champion of women's rights as of Negroes' and Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony were his friends. He was so radical that, as a preacher in Worcester, he could exchange pulpits only with Edward Everett Hale. Sent to Kansas as Secretary of the Worcester Kansas Committee in the 1850's to aid anti-slavery settlers, he had first-hand contact with the brutal tactics of the slavery forces in the sacking of Lawrence by the Missourians. During this period he was a special correspondent of the New York *Tribune*—the first big metropolitan newspaper to take a militant anti-slavery position.

By 1862 Higginson had given up his preaching to devote full time to writing. One morning he opened a letter which began—"Mr. Higginson—are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive?" There were four poems with this note from Emily Dickinson, and Higginson praised and encouraged her. During a long correspondence, she sent him a poem with every letter, although nothing was to be published until after her death—thirty years later.

When the Civil War broke out, Higginson was thirty-eight years old, too old to be a private in the ranks. He wondered a bit about his ministerial background, but resumed fencing lessons, studied military tactics, and started civilian classes in physical culture, drill, and the manual of arms. Finally, his fame as a militant abolitionist brought him the command of the First Regiment of South Carolina volunteers. These were the first black men allowed the privilege of fighting for union and freedom. Now begins a particularly exciting part of Mr. Meyer's book, of which we have space to say only that the commander and the troops covered each other with glory.

After the war, Higginson saw at once that Emancipation was not enough. "To give these people only freedom," he wrote, "without the land, is to give them only the mockery of freedom which the English or Irish peasant has. The time will come when the nation must recognize that even political power does not confer safety upon a race of landless men." Reflecting on the future, he wrote a few years later:

> It is not for nothing that, as the last generation grew up reading Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," so this generation grows up reading Edward Bellamy and listening to Henry George, and wondering where it is all to end. We none of us know even how to state the new problems of the future.

He was amused by Bellamy's answer to an interviewer who wanted to know how the society of *Looking Backward* was to be established. Could it be done by legislation, or would the existing government have to be overthrown? Bellamy artfully dodged:

> "When you want to induce a bachelor to enter matrimony you don't go on with a lot of particulars about the marriage license and the gloves and the ceremony—you just show him the girl and let him fall in love with her and the rest takes care of itself."

All in all, Higginson, like Bellamy, was a man who did very well by his times. The problems now are greater, the future more unpredictable, but an exercise worth considering would be to wonder how Higginson would be thinking and acting today. He was a gentle, courageous, and vastly civilized man. He had the extraordinary opportunities of a youth who grew up in the golden age of New England, and he used every one of them to the full. Conceivably, one of the great lacks of the present—one to which little attention is given—is that there is no corresponding rich culture offering anything like the same resources of mind available today. A young man may not need to know six languages at nineteen, but it makes for a hardy breed of heroes to have the discipline such knowledge involves. After being injured in the war by a cannon ball, he found the time to translate the works of Epictetus. At the close of the Preface to the first edition, he wrote:

> It has not seemed to me strange, but very natural to pass from camp life to Epictetus. Where should a student find contentment in enforced withdrawal from active service, if not in "the still air of delightful studies"? There seemed a special appropriateness, also, in coming to this work from a camp of colored soldiers, whose great exemplar, Toussaint l'Ouverture, made the works of this his fellow-slave a favorite manual. Moreover, the return of peace seems a fitting time to call anew the public attention to those eternal principles on which alone true prosperity is based, and, in a period of increasing religious toleration, to revive the voice of one who bore witness to the highest spiritual truths, ere the present sects were born.

Howard Meyer's book is more than a biography—it is the exploration and recovery of a portion of a very great heritage of all Americans, generated in a time when men still knew how to use their repose for deep reflection and their active energies in the service of broadly based ideals. It was a time when men of high public distinction defended the "extremism" of the New England Reformers, as William Ellery Channing did by saying: "Nothing terrifies me in their wildest moments. What has for years terrified me and discouraged me is apathy."