

DIMENSIONS OF SUCCESS

Today it is not uncommon to find some young people not wanting to be named Christians. I suppose this is due in large part to the secular humanism of today in which God is simply a projection of human needs and desires. They properly reject the old idea of a God who filled many people with fear rather than with hope and faith.

Freedom from convention means freedom to observe, to think and behave sensibly, to the advantage of the person and of the group, free from outmoded types of loyalties and from the magic fears of our forefathers.

When persons have reached certain enviable goals we often say they are successful. We presume they have it made. We feel that we too will have arrived when we achieve similar desirable goals; when we get married, have a baby, get promoted, lose weight, buy a second car, move to the country, etc..

Although its admirable, and perhaps important, to work for such goals, the idea that we can find true and lasting happiness in merely seeking such goals is a fallacy. It requires discipline, responsibility, and hard work to care for a baby, to contribute to a marriage, maintain a weight loss, or be ultimately satisfied with material riches. Just because we gain these objectives doesn't mean life will be problem free or that we'll even be happy.

The philosophy of humanism ("Man is the measure of all things") is in itself a form of belief. It is an expression of religion. In humankind's search for satisfying human living, religious humanism is concerned for values that persons can realistically hope for. God is

defined generally in terms of humanity considered in its noblest aspirations and capacities. Our age of scientific achievement proclaims the inherent greatness of humanity, but denies the need of any power other than ones own for deliverance.

Extreme humanism simply dismisses God (a divine power) as irrelevant. Pride reaches beyond sensible knowledge when it develops contempt for the holy in life. To dismiss the holy and to leave it out of the account in the handling of life is a steady deterioration in human relationships and personal growth.

In a society which so covets success the question of what success does to a person's soul and to their relationships with others is worth considering. Is the successful person liked? Does this person gather friends? Are they feared? Envied? Hated? Success may be too dearly bought. It is attributed to Jesus that he admonished: "For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?" (Mark 8:36).

Popular Goals

1. SECURITY is one of the popular

SUCCESS, cont'd

goals sought after by a majority today. They want a good job which offers permanent employment, holidays with pay, fairly short hours without too much responsibility and a good pension plan. Pay should be enough to purchase a choice home, modernly equipped, provide a good standard of living, including as much education and as many advantages as possible for the children.

2. A GOOD TIME. Many want to have fun now and not have to think too much of the future. Consider the popularity of expensive hobbies and sports - skiing, water sports, travel, photography, hi-fi and stereo sets, etc..

3. POWER. Through the accumulation of money, prestigious employment positions, election to offices of government or administration, some seek their goal of success.

4. SERVICE. Some people devote many years to preparation for the service of humanity in the fields of public welfare, medicine, dentistry, government, social work, correctional work, the ministry or other forms of church work, teaching and so forth. But there are continuing shortages of personnel in many of these fields.

5. CHRISTIAN GOALS. Jesus said: "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to not to

be served but to serve...."

Such a goal can be accomplished through many occupations provided the motive is love and not self-interest.

#### LOVE versus SELF-INTEREST

In Plato we find the doctrine of love as the power which drives to the union with the true and the good itself. In his interpretation of the ideas as the essences of everything he saw them as the "power of being."

Love is the moving power of life. The power of love is not something which is added to an otherwise finished process, but life has love in itself as one of its constitutive elements.

Love is a passion. It gives drive, strong interest, enthusiasm to life. It develops wholesome relationships. It goes beyond physical attraction to friendship to unconditional benevolence.

Desire is the lowest quality of love. The Greek word is epithymia, meaning to set ones heart upon, to long for, to lust for. The New Testament Christians coined the new word agape to mean unconditional love, without thought of reward or return.

Read for yourself the New Testament description of the gift of love; patient, kind, unselfish, and generous. These can come only to the mature person, the highest and best gift of life. It is the epitome of success. (1 Corinthians 13).

A drop in the bucket  
Is only a drop -  
A minor and moist detail;  
For a drop can't change  
The colour and taste  
In a ten litre watering pail.  
But if the drop  
Has the colour of love  
And the taste of tears divine,  
One drop, dropped into  
The vessel of life  
Can turn the water into wine.

## WAY TO GO

When Edmund was 16 years of age the pair of us set out on a daylong canoe trip in the interior of Algonquin Park. We remember getting lost and finding our way again. We were handicapped because we didn't have a compass.

There is the story of a woman who was in a store seeking to purchase a compass. The clerk told her, "We have compasses for drawing circles, but not for going places."

So often we use our moral knowledge like a compass for drawing circles, but not as a compass for finding direction and advancement.

All of us need, even as humanists, in today's complex world, moral integrity and direction to find our way through the ethical wilderness of our contemporary society.

Here is the way to find our moral compass for living. Like a regular compass it can spin in any direction, and spin back. We need it constantly to keep our bearings in life, for morally we are compelled to search for our personal north, south, east and west. This is not easy. As well there is a lot of "junk" in life which can pull our compass out of true alignment.

Yet, directions begin someplace. I suggest the mental image of a compass to help us find our moral directions.

A regular compass consists of a magnetized needle, mounted and balanced on a pivot. It will seek to always point in the one direction. Our moral compass may have its north and south poles as knowledge and experience. The pivot point is love.

Knowledge

You can't live a faith or religion you don't know; you can't find realism in a faith you don't live. The history of humanity is a story of the efforts of people to find right answers: trying all sorts of formulae, regretting some, adopting others, rediscovering yet others, reaching everywhere for the fullest expression and meaning.

The Bible must be read as a religious book, not as a book of science, or even of history, but as a book about human morality. All of life is learning and re-learning. We have to develop minds that are capable of coping with everyday problems in the here and now, to better know what is right and wrong.

Experience

The other pole of our moral compass is experience. The richness or paucity, the fullness or weakness of our lives depends greatly upon experience. I test what I learn from the Bible, from the teachings of Jesus, from my faith, in my life. The spiritual path, the narrow road that leads to the virtuous life, the knowledge of right and wrong, is not always a smooth one. Experience can be a hard teacher but its lesson may be invaluable.

Love

The pivot of the moral compass needle is love. When we have the necessary poles of knowledge and experience, the facts and acts of living, then we must develop our ability to love. It is not enough to know; it is not enough to experience; love must balance and give us point in their use.

## QUOTABLE

"The Vatican had taken a dim view of Jean-Bertrand Aristide when he was elected president (of Haiti), because he was an ordained priest - a violation of the new canon law's ban on priests running for elective office -...and advocate of the Theology of Liberation... When Aristide was overthrown by the Haitian army, the Holy See became the only state formally to recognize the new military junta. Strange as it may sound, there were no Vatican protests against massive human rights violations...Subsequently, Aristide applied to the Holy See to leave the priesthood...Apart from such startling incongruities, John Paul II has staked out an unassailable position for his Church in the fundamental areas of social justice and human rights."

-From Pope John Paul II: The Biography by Tad Szulc. (Scribner).

## ESSAY ON ADAM

There are five possibilities. One: Adam fell.  
Two: he was pushed. Three: he jumped. Four: he only looked over the edge, and one look silenced him. Five: nothing worth mentioning happened to Adam.

The first, that he fell, is too simple. The fourth, fear, we have tried. It is useless. The fifth, nothing happened, is dull. The choices are these: he jumped or was pushed. And the differences between them is only an issue of whether the demons work from the inside out or from the outside in: the one theological question.

## BIBLICAL SUPERHEROES &amp; HEROINES

*And the Lord said to the Publishers: Parents do not clearly remember the stories of the past. It has been many years since they went to Sunday School. They are forgetting to read or tell these wonderful stories to their children. Lo, I will send them books of Bible stories, Testaments both Old and New. And reviewers will weigh them and booksellers will sell them and the parents will buy them and the children will hear them.*

*They are welcome to their myths, their fairy tales, their science fiction and mysteries. But the stories of Jacob and Job, Sarah and Esther, Jesus and Paul are good stories, too, and it behooves the people to read them each according to the needs of their family and their religion.*

1. "The Kingfisher Children's Bible" by British writer Ann Pilling. 157 pages, ages 6 and up.
2. "The Illustrated Children's Old Testament" and "The Illustrated Children's Bible". Mostly King James Version. Ages 8 and up.
3. "The Children's Bible" by David Christie-Murray.
4. "Behold! Spot the Difference Bible Stories" by Wendy Madgwick, Random House. Ages 4-8.
5. "My First Bible" by Linda Hayward. Large colourful plates set in pairs. Close, hands-on examination by eager youngsters will expose 10 differences between each set of pictures.

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