

AN EASTER MESSAGE

By A. J. Truesdell

Out in the country where rural electrification has not been established, some of the people use wind-chargers to generate electricity to supply light for houses and farm buildings, run labor saving devices, play radios, and so forth. When the wind is blowing steadily enough, this makeshift substitute for adequate electrification is good and benefits are obtained. Like any substitute, a wind-charger is satisfactory when the elements involved are favorable. But people who had been used to an ample supply of electricity at any and all times of the day or night would be worried by being forced to depend upon such an unstable source.

To strengthen our illustration, we can recall how sailors of old depended upon favorable winds as the main cause for a good and successful trip. Seamen today would be impatient if they were forced to rely upon trade winds as a substitute for the high-powered machinery by which modern ships are moved.

In seeking the spiritual power which is to move us toward and into our good, we are not looking for a wind-charger shaken in the wind. Under power generated by such an unreliable force as wind, we could stumble along somehow for a while longer and then have nothing to compensate us even in part for our years of confusion except, perhaps, the dubious honor of a flattering obituary.

When we ask ourselves the question, Is this all the good we want? we answer definitely, NO! We wish neither our source of power to be fluctuating in any degree, nor do we choose that our supply of good be spasmodic or circumscribed. When we think about it at all we realize that, in the world, the power, generated by all wind-chargers, power projects, or other instruments, has a definite point of limitation. With this realization we conclude that the power we seek and the good we wish to receive and enjoy is that which is limitless and permanent. Somehow we know in our hearts that what we want comes from the One God who has the power to give us our good, not according to measure, but according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Each one is seeking his good. Each one of us is entitled to the good he seeks. Each has a different concept of what constitutes good. That which satisfies one person would not do for another.

My good might not satisfy you. Your good might be a burden to me. However, each must have certain fundamentals in his concept and demonstration of good. Each must have life to enjoy good life. So with health and strength. Each must feel a sense of security, provision, protection, to say nothing of love, joy, peace, culture, enlightenment, moderation. Not one of these, or other fundamentals, can be withheld from the recipe for a good life. Who can say but that two individuals of different tastes, aspirations, and selectivity might not find themselves seeing life from a similar perspective if each had his full quota of these fundamentals.

There are many lesser qualifications to be noted in an examination of individuals as a group. Some of these seem to be distributed in haphazard or preferential manner. In matters of environment, culture, educational advantages, and even in the distribution of talents, there seem to have been

discrimination for some and against others. In the unequal distribution of the goods of the world, some have seemed to enjoy priorities not generally accorded to others.

Our democratic axiom that all men are created equal is often misquoted as we declare that all men are born equal.

Even in this day men and women are born into slavery or its equivalent in certain parts of the world. Too, some are born into the equivalent of royalty or aristocracy. The desires of men and women born into these diametrically opposed stations would be different. Yet, each would be seeking the good he feels ought to be his. One might desire liberty and security; another might seek health and happiness. Each would want that which seemed good to him.

Throughout all time man has been seeking his good even as we are seeking today. With each one seeking for something different, it is hardly reasonable to suppose there could be a common formula for such seeking and a common source of supply to fulfill that seeking. But there is both formula and supply: a formula that frees slaves and comforts kings; a supply unhindered and unlimited by the measures of man.

Such a quest of two brothers (and other men) two thousand years ago, because of an indescribable urge for something new, better, more satisfying than their comfortable, protected daily living, led them to seek out a prophet in Galilee. The whole course of their lives was altered by a short question, an invitation, and a command.

In three sentences, two of three words, and one of two, Andrew, Peter, and Philip were initiated into the mystery of life and directed to the treasure house of all good for all men. The Sentences were:

"What seek ye?"
"Come and see."
"Follow me."

These words are just as applicable to our seeking as they were when spoken to Andrew, Peter, and Philip by Jesus Christ. These same sentences will clarify for anyone of us the object of our search and the degree of reward we shall receive.

"What seek ye?" What do we want? and how much of what we want can we handle? Is there a limit to the extent of the good we can get?

Suppose we want a fuller, richer life. Just how full and how rich do we want that life to be and how much of it can we stand? Will the usual allotment of three score and ten years be sufficient for our needs?

This question brings us to our Easter lesson. Unless we know what we seek and what we are willing to do to get what we seek, we are inadequately prepared for the pursuit of the good we vaguely hope for. For instance, in the pursuit of life, are we willing to have our concept of life completely transformed? Regarding liberty, or freedom, are we prepared to give freedom to others and thus loosen our own bonds? Would we be willing to place our hope of happiness in a permanent principle of provision rather than depend on temporary thrills provided by people and transient things? Are we willing to wipe clean the slate for each day's schooling?

Andrew and Peter believed themselves willing to pay such a price for the fulfillment of their desires, so they accepted the invitation, "Come and see." They entered the Presence and the Life of this great One and saw and heard things many former prophets would have given their all to have seen and heard. As reported in the gospel of Matthew, they (when Jesus addressed the multitudes concerning John the Baptist and his mission) were reminded of their original quest when Jesus inquired, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? A man clothed in soft raiment? . . . A prophet?"

"All the prophets and the law prophesied until John." And John came announcing, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

John's receptive mind comprehended an advent surpassing all the miracles of all the prophets when he beheld the person of Jesus glorified by the inner light of realization at his baptism. Here was an actual visitation of divinity in a form like his own. Later, Peter was to acknowledge that in Jesus were the very acts of God manifested, when he spoke living words, "Thou art the Christ."

Of the two brothers, Andrew was the more stable. Peter was of the height-and-depth type, either superior or inferior. He tried to get away when the way became rugged. But neither he nor Andrew, Philip, or the others could have disobeyed the command uttered by the Master, "Follow me." As they continued on, the inner conviction grew that this man was more than a prophet. He was not giving them a personality course, or teaching them how they might control, through their wills, the lives and estates of mankind. He was not selling a course in how to get rich while you sleep. He was not directing them on a sentimental journey or tempering winds to shorn lambs. This man was not talking about social security or annuities for a pleasant old age. He was demonstrating divinity and proving a principle of plenty. He was functioning from and abiding in a permanent, eternal commodity known as life, without end, or, the good, without limit.

Jesus proved he was Christ the Son of the living God. This proof he gave to the race in his every act and experience, and he signed and sealed it voluntarily with his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection.

Every man and woman may prove the truth regarding the good for himself by making such inquiries within, as:

"What seek ye?" A demonstration. A comfortable living. Fine garments. Personal power. A wife. A husband. To do good works to be seen of men. To be called, Teacher. These are things to be added unto the true seeker, but all are secondary, subsidiary, auxiliary.

"Come and see." Move to that which Jesus thought of himself as being. Draw nigh to perceive and observe with your mind, and understand with your heart, that the Father knows what things you have need of and that if you seek him first the things will be added. Through at-one-ment with the Giver you can have all he has to offer.

"Follow me." Whoever does will be a citizen of the universe, a dispenser of life without beginning or end. He shall be called the Son of God. He shall be a partaker of the resurrection, a companion of Jesus Christ who is the life of man.

"What seek ye?"

"Come and see."

"Follow me."

* * *

SPIRITICITY April 1947

THE ATONEMENT

By Nell Truesdell

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the rock upon which many earnest students split. These are they who fear physical suffering. They treat suffering as a real and necessary experience in the life of man. They argue that they cannot conceive of a Good God forcing one person to assume all the trials and troubles of the flesh. Such students give much power to pain, sorrow, and hurt. But Jesus gave no such power to negation. In the face of every shortcoming on the part of those who came to him, he lifted up his eyes and healed them, every one. A man conscious of pain, sorrow, or hurt as such, could not have done this. The suffering, as it appeared to the patient, or the onlookers, would have been more real to him than the fact that in Reality no such negation exists.

Jesus Christ was not the man of sorrows we have been taught. He was a virile, masculine, strong, healthy, sensible, rational person. He withstood the rigors of weather, constant travel on foot over miles of rough countryside, did without food for long intervals of time, prayed, worked, healed, taught, and ministered all the time. There was no time in which he was not busy -- occupied with "my Father's business." And, he attended to business. That is why he was such a great success.

Great teachers of other ages had tried to take upon themselves the privilege of making the atonement for their people. They perceived that when one man did it, the whole race of men would be made free from the ravages of negation in which humanity had wrapped itself foolishly and ignorantly. Such men realized that when the atonement was made the race would no longer have an excuse for suffering, for ignorance, for lack, or for dying: it then would have been made free. When a fundamental rule is discovered and proved on any plane, any mistake along that line after, is counted a distinct breaking of the law, and claim of ignorance is no excuse.

The average truth student, as well as religionist, places the value of the example of the atonement in the death of Jesus. They reason that because he died for their sins he satisfied the offended infinite majesty of God, and, that through faith in him and his suffering on their behalf they are released from any punishment that might accrue to them for mistakes and shortcomings. In this, they forget that God's eye is too pure to behold iniquity. They neglect to consider that God views everything and everybody in the pure light of himself.

Man's sense of sin, or guilt, through which he is separated in consciousness from his Source, is but the result of his own foreshortened and aberrated vision. We are understanding more and more that man has or experiences what he sees.

This is where the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ come in. He taught and demonstrated to man, as an individual and as a race, that by looking up to God he could enter into the very kingdom of God.

Under the Mosaic Law man had practiced offering sacrifices for the express purpose of escaping the results of his sins, or offenses. Under the terms laid down by the Law, he brought the price-offering to the tabernacle where the officiating priest made sacrifice. The practice was good in that it provided opportunity for the individual to GIVE in order to RECEIVE. He wanted good for evil so he was forced, under the Law, to GIVE to GET. The very act of giving, even though it might be reluctant, opened the consciousness to receive and, no doubt, many a conscience was dedicated more strongly to the Lord through the renewing healing balm of offering. All of the sacrificial offerings were supposed to be voluntary and the choicest of herds and flocks was selected. It is possible the hidden pain of sin forced many an offering that otherwise might have been withheld.

The sin offering of ignorance was made by a soul, a priest, or the whole congregation when any of the commandments of the Lord concerning the things which ought not to be done was broken, and a young bullock without blemish was sacrificed. "When a ruler had sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the Lord his God concerning things which should not be done, and was guilty;" -- and this sin had come to his knowledge -- "he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish." Too, "if any one of the common people sin through ignorance," -- and his sin come to his knowledge, he too offered a sacrifice of a male goat without blemish.

There was trespass offerings also which covered the sin of hearing a voice swearing, or if the offender had touched any unclean thing or unclean man, or if he had sworn to do evil, or to do good, his trespass offering would be a female goat or lamb, and the priest would make atonement for him concerning his sin. If he could not provide a lamb, then two turtle doves, or two young pigeons, one for a sin offering, the other for a burnt offering, should be brought unto the Lord.

Then there was the trespass against the Lord in the form of a lie unto his neighbor wherein a man had cheated or stolen from, or deceived his neighbor, or had found something his neighbor had lost and lied concerning it. Such a person was to restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he had deceitfully got, or that which was delivered to him to keep, or all that about which he had sworn falsely; "he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part thereto and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering. And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock. And the priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord: and it shall be forgiven him for anything of all that he hath done in trespassing therein."

If you are interested in reading of the various forms of offerings used as a means of atonement, begin with the first chapter of Leviticus and read on.

There was one law for all offerings and that was "the priest that maketh atonement therewith shall have it." When Paul taught, his clear perception made him state, "the law made nothing perfect, . . . the bringing in of a better hope did."

In the beginning the religious practice of atonement was no doubt fulfilled in a consecrated manner by petitioner and priest. But as practice fell into decadence, even the priests who accepted the offerings and made sacrifice in elaborate ceremony for the atonement of sins were just as offensive as the persons applying for forgiveness. As the people became pawns in the hands of the untrustworthy, the scheming, and unprincipled, the whole system of religious observation fell as the vision lowered. Nothing was accomplished. The people kept on sinning. Some might even have enjoyed breaking all the laws, for they learned to feel they had compensated sufficiently when they made an offering at the altar. This was what the unworthy priests wanted for their worldly provision came through this means. The more they were able to impress the people that they were sinners the richer the priests became.

But when Jesus Christ came into the world, all that was changed. He took upon himself every infirmity, sin, and shortcoming to which the human being can be subject, and nullified the effects of all. And this vicarious atonement by Jesus Christ is, I say, the rock on which many fall.

Jesus Christ not only recognized his own divinity, but the divinity of mankind when he quoted, "I say ye are gods." He knew his goodness; he knew his ability to do the work he was appointed to do on this earth. He knew because he relied upon the Father with whom he claimed to be one. He knew that if he held himself in constant right relation with God the work of God would be accomplished through him.

He identified himself so wholly with God that the frailties of flesh were unknown to him and any pains and discords of the human beings with whom he came in contact were dissolved in his presence; and today, remembrance of him has the same effect. "Who gave himself for us," said Paul, "that he might deliver us from this present evil world."

We should acknowledge the completeness of his finished work. Jesus of Nazareth, in the history of man, was the one who could draw into himself the wretchedness of man and make it nothing, not only for himself, but for mankind also. Jesus Christ left us his name whereby we too might accomplish all things. For the name is imperishable Presence of God when it is spoken, and through it man experiences the life, love, and power that is God with which all living creation is endowed.

* * *

SPIRITICITY April 1947

PLOTINUS AS A SPIRITUAL GUIDE

By Robert A. Applegate, Jr.
Chapter III, DIALECTIC

Dialectic is the positive discipline which corresponds to the negative one of purgation. It is the path which leads the Neoplatonic mystic up to the goal of unification. It starts with discursive reasoning and ethical discipline and ends with contemplation. Its purpose is to confirm in the mind and consciousness of the philosopher the faith that behind the changing appearances there is a stable Reality, that behind the seeming plurality there is a Unity.

The path of dialectic has three branches: the ethical, intellectual, and esthetic, which are distinguished as the goal sought is regarded as the Good, the True, or the Beautiful. These are all names of the Highest; or rather they are the first determinations of the Highest, which is itself nameless. The three branches of the path meet at more than one point along the way, and they all join in dialectic, from which point they blend into one. The intellectual or the esthetic ascent may be followed by the neophyte according to his individual temperament, but the ethical ascent must accompany whichever of the other two is chosen, because virtue is, according to Plotinus, absolutely necessary for spiritual progress, and that virtue must become perfect before the ultimate goal can be obtained.

The ethical ascent is the first step on the upward path. It need not be completed before one of the other paths can be followed; but it must be started first. "Arrived here from out of the divine nature (we) must inaugurate (our) effort by some earthly correction." And it must be accompanied whichever of the other two paths is chosen. "God on the lips without good conduct of life is but a word." This ethical ascent consists of, first, purgation; then the practice of the civic virtues; and, lastly, the exercise of the philosophic virtue, which is wisdom or contemplation.

Plotinus does not describe the political or civil virtues, but we can divine some idea of what they were for him. For Plato these virtues consisted of courage, moderation, justice, and (if we take the guardians of the ideal state as the models of virtue) the complete dedication of the individual to the good of the community. They do not include, unless some miracle should make an ideal state possible, the active participation in political affairs. Marinus, the biographer of Proclus, one of the last of the Neoplatonists, also gives a list of the political virtues. Dean Inge gives the following which this biographer ascribed to his hero: "Contempt for filthy lucre, generosity, public spirit, wise political counsel, friendship, industry, and all the cardinal virtues." This list is little more than an elaboration of the virtues given by Plato as they would be applied to an autocratic form of government. Since this is true and since Plotinus himself (coming between Plato and Proclus) gives no description of the civic virtues, we may assume for him they were in substance the same as those given by his forerunner and by his follower: in brief, courage, moderation, justice, consideration for others, and service to the community in whatever way one can be of the most practical benefit. The life which Plotinus himself lived gives further support to this assumption.

These civic virtues are to be practical, according to Plotinus, because they dispel false opinions and give order and measure to the soul. Porphyry, however, gives a further, more altruistic reason for them, which may also safely, I think, be ascribed to Plotinus. These virtues are to be practical, Porphyry says, because they give to the individual benevolence and consideration for others. Thus they are called the civic virtues because they bind the citizens together.

The civic virtues will, if they have not been practiced before, come automatically to the philosopher with the wisdom that comes from the practice of contemplation. "The lower will spring either before or together with the higher." This higher virtue is wisdom, "the contemplation of all that exists in Divine Mind, and (since the soul becomes like to that to which it gives its attention) . . . the immediate presence of that Divine Mind Itself." This contemplation is not an idle self-indulgence, but an intense inner activity which always results in an outer activity. By contemplation, the philosopher allows the passage of an unprejudiced idea through his mind until that idea

becomes active. He contemplates Divine Mind until that Divine Mind is all there is of him. Then whatever he does outwardly is done with wisdom and power. Contemplation is not meant to supersede the political virtues, but to guide and complement them. In fact they cannot exist except imperfectly, without it. Contemplation is the last stage of the ethical ascent. It is also the last phase of dialectic; and from this point, the ethical ascent merges with the intellectual and the esthetic into one path. This is the continued practicing of dialectic and of the civic virtues and the waiting for the supernal vision.

The ethical ascent of Plotinus is taken almost entirely from Plato. The ethical virtues are the same as those to be practiced by the rulers of the ideal state, and the emphasis on contemplation reflects that of the seventh Book of the Republic. For Plato, the political virtues are to be practiced by the philosopher whether or not an ideal state does or ever will exist. However, they are always to be directed and guided by contemplation, as is emphasized by the image of the cave and in many other places. Where Plotinus differs from Plato is that for the Neoplatonist, contemplation, though always accompanied by action, is not sought for the sake of action, but for something higher, the knowledge of the One. For Plotinus, also, contemplation is itself an activity which transcends the activity which it directs. Here he may be following Aristotle, who says that contemplation is the highest form of activity, because the contemplative faculty is the highest of man's endowments and also because the things with which contemplation deals are the best that can be known. Plotinus, however, departs from Aristotle in that he does not make contemplation an end in itself. For him the goal can be only one thing, to know God and to know the Truth of Being which is identical with God.

Plotinus has been criticized because he makes philanthropy secondary to contemplation; whereas, the modern tendency is to regard contemplation with suspicion except in so far as it leads to virtuous activity. It has already been pointed out that, for Plotinus, contemplation is always accompanied by activity and is itself an activity. However, it is true that it is sought not for the sake of doing something nor for its own sake, but for the sake of knowing the Good. We do not seek God, Plotinus says, in order to be virtuous; but we practice virtue in order to find God. However, this is also the Christian point of view. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." "Thou shalt love (seek) the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."

It may be argued that Christianity has nothing to do with contemplation and that the Christian way of seeking God is by doing for others: that we will find God only after the death of the body. This seems to me to be a complete misconception of the true Christian doctrine. It is as much mistake to regard the message of Jesus Christ as the promise of a reward to be gained in a future life for living a good life here as it is to look upon it as the message of a second coming of the Messiah. The true Christian doctrine is mystical, and Christianity is mysticism in its highest form. Jesus Christ never told the disciples that they would enter the kingdom of heaven after death. He told them that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and that it was within them. He told them that the pure in heart would see God within themselves, here and now, whenever they became pure in heart: even as Plotinus told his followers. Jesus Christ instructed his disciples in contemplation. He told them that the light of the body was the eye of the soul. He told them that if this eye was kept single, if it was directed steadily up towards God, their whole body, their whole life, would be full of light; and they would know all things because the Holy Ghost would teach them. Jesus told his disciples to give unto others freely: to minister, to preach, to teach, and to heal; but this was always to

be secondary to prayer and contemplation. They were to seek the kingdom of heaven first, and that not for the sake of ministering more effectively to others, but for its own sake; nor were they to seek it only by ministry, but by seeking it directly within themselves, the only place that it was to be found. They were to wait on this inner presence until they were "endued with power from on high."

Thus Christianity and Neoplatonism agree on the part that contemplation should take in the highest way of life. It is not to be desired as an end in itself nor for the sake of doing good works, though it is always accompanied by good works. It is to be desired and to be practiced as a means to finding God, here and now, within the seeker, the only place that he ever will be found, because that is where the kingdom of heaven is.

(Continued next month.)

* * *

Alphabet of
DAILY MEDITATIONS
For Every Week Day of the Month

APRIL 1947

1. God now ACCEPTETH thy works.
2. Thy BLESSING is upon Thy people.
3. CALL ye upon Him while He is near.
4. O, Thou, that DWELLEST in the heavens!
5. He hath done EXCELLENT things.
*
7. Christ hath made us FREE.
8. Who is like unto Thee, GLORIOUS in holiness?
9. Whatsoever ye do, do it HEARTILY, as to the Lord.
10. Thy God shall bless thee IN all thine INCREASE.
11. JOY in the Holy Ghost.
12. His KINGDOM ruleth over all.
*
14. Ye have been called unto LIBERTY.
15. MY MOUTH shall speak of wisdom.
16. The Son can do NOTHING of himself.
17. Lean not unto thine OWN understanding.
18. Do those things that are PLEASING in His sight.
19. In QUIETNESS . . . shall be your strength.
*
21. Of the Lord ye shall RECEIVE the REWARD.
22. STAND fast.
23. My THOUGHTS are not your THOUGHTS.
24. Thanks be to God for His UNSPEAKABLE gift.
25. Thy VISITATION preserved my spirit.
26. The WISDOM that is from above is first pure.
*
28. All things are YOURS.
29. Have a ZEAL for God.
30. The Lord is my God.

* * *

Please join us in the DAILY MEDITATIONS and our whole communion will be strengthened and blessed and each shall receive his good.