

THE APOCALYPTIC VISION - ECOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN, SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH

Most of us have been caught up from birth in ways of life belonging to a civilization which cannot continue in its present forms for very much longer, insofar as it is in danger of destroying, for good, resources upon which these ways of life depend, either through pollution, or through harvesting faster than Nature can replace, or through exhaustion of non-renewable resources. Since the Industrial Revolution, Man has acquired an increasing dependence on limited resources, without realizing or accepting that such a lifestyle is wantonly destructive and possibly suicidal for mankind altogether.

The first real confrontation with this fact will happen within the lifetimes of most people alive today, for the limits of previously bountiful resources like oil, copper, trees, fresh water, even fresh air, are becoming very suddenly apparent, although we are still increasing our rate of consumption of resources. We think that Science will provide the answers, or that it is the Government's responsibility, while forgetting that we elect the politicians, and that it is our failure to control, and to realize the implications of, the inventions of Science, which has caused the problem.

For instance, nuclear energy is not only another very limited resource; it is also (if one includes all relevant costs) more expensive than compatible alternatives and creates fewer jobs; it is also potentially much more dangerous than other conventional energy supplies; but due to newness, secrecy, lack of imagination and the confusion of conflicting propaganda this is not generally understood. It cannot even halt or replace the dwindling oil supplies since it only provides electricity, not petrol or fertilizers or plastics or lubricants. One needs imagination and precious time to verify those facts by examining the argument from all sides rather than accepting the schoolbooks account. Especially lunatic is the betrayal of the whole arms race, in which a war would have no winners; yet such a war is daily becoming more possible as the system grows more complicated, expensive, dangerous and vulnerable to accidents and terrorists. The 1,000 million people in the world on the brink of starvation are already the losers in a world where 1/4 of its inhabitants own 4/5 of its wealth, and 20 times the amount of money needed to end world poverty is spent on armaments. The fact that the problem is complicated by exploding populations in the poor countries (world population doubling every 32 years), and by unknown quantities of shortsighted vested interests, should make us more concerned, not more apathetic. We are addicted to materialism, and it hurts less to continue in the path of self-destruction than to face change.

One cannot deny the real wellbeing which the materialistic technology and industry have brought and may yet bring. But now we need to see clearly in our imagination the limits to material growth before facing

them as real physical disasters. We can only avoid these as disasters if, with sensitivity, ingenuity and persistence, we dig deep for spiritual roots from which can grow deeper philosophies of life, more responsible habits of consumption, more passionate sense of vocation. We need more and more subtle imagination to recognize new possibilities of change, of subtle changes causing far-reaching results. We need a picture of life, of Man, of the spiritual realities underlying the events of history and the mysteries of our own lives, that starts, and can continue to start, from where we are now, each one of us, and not just from humanity 2000 years ago. This picture must be true, beautiful and good. We need to evolve new creative responses, first in our thoughts and our inner depths of soul and spirit, then in our lives, then in our laws. We need to heal the planet to allow the continuing evolution of Man through attunement to the will of God, fostering our sense of purpose and meaning and wholeness in life, fostering reverence for life and what is good in life.

One reason that most people do not yet see the need to feel personally responsible for the crisis today is the way it has been creeping up insidiously on us all, so that in a sense we are all accomplices. The fact that the scale of the crisis is unprecedented in textbook human history (though Toynbee likens our position to that of the declining Roman-Greek civilization) is also very difficult to accept or imagine, and frequently a glimpse of it threatens our sense of security so badly that we find it too painful to go on looking, and refuse to acknowledge what we have seen.

Yet it was amid the downfall of Rome that Christianity came to birth. There is a growing body of information about the seriousness of the situation, and the opportunity for spiritual re-integration at a higher, more conscious level which the crisis is offering. The scientific approach (ie based on statistically significant facts) is well represented in "The Seventh Enemy" by Ronald Higgins, a senior diplomat well qualified to have a balanced, unsensational, informed approach. The psychic approach (ie relying on the perceptions of sensitives like Edgar Cayce) is documented from the more negative aspect in "The Earthquake Generation" which talks about the growing appearance in the collective unconscious of dire prophecies. The UFO phenomenon is intensifying over the years. "The Six O'Clock Bus" by Moira Timms talks about a wide range of phenomena appearing to signify an apocalypse, which gives a broad, even if not always convincingly explained, introduction.

One must surely ask "What are the responsibilities of the existing religions which claim to be our guides in life, particularly the Christian churches of the West which is precipitating this crisis?" Professional expertise claims wisdom in many representative areas which should have something to say about their relationship to the crisis. Judging by the beauty, the grandeur, the sense of sanctity of the old holy places, their importance was not merely a belief but actually a deeply felt experience. But a living Church must reflect the whole spirit of

the times, in its highest sense of joy as much as in its deepest sense of concern, as well as simply being sensitive to all the typical details of ordinary life in between.

The deepest sense of concern is surely the one we all face together as citizens of a limited and vulnerable planet. But alas, here lies the real difficulty. For it is the groups one does not ordinarily learn about, the carriers of esoteric wisdom, who reach out to the extremes of heights and depths, and can bring understanding which is wholesome, healing, holy; one needs to use discernment. This phenomenon of direct experience of the power of spiritual worlds is called within Christianity the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Essentially it is found within the silence within the self, manifesting in its purity as the universal "I AM" which Moses saw as the burning bush in the Egyptian wilderness.

It is religion which has the chief task of helping people reunite, harmonize and sanctify the broken, painful and meaningless aspects of life. Religion needs to draw fresh inspiration from many sources so as to look at the whole earth, at the whole of mankind, at all the prospects for spiritual evolution, in order to create afresh the spirit of wholeness, integrating news, ideas, feelings, concerns, criticisms and unusual or important experiences together with its traditional wisdom. It needs to forego its own authority whenever it encounters greater authority elsewhere, from people with practical, social, artistic or spiritual skills and sensitivity. It needs to look outwards, as if lost sheep might matter, and ask people "what do you most value in life? need in life? fear in life? what do you feel the Church lacks, and what can you do to amend that lack?" in order to link the living present with the best of the past. It needs as it were to breathe ever more deeply to encompass the heights and depths of an increasingly varied range of experiences open to Mankind today.

In my own search for a positive, balanced, natural approach to life and to my sense of life's problems and possibilities, I saw that I needed to find and master tools for self-development which would make sense of the stumbling-blocks of my education and life experience and enable me to turn them into useful building blocks. Indeed they do when transformed become the cornerstones, giving the capacity to help others with the same difficulties. I felt that the established Churches, and my teachers, and my friends, were all giving me incomplete parts of a whole picture, pointers to a whole which I needed to spend time and effort to knit together, if I was not to see life as a meaningless sequence of events and array of facts where love, happiness and God are illusions or at best transitory, to be playthings of a capricious and malicious fate.

All the standard scientific images of man are reductionist though plausible and intriguing, built from facts which cannot be denied; nothing but DNA, or nothing but hormones, or nothing but patterns of stimulus and behavioural response, or nothing but forms of sexual desires or inferiority complexes. Ordinary science does not touch the experience of our inner thought world, or the magic and mystery of Nature, yet how I longed to

find a science that did regard these silly subjective feelings as real, that could look at them without destroying them in the process. Religion on the other hand assures us that God is real, but fails to explain just why He should choose DNA rather than anything else.

I scoured the libraries, sought to sharpen my senses and wits, and simply began to think hard. My deepest sense of meaning in life is linked with selfless close observation of the world of Nature; with experiencing and creating works of art; and with quickening my own thinking powers to recognize intuitively the things that really matter in life, and to discard the unessential things. There is nothing in orthodox education specifically directed to teaching this last skill, though all teaching points this way whenever there is insistence on quality rather than quantity until the pupil is really giving all he has got and cannot give more, but feels it is worth the effort. Yet there is nothing more important in the whole of education, and today we need to cultivate this ability to cope with the problems, confusion and complexity of life.

Recognizing that life itself is a school, is the start to finding the path beyond the limitations of orthodoxy. This is the lonely path of inner knowledge and experience, known as the path of initiation, which has been known to a few in accordance with Man's need to know, throughout history. Today the number of seekers of this path has grown enormously in response to the growing awareness of the planetary crisis.

If we are to change reality, we must understand reality through examining its nature at its heart which is the centre of our personal experience of reality. To find this centre it is necessary to still all impressions coming from the outside through our senses, our bodily feelings, our emotions, our thoughts, by just letting them be without getting involved personally. This is the discipline of meditation, linked traditionally with the path to God through prayer, contemplation and communion. The best approaches to meditation know and understand the meaning of the many archetypal realities that can appear through meditation. But meditation by itself is the wilderness experience, a discipline without content whose purpose is meaning, when applied to life; from life's problems it will yield relief, and from life's joys it will yield spiritual perception; but we must choose to use it if we want its rewards. The greatest realities we can know are those of complete freedom, of limitless love, of creativity in partnership with God. We need to be opportunists, to make use of every gift which life offers, and not be restricted by habits, conventions or laws, unless they are themselves allowing life to manifest more abundantly.

Many people are experiencing a gulf between inner ideals and outer facts in life when confronted by today's changes, especially in the work to which they find themselves committed, which so often seems to perpetrate a meaningless or doomed system. Some changes seem to offer us higher hopes than we have ever known before; others seem to threaten the deepest foundations of our existence. The essence of these experiences

is of course nothing new to Man, but the form and possibly also the intensity are. "What can I do? If I drop out I lose the freedom my money gives me to enjoy life or even to fight for an end to our materialism" must be a thought many people have. Here is where we need to become opportunists, wily as serpents and gentle as doves, ensuring that we have whatever money and goods we really need, but treating our life and possessions as gifts from God to be accepted as they are with love and used with unselfish imagination creatively. One can capitalize on one's mistakes and failures - "If life hands you a lemon, make lemonade".

There are a growing number of groups concerned with important areas of life in which new patterns of wholeness can be developed. These include: pressure groups concerned with ecologically sound politics; self-help groups for problem minorities; community associations and cooperatives; charities; organic foods industries; future studies courses and workshops; alternative technology developments; consciousness-raising groups; communal living experiments; meditation groups; new religious movements not claiming exclusive infallibility; research associations for examining the strange phenomena that orthodoxy cannot cope with; new developments of old esoteric disciplines like astrology. It is as if many seeds have been sown in preparation for one harvest. As Teilhard says "The time has come to realize that Research is the highest human function, embracing the spirit of War and bright with the spirit of Religion". There are other groups, individuals, publications, festivals, who recognize more or less consciously that all are trying to help Mankind take his new responsibilities seriously and joyfully, laying the foundations for a new age, a planetary civilization, even in the midst of the failures of the old world.

There are also naturally many misguided attempts, shams and failures, which each person must learn to recognize, sometimes the hard way. This quite foreseeable aspect of the "new age" groups puts off a lot of people who are unwilling to discriminate carefully, who may reject the lot as hairy dropouts who sponge on society, or else set up another sub-group with its faults. Establishing well-earned credibility seems the biggest single problem at present. This is where I need to take time to listen to my own heart, thoughts, conscience, intuition, attempting to release my personal will so as to let the will of God stream through me from beyond, in order to keep freshly alive a sense of what is right. This practice has got me into serious trouble with other people; yet even so it is the only key I have for getting out of trouble again. It seems that though it is the feminine side of life which leads to the experience of the Fall into sin, it is also the feminine side of life pictured by the wise virgins in the parable, which allows the healing space, the acceptance of reality, the possibility of transformation, and which does not simply seek power, wealth or fame.

There are so many different sources that have helped me that I can here only take a representative selection. The esoteric disciplines are of crucial importance here, with two difficulties: first, few intelligent and open-minded people even know about them, let alone have balanced or sensitive or informed opinions; second,

very often the adherents of one discipline seem quite ignorant of other disciplines or of the place of their chosen discipline in the whole. Perhaps because of this it is the more remarkable how often the teachings do closely resemble each other, in the descriptions of the crisis today, of the spiritual events behind history and evolution, of the nature of the spiritual worlds and the beings who reside there. Because the teachings are similar, but never quite identical, one is forced more and more into developing one's own understanding of the truths to which the words are pointing.

Cris Popenoe's book "Inner Development", which is only a well annotated catalogue, gives a good impression of the sheer immensity, profundity and universality of the awakening today as expressed in people's writings. Sir George Trevelyan's book "A Vision of the Aquarian Age" gives a beautiful, coherent and readable overall picture, quoting many of our greatest well-known writers. Life itself, with its mystery, its coincidences and its painful rebukes when I think I've attained all the spiritual wisdom I need, is, I suppose, the greatest teacher I've found. To my little-valued religious education at school I owe the memory of Bible passages that appear when I need them, somehow. The Quakers have somehow, I feel, I don't quite know how, enabled me to talk about God as if God is real. To the esoteric stream starting with Helena Blavatsky and the Theosophists, linking with Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophists, and with Alice Bailey and the groups she inspired, and probably linking with many more, I suspect I owe a great deal.

Through Steiner I gained a wonderful, deeply religious and creative sense of the universe as an integrated whole, with Man as a being of body, soul and spirit living in balance between the world of Nature and the spiritual worlds. A natural clairvoyant and trained scientist, Steiner had a panoramic view of reality which gives a characteristic, original and profound approach to understanding the spiritual essence of all the main areas of life expressed in academic subjects, besides other esoteric subjects. He experienced what he calls the "Mystery of Golgotha" as being of central importance to Mankind everywhere. He sought to work within the disciplines of Science, enlarged imaginatively but legitimately so as to leave a safe, open path for others to follow to attain the spiritual perception which he had, believing that many in this century would seek such a path, finding access by foul means like drugs if fair means were denied. Steiner's discipline seems directed to healing the inner sense of meaning in life for those who cannot find enough help within the orthodox religions, but feel there is something of real importance in Western life, despite - nay, within - its materialism and spiritual lack of understanding.

At Findhorn this work is I feel carried one stage further. This is a community of sensitives who have found that by focusing on this inner experience of meaning, of wholeness, of God rediscovered independently, to the extent of obeying what they experience as God's will, miracles become possible and life can be totally sustained in this way. The place needs to be judged by people who themselves are seeking to work for God

directly, for their God is a God of redemption, not one who keeps people sinless, and this fact confuses a lot of people who judge the place for the orthodox rules it has broken. Findhorn is as vulnerable to over-credulous believers as to dogmatic disbelievers. But in a world where more and more of life seems removed from our experience of humanity and divinity, the re-establishment of the path to miracles seems to me a political necessity.

The question with me now is "what can I do? am I doing enough? how can I do enough? are the many helpful activities in existence enough?" The generals in the First World War felt they were doing their part by developing trench warfare and killing millions of young men. But not until it was asked if this was enough, and tanks were invented, was the war resolved. Our victory in the Second World War was said by the Nazis to be due to a secret weapon they could not match, the Silent Minute. We are not now fighting a physical war, but insofar as we are threatening suicide for Mankind we are all at war with an invisible enemy which manifests as Ignorance, Insensitivity and Apathy. For centuries the discipline of direct contact with God has been left out of normal daily life, but in order to come to terms with today's problems we need to rediscover it, whatever our job or vocation.

Yet who is God? I have certainly to start and end with my own inner sense, but on the way to certainty I need to be open to other people's interpretation of God's will. "Where two or more are gathered together in My Name, there I AM". The ability and willingness to give help wherever help is really needed must surely be the way to establish goodwill and confidence that the work is God's work. Here it seems important to strike a right balance between the concern with world problems, the duty to attend to problems in one's relationships with other people, and the need to resolve one's own tensions and hangups. It is impossible to give love unless we have first been given love from a higher source. Yet there is also a spiritual law which says that if we give of ourselves completely, we shall receive enough to meet our physical needs and more than enough to meet our spiritual needs, expressed through a sense of vocation, the experience of joy, of having fun. Realizing the apocalyptic nature of our times and coming to terms with it is a long lonely path with many pitfalls and false shortcuts; and laughter is the greatest gift in helping to sustain the pilgrimage.

In religion, technology, business, government, education, science, medicine, - our technical skills obscure our awareness of the ideals towards which these professions must evolve, or the needs which they must serve. Thus many lose the sense of vocation, become cynical, materialistic, caught up in the "system". these ideals need to be clarified, experienced as good, adjusted to practical realities, and shared, through developing a kind of spiritual technology. We need the forms of education that teach and share in theory and in practice: ecological attunement, initiative, simplicity in living habits, self-reliance, sensitivity to quality, affirmation of responsibility as planetary citizens, the search for God within the still Self as well as in the world's religions,

and the sharing of one's abundance with others in need. We need the newly emerging forms of counselling in experiential workshops.

We need longer-term opportunities for exploring and developing abilities from the sense of vocation, rather than from as so often at present, one's favourite subjects or one's best manifest abilities. We need to recognize good new developments wherever they are found, and support them, and recognize their particular potential contribution to the whole, and complement them, rather than compete with them. We need centres where the best new ideas and practices can be collected, lived, improved, integrated with the best of existing ideas and practices, and passed on to whoever needs them most. Help may be needed and can be given at many levels: physical, behavioural, emotional, mental, spiritual. Such centres must start from within each of us, before they can grow outwards and manifest physically.

It is very easy to think that plunging into certain projects will provide "the answer", whereas in fact one needs to be flexible and obedient to the changing pressures of outer circumstances and inner guidance. Many communes foundered on this issue. Old forms need to be put aside if they no longer help to serve where help is most needed, if they cannot help us answer the questions ""where is help most needed? how can I best serve?" But sometimes these old forms can provide a picture, in inspiration to lead into the future, if they are allowed to speak to one's soul.

For instance, I am living in Somerset in an area pregnant in its history and geography with images of the Grail, the source of spiritual inspiration and physical plenty; of esoteric Christianity giving birth to the Church. Many people come here to live or visit, drawn by the potency of this imagery, yet it is useless unless feelings are grounded in practical activities of service. Do others have this vision? There is a growing local network seeking to link the best of local traditions and our Western heritage with the incoming New Age revelations, using lectures, discussion groups, self-help groups, etc. could there be a real place here for a college / community of service, linking the esoteric and the orthodox religious streams, serving especially in the area of education to prepare for our spiritual responsibility as planetary citizens, and establishing goodwill and confidence that such a task is necessary as well as possible, inviting criticism at the same time as seeking help in resolving such criticism? Most of me is pretty ordinary, stuck at home with a small child, fallible, gullible, selfish and stupid, and I am not competent to ground such a vision by myself. Do others have this vision?... (1981)