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The Mature Mind, 1949.

THE MATURE MIND

Sunday, December 11, 1949

In discussing with you this morning "The Mature Mind", I should at the outset like to alert you to the fact that I am not discussing "Peace of Mind" or "Peace of Soul". Those themes are very popular today and books written on these subjects have a very popular appeal. It is a sort of a symptom, I believe, of our distraught age that so many are seeking and so desperately for peace of mind which really cannot be sought, for it is ^{not} an objective in itself, but only a by-product of a different quest altogether. The only peace which we are urged to seek in our sacred literature is the peace with our fellowmen, peace with our kith and kin, with our neighbors, with our community, peace between countries, races, classes. "Go seek the peace of thy brothers," Joseph is commanded in the Bible. "When thou wilt approach a city to do war upon it, stop and first call for peace. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. Seek the peace of the city wither thou wilt be sent to seek the peace of Jerusalem." And hundreds of others such mandates found in our Bible. Man us urged to walk in the ways of God and to engage in a career of active, moral enterprise, and then fine peace.

, we read in the Psalms. "Acquaint thyself with God and then thou wilt be at peace." Get acquainted with what God wants you to do on this earth. Do it. You will find that measure of peace which is possible for a human being to find in his mortal, finite and much troubled life. "Great peace have they who love thy law." ✓ It is in the pursuit of justice and righteousness and the ways of God that, so we are told by our seers and prophets, a man can find a measure of peace. "Righteousness and peace have kissed." Righteousness first, then peace. "And the work of justice shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness shall be quietude and confidence." It's a different conception altogether than this "Peace of Mind" which is a sort of a soothing syrup that people are looking after.

Our sages conceived of peace as a covenant of peace, a "brith shalom"; that is, a covenant which links a man to a certain quality and kind of action which results in peace. "The mind stayed on Thee, O Lord; Thou keepest in perfect peace because it trusted in Thee."

Peace of mind as an act in itself, as an objective in itself, is nowhere urged, and peace of mind in terms of undisturbed and everlasting tranquillity and imperturbability is nowhere identified in our long and in our noble literature either with the lives of the great or with the lives of the good. Nowhere is a man urged to avoid conflict and struggle and resistance and even suffering to conform for the sake of preserving his peace of mind, or his emotional equanimity. On the contrary. Man is summoned and challenged to resist evil, to wage war upon wrong-doing, to struggle with his own lower nature and his own undisciplined instincts in order to purify and sublimate them. Man is called upon to a life of moral enterprise of adventure and struggle. That doesn't always make for peace of mind. The servant of God who, in the eyes of the prophets, was the supreme human being, the "eved adonai" - the servant of God is often represented in the Bible, to quote the words of Isaiah "as a man despised and forsaken of man, a man of pains, smitten of God and afflicted, but through his stripes mankind is healed". Of all the great men of the Bible, Moses was perhaps the greatest and he should have had the most perfect peace of mind. You don't associate peace of mind with Moses. Frequently Moses had to cry out in the anguish of his soul:

"Before long these people whom I am leading, whom I am trying to serve, will stone me to death. How can I bear alone," Moses cried to his people, "how can I bear your complaints and your burdens and your strife and your bickerings?" How much peace did he have, this man, Moses who was even denied the privilege of entering the Promised Land towards which he had been leading a difficult and rebellious host of erstwhile slaves for 40 years in the wilderness? No, Moses did not seek his peace of mind. He sought the freedom and the peace of his people.

And the greatest of the literary prophets, Jeremiah, complains bitterly: "Woe is me. My mother," he says, "woe is me that thou hast born me. A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth. I have not lent, neither have I borrowed; yet every one of them doth curse me." How much peace did Jeremiah or any of the prophets or pathfinders of man ever have? But it was these people who made the blind to see the truth of God, who made the deaf to hear the wisdom of life, who carved out to their tortured

hearts spirits, the highway of civilization. They were seldom at rest. They were always advancing, frequently with bleeding feet along the dolorous road of their progress. ✓

say the Rabbis

501/2 102/1/1/1 . "The truly righteous and noble men have no rest, even in this world or in the world to come. But they drink deep of the radiance, of the ever-increasing radiance and effulgence of the Glor~~y~~ of God".

It is a phase, I am afraid - this quest for peace of mind - of the spiritual exhaustion and weariness of our age, of the frustration and the disillusionments and the confusions of our day, and of the fear which the individual human being is experiencing being somehow submerged within these mammoth structures of the machine age, his stature being reduced, his dignity, his security, his worth is being reduced in the world, and he is afraid of his dictatorship and regimentation and overwhelmingness of life, that he is eagerly and so pathetically seeking today - not for a chance to work ✓ for the Kingdom of God, not for new adventures of the spirit, but for peace of mind, for rest, for an oasis in his desert world.

A few weeks ago I came across a very fine statement which, in a way, summarizes what I am trying to say, written by the eminent psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, called ✓ "Take Your Choice", and he bases his statement on a quotation of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson's statement is this: "God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please. You can never have both." And Dr. Menninger says, "To me it is a strange and dismal thing that in a world of such needs, such opportunity and such variety as ours, the search for an elusory peace of mind should be so zealously pursued and defended while truth goes languishing. Unrest of spirit is a mark of life. One problem after another presents itself and in the solving of them we can find our greatest pleasure. The continuous encounter with continuing changing conditions is the very substance of living. From an acute awareness of the surging effort, we have the periodic relief of seeing one task finished and another begun, and the comfort of momentary rest and nightly sleep. But a querulous search for premature, permanent peace seems to me a thinly disguised wish to die. As I have said elsewhere in paraphrase

of Freud, man is a creature dominated by an instinct in the direction of death, but he is also blessed with an opposing instinct which battles heroically with varying success against its ultimate conqueror. This magnificent drama of conflict sets us our highest ideals - spiritual nobility and social achievement. To seek after peace of mind is to forsake this truth for an illusion. It is the search to which I object, because striving for personal peace means turning one's back on humanity and its suffering, losing one's life in trying to save it. On the other hand, peace or something near it is often achieved by those who do not seek it, who, seeking truth, forget themselves."

Professor Overstreet's book, "The Mature Mind", does not concern itself with peace of mind, but with the mature mind whose essential characteristic is not an illusory adjustment yielding peace of mind, but growth, development. The immature mind, says Dr. Overstreet, is likely to affect a smoother adjustment than the mature mind, naturally. It more easily conforms. It more readily avoids issues, challenges, conflicts in order to be at peace; conditions which the mature mind dares to face up to, even if it involves conflict and struggle. The predicament of mankind today, maintains Professor Overstreet, is its mental and emotional and social immaturity. It refuses to grow up, and all its important agencies and institutions, far from contributing to a psychological adulthood, a psychological maturity, are conspiring to keep man fixated, retarded, immature, and because man today is possessed of vast power, the like of which he never possessed in the past, this intellectual and emotional and social immaturity presents to him an extreme peril and danger, the like of which did not confront him in the past. It is like a huge grown, physically mature human being guided by a mind of an infant or of a child. His capacity for doing evil is infinitely greater - evil to others and evil to himself.

Modern psychology, Professor Overstreet points out, as generally known, of course, has given us today certain new insights into human nature which help us to understand why men today are largely immature, which help us also to think hopefully of changing the conditions of men and enabling them to grow into maturity. There is the idea, for

example, of arrested development. Many of the baffling diseases of adulthood, of grown people, have their origin in the unresolved emotional conflicts of childhood. A neurosis in an adult, in a grown person, is frequently assigned that at some time or other in his formative years his development was arrested by some shock, by some experience which he could not master, and this unhappy and unresolved experience was repressed into the unconsciousness where it continues to operate in its infantile form.

Now there are many adult people today, even those who do not suffer or have not suffered any severe traumata or shock, who nevertheless continue to solve or to attempt to solve their adult problems by childish means because of a kind of education and training which they had received in their homes and in their schools and in society generally. They employ immature methods in wrestling with personal and social problems.

Dr. Overstreet also calls attention to the other new insight which has come in the wake of our greater understanding of psychology. Man can today be conditioned to become a creature that he is not by his original nature. As he puts it, a man can be conditioned to eat ~~spinach~~ spinach and like it, to kill his fellowmen and feel proud of it, to insult a minority race and feel justified in his discourtesy, just as in the famous Pavlov experiment where a dog, who naturally salivates when meat is brought to him, and who does not salivate when a bell is rung; yet by ringing a bell every time the meat was brought to that dog, the dog was conditioned to salivate merely at the ringing of the bell when no meat was brought. His nature was reconditioned radically.

Now, man can be so conditioned. Man can become almost anything, of course, within the framework of his humanity. This is the rousing news, writes Dr. Overstreet, brought to us by Pavlov's experiment on conditioned responses. It is news, however, that cuts both ways. By effective stimuli we can build far more enlightened and capable human beings, and by equally effective stimuli we can build creatures in whom human powers are dangerously distorted. In the schools that Hitler designed for ~~and~~ German youth, for example, the meat and bell technique conditioned a whole generation of boys and girls to contempt for non-Aryans, to cruelty to Jews, to spying upon parents and neighbors, to unquestioning obedience to the Fuhrer. The Nazi youth, male and

female, who poured like a scourge over Europe, had been conditioned into creatures unrecognizable as human by common standards of human decency. This is the one way in which conditioning can work, and it is a way we are learning to worry about.

All through our human society in families, communities, schools, nations, a vast amount of conditioning is taking place that is inimical to maturity, that it is inimical even to human survival. In other words, society today and its institutions are not conditioning human beings for complete maturity.

Now, what is a mature person? Well, Professor Overstreet in his book gives quite a number of definitions, all summing up to the same theme. He says:

A mature person is not one who has come to a certain level of achievement and stopped there. He is rather a maturing person, ✓ one whose linkages with life are constantly becoming stronger and richer because his attitudes are such as to encourage their growth rather than their stoppage. A mature person, for example, is not one who knows a large number of facts. Rather, he is one whose mental habits are such that he grows in knowledge and in the wise use of it. A mature person is not one who has built up a certain quota of human relationships - family, friends, acquaintances, fellow workers - and is ready to call a halt, dismissing the rest of the human race as unimportant. Rather he is a person who has learned how to operate well in a human environment so that he continues both to add new people to those whom he cares about and to discover new bases of fellowship with those already familiar.

There's a beautiful sentence in the Book of Genesis: "And Abraham travelled; he kept on travelling." He kept on travelling to the South. One of the great Chassidic teachers said: "He kept on travelling from one level to a higher level." Abraham kept on travelling all his life from one rung to a higher run upon the ladder which reaches into the infinite.

That's what Dr. Overstreet means when he speaks of maturity as growth. What are the criteria of maturity? Well, he enumerates what he calls the basic linkages with ✓ life, the basic tie-ups with life which a man must establish in order to grow not only into physical adulthood, but into real maturity. And the first of these is what he calls the linkage of knowledge, the linkage of knowledge. Man is born ignorant. Every human being is born ignorant, and he must acquire knowledge not only to insure his animal survival, but that is not enough. Nor is the knowledge which makes for maturity merely the mastery of this fact or that fact, or this set of facts or that set of facts.

It is rather the attitude towards knowledge and the tie-up that exists between a man's knowledge and the situation in which he finds himself. If a man makes no effort, for example, to understand what is involved in the situation wherein he is called upon to act, upon which he is called upon to exert a decision or an opinion, then he is immature. When he is given the right to vote, a ballot, and goes into the voting booth ignorant of the issues involved, that man is immature as far as his knowledge is concerned. He is not equipped by knowledge to meet the situation confronting him on which he is asked to express an opinion or make a decision. If a man take for granted, for example, that the knowledge which he now possesses is sufficient and adequate for all future time, he is immature. If he accepts dogma, however impressive, without scrutinizing it, analyzing it, challenging it, or if he has a pride of opinion which keeps him from revising his judgment, that man is immature. Knowledge - real knowledge, searching, progressive, intolerant knowledge - if you will - is one of the first criteria of a mature person.

Our sages said: "If there is no knowledge, there is no true religion." Because religion cannot be based on ignorance. "He who increases his knowledge, increases and intensifies his life." Because it isn't how long you live, it's what you do with the years allotted to you, how you crowd them with significance. That's the first linkage.

And the second one, according to the author, is the linkage of responsibility. Man is born irresponsible. A child is absolutely helpless - an infant - and therefore, is irresponsible. With maturity comes a readiness to participate in the chores of life, in the bettering of life, and the assumption of responsibility commensurate with our powers. "To mature," says Professor Overstreet, "is progressively to accept the fact that the human experience is a shared experience, the human predicament a shared predicament." And a mature person does not run away from responsibility. A mature person is not a drifter. He is a worker; he is a builder who goes about his work with earnestness, with order, without indulging in self-excusing and self-dramatizing - an honest worker, who assumes the responsibility for doing the job assigned to him in the scheme of things. That's a mature person.

There is a third linkage, according to the author. That's the linkage of what he calls communication, of words. Most men suffer arrested development of speech - not that they don't talk enough - an inadequate speech apparatus makes for the mediocrity of ideas expressed; just as stammering and stuttering have their roots in emotional disturbances, so other defects of speech - habitual dullness, pomposity, needless sarcasm, nagging, impertintry, monologuing - all these reveal character defects. To be able to acquire knowledge and to transmit knowledge accurately, you have to have a perfected media of speech. That is why the ancients lay so much emphasis in their education on what they called rhetoric. They didn't use the term as we call it today, pompous and flowery speech. Rhetoric was the art of expressing your ideas clearly, succinctly, accurately. It's sloppiness in expression of an idea that ultimately either implies sloppiness in the idea itself or in the way it is received by those to whom you are endeavoring to transmit it.

In the beginning was the word, and it is the job of a mature ~~person~~ person to perfect the art of communicating his ideas to other human beings.

And then there is the linkage of sex. Man is born a creature of diffused sexuality, and he must mature according to a specific and creative sexual relationship. Sexual immaturity, according to the author, of one sort or another is so prevalent in the world today as to seem normal. Our sex natures go through certain normal stages of development. In early childhood when children develop an especial attachment to the parent of the opposite sex - the boy for the mother, the daughter for the father - later on there is the stage of especial attachment to members of the same sex, and in adolescence again, especial attachment to members of the opposite sex, and each stage is attended by its own intense emotional experience which, if misunderstood or mishandled, lead to all forms of psychic distortions and conflicts, and may lead to lasting immaturity.

And finally, there is the linkage with society. Every human being is born self-centered, egocentric, completely sunk in his own world. He matures slowly into an awareness of his relationship with others - mother, father, brothers, sisters, family, friends, the community, the nation, the world!

Unfortunately, claims the author, in our society today, children are encouraged to receive only a limited degree of this social-centricity instead of ego-centricity. They're encouraged to link themselves up, as it were, with people of their own special group, members of their own special class or race or religion. All others are beyond the periphery of their life interest. They are not linked emotionally up with them. The author calls this the habit of emphathic provincialism, provincialism in human sympathy, and it is the most common emotional block set up against the full maturity to the human race. "The overshadowing tragedy of our human existence, he writes, is that so vast a number of people grow into adulthood with their social imagination arrested. They take on the powers of adulthood, but they are incapable of feeling what happens to other people, or of greatly caring whether these other people fare well or ill."

The great Hillel gave one of his basic instructions to his disciples: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, but if I am only for myself, what am I?" Nothing. A human being whose life's interests are so restricted as to center entirely within himself or in his own little extended self - his family - that man is nothing. He hasn't realized his full manhood as a member of the human society, of the human race.

And lastly the author urges for maturity linkage with the whole. Man is born in a world of isolated particulars and he has to mature into a world of wholes. It is in the direction of whole-seeing and whole-thinking that growth must take place. Therefore, a man must have a philosophy. A philosophy means that a man has gotten the grasp of the totality of life, of destiny, of man's position in the world. Man is, therefore, mature if he moves in the direction of wholeness through the linkages of knowledge and of responsibility and communication and of mature sexuality, of sympathy.

God said to Abraham: "Walk before Me, walk in My presence and be thou whole."

A whole human being, not fragmentized and not biased in the direction of one of these linkages as against the other, but a human being who tries to develop himself equally, harmoniously as far as possible along all these channels and avenues of personality development.

I wish I had time to go further into this book, but why should I - the book is available, and you ought to buy it and read it. It's very stimulating. He calls attention, for example, that all the basic mature ideas were known to mankind thousands of years ago. All the things that he has been saying are not new things, but the immature mind of man has been unable to grasp them or has, in trying to understand them and being unequipped for them, distorted them. He calls attention to the great ideas which the Jews gave to the world - the idea of the one spiritual God, the Father of all men, and he asks, Look what the immature mind of the human race has done with this revelation, this tremendous mature idea which the Jews brought into the world. Or the idea of social justice, or the moral law, or the concept of love, or the great ideal of reason which the Greeks gave to the world, or of the rights of the individual which came to mankind with the Renaissance, or political freedom. What has the human mind done with these great, mature and sovereign concepts? It has been unequal to them because in their training - in home and school and church and community - human beings have been inhibited from becoming adults, from becoming mature.

Professor Overstreet makes a scathing attack upon the civilization of the 19th century and shows how all its basic philosophies have been those of immaturity. The 19th century, in its most characteristic developments, was the century of power politics and power economics, of aggressive nationalism, imperialism, of captains of industry, Napoleons of finance. These developments were all justified by the philosophies of the century, whether by the ego-centered, race-centered, and nation-centered

romanticism, the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, the struggle for survival, philosophies of various evolutionists, or the dialectic materialism of Karl Marx. Never perhaps in all history has the madness of man's trying to go too far alone received such elaborate support. Never perhaps has there been a more various rationalization of immaturity or a more tragic handling of authority of the mentally, emotionally, and socially immature.

And the author is equally as critical of what we do today, of what we read and see and hear in our newspapers, in our radio, in our movies, in our advertising. They contribute, he maintains, to man's permanent immaturity. The newspaper has a vested interest in catastrophe and its major appeal is to the psychologically mature. The radio is geared to mediocrity. The movies are there to provide escape and fulfillment by phantasy which is the very pattern of psychological immaturity.

But he is also constructive and not merely negative and critical. He points to what can be done in the home and in the school and in the church to help man grow to being a real human being made in the image of God. He speaks of the difficulties which the modern home faces, the small space, not enough privacy, mother too close to children as a dominant psychological force and father too far away; the over-mothering and the under-fathering of children today; the fact that there are too few children in the modern family, just making for over-indulgence and for lack of companionship for children. He calls attention to the fact that these basic linkages of which he has spoken - knowledge, responsibility, sexual maturity, etc. - it is in the home where these can be best, not taught, but illustrated. Children learn by contagion, by example - not by word. The home is a place for growing. It is, therefore, imperatively a place where adults must themselves be growing and where there is some knowledge of how growth is accomplished. It is no place for adults who are unwilling in pride or apathy to learn and to keep learning about the peculiar ways of human growth.

Again, the home must be a place where all that the parents can learn about psychological growth as well as physical is given a daily work-out in practice. Finally, the home is a place where we can begin to re-make our culture. If our culture has slipped into unsound habits of irresponsibility and egocentricity, the home is a place where we can begin to mitigate these habits. If our culture has slipped into carelessness regarding human values, the home is a place where those values can be cherished and made to grow and influenced. If our culture has learned to put a disastrously high premium on competition, the home is a place where the cooperative arts can be a strength and a delight.

And in the same way, the school - our children are taught to think in the school, but within limits. They are not exposed enough to doubts and to curiosity. Education is too orthodox and too dogmatic. There is not enough of creative evaluation in education. There is not enough effort to develop the inquiring mind. What we call education today is largely a matter of memory. Children should be taught to solve problems. They should be taught the habits of cooperation in common projects within the school.

And the same way with the church. It is the business of the church, maintains the author, to devaluate the concept of the success pattern in life and the power pattern which are dominant in our world today, and to emphasize the pattern of human linkage. Religion means tying together, binding together. Differences in religions naturally need to be respected, but basic to all religions must be the concept of man as a creature of dignity whose ~~destiny~~ destiny is to grow into maturity.

And so there is a challenge in the book - Keep on travelling from degree to degree, from level to level. Jochanim ben Zachai had five pupils. Jochanim ben Zachai was the great rabbi who lived in the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and was credited with having saved Judaism after the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of its national life. There were five great disciples and each one had some great quality, some great merit. One of them, Elazar ben Arach - of him the great Jochanim ben

Zachai said - his outstanding quality was that he was "like a well, like a spring, which continuously increased its strength and its vigor". And of him it was said that if you put all the other pupils on one scale and Elazar ben Arach on the other, Elazar ben Arach is equal to the rest of them put together because he was "the spring that was everlastingly replanishing itself and growing in strength".

And Hillel said, "He who does not increase, decreases." That's the key to the mature mind.

