Rethinking the Doctrine of Man

HARVEY H. POTTHOFF

GEORGE FOX, the founder of the Society of Friends, tells in his journal of his spirtual struggles as a young man. He visited a number of spiritual counselors, but to no avail. No one seemed to understand. One counsellor suggested that he take up tobacco and sing Psalms. But, reported Fox, he did not like tobacco and was in no shape to sing Psalms. Then he wrote these words: "There was none among them all that could speak to my condition."

Would we not agree that the Christian minister is called to speak to the actual condition of men with understanding and concern? Insofar as he succeeds in this high calling, he serves. But though he speaks with the tongues of men and of angels, yet addresses a creature who does not really exist, it profiteth nothing. The world needs a salvation which is relevant to the actual nature and situation of man.

When we look at a man what do we see? What is his origin, his nature, his situation, his destiny? What are his deepest problems and satisfactions? What are his limitations and possibilities? For what may he reasonably aspire? Questions such as these keep pressing in on one who would minister to human beings.

There are many persons interested in man—the anthropologist, the biologist, the sociologist, the psychologist, the philosopher and so on. Each comes to some theory of man in the context of his particular interest. The theologian is interested in man from the **religious** perspective. He is interested in man as a religious creature—as a candidate for religious values. It is in the context of the religious life that he endeavors to formulate his doctrine of man.

There is an expression we have heard many times— "human nature being what it is." How often these words are spoken with a kind of cynicism as though to say, "Human nature is not very much; at least, it doesn't provide much on which to build." Obviously this is an important point for anyone who contemplates spending a life working with people. Is human nature something on which we can build and in which we can take hope? Is it worth the investment of a life?

What are we to make of a creature who can produce space rockets, a Salk vaccine, majestic symphonies, great systems of philosophy . . . who can climb Mt. Everest, build hospitals and give life in sacrificial love . . . and yet who can act in bestial ways, inflicting pain and destruction on other life? Following the first world war Bertrand Russell wrote:

> It became obvious that I had lived in a fool's paradise. Human nature, even among those who had thought themselves civilized, had dark depths I had not suspected. Civilization, which I had thought secure, showed itself capable of generating destructive forces which threatened a disaster comparable to the fall of Rome. Everything that I had valued was jeopardized, and only an infinitesimal minority seemed to mind.[1]

And A. N. Whitehead could say: "Man is a queer combination of delicacy of spirit and a brutality which would disgrace a rat."

A number of important questions revolve around the theory of man. Is man of such a nature that a reasonably satisfying and productive life is possible for him? Is human nature such

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[1] *Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell,* New York: The Modern Library, pp. xi f.

that we may reasonably strive for a greater measure of justice in human affairs? Is man capable of the wisdom and self-discipline required if the power at our disposal is to be used constructively in the context of a free society? Assuming the desirability of religion, is man of such a nature that he is capable of functioning religiously, confronting the facts of existence, reflecting on them, reorienting his life around the divine, moving ahead in courage, creativity and compassion—inspired by a vision of greatness in God and man?

SEVERAL IMAGES OF MAN

There are several images of man which have exerted great influence. In varied forms they are still with us. Some of these images either play traitor to man at some crucial point, or leave out of consideration some important aspect of his being, even though there may be elements of insight in them. Some of these images of man emerged before we had access to modern methods of investigation. They represent guesses about man. They remind us of the need for rethinking the doctrine of man for religious purposes in our own day.

First, there is a tradition of thought given impetus by Paul, systemized by Augustine, modified in later Catholic thought, but reaffirmed and emphasized by Protestant reformers. This image of man presupposes a thoroughgoing dualism and is other-worldly in its orientation. Man's relationship to God is understood as a highly dependent relationship, yet one of conflict—will against will. The God-Man relationship is a drama of conflict and reconciliation, with the hope of reconciliation resting with God, who is sovereign will and power. It is an over-under sort of relationship in which man cannot even will the good without divine grace. Calvin wrote, "the will . . . is so bound by the slavery of sin, that it cannot excite itself, much less devote itself to anything good." God is a highly judgmental reality in this picture; submission and obedience are the appropriate responses on the part of man.

The chief analytic concept in approaching the human situation, from this point of view, is that of sin, and sin is basically pride, rebellion and self-assertiveness in relation to the supernatural Father-figure who exercises control and power to punish. Man is estranged and helpless to do very much about it.

Augustine, Luther and Calvin were all believers in predestination, with the corollary notion of man's impotence. Man's sin is such that he is worthy of damnation. Should this be the outcome, God's justice would be demonstrated. If, through God's inscrutable decree, some are saved, that proves the divine goodness. In either event, God should be given the glory.

Running through this tradition of thought is the notion of man as substance, possessing fixed properties within himself. Man's depravity of will is carried by inheritance to his offspring through the ages.

It is important to recall that these theories were devised before there was any equipment of research or experiment to give them validation. They were simply declared to represent the truth about man. These theories were conspicuously lacking in what today we understand as man's capacity for growth, maturing, movement toward wholeness of life.

The Augustinian-Reformation image of man has exercised and still exercises tremendous influence. Who can begin to estimate the consequences it has had in the lives of men—in their personal adjustments and maladjustment; in their human relationships; in their religion; in their conceptualizations of God? There are those in our own time who would call us back to this type of thinking.

There is a second image of man—held by a group of non-theological thinkers— which like the first has exerted considerable influence. To be

sure, there are important variations in the thought of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, and Freud — such great differences that one may wonder how they could be brought together in one classification. Yet, in some of the work of all of them we find a shared assumption — man is a separate being. As Overstreet and other students have observed, not one of these thinkers saw society, group life, government, as a product of man's maturing.

Machiavelli's distrust of human nature left little room for confidence in man. Distrust and deception were central in his way of things.

Hobbes insisted that we are unsocial, and advocated strong government to keep us alive, although together.

Life, as Marx saw it, is an endless struggle between economic classes. Man, understood primarily as an economic creature, can at best hope for a classless society.

Freud is amenable to more than one interpretation, but there are passages in his writing which indicate he thought of man as a separate being. For example, he wrote that civilization

> is built on renunciation of instinctual gratifications. This cultural deprivation dominates the whole field of social relations between human beings . . . The liberty of the individual is not the benefit of culture. It was greatest before that culture.[2]

Here is the doctrine that man is man within his own skin, so to speak. Society, culture is ever against him. Neo-Freudian thought has endeavored to present a more balanced view.

Thus, we have an influential strand of thought which has missed the dimension of man as a social creature, and society as a product of man's becoming more fully human.

A third image of man is that found in early liberalism. Here we find an optimistic view of man as essentially rational and good. Man is a moral creature, capable of knowing the right, and with a boost from God, capable of doing it. W. N. Clarke was reflecting this point of view when he wrote: "Humanity certainly is by nature a slowly rising race, with a native tendency to outgrow faults."[3]

Sin was usually defined by the early liberals, not as a basic cleavage between God and man, but in moral terms. A. C. Knudson wrote:

> The moral law or ideal, departure from which constitutes sin, is by no means a fixed, objective standard. It is relative to the individual, to his knowledge, to his ability.[4]

As to man's rational capabilities, the early liberals were confident. Much of the early theological liberalism was cast in the form of idealistic philosophy —mind at the center of things with man incarnating the intelligence which pervades the universe.

We can readily understand that so long as the course of events did not disturb this image too much, it was a pleasing one to hold. It gave man a sense of his powers and dignity in the sight of God. It gave impetus to a gospel of social concern and action. The by-products of this image of man are writ large in the 19th and 20th century American Protestant life and thought.

But along came two world wars and a major economic depression to shock man into a reappraisal of his situation. The work of Freud pointed to the role of the unconscious in human behavior. Man's capacities for deception, self-deception, destruction—his persistent drive for gratifications which could hardly be defined in moral terms—his tendency to rationalize—all came to assume greater importance in understanding the human creature.

By the second third of the twentieth century increasing numbers of persons were questioning the adequacy of the

[2] S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* Chapter III.

[3] W. N. Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology,* New York: Scribner's, 1908, p. 245.

[4] A. C. Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption,* New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1933, p. 245.

image of man held by the early liberals. Granting the important contributions made by the early liberalism, the question remained as to whether man can be defined primarily in rational and moral terms. Are there dimensions to human nature the early liberalism overlooked or minimized?

Among those who reply to the above question in the affirmative are the existentialists. Their protest is not simply against what we have called the early liberalism. Basically, it involves protest against traditional philosophy of any kind—with or without theological overtones. Kaufmann puts it this way:

> The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic and remote from life—this is the heart of existentialism.[5]

Most existentialists pay little attention to science and are not interested in metaphysics as a systematic organization of knowledge. Reality is now, in the existential moment. Existence is identified with the individual's own immediate experience of himself and his situation as a free being. Here is a message—not of detached reflection on essences, trends, cosmic structures and so on, but a doctrine of the individual existentially involved, here and now.

What, then, is the image of man existentialism offers? It is the image of a creature "thrown into the world" (Heidegger) in a kind of naked aloneness, in crises, in the agony and frustration of decision, existing under the threat of non-being. It is not enough to know that all men are mortal, Kierkegaard said; each of us must be confronted with the fact, "I, too, must die."

Man's situation is an ambiguous one. He is enmeshed in a natural and social order, in one sense making him what he is. Yet—and here is the deeper fact—through the exercise of freedom he can assert himself as an authentic being and rise above the limiting factors about him. As one writer puts it:

> From top to bottom, as it were, man is a contradictory creature. Viewed from the outside, he is but an episode in the vast process of nature. Viewed from the inside, each man is a universe in himself.[6]

Man's hope lies not in rational reflection nor in the wisdom of metaphysics. It lies in decision and action. Through the exercise of freedom man asserts his humanity. Man's salvation is in asserting himself against the dehumanizing factors in our culture—in becoming an authentic person.

More precisely, what does this decision entail? Existentialism of the atheistic and Christian varieties differ at this point. For some, it may be the assertion of selfhood in the face of external meaninglessness. Man in a nihilistic setting may be authentically human. For others, decision may entail the leap of faith, engaging the whole self in commitment, wherein anguish and salvation wondrously meet.

Existentialism, then, responds to man's yearning for meaning in his life. It cannot rest content with the sort of thinking which identifies philosophy exclusively with word-analysis. Neither is it prepared to follow the rationalistic road to truth. The appeal is to the individual—here—now—in the anxiety of crisis, decision, and the threat of non-being.

Existentialism is inclined to be preoccupied with extreme states of mind. The focus is on guilt, dread, despair and conflict as fundamental in human experience. These themes, together with those of subjectivity and freedom appear in other philosophies—but here they are central.

That the existentialists are getting a

[5] Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre,* New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1956, p. 12.

[6] D. E. Roberts (Roger Hazelton, Ed.), *Existentialism and Religious Belief,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 8.

hearing there is no doubt. In a day when we are confronted with new scientific information, existentialism offers a message which can go its way without much attention to these matters. To those who have the assurance born of encounter and faithful response it offers a source of inner satisfaction. Its call for authentic selfhood in a day when the pressures for conformity are strong, has an understandable appeal. It permits man to acknowledge his feelings.

Preoccupation with self and one's inner states always has a peculiar fascination for some. This type of thought may well appeal to anxiety-prone individuals, but as William James pointed out, we are hardly justified in fitting everyone into the same pattern of religious experience. Existentialism may speak to the condition of some people under given circumstances. It does not follow that it is the most wholesome diet over a period of time, let alone the most realistic analysis of the human situation.

Like some other views we have noted, that of existentialism tends to see man in his separateness, too often missing the social dimension to his being, and too often neglecting the joys and wholesome resources available in fruitful relationships within nature, society, and with the immanent God. It leaves too many facts out of consideration.

Others, from our own country, have challenged us to face up to suffering and tragedy without abdicating to an unknown supernatural power or falling into the abyss of nothingness. Emerson, for example, said, "Only so much do I know as I have lived:" And William James affirmed, "It is better to be than to define your being." What is valid in existentialism can be said just as well, if not better, in a more hopeful and balanced pattern of thought.

Here, then, are several images of man influencing the lives of men and institutions. There are elements of insight in each. However, there are shortcomings in each; they tend to lack balance in over-emphasizing some phase of experience.

Man's capacities for maturing, as well as his capacities for regression; his social nature, as well as his capabilities for self-centered living; his complex situation involving many types of relationships; his varied motivations, conscious and unconscious; his rational, adjustive and creative powers as well as his destructive potentialities; his existence in a qualitatively rich matrix of being, as well as in a threatening world—all these are factors we cannot afford to miss in a realistic doctrine of man.

It would be amusing, if it were not so pathetic, what the so-called "new theology" with its existentialist overtones sometimes leads to. One college president has told of the student who said, "I can't tell you how much satisfaction I take out of this ontological despair."

Last summer (1958) the committee on socio-political concerns of the National Methodist Student Commission drafted a statement of philosophy. Here is a group of healthy, young Americans, bit by some kind of theological bug, talking:

> We turn perplexed to the irrelevancy of our church and of our own faith. Our very being trembles to discover a new meaning . . . we must stand before the judgment of God. . . . We are moved to humble ourselves before God, confounded, weak, empty. With sorrowful hearts we come to beg forgiveness, unworthy as we are . . . with humble and contrite hearts . . . we ask God in his infinite mercy to forgive our past and present folly.[7]

Bishop Nolan Harmon was constrained to say of this statement, "The whole thing is more of a wail than an affirmation, but for the life of me, I cannot tell what the wail is all about."

The story is going the rounds concerning the distressed individual who was influenced a little here, and a little

[7] *motive,* December, 1958.

there, by this and that brand of theological thinking, leaving him much confused. He said, "The scientists have taken away God, the higher critics have taken away Jesus, but thank heaven, I still have my total depravity!"

Perhaps this little poem (author unknown) is not without its point:

Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief,
"O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief."
Then stopped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
"Vanity, my little man,
You're nothing of the kind!"

It is one of the anomalies of our current religious scene that at the very time that many theologians, wedded to the orthodox idea, insist on using traditional categories of thought, with original sin being the chief analytical concept, numerous scholars whose work it is to study man with empirical methods of research, are coming forward with more hopeful words about man and his possibilities.

Gardner Murphy, Director of Research at the Menninger Foundation, writes: "An attitude becoming a thoughtful, scientifically-oriented student of human nature is one of gratitude for the richness of its apparent possibilities." [8] Gordon Allport speaks of man's dynamic potentialities for growth in his book "Becoming." Clyde Kluckholm, Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, writes:

> . . . perhaps the greatest lesson which anthropology can teach is that of the boundless plasticity of "human nature." . . . Man must humbly but with courage accept responsibility for the destiny of mankind. Any other postulate is a frightened retreat and, in the long run a retreat which leads to the blank wall or the precipice of chaos unthinkable. Man may be able to understand and control himself as much as he has demonstrably understood and controlled nonorganic nature and domestic animals. At least it is worth the trial.[9]

Our need, then, is for a more balanced view of man, based on empirical data rather than upon words spoken in the past, or upon the unusual experiences of some unusual people.

NEW INSIGHTS INTO MAN

There is no one understanding of the nature of personality common to all schools of thought devoted to investigation in the field. However, there is rather a general meeting of minds on a number of crucial issues:

1. Man is a complex creature. His existence is to be understood as involving organization and inter-relationships of many factors, rather than in terms of soul or self substance.

2. Man is to be understood in dynamic rather than in static terms. This is suggested by Murphy in his comment that personality is "a flowing continuum of organism-environment events."[10]

3. Man is to be understood not as a separate, independent, isolated entity, but as organic to a dynamic context of events. Even as his environment moulds him, he moulds the environment. He emerges out of a context, is sustained within that context, finds both threatening and sustaining factors within that context. We do not know anything about a human creature out of a context of events.

4. Man is ever in process of **becoming**. The processes of becoming cannot be explained simply in terms of mechanical pushes from behind, so to speak, but in terms of complex networks of relationships, including man's goals, aspirations, his self-image. Man, on these terms, is to be understood in terms of limitations, potentialities, inter-relationships, culminations, aspirations.

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[8] G. Murphy, *Human Potentialities,* New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1958, p. 12.

[9] Clyde Kluckholm, *Mirror For Man,* New York: Premier Books, 1957, pp. 213, 215 f.

[10] G. Murphy, *Personality,* New York: Harper and Brothers; 1947, p. 21.

5. Man is a creature with capacity for self-transcendence. As Robert Ulrich puts it:

> Man . . . lives in the continual state of self-transcendence; he never stays quietly within himself but reaches or goes intellectually beyond himself into unknown spheres of reality.[11]

Any doctrine of man relevant to modern thinking must understand man in dynamic and contextualistic terms. The nature of the context of events in which man lives and moves and has his being is relevant to our understanding of man himself. More specifically, man cannot be understood apart from his involvement in an order of things characterized by change, creativity, growth, inter-relatedness and differentiation. Our universe is best understood in terms of process. Man is not a static creature imposed upon such an order—he grows out of it and must be defined in terms of it. Many of man's deepest problems and highest possibilities inhere in his involvement in processes of change, growth and differentiation.

Much past theology has been written on the assumption that man is a simple substance, with fixed properties, dependent for his real nature and hope on a God external to his conditioning environment. What is entailed, on the other hand, when we see man as emergent within a context of events marked by change, inter-relatedness, growth, differentiation?

For one thing, we begin to see more clearly what man's deeper problems are. For example, we see man destined to a type of loneliness — his freedom coming at the price of separation from early relationships of support. He is threatened at many points and is often in competition with others. In many situations he is on his own.

He is a creature destined to experience conflict and ambivelence of feeling. Love and hate are interwoven. There is the conflict of values, loyalties and responsibilities. The man of yesterday may war with the man of today.

He is an impulsive creature — with impulses essential to his arrival, yet oftentimes so complicating in his survival.

He is an aspiring creature, yet knowing frustration as well as achievement. He is involved — involved in society, sharing its virtues and vices; involved in a universe, the basic structures of which he did not determine. He is subject to inescapable conditions of existence, including death and sacrifice.

He is a sensitive creature with the capacity for joy, appreciation, love — and pain. As a candidate for growth he suffers the pain of outgrowing yesterday's value. This is what it is to be a person whose destiny is involved in a dynamic universe characterized by change, growth, differentiation.

Discovering the threatening, frustrating, demanding elements of the world, some persons psychologically reject the human enterprise, committing psychological and emotional suicide. They endeavor to get rid of themselves as human beings. They say in effect, "Being human is too demanding. I shall escape some way. I shall regress, or play the role of a dependent infant or or a sub-human animal. Or, I shall immerse myself in the physical and material and thus drown myself as a responsible, feeling human being. Or, I shall go in the other direction and play God, denying my creaturely status, seeking to possess all and control all." Around us are human creatures rejecting the invitation to adult, maturing human life.

The possibility of this sort of rejection of human life is inherent in the total situation; it is not to be attributed to some defect of will inherited from the distant past. The word "sin" in its root sense means to miss the mark. Involved man does indeed sometimes miss the mark of his highest destiny as a human creature of God. But this misfortune can only be under-

[11] Robert Ulich, *The Human Career,* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955; p. 29.

stood in the context of man's total involvement.

If man's participation in a world of becoming helps define his problems, it also helps reveal his possibilities. Man has capacities for thought, problem-solving, productive and satisfying human relationships, creative work and love, a measure of self-realization, investment in causes which outlast him, subjective adjustments which enable him to rise above external fortune in heroism of spirit, the creation of communities reflecting concern for human welfare, dedication to the Creator-God. The degree of these possibilities varies from person to person, as do the problems.

Seen in the context of events we have been describing, man obviously was not born for ease, complacency, freedom from all tension — nor for the realization of all his dreams. Rather, he has capacities for a measure of growth and greatness, for the expression on the human level of the divine creative life which permeates the universe. Man is metaphysically one with deity. On the human level he reflects the image of God.

In the light of what appear to be the facts I do not find significant help in introducing the myth of the fall as an aid in understanding the human situation, or in suggesting that our real problem is original sin. This sort of talk may lead some people to conclude that they have analyzed something, but in too many instances nothing of designative significance has been said. Man's problem is not that of returning to some Golden Age or state of innocence from which he once became separated. It is that of rising to his potentialities as a responsible, maturing creature of God.

A point I should like to empahsize is that those elements in the human situation which some theologians call original sin are rooted just as much in the dynamic, creative, natural context of which man is a part, as in some abstraction called "human nature." In a system marked by emergence there are possibilities for both regression and progress. Human nature is neither inherently good nor inherently evil — it is potential. This is the way things have been created.

It is currently fashionable in some theological circles to distinguish the essential and the existential conditions of man. It is suggested that we are fallen from or estranged from our essential nature. The implication seems to be that man was once something that he is not now. Unless one is prepared to take the Garden of Eden story literally, or the belief in a golden age, this sort of interpretation is not very helpful.

It would make more sense to talk about what **man is** and what he **might become.** This puts things in a different, more realistic, and more hopeful light. Myths have their place in the life of man, but let us not confuse them with serious theology.

Let us face facts for what they are, using designative and precise language when we can. We might reserve the term "sin" for those voluntary acts and attitudes which operate against the achievement of religious values, making man less human, reducing his fruitful relationships with God. Let us avoid using the word as a blanket explanation of the highly complex human situation.

Let us then go on and recognize man's assets and strengths, his capacities for at least some rational thought, his capacity to relate, his capacity for a maturing conscience, his capacity for self-transcendence and self-investment, his capacity for building a world somewhat more familiar and tolerable than the one we have, his capacity for growth.

Some years ago Dr. Cotter Hirschberg, Director of the Department of Child Psychiatry at the Menninger Foundation, told me that whenever he was dealing with a patient the thing he really counted on was that person's capacity for growth. As religious

leaders we ought do no less. Man is a creature who responds to the lure of the ideal and the vision of God. So long as this is true, we ought not sell him short.

Margaret Mead has written:

> I believe that to understand human beings it is necessary to think of them as part of the whole living world . . . I believe that human nature is neither intrinsically good or intrinsically evil, but individuals are born with different combinations of innate potentialities, and that it will depend on how they are reared—to trust and love and experiment and create, or to fear and hate and conform—what kind of human beings they can become. I believe that we have not even begun to tap human potentialities, and that by a continuing humble but persistent study of human behavior, we can learn consciously to create civilizations within which an increasing proportion of human being will realize more of what they have it in them to be.[12]

To me these words have the ring of reality about them. But they are both hopeful and sobering words, giving us a chastened view of man and reminding us that some of our major problems are extraordinarily intricate, involving the creation of institutions and communities conducive to the growth of maturing persons with capacity for responsible participation in a social context.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

Events associated with the space age do not lessen man's religious needs for the courage and meaning which spring from trust and devotion in relation to the whole of being. What the areas of particular religious need will be in the future only time can tell. It is obvious, however, that in the space age religion must speak to man's concerns about his own significance in a universe as vast and mysterious as we are discovering ours to be.

In the seventeenth century Pascal wrote: "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me." What would he say today? Carl Sandburg quotes a lady in Santa Fe saying, "I don't see how anybody can study astronomy and have ambition enough to get up in the morning." No matter how far he travels, man will face the basic problems of morale; he will need the sense of meaningfulness in existence. He will seek the religious vision of greatness.

When we turn to the theological level of religion, it is evident that our newer understandings of man have implications for specific doctrines. In the next article in this series we shall consider the doctrine of God. At this time I wish to suggest that we must rethink doctrines pertaining to man in dynamic and contextualistic terms if they are to have relevance in our present situation.

The doctrine of **redemption** is a case in point. Man, as the religious experient, is a problem to himself. Involved in his makeup are egoistic, aggressive drives — essential to his existence as a human being — but entailing destructive possibilities. These drives are involved in the most creative and destructive things man does.

Redemption is not a matter of erasing the dynamic elements of man. It is not a turning of an intrinsically "evil" nature into an intrinsically "good" nature. It is not a transformation of a human substance into a divine substance. Once we start thinking of the redemptive processes in dynamic and contextualistic terms, we move to a deeper level. What we want to know is what is happening in the lives of persons—in their attitudes, adjustments, actions, appreciations, aspirations; in their human relationships; in their value systems; in their relations with God. To what sort of terms are they coming with life? Redemption is in the context of man's life involvements, or it isn't at all.

There is increasing reason to believe

[12] Margaret Mead, "A New Control of Destiny," *This I Believe* (E. R. Murrow, Ed.), New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952, pp. 115 f.

that human nature is something with which we can work. The application of intelligence is required. This will do things that even total immersion cannot effect. These words from Edwin Embree, the anthropologist, are worth contemplating:

> Many people think it visionary to try to improve our own lives and relationships. They feel they have closed the whole subject with "You can't change human nature."
>
> Well, we haven't changed the nature of the physical universe, but by understanding it we have turned it in a myriad ways to our service and our convenience. We didn't set aside the force of gravity when we learned to fly. We didn't have to amend the laws of stress and strain, we only had to understand them, in order to build bridges and skyscrapers or to drive engines a hundred miles an hour. . . . We didn't have to alter the laws of biology to breed fleet horses and fat hogs, to grow corn and wheat of far finer quality than anything known in a wild state.
>
> So with human nature, it is not a matter of "changing" the fundamental drives and instincts; it is simply a matter of understanding these forces and turning them to more constructive and wholesome channels than the strifes and frustrations that make up so much of life, even in the midst of our material plenty.[18]

Just as man did not once upon a time fall en masse, so men are not redeemed en masse. There is no universal man — there is John Jones. Redemption is a dynamic process within the life experience of John Jones, and each individual has his own spiritual history.

Redemption is not just a matter of divine grace on the one hand, or human effort on the other — it is a combination, wherein man intelligently sets conditions and exposes himself to influences through which the healing, reconstructive, reorienting power of God can function toward newness of life and hope.

Let me repeat. In the light of our newer understandings of man we must rethink our doctrines in dynamic and contextualistic terms. Whether we use given words is not the issue. Whether we get at given processes, leading men into greater self-understanding, more productive relationships with each other and God — making religious values possible — **is** the point.

Conversion is not necessarily a dramatic or instantaneous experience. Whether it be fast or slow, quiet or marked by moments of unusual vividness of feeling, the heart of it is the same—a reorientation, a recentering of life Godward.

Justification is not a superatural act in which unworthy man, although still unworthy is permitted to stand before a judge-like external deity. Profounder than this is the emerging awareness of belonging and acceptance—the right to be oneslf, in this God-filled world.

Forgiveness is not a formal erasing of something in a transcendent book. It is the sublime emergence into a new chapter of life wherein, through the working of God in the life of man, the past is not erased, but in some measure is outgrown and assimilated into an emerging pattern of new life and hope.

Sanctification is not a blessed state wherein one is lifted above the real testing experiences of life as though they no longer had a claim upon him. Rather, it is the unfolding life of growth—a going on—into fuller expressions of mature love of God and man.

Thus, religious doctrines and symbols point to facts within ourselves, in the world about us, in human experience, in God, or they have no relevance at all. They point to God and the life of God in the soul of man, oftentimes articulating responses of man to the vision of greatness which is incarnate in the passage of temporal fact.

In closing I should like to reaffirm the importance of the role of the Christian minister in these new days at the point of revealing men to themselves, particularly in their religious dimen-

[18] Quoted by Clyde Kluckholm, *Mirror For Man*, pp. 219 ff.

sions as responsible, maturing creatures of God. We are physicians of souls, teachers of men, proclaimers of hope. As such, we need to understand the problems and possibilities of men, and understanding this, to care for individual persons.

Gilbert Murray has written of the widespread "failure of nerve" at the time of Christianity's rise. Today there is a kind of creeping pessimism and fatalism in our midst. How tragic if the Christian church should fail to speak to this condition bringing a word of challenge and light, inspiring man to accept his human role in hope. This need not be a matter of wishful thinking—so long as there are dependable elements in man with which to work—and the vision of God to inspire.