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THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION

THE religious spirit has not died out from among us, but it has become tacit instead of explicit. One finds the hush of reverence in the writings of great men, bespeaking a rich inner life and intuitive allegiance to a principle of meaning in the universe. Perhaps the limitation of religious expression to these occasional and apparently spontaneous utterances is a good thing in the present age. Religion ought not to come too easily and faith is not a matter of casual transmission. We live in a world which has lost its heart of central conviction.

It is customary to blame this situation on "materialism" and on the popularizers of scientific doctrines, but this diagnosis is much too superficial. In *Between God and Man*, a book published last year, Fritz Rothschild answered the complaint:

> It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless.

This is certainly a part of the answer, but only a part. Religion, we say, has not been "progressive." But there is trouble, here, since religion, when it does become "progressive," seems invariably to lose what little concern it had for the ultimate or existential questions, and to concentrate on peripheral issues, as though the basic problems had already been taken care of. There is very little to distinguish progressive religion from humanitarian science, save for the remnants of a theological vocabulary. It is not that humanitarianism needs criticism. But humanitarianism, to be effective, has to be informed by a profound conviction concerning the meaning of things. Otherwise, it is in danger of settling for short-term activities which keep one "busy," but accomplish nothing permanent. Indeed, it is a question whether any *organized* movement can accomplish anything permanent, except as a vehicle for the unorganized discovery of meanings by individuals. And very little organization is needed for this.

It is both possible and desirable to look at the question of religion not as a historical question or as an intellectual question, but as a vital personal or human question—if, indeed, it is not the sole question to be regarded. It is not such a question for everyone, of course. A kind of abstraction of all ultimate questions or problems has for a long time dominated the contemporary scene. The fact is that any sort of resolution of such questions dictates major commitment for human beings, and most people feel that this kind of commitment is somehow old-fashioned, if not naïve. It is more comfortable, more "modern," to focus one's interests and efforts on peripheral matters, and for the satisfaction of moral urges, there are always the social issues to which one can give his attention.

A remarkable text for investigating the religious question is "My Confession" by Leo Tolstoy. A new book has just come out (published by Julian Press at $5.95) containing Tolstoy's Confession, along with related works, under the title, *The Religious Writings of Leo Tolstoy*. We're not sure that it is a good idea to isolate these writings from the main body of Tolstoy's works, any more than a man ought to isolate his religious thinking from the rest of his life; Tolstoy, for one, made no such separation; but if the appearance of this book will stir a new interest in Tolstoy's "Confession," the project

justifies itself. (To read, along with this book, Isaiah Berlin's brilliant essay, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* [Mentor], concerned with the philosophic issue which haunted Tolstoy throughout his life, might be a balancing influence.)

Tolstoy was a great enough man to experience, at the peak of his literary achievement, the kind of loss of a sense of meaning which overtook young Gotama while enjoying the luxury of the pleasure gardens and palace his father had provided him. This Promethean misery comes to very few, but that it comes to any at all is the beginning of a light on the religious problem.

What is this sense of "dust and ashes" which overwhelms a man, even when he has displayed full mastery over the elements of a dramatically successful career? Tolstoy described his situation:

> My life had come to a stop. I was able to breathe, to eat, to drink, to sleep, and I could not help breathing, eating, drinking, sleeping; but there was no real life in me because I had not a single desire, the fulfillment of which I could feel to be reasonable. If I wished for anything, I knew beforehand that, were I to satisfy it, nothing would come of it. Had a fairy appeared and offered me all I desired, I should not have known what to say. If I had, in moments of excitement, I will not say wishes, but the habits of former wishes, at calmer moments I knew that it was a delusion, that I really wished for nothing. I could not even wish to know the truth, because I guessed in what it consisted.
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> The truth was, that life was meaningless. Every day of life, every step in it, brought me, as it were, nearer the precipice, and I saw clearly that before me there was nothing but ruin. And to stop was impossible; to go back was impossible; and it was impossible to shut my eyes so as not to see that there was nothing before me but suffering and actual death, absolute annihilation.
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> Thus I, a healthy and happy man, was brought to feel that I could live no longer,—some irresistible force was dragging me onward to escape from life...
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> The mental state in which I then was seemed to me summed up in the following: My life was a foolish and wicked joke played on me by some one. Notwithstanding the fact that I did not recognize a "Some one," who may have created me this conclusion that some one had wickedly and foolishly made a joke of me in bringing me into the world seemed to me the most natural of all conclusions.

This is no place to introduce easy, verbal solutions. Tolstoy has his own words to tell how he worked out his problem. It is better, here, to suggest that Tolstoy's encounter with the loss of meaning is the essential human problem which every man must go through, sooner or later, and during which he can borrow from no one else. He may seek help, as Tolstoy did, from all the great religions, but his resolution of the dilemma will have to be entirely his own, as it was for Tolstoy.

The question we should like to pursue is: Whence and how does this ultimate tension come upon the life of a man? Why should he be so tortured? Is this a natural thing, or is it unnatural? If it is unnatural, why does it afflict the best and greatest of men with the greatest intensity, while letting lesser men go, or imposing upon them only a secularized imitation of the problem of meaning?

It comes, we think, by reason of the nature of man, and it comes to the best of men in all its fullness because in them the high forces of human nature begin to have unconfused and uninhibited play.

Man, Plato said, is made of the Same and the Other. He is a complex fusion of the finite and the infinite. He has an unslaked thirst for union with the One, and at the same time an explorer's need to go beyond every horizon and to look into every bayou and inlet of the geography of human experience. He has the feeling that in every finite object there is an incommensurable element which laughs at his footrules and scales. His longing to know is followed everywhere by a misty cloud of unknowing.

He moves back and forth along the gamut of possible activities, from pole to pole of this dual reality, never realizing altogether the One—although increasingly sensible of its mystic Presence—and never finding the elusive core of any particular atom of divided existence, while

nevertheless learning more and more about atoms and their aggregates.

He has a whole scheme of metaphysics about certainty—made from the glorious exactitude of mathematics—but he can never convert this certainty into a balm for broken hearts. The certainty is real, but it concerns only the parts, never the whole, and it is hunger for knowledge of wholes that presses man onward. Sometimes—and the some times are often long times—he embraces the delusion that the whole is captive to a particularly complex part, and this gives him a fanatical energy. Then, as we say, he "makes history."

But a day comes when the illusion fails and disenchantment engulfs him like a tidal wave. His empire of thought collapses and he has to make a new beginning. At such moments are new religions born.

What a stark prospect! How terrifyingly earnest are such engagements with destiny! Our lives, we know, are not like that. They are filled with uncounted epicycles involving lesser matters. Here we need a new principle, which might be called the principle of dalliance. Man is not simple and single, but a whole community of intentions. His needs encompass all the functions of the kingdoms of Nature. He has houses to build, seeds to plant, and graces and manners to devise. He is a walking, talking hierarchy of drives, purposes, and satisfactions. Even his laughter has many mansions, his tears flow from many separate rivers of disappointment and despair. The One and the Many are repeated endlessly like a cosmic design. We are forever framing momentary dramatic unities and making poems out of the charm in fleeting loves and hours.

Hence the fascination of the arts, which see the thread of meaning in all this complexity, and find both the meaning and the complexity good. We carry our burdens with us, but spin their substance into the web of literature, the panorama of the singing and the visual arts. Each work of art is a declaration of the life which finds a partial fulfillment within some limit and spills over into lost, undimensioned regions of time and space. Art makes an ecstasy out of the continual frustration of human longings, celebrating the only peace that man can find in a bondage which is also his inescapable labor—an interval of satisfaction in a mission which can never end.

The flower which knows no restlessness is the companion of unresting man. The bird of unpremeditated art is as sure a sign from heaven as the Himalaya whose peak has an untouchable stillness, whatever storms may rage. Inevitably, for all our botany and mountain-climbing and bird-watching, we move in a great circle of symbolic forms. The "things" of the world are most of all springboards to meaning. They do not really come alive until we have transmuted them with the magician's touch. And then, with the sounding harmony of a universal processional, the figured splendor of a mural born to animate the depths of space, they make us feel at home.

What do we remember of the past? We remember the decisions of men to live on Mount Olympus. We remember the Parthenon; we remember Æschylus and Sophocles and the reaching mind and heart of Socrates. We remember Gethsemane and Calvary. We remember Odysseus and his wanderings, we remember Siegfried. We remember the one-eyed Odin and the sky-splitting songs and rides of the Valkyries. We remember the great principles of the Declaration of Independence and the compassion-lined face of Abraham Lincoln. We remember everything that was both locked in life and reached out beyond, to some transcendent and eternal meaning. All the rest goes into the dust-bins of forgetfulness. What we can render into an explanation of our lives, we keep. History is no more than the story of a universal process which is endlessly individualized by the diversity of the hierarchies of life, by the uniqueness of the Many throughout time and space. The resolution of history into meaning is again the squaring of the circle, like the making of a great poem or a

symphony. It is both itself and also every other great song that men have made.

So we come to the religious question. It is the question of who we are and what our lives are about. The desperation of the question arises from the unlimited demand of our being when confronted by what seem our puny capacities to meet that demand. We want roadways to march along, but find before us only tangled jungles, swamps, and abysses. The mercurial imagination is forever anticipating perfections and Herculean feats we can never accomplish. We seemed doomed by our ability to dream and idealize. We feel the god within us, but we *see* everywhere the denial of the god. We understand the perfect abstraction, but cannot comprehend the perfection of the moment. The hounds of heaven bark at our heels. Patience seems to slump into passivity and defeat. We cannot renounce our divinity and we cannot believe in it. Meanwhile, a committed life seems to come only from some blinding, partisan emotion.

Yet out of every failure arises a birth of new strength. The wreckage of life is the universal manure. The death of a dream is also the death of a confinement. A bright-eyed child looks out of every time-worn countenance. High noons come and go, but the beckoning horizon is always there. In the ultimate scroll of meaning, Judas is transfigured as Ananda, and the lonely ones find voices to sing together, making the pain go away. There are times when we bow our heads, but at others we hold them straight, and each time we see a little farther into the distance. Some day, perhaps, we shall discover all the distances within ourselves.

Letter from **MOSCOW**

Moscow.—A member of the Parliament of a Communist country (not U.S.S.R.) said in discussion some time ago: "There is intellectual idealism, and there is moral idealism. The danger and the tendency of Socialism is to rely entirely upon the intellectual. We must learn that there is a proper place in man's life for moral idealism, as well."

He spoke as an ordinary man, not in terms employed by professional philosophers, and this seemed a remarkable statement for one regarding himself as a good Marxist. Surely, if Marxism means anything, it means that the power of intellect, the dialectic, the planning, have usurped the place of moral idealism and have, in a sense, even claimed to *become* moral idealism. If this is not so, how justify the reduction of the individual to one of a long string of zeros in the great number of the mass? How explain the apparent postponement, if not the denial, for such reasons as may be alleged, of basic human satisfactions, under the rigors of the socialist process?

Last week we were in St. Basil's Cathedral, that incredible cluster of domes, towers, and twisted, colored turrets strangely located at the head of Red Square, just outside the Kremlin wall. It is now a museum, to be visited at one ruble per head, but there isn't much to be seen. The old stone steps to the various chapels, turrets and domes, deeply worn by the feet of centuries of worshippers, have been filled with concrete and edged with metal. The feet of the future's curious will have less effect than those of the past's faithful.

On Sunday morning I sat for two hours and forty-five minutes through the monthly Communion Service of the Baptist Church of Moscow. Twenty-two hundred worshippers jammed the church, of whom at least 800 stood for the entire time. They occupied every pew, stood packed four abreast down the central aisle, filled every stairway and doorway and even lined the steps, curving about the Communion table and leading to the lectern and elevated platform on which the elders sat. There are three services on Sunday, and three evening services during the week.

I was unprepared for so moving an experience. The hands which reached for ours as we entered and as we left the service, the warmth of the greetings, passed the barriers of culture and language and reached straight to the heart. The poignancy of the choir's appeal; the thrilling depth and certainty of the music of worship; and from time to time a note almost of despair in the soaring refrains of supplication—all these were largely unexpected.

The church was hot, though a storm raged in the street, and it grew hotter and hotter. At least five persons were seen to faint during the service. One old lady, standing in the balcony across from us, was raised by her neighbors, draped informally over the back of the rear pew, to which she clung, groggily repulsing what were obvious suggestions that she be taken out. She was kept upright by ministrations of cotton swabs, moistened at the mouth of a bottle at the end of the row and passed from hand to hand along the twenty intervening persons. For her, the most important place in the world, right then, was this Communion service, and I felt some sort of victory as I saw her reach for the bread.

Constantly, during the service, papers fluttered from the balconies and were passed down the rows to the front. Stuffed under a lace napkin on the Communion table, by the end of the service they made quite a respectable heap. They were described to us as requests for special prayers, and greetings from persons or groups at some distance who could not get to Church. At one point I counted forty persons taking notes, frequently standing, pad resting on the back of the person in front. I was told they were taking down the sermon to be repeated to groups at a distance who could not be present. We were told that

there are 5400 active Baptist churches in the USSR, and 540,000 members.

The Pastor's words, only incompletely translated by our young guide, were obviously those of hope for the Eternal Life. Repeatedly a certain figure of speech came through to us. He spoke of the life of the faithful in Heaven, where they would "wear Christ's white clothing and carry the palm branches of Peace." There was strength in the Pastor's manner, and faith, and hope; but there was no evidence of an attempt at emotionalism, none of the manner of the revivalist. I think there must have been some 200 quietly weeping in the congregation, from time to time. My attention was especially caught by a young woman in a green head scarf, directly across from us. She tried to sing through her soggy tears, while her husband, a bespectacled, plainly-dressed but intelligent looking young man, did his best to comfort her.

At one point in the service there arose a cry of anguish and heartbreak from somewhere under the balcony. It rose and fell for a considerable period, arousing only the mild interest of a few of those who could see. Our guide shrugged his shoulders and whispered, "Sometimes sick people come to our church."

One has to reach some conclusion about an experience like this. But how? One lacks sure reference points. Are you a Communist? Do you see in this the opium of the people? Are you a psychologist? Do you see the essential irrationality of human beings, trying to fool themselves into a sense of security? Are you a capitalist? Do you see a massive resistance to the totalitarian atheist State? I am not conveniently any of these. The last is the only one of which I am certain that it is wrong.

This week we had quite a long visit with a responsible functionary of the Russian Orthodox Church. I asked him whether it was possible to be a member of the Communist Party and a member of the Church, as well. A man in the full robes of the Church, he wears its dignity naturally and quietly. His kind eyes looked more keenly at me as he answered: "No. Our Government says that to be a Communist one must be an atheist. Believers are not members of the Party."

Last night we briefly attended—from a privileged visitors' area—a solemn Mass celebrated by the Patriarch of the Russian Church on a special occasion related to St. Simeon. The jam of worshippers was almost unbelievable. The Church was beautifully maintained, and of a barbaric splendor such as I have never seen. The service was said to last three hours. The worshippers participated in an intense, attentive silence broken only by occasional responses and the almost constant whisper of prayers. One is almost led to make the fatuous remark that the most crowded places we have seen in Moscow are the Churches.

Here we are, face to face with the problem our Parliamentarian started us off with. The Government of the USSR has divided the people. You can stay with the old, formerly accepted moral system, or you can become one of the elect, the leaders of a new society. This distinction seems sharp. Perhaps it is too much to expect, but I have not seen, in these almost three weeks in Moscow, a synthesis or even an approach of the intellectual and the moral dimensions in the life of this Communist country.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
"THE MASKS OF GOD"

JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (Viking, 1959) is another prodigious survey of the psychology of the myth. More particularized than *The Hero With a Thousand Faces,* it is less provocative from a philosophical point of view, more difficult to read, and written in a style that is obscure for the average reader. However, *The Masks of God,* for enthusiasts of Campbell's *Hero,* will provide a rich harvest in cross references.

At the end of the book, the author shows how the study of ritual parallels the study of myth in revealing an ever-present urge towards "initiation." And it is initiation, says Campbell, that every man is after—the artist, the poet, the adventurer, and the philosopher and scholar as well. Primitive ritual enacted various tragedies and inflicted tortures as symbolic of the necessity for suffering—just as the classical tragedies of Greece exhibited the inevitable drama of the human soul. Campbell writes:

> The Way of Suffering of the shaman is the earliest example we know of a lifetime devoted to the fourth end; the serious use of myth hermetically, as *marga,* as a way to psychological metamorphosis. And the remarkable fact is that the evidence points irrefutably to an achievement—at least in many cases—of a perceptible amplification of the individual's horizon of experience and depth of realization through his spiritual death and resurrection, even on the level of these first primitive explorations. The shaman is in a measure released from the local system of illusions and put in touch with mysteries of the psyche itself, which lead to wisdom concerning both the soul and its world, and he thereby performs the necessary functions for society of moving it from stability and sterility in the old toward new reaches and new depths of realization.
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> The two types of mind, thus, are complementary: the tough-minded, representing the inert, reactionary; and the tender, the living progressive impulse—respectively, attachment to the local and timely and the impulse to the timeless universal. In human history the two have faced each other in dialogue since the beginning, and the effect has been that actual progress and process from lesser to greater horizons, simple to complex organizations, slight to rich patterns of the art-work which is civilization in its flowering in time.
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> Once this point is made, I think, it speaks for itself. The dual service of myth as contributory to the ends of *kama, artha,* and *dharma,* and, on the other hand, as a means of release from these ego-linked obsessions, is now perfectly obvious. And that in the latter service it is functioning as art can hardly be denied. Can mythology have sprung from any minds but the minds of artists? The temple-caves of the paleolithic give us our answer.
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> Mythology—and therefore civilization—is a poetic, supernormal image, conceived like all poetry, in depth, but susceptible of interpretation on various levels. The shallowest minds see in it the local scenery; the deepest, the foreground of the void; and between are all the stages of the Way from the ethnic to the elementary idea, the local to the universal being, which is Everyman, as he both knows and is afraid to know. For the human mind in its polarity of the male and female modes of experience, in its passage from infancy to adulthood and old age, in its toughness and tenderness, and in its continuing dialogue with the world, is the ultimate mythogenetic zone—the creator and destroyer, the slave and yet the master, of all the gods.

One might call Dr. Campbell—who is, incidentally, a comparatively young man—a kind of Platonic anthropologist. For although he makes no scientific excavations at the site of ancient cultures, he pieces together some very interesting theories concerning the development of religion and myth. His copious correlations make it possible to wonder if there was a time when a mankind we know little about today was "of one lip and one religion." Further, the legends of "human gods and divine men" could conceivably have had their origin in impartations of "highly developed teachers of humanity," serving a kind of parental function at the outset of human evolution on the earth. Dr. Campbell does not advance this idea as a personal theory, but his discussion of it opens up wide horizons. It may even be that reflection of this sort is necessary if we are to escape the literalism of specific religious traditions

and to make a transcendent unity of psychology and religion.

Dr. Campbell shows that identical elements appear in the Hindu, Hebrew, and Greek versions of man's origin. The Hebrew tradition is the most obscure, being confused by the confinement of "beginnings" to a concrete historical episode, whereas the Hindu and the Greek accounts of Genesis are clearly intended to be symbolical. However, the important point is that "if we now allow all three of these versions—the Hindu, the Hebrew, and the Greek—to supplement and play against one another in our minds, we shall certainly find it difficult to believe that they have not been derived from a single common tradition; and this probability becomes even more confounding and amazing when the primitive Australian example is considered in relation to the rest. . . . There can be little doubt that there is a common tradition back of all these myths."

There are times when Dr. Campbell's approach, as well as much of his content, is reminiscent of the first major work of H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, for Campbell also believes in "the lineaments of a new science" which will take us beyond the petty belief that only scientific methods of thought lead to significant psychological discovery.

In his prologue to *The Masks of God*, Campbell says that "no one, as far as I know, has yet tried to compose into a single picture the new perspectives that have been opened in the fields of comparative symbolism, religion, mythology, and philosophy by the scholarship of recent years." Dr. Campbell has attempted to remedy this deficiency.

From the standpoint of a synthesis of metaphysical assumptions, Campbell sees the occult meaning of "God" neither as Jehovah nor as any other sort of personalized spirit: The God that men have really hungered for when they are aspiring to the apprehension of a higher meaning is simply a sense of universal order, called *Ma'at* in Egypt, *Dharma* in India, and *Tao* in China. This is Plato's Good and also his Law. It is the Nature-God of Spinoza and it is the congeries of Monads in the philosophy of Leibnitz.

In a chapter entitled "The High Civilizations," Dr. Campbell synthesizes these apparently far-flung approaches and conceptions:

> It can be said without exaggeration that all the high civilizations of the world are to be thought of as the limbs of one great tree, whose root is in heaven. And should we now attempt to formulate the sense or meaning of that mythological root—the life-inspiring monad that precipitated the image of man's destiny as an organ of the living cosmos—we might say that the psychological need is to bring the parts of a large and socially differentiated settled community, comprising a number of newly developed social classes (priests, kings, merchants, and peasants), into an orderly relationship to each other, and simultaneously to suggest the play through all of a higher, all-suffusing, all-informing, energizing principle.

COMMENTARY
AREN'T THERE ANY PEOPLE?

IF this report on a talk on Human Relations by Burton Henry, professor of education at Los Angeles State College, seems fragmentary, the explanation is that it is from memory, and that while listening to the KPFK broadcast of Dr. Henry's remarks a couple of nights ago, we were deprived of hearing the middle portion of his talk by a sudden silence from the speaker. The break in the program was irritating because Dr. Henry seemed to be speaking directly to the question of "identity," as examined in this week's "Children." Well, we thought, maybe we should send in our fifty cents to KPFK to help them buy that new transmitter they keep talking about; but then we found that the little wire that serves as our antenna had curled around and poked its end into the back of the FM tuner, causing a complete breakdown of modern technology.

The repair was easy, but when Dr. Henry was again audible we found that he was describing work in a school which, at the time of his visit, was dramatizing its educational achievement by means of an extensive display of illustrated maps of areas in the continent to the South. By each map a child was stationed and when his turn came he made a little speech about the things the map represented. One child, for example, gave a precise account of coffee production, covering both the wet method and the dry method. That's the way it went—maps and set speeches on natural resources, raw materials, production techniques, the wonders of geography, the rivers, the mountains, the lakes of South America.

Modestly, Dr. Henry asked, "Don't you know about people in South America?" Getting no intelligible reply, he asked again, "You know, *people*—don't you study people, who they are in these countries and what they are like?"

The teacher took him aside and explained that things like that were "too controversial." The children could talk about *things* without raising any upsetting issues or questions.

On another occasion, Dr. Henry ran into an interesting consequence of the neglect of people. He was talking to a teen-age girl who had just returned from school. He asked her about her classes and she emptied her handbag, showing him a dozen or so of the notes that had been passed from girl student to girl student. Notes which said, "Don't go out with him—he's a jerk!" "That drip!" "Do you think he likes me?" "Do you like the way I do my hair?" This was the general level of the intra-class correspondence.

The professor of education, being confronted by this intimate confidence, decided to deal gently. "Well," he said, "it must have been a study period." "Oh no," the girl said. "It was an English class," she said. "The teacher was reading to us."

"Didn't she see what you were doing?" Dr. Henry asked. "No," the girl said. "We're careful to look interested."

By this time in his talk, Dr. Henry had enough ammunition to fire a salvo. If, he said, you deny youngsters access to the interesting things about people, keeping education safely impersonal and uncontroversial, they respond like this. They give you what you want—or what they think you want. They put on bland, "interested" expressions, but devote their real attention to matters of human importance to them. If there is no discussion of the activities going on in the community around them, no awareness allowed of peoples' differences of opinion, controversy, issues, problems, the children will almost certainly fill the abyss with interests of their own devising—usually childlike and purely personal; after all, they *are* children.

That, Dr. Henry points out, is how our schools create attitudes of hypocrisy and conformity.

This tendency, he said, has its beginning with school administrators. If school boards and

superintendents try to "control" what teachers say and do, if they issue rulings on what is "safe" to teach and repress educational freedom and originality by pervading the system with an atmosphere of conformity and timidity, the teachers will inevitably convey the same frustrating influences to the children. They will foster routines of protective deceit and skillful pretense. The Organization Teachers will produce Organization Children.

There will be exceptions, of course. There will be two or three girls and boys in every big school who will champion issues and carry on a private crusade against tired and frightened administrative apathy. They will buck the system and maybe get some of their letters published in a paper like MANAS. And if they have some personal balance, they may do some good.

But is this any way to run an educational system? Wait for intelligent children to point out the Way?

We're going to write to Dr. Henry for a copy of his speech. FM radio is a fine thing, but nobody ever told us to watch out for a neurotic antenna.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
"GOODBYE TO MAMA"

HAVING at hand some interesting letters by teen-agers—chiefly to newspaper editors—and also desiring to delay no longer at least a passing comment on Allen Wheelis' *The Quest for Identity*, a realization suddenly dawned that the two efforts could be combined.

The letters are protests on significant issues. And young people who *intelligently* break away from conventional opinions and attitudes are indeed "questing" for identity. It is Dr. Wheelis' intent—he is a New York psychoanalyst—to clarify the nature of some of the conditions which surround this sort of quest in our time. In his Foreword he explains.

> This is an essay on man in mid-twentieth-century America. It is concerned with his changing character, with the loss of his old identity, and with his search for a new one.

Dr. Wheelis' psychoanalytic discussion is periodically illustrated by incidents in the story of a boy and his family—a family of pious but inadequate certainties—and of the boy's needful separation, finally, from the obligations of the filial tie. The last of these episodes has the title, "Goodbye, Mama," by no means a frivolous expression.

"Mama" is a symbolic figure. She stands for a past from which those who may represent the promise of a new culture must be weaned. Mama, in the stereotype, is utterly conventional. In actual life, and in the nineteenth century, she was often more than that—often an extraordinary human being, from any standpoint. But at all times she was accorded *automatic deference.* So were the standards of nationalism, and likewise other institutions now subject to grave questions, such as capital punishment. Now all of the youths talk back to their parents, because automatic deference simply doesn't fit in with the growth pattern of Western culture. Few, alas, talk back to any particular point. But what those few do say is apt to be worth hearing.

So now to some of those pungent "Letters." The first is addressed to the Pasadena Board of Education. The Pasadena Miss who wrote the missive is, we think, to be congratulated. How can she respect the teacher she describes? Why should she? Here is an ultimate case of "goodbye to mama,"—with the teacher a stereotype of authority akin to the maternal:

> Gentlemen:
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> Recently, after reading an article from the *Atlantic Monthly* which spoke of Ralph Bunche as an American who had not succumbed to the tendency of the individual to become lost in what it felt was an age of conformity and unjustified bigness, a teacher mumbled that she certainly disagreed with the author, that she had "heard some things" about the Negro statesman. She was asked to explain what she had heard, so that the students could come to their own conclusions. It was pointed out that such allusions cause people, at least subconsciously, to consider those in question to be in some degree subversive, and that the situation is rarely looked into in the necessary detail. She replied, "Oh, he's on a list of people we can't talk about." It was mentioned that she had indeed talked about him, and that she was now allowing no method of judging the validity of her statement. She repeated that she could not discuss him, and was asked the origin of the list:
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> "It comes from downtown."
>
> "You mean the Board of Education drew up the list?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Well, who is responsible for it?"
>
> "It's state-wide."
>
> "Where can I get a copy of it?"
>
> "I don't know. I don't think there is a copy."
>
> "But you have seen it?"
>
> "Now, don't get excited about this thing."
>
> I'm not excited, I'm absolutely fascinated. It is from downtown, but the Board has nothing to do with it; it is state-wide, but she doesn't see how I can get a copy of it from the state authority; in short, it appears that the list exists, but that it is definitely not in existence.
>
> If you know of the list, I would be most grateful if you would send me a copy; if you know where I can find it, I would appreciate any information you could give me. If, on the other hand, the Board has authorized no such list, I think it might serve the

interests of many students who are being indoctrinated by proxy, if you looked into the matter. I am pretty young, but I believe that censorship is an unnecessary evil. And it appears to me that when it is used to hint at unnamed "sins," it goes beyond even the feeble concept of protecting students from the possibility of being swayed on controversial subjects.

Sincerely,

Next is some irony on a subject of tremendous psychological, as well as humane, significance—capital punishment. This letter by Tony Chaitkin, a high-school boy, appeared in the Pasadena *Star-News* for Feb. 12:

Editors:

This letter concerns the California state law which permits the public to carry out revenge murders against capital criminals—"capital punishment."

It seems to me we are going about these executions all wrong. If we want them to be real deterrents to crime, this is what we should do: take a few of these miserable criminals, who don't really count as human beings, put them in some sort of glass ovens, and burn them alive in front of a huge audience, so that all could see the penalty for crimes against society. Or maybe we could let everybody in the crowd come by with a razor and take a swipe. We've got to do *something*, because it's just disgraceful that our crime rate is no lower than those of states without capital punishment.

And as for the fact that guttersnipes generally get it and those with money for good lawyers don't, there is only one solution: anyone accused of a capital crime should be executed (this will save the expense of another scandal like Chessman's).

I know the parole provisions of a bill to abolish the death penalty could be made strong enough to protect the public, but there is always one possibility—the convicts might escape.

I say you've got to fight fire with fire, death with death. We are living in cruel times—to hell with the teachings of Christ, or the helpfulness of psychotherapy. We're living in a jungle, you've got to kill to protect yourself.

This letter evoked scandalized protests. Apparently some Pasadenans completely missed the point and took this twentieth-century "modest proposal" quite literally. "Your newspaper has sunk to a new low," wrote one righteous Protestant. Appropriately, the editor replied: "There is nothing more dangerous than irony: not everybody gets the point being made. Tony Chaitkin's phrase—taken out of context—is indeed shocking. In context, Mr. Chaitkin was not sacrilegious, nor were the editors in publishing his letter."

The theme of Dr. Wheelis' book—which deserves more attention than space permits in this issue—is that character change must precede cultural change; that in an age of social and family disorganization, we must expect young men and women seeking individual identity to break ties with the thinking which underlies conventional attitudes. For the present, we offer one quotation from *The Quest for Identity:*

Nowadays no character that is fixed can remain adjusted—unless experience is limited to those conditions under the influence of which character was formed, in which event the dimensions of life shrink rapidly. To be of fixed character and also receptive to the environing culture generates a mounting tension—a circumstance in which psychiatrists become acquainted with a large number of their patients.

FRONTIERS

Against Capital Punishment in California

THE California legislature is now again considering the question of capital punishment, and whether or not it should be abolished in the state. Everyone knows why; a notorious convict, Caryl Chessman, whose published autobiography also became known throughout the world, was finally to be executed after nearly twelve years of delays and legal maneuverings. And then the protests began to mount with increasing fervor and insistence—a great many from far away places—apparently because some people cannot help feeling shocked when a criminal they know so well is to be told that he must leave his typewriter, walk into the other room, and be killed by gas. After his twelve years of tantalizing hope, one feels, this is simply too much. And too macabre and mechanical a way for society to act.

The French newspaper, *Le Monde,* called the projected killing a "ritual murder." Murder motivated by the sort of amorphous revenge which laws enacted by the self-righteous allow every vindictive citizen to savor. And is there any worse variety of self-righteousness than that of those who are not right? And can any deliberate murder be right, no matter in what name it is committed?

So Governor Brown heard the swelling voice of protest, and, teetering on his tightrope, granted a brief reprieve, asking the legislature to argue the capital punishment issue once more. Now came a voice of protest with a different sound; Brown, this loud and angry voice said, should not confuse the abstract issue of capital punishment with this single highly-publicized case. Why in heaven's name—or, if you prefer, why in hell—not? Since when have any of us become such perfect philosophers as to always awaken to an issue whether or not it touches our own emotions in some fashion? Apparently, though, four legislators thought themselves able to judge from this Olympian pinnacle, for they announced that, while heretofore intending to oppose the death penalty, they would now uphold it during the current session. And thus proved our point, not theirs. For if a man announces himself to be against capital punishment *on principle*, and then votes for it because he is angry, we can only conclude that when his emotions are stirred he reacts like everyone else—except that he reacts in a destructive, negative manner.

Oh, yes, let's be detached and impersonal, and weigh such a matter in its proper perspective. One version of this virtue, however, is all too reminiscent of Big Brother psychology in *1984*. The Los Angeles *Times,* that perennial monument to its own definitions of virtue, made the matter all very simple. What is involved in the protest and reprieve, said the *Times,* is that "emotions, springing from ignorance, mostly, have operated to save Caryl Chessman from the sanitary disposal mechanism that a civilized society is constrained to set up to shield itself from the contamination of criminal psychopaths." Your choice of civilization, friend—not ours.

There are of course things to argue about in the Chessman case. But what we want to argue about is not the fate of Caryl Chessman, but the quality of a social community which finds capital punishment to be a suitable remedy for criminal behavior. It is the manner and the circumstances of the death of a man destroyed legally by capital punishment that are at issue. These exhibit a supreme contempt for the human spirit. From the moment sentence has been passed, we are all responsible for the judgment that this human spirit no longer exists in the man who is condemned. We say he is worthless, a piece of dirt to be kicked aside—"disposed of," as the *Times* casually puts it. As though we could know *all* about it.

Now and then a community is fortunate enough to have a Clarence Darrow within its midst to rob the death chamber of its prey. What does a Clarence Darrow do? He does not change anything. He does not make a guilty man innocent in the eyes of the law, nor does he

change the law. A Clarence Darrow is a man with the power in him to restore to human beings for a little while long enough for them to change their minds about judicial killing—their moral intelligence and sensibility. He makes them see that they ought not to do this thing. He makes them see that they do not really know what guilt is, or what innocence is. He makes them realize that while the man on trial may be guilty, they do not know just how guilty he is, or why, and that they are not, after all, so sure of their own innocence.

A Clarence Darrow is an embodied conscience for the social community. Having a Clarence Darrow on hand seems to be a matter of chance. But decisions of this sort should not be left to chance. Why should a Darrow burn out his life in never-ceasing frustration at the impersonal cruelty of the blind mechanisms of "justice" when the people do not learn from him or take up his work after he is gone?

California is a state which incorporates many currents of the history of the people of the United States. It has much ruthlessness in its past. Its powerful men have been aggressive and proudly hostile toward less fortunate individuals and groups. Looking back over the history of California, one may wonder if it can ever become really civilized, outliving the racist injustice of its origins, the arrogant irresponsibility of its economic development, the almost chronic delinquency of its urban centers.

There are good things to be said of California, of course. But the good things of California are marked mostly by immaturity and undeveloped strength. If California can abolish capital punishment—if not during this session of the legislature, the sooner, at least because of it—the state will move a long way in the direction of becoming a responsible social community.