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LOOKING INTO THE ABYSS

MODERN society owes much to the recent advances in psychotherapy; indeed, owes much, on many counts, to the entire psychoanalytical movement, from Sigmund Freud on; but the individual, as distinguished from "society," has obligations of his own to the findings of psychotherapy. The man who, without being "sick" in any notable way, is trying, as we say, "to find himself," may profit exceedingly from what the psychologists have discovered.

Even though the psychologists are able to tell us very little about the "self," and have until recently done everything that they could to discourage subjective methods of inquiry, the one thing that they have made abundantly clear is the extraordinary complexity of human motivation. You have only to ask yourself the question, "What do I really want from life?", to realize how helpful it is to have the running comment of psychologists to refer to, while you are trying to make up an answer.

Not that the psychologists can be of much use, finally, with such a question. Their contribution is chiefly in making it difficult for you to deceive yourself.

A useful resource for starting such an investigation is a passage from William James' classic, *Psychology,* in which the ambivalence of human beings is pressed into the open:

> Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon-vivant,* and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a "tone-poet" and a saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's; the *bon-vivant* and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay.

With this as a sample line of motives, any man can write his own psychological diagnosis, lining up the compatibles and the incompatibles, the light-hearted as well as the serious intentions of his life. Even a simple inventory of this sort is a help in making decisions; but there is still the question: "What do I *really* want from life?" A man can spend many years trying to be a philosopher, and still be stumped by the question. And there is always the problem of deciding whether what a man would like to do or be is for the purpose of impressing or winning the approval of others, or an expression of some deeper resolve.

Intellectually, reaching a general decision concerning an end in life often seems quite simple. From a reading of philosophy and a study of religion, a man may say to himself, "I should like to be a saint." But what sort of man is a saint? Does the person who wants to become a saint really know what it is like to be a saint? Even casual attention to the question suggests a variety of complexities. If you give the word "saint" its best possible meaning, you must face the likelihood that the man who *is* a saint is not the least bit interested in the things which cause other men to aspire to saintship. The motives of the saint are much more liable to be similar to the simple hope of a normal woman to be a good wife and mother. The longing to be a saint is a longing for status, and the would-be saint could meet with no greater obstacle to achieving his supposed aspirations.

Saintship, we shall have to stipulate, is a by-product of some more profound intention in life than wanting saintship. In fact, this sort of judgment should be stipulated about every sort of human desire which reaches after some socially approved goal or position. A first conclusion, then, is this: That the only motives worthy of

attention must represent ends-in-themselves—things sought and done from a primary drive to expression, and not for the sake of "appearances" or the status achieved in the eyes of others.

From this it follows that an objective which can be easily labelled is an objective subject to suspicion. When a man is able to express his wants in terms of labels, he needs to ask himself whether he longs for the label or for the reality—whatever it is—behind the label. And if he withdraws from the bothersome task of defining his ends without the use of labels, he can be pretty sure that it was only the label that he wanted, after all.

It now appears that a man who has difficulty in saying what he wants from life is in pretty good shape. He rejects the labels as invariably involving some kind of pretense, and he is hesitant about claiming a goal that he cannot, in the nature of things, wholly understand.

And now something else becomes clear. Abstract thinking about human ends, when pursued beyond a certain point, increasingly becomes thinking in a vacuum. Such thinking tends to lose its connection with actual life. The fact is that, whenever we start to think seriously about our lives, we are always in the middle of a complicated situation which represents what we have been doing up to now. The motives that we have had in the past, good, bad, or indifferent, have created that situation. The man-thinking-abstractly is also a man-in-motion. Always, we are in some existential situation, to which the thinking naturally applies, or should be made to apply.

Well what are the human occupations? There are dozens of callings to choose from, but the following will probably be as useful as any others: Teacher, Artist, Administrator, Builder, Merchant, Workman, Servant. Let us first deal with possible objections to these categories. Where are the philosopher, the religious leader, and the scientist?

"Teacher" is supposed to include all those who are concerned with the discovery of truth. If we define Man as a being who is essentially a truth-seeker, and if a teacher is one who undertakes to assist others in the process of self-fulfillment, then the teacher must also be a philosopher; and philosophy, as the love of truth naturally includes religion. Insofar as a scientist is concerned with the quest for truth, he, also, is a teacher; and to the extent that he is concerned with thc practical applications of scientific discovery, be may be called a builder. All technology, according to this analysis, comes under building. "Administrator" covers all activities concerned with the ordering of human relationships, "Merchant," all buying and selling, while the application of "Workman" and "Servant" are fairly obvious. Fortunately, the category of "Servant" is a diminishing one in our time. The idea of any human being having nothing to do but minister to the personal needs and wants of other people is out of key with the spirit of the age.

Let us suppose, then,—to pick a particular "existential situation,"—that a man is a builder of some sort at the time that he begins to ask himself, "What do I really want from life?"

There are multiple satisfactions in being a builder. A builder provides homes and other physical facilities for living. This is his essential function, which ramifies into endless projects. He may construct roads, ships, bridges, communications systems, public places such as libraries and hospitals. He may make the tools, which make other things, or the instruments which operate machines. Fundamentally, the builder supplies the man-made contribution to the human environment—a wholly necessary activity.

Why should a builder worry himself with wondering about the meaning of his life? Usually a man does not ask such questions unless he is provoked to ask them. He asks them, then, either because his profession leads him into manifestly contradictory situations—the kind of situation exploited by the modern novel, in which, for

example, a builder of aircraft may find the design and construction of guided missiles wholly repugnant to him—or simply because he begins to wonder, as any philosopher might wonder, where all his tremendous efforts are leading.

The idea that being a builder is a good thing has involuntary confirmations. It is confirmed, first, by what may he called "instinct." A man seeks or contrives shelter almost by instinct. The need for shelter, and for everything that may legitimately come under the heading of shelter, is plainly self-evident. To meet a self-evident need requires no extensive explanation or apology. It is an activity which explains and justifies itself. The second involuntary confirmation is from the intuition. We "sense" the validity of building. Building is the creation of a form through which intelligence may manifest, and the manifestation of intelligence is, we feel without need of supporting argument, good. Inward satisfaction is thus the immediate reward of the builder—from the child who gleefully calls a parent to inspect the block he has piled on top of another block, to the architect of an Empire State Building or the erector of a Golden Gate Bridge.

We must note, then, that the man who happens to be a builder, and who turns to wondering what he wants from life, is a man who has begun to question the wisdom of his instincts and of his intuitions. He questions the validity of spontaneous satisfactions. He wants to know *why* he should feel satisfaction from such activity, and what that satisfaction may mean.

A man who is naturally a philosopher (why there should be such men is another, although extremely important, question) is moved by some mysterious internal stimulus to ask questions of this sort, whereas the rest of us need the prod of circumstance or disastrous or disillusioning experience. The type of the philosopher is suggested by the story of Gotama Buddha, who insisted upon investigating the cause of suffering, even though he had nothing but pleasure in his own life, and came upon the fact of suffering most casually, only by accident. For Gotama, then, the provocation to philosophy was the fact of human suffering—not his suffering, but *any* suffering—and his answer to the question of what he wanted from life was that he wanted to know what *causes* suffering: under what law or order does it occur?

If we were to hazard a guess about the present, and why men of the present are brought to similar reflections, we would say that, from a variety of causes, modern life has become tasteless and insipid, as well as frightening in some respects, with a sense of constructive significance withdrawn. Activities which seem in principle to have a validity supported by both instinct and intuition have become so filled with practical contradictions that we now begin to distrust their role as a part of the "good life." The spontaneous satisfactions are weakened, our right to them challenged, by the over-all consequences of what we do. A builder, for example, cannot feel the same fulfillment from building gun turrets as he felt when building, say, hydro-electric plants. An engineer concerned with the production of atomic energy may console himself by thinking of its peacetime applications," yet he is forced to recognize that the military applications (atomic-powered submarines, for example) seem to get most of the priorities. What was near to being Albert Eintein's last public pronouncement—that if he were setting out as a young man, today, he would prefer to be a pedlar instead of a theoretical physicist—was no idle commentary on the times.

The result of such questioning is that a man finally gets to the point where he can no longer take either his instincts or his intuitions for granted. He still has them, of course. But whatever his existential situation—whether he is teacher, artist, administrator, builder, merchant, workman, or servant—he wants to know why he should continue what he is doing. He wants a better reason than the fact that he happens to be doing it, now, and that in the past it seem worth while. The builder, in short, wants a good reason

for continuing to be a builder, or for becoming an administrator or an artist, or a teacher, instead.

Seeking an answer, he may turn to the traditional systems of philosophy. If he studies ancient Eastern thought, or examines Gnostic or Neoplatonic conceptions, he will be led to the broad, metaphysical view that every human being is on a great evolutionary journey, starting from unity, and ending in a unity which is also divinity. He will read much of how the spiritually great abandon "worldly" intentions, seeking only a return to the One. He may, in short, "get religion," and then there begins another war in himself. He would like to be in-growing, but a large part of him is still out-going, and how are these opposing tendencies to be reconciled?

It is difficult for a man of ability and accomplishment to say to himself that all "outward" works are mere illusion. If we can ignore some of the less admirable works of man, the world about us is filled with splendor, illusion or not. The genius of action, surely, is as great as the genius of repose. Can he reach a compromise between these two ideals . . . and is "compromise" really the right word?

What the man really wants is a philosophical "permit" to go back to his old pursuits, to enjoy the intuitive satisfactions that once filled his life, but no one can issue the permit except himself!

If, he may ask himself, I were absolutely free—free, tomorrow morning, to do exactly what I want to do—what would I do? A man who asks this question with complete honesty is a man looking into the abyss. The fact of the matter is that he cannot answer this question with any certitude. The fact of the matter is that he would probably go back to doing exactly what he did today—and he would do this, even if he had a miraculous visitation of Divine Wisdom.

For the fact of the matter is that he doesn't really *know* what he wants, and all that he can profit by asking the question, and by the visitation of wisdom, is in recognition that his real career lies in seeking an answer. In this, and only in this, is he changed.

The life of the artist is thus a type of the life of man. For the artist, as artist, never knows what he wants. He is forever seeking to confine the unconfinable, to capture eternity in a moment, to represent what cannot be represented. Hence the artist is never satisfied with himself, nor with his art, unless, by transcendental paradox, he learns to be satisfied with his unceasing dissatisfactions, acknowledging that they are, after all, the genius of his art.

Something of this secret was known to the ancients, or to some of them, at least, since it was their habit to turn every earthly activity into a symbol of more universal undertakings. A man's life thus became the type of the eternal comings and goings of nature; but a man's life was something more as well—a way of distilling from individual experience the meaning and fulfillment of the larger process. So a man, at any moment, in joy or in anguish, could lift up his eyes and feel in himself something of the Promethean glory. Like Prometheus, he could leave the banquet-table of the gods, and he could apprehend the promise of his return. While there were world and sun and stars, he could be content to be embodied as a finite portion—an atom—of the whole; and while time lasted, he could live out his life from moment to moment. He could be a man in the midst of nature, feeling himself one with nature, and he could be a man in the midst of his own creations, at one with them, yet apart from them also. And in these moments of realization—self-realization—he was both the One and the Many, the silent, secret, motionless center of existence, and the whirling periphery of action. Being on the periphery, he did not long for the Nirvana of the One; and being at the center, he did not hunger for the furious activity of Life. Both were in him, and both gave him their climatic moments, both revealed their polar versions of Eternity.

But there is more to the existential situation than the solitary individual and the universe.

There are the epochs of human society, each containing its own approximate synthesis or balance of time and eternity, of action and repose. So the truth of what a man may want and get from life is subject to another series of modifications. The age imposes its own sphere of comparative illusions and realities. Finally, what a man wants from life can never be wholly divorced from what all the rest want, or think they want. What Buddha wanted was fabricated from the pain of other men—he wanted explanation of their sorrow. There is an inalienable companionship of longings, some informed, some uninformed, and what one man wants—what one who is a teacher wants, for example—cannot be conceived of except through understanding the temper of his times, the modes and prospects of self-realization for other men. How can such a man define these matters for himself? He, too, is one who cannot say what he wants from life. He can only say that he is trying to find out.

The value in all this—if it has a value—is that it may save us from pretentious self-deceptions, or from adopting the labels and the slogans which have been fixed to the human dream of liberation. We want to find the truth true enough, but the truth is a secret locked in the magic of moments—moments which unfold from hour to hour, from day to day. A man can never know more than what he is himself, in the moment when he is in some sense content with both that moment and himself.

REVIEW
RELIGION IN THE FUTURE

THE *Saturday Review* lead articles are establishing an extremely high average in treatments of contemporary issues. Erich Fromm's *Man is Not a Thing*, something of a classic, is now joined by Julian Huxley's "A Religious Outlook" (taken from Dr. Huxley's forthcoming book, *Religion Without Revelation*), in *SR* for Sept. 28, 1957.

Dr. Huxley once sounded like a conventional mechanist, but during recent years he has turned the searching, scientific mind which gave him fame as a zoologist, to revaluation of ideas concerning the human soul. Some years ago Dr. Huxley explained why he thought the word "spirituality" was not meaningless. Prejudice against such terms as soul and spirituality, he said, stems from the fact that formal religion has removed the natural elements of what might be called spirituality from life as we know it, transporting them to a supernatural realm that belongs to heaven and to God. He predicted that the spiritual significance in the universe would gradually become apparent as we learn to reverse this process.

In "A Religious Outlook," Huxley condemns the narrow conceptions of religion which resist expanding conceptions of truth. "If the religious believe," he writes, "that the spirit of truth be a gift from or a part of the third person of the Trinity, then to continue to shut oneself up in the swaddling-clothes of primitive doctrine when the limbs of the spirit might be freed for action is a sin against the Holy Ghost." Like the late Dr. Einstein, Dr. Huxley protests against a supernatural deity, even proposing that the word "God" should gradually be eliminated from our vocabulary, to be replaced, perhaps, by a term of less equivocal meaning. He explains:

> In any intellectual organization of religious thought there appear to me to be three main categories to be considered. The first is constituted by the powers of nature; the second by the ideal goals of the human mind; the third by actual living beings, human and other, in so far as they embody such ideals.
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> The three categories themselves, and their relationship, are not the same thing as the sum of the isolated brute facts which go to compose them. They are the facts as apprehended by the powers of the mind—they are reality embodied in experience, and so becoming organized and unified into an ordered and more vital reality.
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> Had the word God not come, almost universally, to have the connotation of supernatural personality, it could be properly employed to denote this unity. For if my reasoning has been correct, what has been called God by men has been precisely this reality, or various aspects of it, but obscured by symbolic vestures. Perhaps the day will come when men will recognize this, and throw away the veils. Until that time, it is best to use some other word or phrase. In any case, this reality, as a proper object for the religious sentiment, is something unitary and deserves a name. For the moment I shall call it the Sacred Reality. The precise term, however, does not matter. What does matter is the recognition that the experience of the universe as affecting human life and therefore as invested with sanctity is a reality, and is the proper object of religion.

Dr. Huxley will have none of the "uneasy compromises" which are sometimes attempted between science and religion. The conventional pattern of "reconciliation" usually revolves around the scientist's willingness to "go along" with the personal-God idea. But Huxley wants neither compromise nor reconciliation; he simply wants more light and truth. If a synthesis between *some* of the religious beliefs which support ethics and the habit of scientific thinking can be achieved, this is all to the good. But such a synthesis can be reached only by men who are not afraid to desert many conventional "religious" ideas. Huxley's definition of "mature religion" is as follows:

> Religion should satisfy the following requirements. It should not merely be confined to man's more or less immediate reaction to the mysterious or sacred; it should not be content with a system (often incomplete or self-contradictory) of mythology or of primitive rationalization as its theology; nor only with traditional ritual or formalism

> as its code of action. On the contrary, it should always extend its conception of what is sacred and a proper object of religious feeling to include man's destiny and his relation with the rest of the world; it should apply the pure force of intellect to its ideas, and attempt a theology or intellectual basis which shall be both logical and comprehensive, accurate and coherent; it must also inevitably perceive that ethics and morality are keystones of human destiny, and link up its sacred beliefs with a pure ethic and a reasoned morality. It should, in a word, not be content to leave its religious life chaotic and unordered, with loose ends unconnected with the rest of reality, but come more and more consciously to aim at an organized and unified scheme of religion, which further should be connected with all other parts of the mental life; and it should attempt to achieve this by putting forward a scheme of belief and a scale of values around and over which man's aspirations to sacredness in emotion, thought, and action might most securely grow.
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> Thus a mature religion should definitely be a relation of the personality as a whole to the rest of the universe, one into which reverence enters, and one in which the search for the ultimate satisfaction of discovering and knowing truth, experiencing and expressing beauty, and ensuring the good in righteous action, all have the freest possible play.
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> Any conflict which prevents the personality from attaining wholeness is a hindrance; all taboos against considering any part of the universe in relation to man and his destiny are hindrances; so, too, are all restrictions upon the free use of reason, or the free appeal to conscience.
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> In other words, any religion which is not an affirmation of the ultimate value of truth and knowledge, beauty and its expression, and goodness and moral action, which ever sets itself up against these, is in that respect a false, low, and incomplete religion.

All this seems to suggest that, from the standpoint of intellectual integrity, religion can never be much more than a compromise with philosophy. But someone will ask, What about the inward "revelation" which is intuitive or mystical, and which may be aided by the symbolism of religious doctrines? The point, we think, is that while every human being is capable of intuitive insight, and while religious symbolism may give focus to intuitive perception, such glimpses will seldom develop in breadth or depth without help from the disciplined attitude of a philosopher. When a man is a philosopher—that is, when he is searching rather than proclaiming—he is forced to consider every belief to which he is drawn as provisional, for there is no other way to avoid defensiveness and partisanship. Dr. Huxley implies that a religious doctrine should never be confused with knowledge, even though it may be regarded as a symbolic approximation of some psychological verity.

We shall look forward to reading *Religion Without Revelation* in full.

COMMENTARY
THE GIFT OF EXCELLENCE

LAST week we listened to a conversation about an artist. This artist, it was said, is an egotist, and his egotism was called tiresome. We agreed with the opinion; in fact, we confirmed the judgment with what was probably a little more enthusiasm than was necessary. So, wondering about this, we came to think about the artist in the practice of his art. In this, at least, he is no egotist, but an artist.

What is the practice of an art? What is involved in doing well anything important? At least two things are involved: discipline and inspiration. It is a profoundly interesting fact about human beings that they can experience and respond to inspiration, and put their response in an appropriate form, without being themselves "perfect." They may have grave defects, yet still be capable of showing how human beings behave at their best.

If you think about this, it occurs to you that work, skill, and inspiration may be a means of salvation. You can forget a man's imperfections while watching him practice his art. In this, at least, he is perfect, which means that, for the time being, he is a man set free. He is a man released from certain unpleasant or unadmirable aspects of his nature. He has learned one of the great secrets: he has *devotion*, and his devotion has brought him skill. His defects and weaknesses may weigh him down, but not without leaving behind his gifts to others—an example of a man doing work that exhibits grace and beauty. This makes the learning of how to do something well of the greatest importance to human beings. Every child should become skillful at *something*, simply to experience the dignity and impersonality which grow from excellent action. The person who can act with skill and excellence momentarily illuminates what it means to be a whole human being; we are forever in debt to such people.

One might conclude from Reginald Reynold's lighthearted remarks about Sea Serpents and Bishops (see "Children") that Sea Serpents are in a class with Unicorns and Chimeras; that, in short, they do not exist. We lack the testimony of Bishops, but can report that there is a fearsome literature on the subject to be found in any large public library. The stacks of the New York Public Library hide more than one large tome and several smaller volumes devoted to the subject, and anyone who goes through this material conscientiously will come away a True Believer.

The nice thing about believing in Sea Serpents is that it is not difficult at all, once you investigate the evidence, and then your faith in a world of wonder and fascination begins to be restored. You don't have to become a crusader; only people of little faith become crusaders; you don't have to feel like a crackpot; you simply share in a lore which is unbelievable to a lot of people who have never bothered to look the subject up.

MANAS is now ten years old, going on eleven. We continue to grow, although rather slowly. With the help of our readers, we shall grow some more. We were determined to keep going, when we started, and while it is not easy to keep going, the habit is now well-confirmed. We can always use help, but we have an aversion to speaking of this very often. A tenth anniversary is a not inappropriate time, however, to mention the fact.

It is an appropriate time, also, to speak of the wonderful letters that are received from readers—letters which, in these days of pretension and presumption, show that the writers accept the stated purposes of this magazine without suspicion or questioning, and write as friends who are filled with the same intentions. To receive such guileless communications is a privilege and a pleasure to those who have anything to do with putting words into print.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
NOTES AND QUOTATIONS

OUR Dec. 18 discussion of Mauree Applegate's advocacy of "education in critical thinking" can be usefully supplemented by correlative material. Following is Miss Applegate's chief point (in *Everybody's Business—Our Children*):

> Critical reading and thinking can and must be taught during the first eight years of an elementary school child's life. Only as it becomes part of a child's pattern of learning will critical thinking become a part of his living. An American's only weapon against propaganda is his ability to think and read critically. He must armor himself against the inroads of unscrupulous or coercive advertising, clever propaganda, and the misleading treatment of news in unethical newspapers.

Writing in the October *Aryan Path* on "The Need for Propaganda Analysis," Reginald Reynolds shows why "critical thinking" is necessary if a human being is to be more than an automaton who is controlled by the "selling devices" of both commercial and political advertising. As everyone knows, advertising is now almost altogether psychological, its heaviest reliance being placed upon the association between the product to be sold and some symbol of pleasure, goodness, or authority. Discussing the "testimonial" technique, Mr. Reynolds says:

> . . . a testimonial may be a perfectly sound one, but some are dubious. In the papers and on the films I often meet a man who is supposed to be a doctor. I can tell that because he is negligently carrying a stethoscope and probably wagging it in my direction. And in what is meant to sound like the language of an experienced general practitioner he is telling me to take some proprietary drug or food for my health. The whole weight of medical opinion appears to lie behind his words, just as the authority of the Church supports the words of the Bishop. But what do I really *know* about this man? First, that he is *not* a doctor. If he were, he would be struck off the Register for lending himself to advertising.

But the ramifications of propaganda extend in every direction, including that of religion. As Julian Huxley has said, "Any religion which is not an affirmation of the ultimate value of truth and knowledge, beauty and its expression, and goodness and moral action, which ever sets itself up against these, is in that respect a false, low, and incomplete religion." The traditional taboos against the free questioning of religion are powerful conditioning for acceptance of the irrational associations in advertising. We can obtain a "wholeness of personality" only by living with the questions which spontaneously come to our mind, and if we have been taught to fear these questions, we think with only half our minds. A recent press dispatch reveals the extent to which the National Council of Churches is willing to soft-pedal truth in the interests of "human relations." A 6500-word report on the "State of the Churches" to last month's General Assembly of the NCC at St. Louis contains the following admissions:

> Many churches, yielding to secular practice, have become public-relations conscious. There is as much if not more concern for the attractiveness of the package and the effectiveness of the marketing techniques than for the quality of the product.
>
> Many in the churches as well as outside cannot understand why anything should be done which induces a hostile or even a critical popular response.

Surely, only a reformed conception of the function of religion—making it an aid to intellectual integrity rather than its opponent—can eliminate the unthinking collaboration between religious techniques of presentation and deliberate attempts at political falsification. The testimony of an impressive figure in the religious world is often no more indicative of where truth is to be found than the advertised testimony of a man pictured in a white coat with a stethoscope around his neck.

Mr. Reynolds calls for propaganda analysis in the most remote fields, in an amusing passage on Sea Serpents:

> According to the *Manchester Guardian* (May 14th, 1957) the Bishop Aarhus, in Denmark, recently called for an investigation of the legend of the Loch

Ness Monster, which so many people claim to have seen. This is of great interest, because of the long connection between Bishops and Sea Serpents. It is an easily verifiable fact that, on a large number of historical occasions when sea serpents are said to have been sighted from vessels, a Bishop has been on board to give his valuable testimony. My friend Mr. Jonathan Curling, the first person to draw attention to this fact in public (in a radio talk), was unable to say whether the sea serpents attracted the Bishops or *vice versa*. All we know is that if you want to give credit to a story about a sea serpent you cannot do much better, in Europe, than produce a Bishop as witness—though it is true that, in modern times, an eminent scientist enjoys episcopal (if not, perhaps, papal) status.

So if I want to have people believe in my nautical stories I must take a Bishop with me when I go sailing.

A letter from a subscriber suggests further reasons for integrity, which is closely related to the habit of careful, evaluative thinking:

Editor, Children . . . and Ourselves: MANAS, Nov. 13, page 8, column 1, last sentence: "To venture, without prejudice, far afield from our familiar ideas, is the only means by which we can avoid stultification of our faculties and bondage to dogma "

Let a man start doing his own thinking, and that moment he "ventures far afield." One man says that it was three years after he rejected religious dogma for creative thought before he found a single person who "spoke his language." Another man thinks the same period in his life was twice as long. These men more recently find an occasional understanding soul, but "occasional" is the word to use. By and large their own ideas are crashing head-on with the ideas of those around them. Of course, such encounters do provoke more creative thought in those already given to such thinking.

When one creative person meets another such person they agree only in spirit; ideas may seem poles apart. Such contacts are so rewarding that a creative person, next to his search for truth, searches for other such persons.

* * *

Since we have never yet heard of a parent who does not wonder, periodically, about the advantages and disadvantages of corporal punishment, we submit a passage from the July *McCall's* by Dr. Milton Senn, Director of Yale University's Child Study Center. Discussing "What's Wrong with Spanking?" Dr. Senn writes:

Almost every parent spanks a child at some time or other, but this doesn't mean it is the best method of discipline. The aim of discipline, after all, is to teach a child, and a lesson learned through fear and pain isn't as profitably remembered as one learned through understanding. However, though spanking is not the best method, it is not always the worst. Shame or ridicule can be more damaging to some children than physical punishment. Refusing to speak to a child who has misbehaved, unforgivingness, or any measure on the part of the parent that makes the child feel he is hopelessly wicked and has lost the parent's love is likely to inflict even more pain on the child than a spanking—and be even less effective in teaching him to behave.

A parent writes to Dr. Senn about her own feeling of guilt. She had always been "against spanking," but recently, losing her temper, she applied a hand vigorously. Dr. Senn replies:

A sensitive child may remember a spanking for a long time, but he is not likely to be permanently harmed emotionally by one, or even a few, episodes. His emotional well-being is affected much more by the home atmosphere and his everyday relations with his parents than it is by an isolated incident. A child who knows that his parents love him is able to accept the fact that occasionally they fly off the handle.

Much more can be said on this question, since so many psychological issues are involved. Comment from readers would of course be appreciated.

FRONTIERS

What To Do About "Names"?

A LETTER from a reader exposes the difficulties in discussing with clarity ideas and points of view which have been given labels or names—difficulties which are multiplied when the point of view so identified is also regarded as a "group opinion" or "faith." This reader comments on a MANAS article, Theology Revisited (MANAS, Nov. 13, 1957), feeling that the discussion should not have assumed that the believers in the Vicarious Atonement are the "real" Christians. Our article, however, anticipated this objection by asking several questions in the closing paragraph, which was as follows:

> We suspect that many of the differences among contemporary thinkers concerning what is "Christian" depend largely upon definitions. Should a religion gain definition from the highest implications of its most sublime expositors, or should the orthodox exegesis and the practices of the majority be taken as authoritative? Who or what is to be vindicated in such inquiries? And for what reason? Not only men perhaps, but institutions and traditions, orthodoxies and organizations as well, will have to die and be "born again," if they are to be "saved."
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> [A parallel discussion, "The Meaning of 'Christian'," appeared in MANAS for July 31, 1957, p. 6.]

The importance of these questions is obvious, if we are to continue to use such adjectives as "Christian," "Buddhist," or, more broadly, words like "religious," and "irreligious." The same sort of analysis is necessary for words like "patriotic" and "socialist," or even "communist," since, for example, the earliest Christians were certainly communist in one meaning of this term.

Our correspondent argues in a somewhat different context, presenting what she suggests is the "true" Christianity:

> Editors, MANAS: I was pleased to read "Theology Revisited," for I have long desired to know the basis for your rejection of all Christianity, when you so obviously speak "for" a certain unorganized group of Christ-followers whose members are scattered in all congregations and in none. If I may be permitted to comment, it seems to me that your "fallacy" is in assuming that the believers in vicarious atonement alone are "really Christian" in theology.
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> May I point out that the vicarious atonement is never found in the synoptic Gospels and found only in the Fourth Gospel by those already subscribing to the theory and who interpret it into the words of John. Nothing in the teachings of Christ himself claims that his mission was as substitutionary placating of a God of retribution. The message of Christ himself was, "I am the way," and that way involved his death in the same inevitable fashion that such a life today would meet martyrdom. "The kingdom is here," follow me and live in it now, he said in essence. He did not say, accept my death as propitiation for your own refusal to live in the kingdom. This latter is Paul-inanity.
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> A vivid contrasting of these positions is found in Alfred Hasslcr's *Dairy of a Self-Made Convict.* The author speaks of a favorite aunt from a fundamentalist background who was disturbed that *his* (of course!) religion should separate the family. "I have written her that what divides us is not our religion, but our religions. We have two fundamentally different religions. In one, Jesus is historically a more or less passive figure, whose role was that of the lamb, sent as a preordained sacrifice to the slaughter. The function of the believer is belief. Salvation is an end in itself, and the relevance of religion to life is largely confined to certain aspects of personal morality and the alcoholic beverage industry.
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> "The other—to which I hold—regards Jesus as the towering figure of history, who brought a conception of human values and relationships so revolutionary that the frightened rulers of his day put him to death. . . . Last night I read again the short, simple, straightforward language of the Sermon on the Mount. Here is the whole essence of that revolutionary new concept; the rest of Jesus' life and words were devoted largely to clarifying the implications of the Sermon."
>
> Is it not possible that "really Christian" should be applied to those who take Christ at his own evaluation? The atonement devotees have, by tradition, claimed to be the true Christians; but they are so no more than the priest-inspired worship of the idols of the god Buddha is really following Buddha.
>
> Those who follow this "towering figure of history" himself and seek no easy purchase of heaven by acceptance of blood payments are not beset by the theological difficulties of the church. Consciously or

unconsciously, their only theology is that expressed so perfectly by Henry Van Dyke:

> Who seeks for heaven alone to save his soul
> May keep the path, but will not reach the goal
> While he who walks in love may wander far,
> Yet God will bring him where the blessed are.

Now if this is the "real" Christianity—and, on the whole, we are happy to agree—then it must be admitted that there are not very many Christians in the world. By a parity of reasoning, it might be argued that the "true" followers of any religion are always very few, making it profitable to inquire whether a serious investigation of religious truth ought to neglect all the orthodoxies entirely, and to devote itself, instead, to the philosophic content of the great religions of the world.

The question then becomes, What shall a man judge by? From the passage quoted by our correspondent from *Diary of a Self-Made Convict,* it is plain that Mr. Hassler judges, at least in part, by the *consequences* of belief in human behavior. In the version of Christianity which he rejects, Jesus is a passive lamb sent to the. slaughter, the "function of the believer is belief," salvation is "an end in itself," while Christian practice is largely exhausted by attention to "certain aspects of personal morality and the alcoholic beverage industry."

Mr. Hassler prefers the "revolutionary" consequences of the Sermon on the Mount.

The point, here, is that the individual, according to this view, reserves the right to choose his own religion. That religion may have a transcendental inspiration; indeed, such a man may declare that he is led to admire the consequences of the Sermon on the Mount precisely because of the inspiration he finds in his religion; but the fact remains that the individual *chooses:* his faith is not dictated by a sacerdotal bureaucracy speaking in the name of the Most High. The individual determines for himself what is an expression of the "Most High," and what is not. And he feels free to kind confirmation of his decision in its consequences in human behavior.

Again, in the passage cited, Mr. Hassler sets up an opposition between "two fundamentally different religions." Perhaps he would allow us to say that one of these religions tends to obtain its definition from the formulation of *creeds.* A creed is an affirmation of belief, and, presumably, the belief so affirmed is supposed to contain primary religious truth. The creed is a distillation and summary of a theological position. Hence, if there is any significant distinction among the sects of Christianity—any real excuse for them being separate from one another—that distinction should be explicit in their creeds.

Is there anything wrong with creeds? Ideally, there is certainly nothing wrong with affirming one's convictions, but if it be insisted that there can be but one Truth, then there is something manifestly wrong with having a number of *conflicting* creeds.

It is possible, of course, to say that there is not One Truth, but many; or that while there may be One Truth, it is natural for human beings to see that One Truth differently, which results in many differing accounts of what it affirms.

But if this is the case, and if it is acknowledged to be the case, then the differing creeds should take some notice of the fact. Instead of declaring that the Truth is thus and so, they should confess to the relativism of their position. They should say, "*As we see it,* the truth is thus and so."

Even this formula, however, fails to complete the logic of the situation. For within any group there are bound to be differences of perception and opinion, making the only proper creed the one composed by each individual for himself, and beginning, "As *I* see it, . . ."

What then becomes of "religion" as we know it? It becomes a venture *in search of* truth, instead of a claim to possession of it. And creeds, it must be admitted, are hardly sympathetic to this transformation. So there is something wrong with creeds.

A man could avoid these difficulties by making for himself a creed which declares his intentions rather than his conclusions, and this, doubtless, is what men like Mr. Hassler do, if he will permit us the liberty of saying so. For where is the man who shrinks from the dead-letter of orthodoxy who would boast of being the "true" Christian? Living religion is always a quest, never a claim. All that a man may claim for his religion or his faith is that it is an approach to the meaning of life which he finds best for him—a statement which has both modesty and integrity.

He may of course say something more. If he is a Buddhist, he may repeat scriptural injunctions without claiming them to be spiritual insights of his own. "Thus," he may say, according to the Buddhist formula, "have I heard." Which is the same as saying, "I have found this helpful; perhaps you will, also." It is in this mood, perhaps, that Alfred Hassler refers to the Sermon the Mount.

In these terms, a Christian is one who refers you to the Sermon on the Mount, while a Buddhist invites you to consider the *Dhammapada,* or the *Diamond Sutra.* Yet neither makes claim to possessing absolute truth.

It could be argued, of course, that in adopting this attitude, a Christian goes against the pattern of the historical practice of his religion, but that the Buddhist does not. This returns us to the question of what is the proper way to use the adjective, "Christian." Or, we have what could amount to a rather crucial comparison between Buddhism and Christianity, on this particular point. The important thing to be said here seems to be that the religions of the Orient, whatever their defects, have never laid claim to exclusive possession of religious truth, and their champions might suggest that, simply for this reason, they must have more of it than a faith which declares all others false. In this case, however, as our correspondent would doubtless agree, the reflection is not upon Christ, but upon the unwisdom of some of those who have taken his name.