VOLUME XV, NO. 49
DECEMBER 5, 1962

THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION

FOR more than a quarter of a century—for about a generation—sophisticated Westerners have been wondering if their age and culture made a serious mistake in the rejection of religion. This trend of thought became so pronounced in the 1940's that the *Partisan Review*, dean of the little magazines and the forum of *avant garde* intellectuality, published a series entitled "The Failure of Nerve," reproaching literary figures and other leaders for their return to religion. The idea was that, after a long period of confidence in scientific progress numerous members of the intellectual community were losing faith in the capacity of man to cope with the world and the pressures of experience without the aid of a supernatural Friend behind the cosmic veil. Shaken by the war, disillusioned by the moral failure of the revolutionary movement, as typified in the Moscow Trials and other forms of Stalinist ruthlessness, these renegades from John Dewey's Progressivism and the upward and onward optimism of nineteenth-century science seemed to be succumbing too easily to the seductions of religion. Then, a few years later (in 1950), the *Partisan Review* offered a lengthy discussion of "Religion and the Intellectuals," to which Sidney Hook was a major contributor. What Mr. Hook said at that time may provide a summary of one general analysis of the trend:

> Considering the renaissance of religion among intellectuals certain special features, cultural and psychological, should be noted.
>
> First of all, the intellectuals mainly concerned are literary and political—individuals who are not professionally interested in ideas from the point of view of their validity. With notable exceptions they had never earned their right to religious disbelief to begin with, but had inherited it as a result of the struggle of an earlier generation. They were largely ignorant of theology and philosophy, ignorant of the facts of historical evil, ignorant of the recalcitrance of human habit and of the depth and varieties of human limitation. It would be false to say that any group was prepared for the modern world in the sense of anticipating its horrors. But these intellectuals were pitifully unprepared to understand them even after they happened, and to re-examine their assumptions about the modern world in the spirit of critical realism rather than of panic or despair. The shock of recent events bewildered them to such an extent that they have become intellectually, not more skeptical, but more credulous, abandoning beliefs never properly understood, for others understood even less. Some have become so obsessed with the animality of man that they can see no grandeur at all in human life; so fearful of the possibilities of human cruelty, that they are blind to still existing possibilities of human intelligence and courage; so resigned to the betrayal of all ideals, that they can no longer make distinctions and regard all social philosophies which are not theocentric as different roads to the culture of 1984.

Mr. Hook does so well with this description of the psychological processes of flight from scientific impersonality that it seems almost a pity to insist that there may have been other forces at work in the changed attitudes of at least some of those who, if they did not "return" to a conventional sort of religion, began to wonder if there might not be crucial elements of reality which have been thrown into deep shadows by the scientific theory of knowledge. What we are suggesting is that the revival of interest in religious ideas has not been in every case a frightened submission to credulity, nor has the impulse to inquiry been limited to responses to "panic or despair." It is even possible that the very virtues which Mr. Hook finds especially valuable—interest in ideas from the viewpoint of their validity, knowledge of theology and philosophy, awareness of the facts of historical evil, and a thorough awareness of the recalcitrance of human habit and the depth and varieties of human limitation—might cause a man deepened by the trials of experience to attempt a new

beginning at answering, or at least asking in fresh ways, the age-old questions of religion.

Why should we set this problem for discussion? Is it not obvious that some kind of inward religion is an important part of the life of every human being?

The trouble with leaving the question with this simple resolution is that too often the admission that "religion" has some kind of "place" in human life short-circuits into acceptance of institutional religion as having a "place" in a well-balanced social order—which is no resolution at all, but the kind of avoidance of issues which makes Mr. Hook's argument quite victorious.

We have a letter from a reader which illustrates what may happen whenever there is a failure to distinguish between inward and outward, or historical, religion. He writes:

> Editors, MANAS: I take exception to a statement in your Oct. 17 issue, in the article, "Tolstoy on Art," in which it is said "All history shows that the progress of humanity is accomplished not otherwise than under the guidance of religion." I take the reverse stand: that all the worth-while accomplishments beneficial to mankind have come without religious influence, and if memory serves me correctly history shows that religion has fought every modern advance that would make life more pleasant.
>
> Can you name one religious man who did as much for mankind as Luther Burbank? Furthermore, the way Christianity is practiced today has nothing to do with the simple teacher of Galilee. . . . When the doctrine of the Vicarious Atonement was adopted by the Church, Jesus was made into a go-between between man and his God, thus opening up a sewer for priestcraft.
>
> Are you reversing yourselves about the individual? That is to say, are you abandoning the philosophy of Henry David Thoreau and Gandhi? If I have misunderstood this article please forgive me, as I am an individualist and a nonconformist, as well as being poorly educated.

While no man, it seems to us, who is able to make a comment of this sort on the historical consequences of the doctrine of the Vicarious Atonement can be called "poorly educated," this letter does illustrate some confusion as to the meaning of the term "religion." It happens that Tolstoy was the third of the three Western thinkers acknowledged by Gandhi as making seminal contributions to his own philosophy. The other two were Ruskin and Thoreau. Nor could Gandhi, by any stretch of the imagination, be called irreligious, although the non-institutional religion he developed and practiced in his life was upsetting to representatives of the religious Establishment in India. Meanwhile, we have Thoreau's own word that his philosophy was shaped primarily by study of the documents of Indian religion, in particular the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which may be called the New Testament of Hinduism.

Facts of this sort show that loose generalizations about "religion" are wholly meaningless. Yet there is probably no more important subject for thinking individuals to explore at the present time. Last week's leading article in MANAS argued at some length that the chief ideological issue of the Cold War—whether property and the instruments of production should be owned by the State or by individuals—is enormously irrelevant to human beings, in comparison to other questions. We now propose that the question of what constitutes religion is a far more important issue than the debate about ownership of property.

The first inquiry to be made is whether or not religion can or should have a bureaucratic definition.

To begin with, there is a practically irresistible tendency in the societies of the present to define religion bureaucratically. When religion is bureaucratically defined, it can be used in political propaganda and as an instrument of social control. The political role of religion—religion as a means, not an end—has always existed in the United States, but it became so blatant about ten years ago that conscientious religionists felt obliged to object. In the *Reporter* for Aug. 17, 1954, William Lee Miller, a professor of religion at

Smith College and himself a clergyman, described the sudden access of piety that could be observed in the nation's capital:

> We have had opening prayers, Bible breakfasts, special church services, a "Back to God" crusade, and campaign speeches on "spiritual values"; now we have added a postage stamp, a proposed Constitutional amendment, and a change in the Pledge of Allegiance. The Pledge, which has served well enough in times more pious than ours, and which was written in its original godless form by a minister, has now had its rhythm upset but its anti-Communist spirituality improved by the insertion of the phrase "under God." . . . the President and the Secretary of State explained about spiritual values and such, to launch a new red, white, and blue eight-cent postage stamp bearing the motto "In God We Trust." A bill has been introduced directing the post office to cancel mail with the slogan "Pray for Peace."

The contribution of religion to the Cold War was made unmistakable. Mr. Miller continued:

> Mr. Nixon called free worship "our greatest defense against enemies from without", Mr. Eisenhower on a radio-TV program launching the crusade called faith "our surest strength, our greatest resource." In his remarks on the Pledge he said, "We shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource, in peace or war." This reduction of religion to a national "resource," "advantage," "strength," and "weapon," especially useful for anti-Communist purposes, received perhaps its perfect expression from the perfect hero for the devotees of such an outlook, J. Edgar Hoover, when he wrote "Since Communists are anti-God, encourage your child to be active in the church."

Mr. Miller found all this disheartening. It is quite plain from his comment that he regarded such "religious" activities as in fact anti-religious:

> To say confidently "In God We Trust" may obscure the fact that we don't. . . . Our coins and stamps and floats now proudly assert "In God We Trust," while an even more compulsively anxious security system intimidates government employees, teachers, Army officers, scientists, and citizens generally, censors books, almost closes our borders to immigrants warps our politics, and proclaims to the world with spectacular clarity that we do not even trust our brother, whom we have seen. . . . what is affirmed may stand in ironic contrast to the unexamined context in which it is affirmed.

What can be done about such hypocrisy? Is there any way in which it can be punished or made unpopular?

There is only one way to stop it *in a hurry*, and that is by making another bureaucratic definition of religion—the kind developed by the Communists. Here, in a technical way, the bureaucratic techniques of the Communists are identical with those of the West. Both exclude any serious reference to inward religion in their definitions, both identify "real" religion as the religion that can be manipulated for political control or advantage, the only difference being that the Communists want to stamp out religion as they have defined it and the Western advocates of religion as a political resource want to turn it into an emotional armament against the Communists in the Cold War.

The question arises: Is it *possible* to keep religion from becoming a tool of the politicians? The answer to this question must be a yes-and-no answer. The "yes" answer is provided in the Constitution of the United States and in the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. Both these charters provide for freedom of religion. Both countries are, so to speak, "Secular States." Yet we know that there is an enormous difference in the way the idea of freedom of religion is interpreted in these two countries. In the United States, the grain of political life is set dead against overt *unbelief* in conventional religion, whereas in Russia it is just the opposite. The Soviet politico is committed to unbelief by bureaucratic tradition, just as the American politico is committed to belief, also by bureaucratic tradition.

Two factors are involved here. One is what might be called honest philosophical inclination, and the other is access to power. While both countries nominally permit freedom in religious or philosophical thinking, access to power exercises an obvious influence in the decisions made by individuals. In both cases, reaching power

depends upon conformity to bureaucratic definitions of the meaning of religion.

Now, since the Cold War is an ideological war, it follows that so long as religion continues to be defined by bureaucracies, there is little hope of finding ways to peace, a genuine peace, between the two countries.

The "no" answer to the question of whether or not religion can be depoliticalized was well put by David McReynolds in the passage quoted in MANAS last week from his *Liberation* article. It is "a fundamental fact of real politics," he said, that "formal political forms follow after informal cultural values." It hardly needs pointing out that cultural values derive in large part from what is felt and thought about the ultimate questions of religion.

But is there any way to prevent politics from exploiting or corrupting religious ideas? No way that we can think of, unless the religious ideas in question are such that no man would seek political power at the cost of degrading the meaning of his religion. And this, obviously, will not be accomplished save by a revolutionary reform in religious ideas. This is the same as saying that political power can never be the primary means of accomplishing any kind of religious good—a proposition which, under logical development, leads to the pacifist philosophy of Gandhi, war resistance, and the theory of non-violent action as the means of countering injustice.

This brings us to the defense of Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy was one of the few eminent men of history who openly spent his entire life wrestling with the meaning of religion. (See, for example, his essays, *My Confession, Dogmatic Theology, Kingdom of God,* and *What Is Religion?* It is of incidental interest that, according to Isaiah Berlin's study, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* [Mentor], Tolstoy's literary greatness developed out of this moral and intellectual struggle.) Probably no one, it seems to us, has set the problem with greater impartiality than Tolstoy. The following is from *What Is Religion:*

> The scientists of our times have decided that religion is unnecessary and that science will replace or already has replaced it; and yet, now as before, no human society or rational man ever has lived or can live without religion. (I say "rational" man, because an irrational man can live as an animal, without religion.) A rational man cannot live without religion, because religion alone gives the rational man the necessary guidance as to what he should do first and what next. A rational man cannot live without religion precisely because reason is an element of his nature. Every animal is guided in its actions—except those to which it is attracted by the direct demands: of its desires—by consideration about the immediate results of its actions. . . . But it is not so with man. The difference between a man and an animal consists in this, that the perceptive faculties in the animal are limited by what we call instinct, whereas reason is the essential perceptive faculty of man. . . . A rational man cannot be content with the considerations which direct the actions of animals. Man may regard himself as an animal amongst animals, living from day to day; he may regard himself as a member of a family or of a society or of a nation living from century to century; he may, and even necessarily must (because his reason irresistibly attracts him to this), regard himself as a part of the whole Infinite Universe existing infinitely. And therefore a rational man is obliged to and always does do, in relation to the infinitely small circumstances of life which influence his actions, what in mathematics is called integration, that is, besides his relations to his immediate circumstances, he must establish his relation to the whole universe, infinite in time and space, and conceived as a whole. And such an establishment by man of his relation to that whole of which he feels himself a part and from which he obtains guidance for his actions, is precisely what is called Religion. And therefore religion always has been and cannot cease to be an indispensable and permanent condition of the life of a rational man and of rational humanity.

It is in this sense that the word "religion" should be understood when used by Tolstoy. Unlike the casual atheists spoken of by Sidney Hook—men who had not earned their right to disbelieve in conventional religion—Tolstoy made a thorough investigation of the religion of the Orthodox Church, in which he was born and from which, at first, he obtained "salvation from despair." Troubled by contradictions, he turned to

the books which expounded the Orthodox Doctrine. As he says in his Preface to *Critique of Dogmatic Theology:*

> I read and studied those books, and here is the feeling which I have carried away from that study. If I had not been led by life to the inevitable necessity of faith; if I had not seen that this faith formed the foundation of the life of all men, if this feeling, shattered by life, had not been strengthened anew in my heart; if the foundation of my faith had been only confidence; if there were within me only the faith of which theology speaks (taught to believe), I, after reading those books, not only would have turned atheist, but should have become a most malignant enemy of every faith, because I found in these doctrines not only nonsense, but the conscious lie of men who had chosen faith as a means for obtaining certain ends.

Then, in *What Is Religion?*, he discusses how this usage of religion comes about:

> Always, and in all religious teachings, when they begin to be distorted, their guardians, having brought men into a state of weakened mental activity, use all their efforts to instil in them what they think necessary. And in all religions it was necessary to instil the same three doctrines which serve as the foundation for all the distortions to which all degenerating religions are submitted. Firstly, that a certain class of men exist who alone can be the mediators between men and God or gods; secondly, that miracles have occurred or are occurring which prove and corroborate the truth of that which is asserted by the mediators between men and God; and thirdly, that there are certain words, repeated verbally or written in books, which express the unchangeable will of God or gods, and therefore are sacred or infallible.

But what might Tolstoy have meant when he spoke, in *What Is Art?,* of the *Christian* religion? He answers this question briefly in *What Is Religion:*

> The principles of . . . true religion are so natural to men that the moment they are communicated they are accepted as something long familiar and self-evident. For us this true religion is Christianity, in those of its principles in which it coincides, not with the external forms, but with the fundamental principles of Brahmanism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Buddhism, even Mohammedanism. In the same way, for those who profess Brahmanism, Confucianism, and so on, the true religion will be one the fundamental principles of which coincide with those of all the other great religions. And these principles are very simple, comprehensible, and not numerous.
>
> They assert that there is a God, the source of all; that in man there is a particle of this divine element which he can either diminish or increase by his life; that to increase this element man must suppress his passions and increase love in himself and that the practical means to attain this is to act with others as one wishes others to act toward oneself. All these principles are common to Brahmanism and Judaism and Confucianism and Taoism and Buddhism and Christianity and Mohammedanism. (If Buddhism gives no definition of God it nevertheless recognizes that with which man unites and into which he is immersed when he reaches Nirvana. So that what man is united with when immersed in Nirvana is the same essence which is recognized as God in Christianity, Judaism and Mohammedanism.)

To the argument that this is not religion, but "ethics," "reason," or "philosophy," Tolstoy replies that it was "only out of these very principles, or rather out of their being taught as religious doctrine, that by a long process of distortion all the absurdities about miracles and supernatural events which are regarded as the fundamental features of religion were elaborated." He comments:

> To assert that the supernatural and irrational elements represent the essential features of religion, is like a man, while looking only at rotten apples, asserting that a repulsive flavor and a pernicious effect on the digestion are the essential qualities of the apple as a fruit.

Tolstoy was well aware of the devices of bureaucratic religion, which ruled in his day as it does in ours:

> . . . why does the Russian Emperor, arriving at any town go kiss the local relics and *ikons* before he does anything else? And why, notwithstanding all the varnish of culture with which he covers himself, does the German Emperor, in all his speeches appropriately or inappropriately allude to God, to Christ, to the sanctity of religion and the oath, etc.? Why, because they all know that their power is based on the army, and the army, the possibility of the

> existence of the army, is based only on religion. And if the wealthy are especially pious and pretend to be believers, go to church and keep the sabbath day, they do all this chiefly because their instinct of self-preservation tells them that their exceptionally advantageous position in society is connected with the religion they profess.
>
> These people often do not know in what way their power is founded on the religious deceit, but through the instinct of self-preservation they know where their weak point lies, upon which their position is dependent, and they protect this point before everything else.

So Tolstoy, with his shrewd observation of human nature, was as effective a critic of the perversions of religion as any of the atheist radicals, yet he was too wise a man—too *whole* a man—to ignore the psychological deeps of individual religious or philosophic inspiration. We have seen what happens when there is total denial of this fundamental core of man's being: human society is completely politicalized and power is openly asserted to be the highest good. But the reaction to this historical sequence, in the United States, has been a defensive revival of many of the vices of bureaucratically defined religion. It is as though we have learned nothing from the past—from the bitter and agonizing cycle of revolutionary rejection of *all* religion.

The obvious solution is that we ought to become, all of us, total abstainers from bureaucratically defined religion, having recognized it as the most divisive force in human history, and almost certainly the major cause of war in modern times.

REVIEW
"SILENT SPRING"

RACHEL CARSON'S shocking book on the felonies compounded by chemical impregnation of nature probably needs no introduction to MANAS readers, since reviews and editorial controversies have appeared in many avenues of communication. Mrs. Carson produces impressive evidence to support her claim that the "side-effects" of commonly used chemical killers of weeds and insects include threats to the health and very life of man. Recent research has revealed that even our underground water supplies are contaminated with potentially lethal arsenic, DDT, aldrin, lindane, heptaclor and dieldrin. We are, as John Chamberlain put it in the *Wall Street Journal* (Sept. 26), "menaced by a chemical time-bomb."

Man is always doing something to the "balance of nature," but when he employs synthetic means he apparently does so without adequate attention to ecologic balance or to the rhythms of nature's laws. The implications of Mrs. Carson's basic view are not restricted to the contamination of earth and water. As a New York *Times* reviewer points out (Sept. 23), wholesale injections into human tissue of serums, viruses and bacteria killers, etc., may involve more "compounded side effects." Lorus and Margery Milne summarize under the title, "There's Poison all around Us Now":

> In answer to the charge that the balance of nature has been upset, it has been pointed out by some members of the chemical industry that modern medicine is equally upsetting. This sort of defense merely invites a pox on both the biocide and the drug industries. "Silent Spring" offers warnings in this direction too: trivial amounts of one poison often make trivial amounts of another suddenly disastrous; and poisons stored in the body may be tolerated during health, but take effect dramatically as soon as any sickness decreases the body's resistance. It is high time for people to know about these rapid changes in their environment, and to take an effective part in the battle that may shape the future of all life on earth:

In Lewis Herber's *Our Synthetic Environment,* we encounter another step of recognition of man's subtler relationships with nature—factors which cannot be neglected without consequences. Mr. Herber writes:

> The impoverishment and destruction of the soil, repeated insect infestations, and the rising incidence of certain diseases represent the reaction of the natural world to man's adverse environmental changes. Whether he likes it or not, there are "rules of the game," which must be obeyed if an environmental change is to advance human vigor, resistance to disease, and longevity. When these rules, simple as they may be, are transgressed, nature takes its revenge.

In a commentary for radio station KPFK, Hallock Hoffman speaks of our understanding of "total ecology":

> The interdependence of cycles of plant and animal growth are as far beyond our present appreciation as was the relation between forests and floods a few generations ago. Our understanding slowly grows—within a century we have learned that forests must be harvested for sustained yield if the social cost of lumber is not to be excessive. A hundred years from now we may have learned that neither crops nor insects can be treated as if they were separated from the rest of life; we will discover how to maneuver the life cycles, tenderly and cautiously, no longer destroying anything without regard for the intimate dependencies among the weevils and the cotton and the wind and weather and birds and men.

Returning to Mrs. Carson, one finds that she is not simply a pessimist, but rather a well-informed advocate of natural means for improving the soil, increasing the resistance of plants to infection, and reducing insect hordes. She mentions many instances in which the ecological instead of the chemical approach has been found to be effective—notably in Canada and Newfoundland. *Silent Spring* closes with these paragraphs, embodying the essential philosophy of the author:

> Through all these new imaginative, and creative approaches to the problem of sharing our earth with other creatures there runs a constant theme, the awareness that we are dealing with life—with living populations and all their pressures and

counterpressures, their surges and recessions. Only by taking account of such life forces and by cautiously seeking to guide them into channels favorable to ourselves can we hope to achieve a reasonable accommodation between the insect hordes and ourselves.

The current vogue for poisons has failed utterly to take into account these most fundamental considerations. As crude a weapon as the cave man's club, the chemical barrage has been hurled against the fabric of life—a fabric on the one hand delicate and destructible, on the other miraculously tough and resilient, and capable of striking back in unexpected ways. These extraordinary capacities of life have been ignored by the practitioners of chemical control who have brought to their task no "high-minded orientation," no humility before the vast forces with which they tamper.

The "control of nature" is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man. The concepts and practices of applied entomology for the most part date from that Stone Age of science. It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against the insects it has also turned them against the earth.

Silent Spring has been widely treated as a spectacular attack on the manufacturers of insecticides—with asides on the gullibility of farmers and of government agencies devoted to agricultural progress. Controversy certainly is lively concerning many of Mrs. Carson's statements and prognostications, but we see in her book a profoundly important invitation to practicing what might be called "natural philosophy." Often biological specialists fail to develop any feeling of "wholeness" for nature and man, as a basis for evaluating the effects of specific discoveries; the great naturalists and conservationists have this perspective, perhaps, more by temperament and philosophy than by profession. Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* and Joseph Wood Krutch's *Conservation Is Not Enough* are prime examples of the larger outlook which would guard against the misuse of techniques for controlling one portion of nature at the expense of another.

Finally, there is no essential difference between the dangers to which Mrs. Carson calls attention and the more dramatic threat of nuclear fallout. *Silent Spring* is less an indictment of certain persons and professions than it is an exposure of potentially fatal immaturities in a technological civilization. The polytheistic Greeks, we think, were more at home with nature, for their mythology filled them all, from childhood on, with awareness of mystical interdependence with the forces and processes upon which human existence depends. Yet here and there, even in "our" culture, one notices break-throughs reminiscent of ancient pantheisms. A passage in Dr. Robert Kehoe's *Public Health in an Industrial Society* (U.S. Public Health Service) closes with these sentences:

The time has come when a much greater and more comprehensive knowledge of the consequences of our changed and changing environment must be had for our safety—perhaps for our very survival. . . .

It must become an axiom of modern chemical and technologic research that the materials produced and the forms of energy harnessed must be as well understood for their biological potentialities as for their physical and mechanical properties. It is equally important that other man-made factors in the human environment, including those which we cannot foresee at this time, should be examined critically for their harmful potentialities, in the full recognition of certain facts of life and death, which have recently come upon some of us with a shock. It is clear that reckless man can turn loose and build up physical forces which may destroy himself and his kind.

COMMENTARY
THE PRACTICE OF FREE RELIGION

THERE is one important question that this week's lead article does not discuss. It offers no answer to the question: What about the people—and there are many of them—who would feel lost without the support they think they obtain from institutional religion?

This, to our way of thinking, is about the most important "social" question that can be raised, and the most difficult one of all to answer.

It is like asking, How do you help men to love freedom? It is, or becomes, the central problem of both education and psychotherapy.

One answer comes from the example of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He found the atmosphere of nineteenth-century Unitarianism too confining, stopped filling pulpits, and wrote a now-famous essay on Self-Reliance. If you could measure the influence of this essay, and the rest of Emerson's vigorous but temperate thought on the men of his time, and those who came after, you might have some indication of what the efforts of a single individual can do in this direction.

It goes without saying, also, that Emerson's influence made Unitarianism less institutional.

The confidence of a good man in his own thinking is a powerful example and an inspiration to others to go and do likewise. A more contemporary book with rich exhibits of this sort is W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation* (now available as a Galaxy paperback).

There is a sense in which it is a pity that Americans are so "action-minded" a people. Instead of being willing to go back, back into themselves, to think as they have never thought before—asking themselves the fundamental questions: Who am I? What am I living for? Where am I going? Will what I am doing really get me there?—they feel guilty unless they are busy doing precinct work at election time, contributing to worthy causes, and writing to their Congressman. We're not deprecating these activities, which represent very nearly all the "Americanism" we have left. But they often represent so much of an adjustment to existing institutions that it remains possible for a man to do all these things, and do them with great efficiency and dispatch, and still lose the substance of his birthright as a human being.

A free man is continuously helping to set other men free. This influence flows from him as surely as the sun shines on all that its rays can reach. There is no quality in another which gains such immediate and sustained respect as the quality of freedom in thought and action. It is an encounter with the Holy Grail, a hearing of the sounding resonance of the Lost Word. It makes you say to yourself, "I, too, am a Man."

The practice of freedom bears with it an implicit reverence for the quality of being human. This is what we honor in the free man, because his freedom honors all men.

The point, here, in relation to the question with which we started out, is that freedom does not depend upon being an "advanced thinker," or upon any measurable quality in human beings. There is a freedom appropriate to every level or station of human existence. It is a basic attitude toward self and life, not an acquisition, although it may be thought of as a growth. You can recognize it in the sturdy self-determination of a small child.

It follows that any man can make a contribution to the temper of freedom in social and religious life. The contribution is given every time he makes it clear that he will act only upon what he has found for himself to be true—or, to be more accurate, that this is the principle, even if seldom wholly realized, that he has chosen as his guide in life.

Religion can never remain "pure" so long as societies ignore its true source in individuals. The abdication of authority in individual religion is in turn the source of institutional authorities, which rush in to fill the vacuum, and thereafter the organizational sovereignties multiply, until external power and the reduction of human beings to passively manipulated units of "policy" become the rule of life.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TEACHERS IN TROUBLE

A LONG time ago, Robert M. Hutchins remarked that good teachers and good administrators always manage to be "in trouble." His point was that such teachers see the necessity for new ideas and approaches to every question, and this inevitably leads to conflict with status-quo attitudes. A current letter to MANAS from two embattled educators shows that teachers who try to help their pupils to think, especially within the framework of secondary education, are likely to be held suspect by the community.

This husband-and-wife "teaching team" was recently pressured into resigning from a Des Moines high school. A generally favorable story in the Des Moines *Tribune* closes with a quotation from an attorney who had served twelve years on the school board:

> They're good teachers—probably college level. But high school? I don't know. Maybe the students are ready for them, but the parents sure as hell aren't.

What was it, precisely, that offended the community? Well, for one thing, the husband, who teaches mathematics, asked his students to prepare definitions of a "Communist." Since accurate definitions should be a by-product of instruction in geometry, the instructor felt it would be worth-while for his students to struggle with a definition which presented a host of difficulties—but the mere mention of "Communist" led to a whispering campaign. Then, in an American literature class, attention to Thoreau and Emerson frightened several parents. It turned out that "one youth was so enthusiastic about the writings of Thoreau that he scorned his bed for a week and slept on the floor." Reading Emerson also proved to be dangerous, since his concept of the Over-Soul was found to be "killing belief in God." Senior students in particular, liked to discuss matters of religion, and since this could not be done in the classroom, the teachers' home was offered for extra-curricular sessions on religious questions. Again the whispering campaign began and the home became "off limits."

With this as background, and explanatory, incidentally, of the omission of the teachers' names, we quote from the letter itself:

> It seems that you have been heavily (and rightly) stressing Gandhi's ". . . the best way to begin working for freedom . . . is to act as if . . . free."
>
> I would like to tell you that this can be done. We have been doing so for about seventeen years—and raising a family at the same time. (People used to say, "Once your children are out of the cradle, you won't dare be so independent!") I'd like to tell all the fearful that no great daring is involved. In the United States, at least, one doesn't pay any price that matters compared with the gain. We have heard occasionally rumors of tarring and feathering, of house-burning, but they remain rumors. Of course, one doesn't have job security, positions of popularity, permanence of residence, or great income. My husband has had three distinct careers in five states and at about fifteen locations. We are about to start another type of work in sixth state.
>
> Thinking people, while they often prefer not to have us around, almost always accord us respect and even a kind of admiration. This, of course, is the reason why Gandhi recommended this as a technique for aiding more than the self.
>
> Quite possibly there are people whose desires would bring heavier penalties. We are not different from the great mass of people except that we are seeking the values underlying the symbols all worship. We believe, unemotionally, in God, home, mother, etc. We love our country—but we love it for the vision it represents, not the actuality it has achieved. We believe in education—but are unimpressed by bits of sheepskin; we believe in spiritual Reality—but are amused by churchmanship. And I think that most people who desire to support real freedom are much like ourselves. . . .
>
> But our freedom has included pacifism (long before it was as respectable as it has become today); vegetarianism (a much more danger-provoking conviction); total refusal to use doctors, insurance or police; racial brotherhood (and we lived a year in the deep South practicing it); organic farming; and a host of less-easily labeled attempts to implement in our lives the meanings underlying easily-spouted values.

> I am not implying that we have seen all truth, nor that we have done a satisfactory job of living "as if." The measure of our failure, I cannot help but suspect, may be the ease with which we have escaped more "crucifixion." But only as little practitioners like ourselves move along according to their limited visions of freedom will it become possible for larger visions to be glimpsed.
>
> To avoid any possible misunderstanding concerning this evaluation of our efforts, we ask that, if you make use of any part of this correspondence, you adhere to your usual policy of anonymity.

So much for the hard knocks and the sort of enthusiasm which allows some teachers to take opposition and minor frustrations in stride. But the *Tribune* story, read between the lines, suggests that echoes of the influence of such teachers in a community will be audible for some time. After the couple's resignation, a group of thirty students, profoundly appreciative of the stimulation they had received in and out of school, sent a letter to the local newspaper. It ended by saying. "We feel the community owes a profound apology." A school board member volunteered endorsement of the teaching ability displayed by the now-displaced instructors. He thought that the campaign against them was " just the work of a vocal minority."

Now a "vocal minority" which unites to detract, smear, and slander, often enjoys regrettable success—at least initially. But since the attempts to regiment thinking in the United States have not yet been implemented by sufficiently heavy punishments of nonconformity, some discussion is bound to proceed. Are the charges in fact true? Has any real evidence been produced that these people are "subversive"? And if so, subversive of what? Are these teachers really opposed to "American democracy" or are they trying to make it work by encouraging children and their parents to think?

It is at least possible that these two teachers, if they return to this community for a visit after a year or so, will find—depending on what goes on in the community in the interim—that they have acquired new friends they have not even met. In any case, they will hardly stop thinking themselves, and, while they are not looking for "trouble," wherever they go the educational process is likely to prosper for a time

FRONTIERS

Epistemology—But Don't Go To Sleep

KARL POPPER, professor of logic and scientific method at the University of London, is occupied in his various writings with one central theme—aptly summarized by the title of a piece written for the September *Encounter*, "On the Sources of Knowledge and of Ignorance." "Epistemology," the forbidding term which stands for comparative study of theories of knowledge, usually receives a purely historical treatment. Dr. Popper, however, approaches the subject of knowledge from the psychological point of view. The following paragraph constitutes an introduction to the issues which Dr. Popper raises:

> The question of the sources of our knowledge, like so many authoritarian questions, is a *genetic* one. It asks for the origin of our knowledge, in the belief that knowledge may legitimise itself by its pedigree. The nobility of the racially pure knowledge, the untainted knowledge, the knowledge which derives from the highest authority, if possible from God; these are the (often unconscious) metaphysical ideas behind the question. My modified question, "How can we hope to detect error?" may be said to derive from the view that such pure untainted and certain sources do not exist, and that questions of origin or of purity should not be confounded with questions of validity, or of truth. This view may be said to be as old as Xenophanes. Xenophanes knew that our knowledge is guesswork opinion—*doxa* rather than *episteme.*
>
> Yet the traditional question of the authoritative sources of knowledge is repeated even today—and very often by positivists, and by other philosophers who believe themselves to be in revolt against authority.

Subsequently, Dr. Popper makes the inquiry complicated enough for any hair-splitting logician:

> If only we look for it we can often find a true idea, worthy of being preserved, in a philosophical theory which must be rejected as false. Can we find an idea like this in one of the theories of the ultimate sources of our knowledge?
>
> I believe we can; and I suggest that it is one of the two main ideas which underlie the doctrine that the source of all our knowledge is supernatural. The first of these ideas is false, I believe, while the second is true.
>
> The first, the false idea, is that we must justify our knowledge, or our theories, by *positive* reasons capable of establishing them, or at least of making them highly probable; at any rate, by better reasons than that they have so far withstood criticism. This idea implies, I suggested, that we must appeal to some ultimate or authoritative source of true knowledge; which still leaves open the character of that authority—whether it is human, like observation or reason, or superhuman (and therefore supernatural).
>
> The second idea—whose vital importance has been stressed by Russell—is that no man's authority can establish truth by decree; that we should submit to truth; that *truth is above human authority.*
>
> Taken together these two ideas almost immediately yield the conclusion that the sources from which our knowledge derives must be superhuman; a conclusion which tends to encourage self-righteousness and the use of force against those who refuse to see the divine truth.
>
> Some who rightly reject this conclusion do not, unhappily, reject the first idea—the belief in the existence of ultimate sources of knowledge. Instead they reject the second idea—the thesis that truth is above human authority. They thereby endanger the idea of the objectivity of knowledge, and of common standards of criticism or rationality.
>
> We may admit that our groping is often inspired, but we must be on our guard against the belief, however deeply felt that our inspiration carries any authority, divine or otherwise. If we thus admit that there is no authority beyond the reach of criticism to be found within the whole province of our knowledge, however far it may have penetrated into the unknown, then we can retain, without danger, the idea that truth is beyond human authority. And we must retain it.

This is the first time in years that we have found a logician evidencing a liking for "non-referable" truth. The point, so far as many discussions in MANAS are concerned, is that we encounter here an affirmation that man has the capacity to perceive a distinction between the "truth" he feels himself to presently possess and the existence of a comprehensive truth as yet beyond his ken. Now it is precisely when this area

of "beyondness" is dwelt upon that the religionist, the philosopher—and especially the psychologist—is prepared for break-throughs in insight. New awareness is possible because men realize its necessity.

In one sense this interpretation duplicates, in respect to intellectual and psychological growth, the theme of Joseph Campbell's "monomyth." Each man, in this view, must clamber over the stockade which bounds his values and conceptions. Freed from this comforting orthodoxy, he inhales a new atmosphere—heady and inviting, although somewhat frightening. For man out of his familiar surroundings is "absolutely" alone with the problem of knowledge. He is also better able to know what "absoluteness" may mean. This periodical return to "thinking as if one were the first man who ever thought," as Thomas Paine put it, is an absolute requirement if any psychological evolution is to take place.

The danger of authority, in respect to "knowledge," lies precisely in this: either we accept what we are told because of fear of the consequences of rejecting it, or we refuse truth with a polling of majority opinion as to what is true. But Galileo's public agreement with the Church, when the Church insisted that the planets revolve around the earth, did not make it so. Nor can the distance of any planet from either the earth or the Sun be determined by vote. In psychology, or at least in psychotherapy, we learn to rely upon the sudden, almost intuitive, grasp by the patient as to what is amiss in his thinking and his life—there is no polling of experts or "authorities."

By derivation, the word "authority" means one who increases the value or the meaning of something. He does not, however, hold proprietary rights. The truth, to be *known* as truth—which is very different from the contention that it is true—must be known by each one for himself. To realize this, perhaps, is to place truth beyond all of the authorities who vie for top rating.