

LESSON 4: Religious Growth

The experience of dynamic religious living transforms the mediocre individual into a personality of idealistic power. Religion ministers to the progress of all through fostering the progress of each individual, and the progress of each is augmented through the achievement of all.

Spiritual growth is mutually stimulated by intimate association with other religionists. Love supplies the soil for religious growth—an objective lure in the place of subjective gratification—yet it yields the supreme subjective satisfaction. And religion ennobles the commonplace drudgery of daily living. 100:0.1

Give every developing child a chance to grow his own religious experience; do not force a ready-made adult experience upon him. Remember, year-by-year progress through an established educational regime does not necessarily mean intellectual progress, much less spiritual growth. Enlargement of vocabulary does not signify development of character. Growth is not truly indicated by mere products but rather by progress. Real educational growth is indicated by enhancement of ideals, increased appreciation of values, new meanings of values, and augmented loyalty to supreme values. 100:1.3

Spiritual growth is first an awakening to needs, next a discernment of meanings, and then a discovery of values. The evidence of true spiritual development consists in the exhibition of a human personality motivated by love, activated by unselfish ministry, and dominated by the wholehearted worship of the perfection ideals of divinity. And this entire experience constitutes the reality of religion as contrasted with mere theological beliefs. 100:2.2

THE BELIEVER'S SURETY

Jesus portrayed the profound surety of the God-knowing mortal when he said: 'To a God-knowing kingdom believer, what does it matter if all things earthly crash?' Temporal securities are vulnerable, but spiritual sureties are impregnable. When the flood tides of human adversity, selfishness, cruelty, hate, malice, and jealousy beat about the mortal soul, you may rest in the assurance that there is one inner bastion, the citadel of the spirit, which is absolutely unassailable; at least this is true of every human being who has dedicated the keeping of his soul to the indwelling spirit of the eternal God.

After such spiritual attainment, whether secured by gradual growth or specific crisis, there occurs a new orientation of personality as well as the development of a new standard of values. Such spirit-born individuals are so remotivated in life that they can calmly stand by while their fondest ambitions perish and their keenest hopes crash; they positively know that such

catastrophes are but the redirecting cataclysms which wreck one's temporal creations preliminary to the rearing of the more noble and enduring realities of a new and more sublime level of universe attainment. 100:2.7

RELIGION AND THE RELIGIONIST

Early Christianity was entirely free from all civil entanglements, social commitments, and economic alliances. Only did later institutionalized Christianity become an organic part of the political and social structure of Occidental civilization.

The kingdom of heaven is neither a social nor economic order; it is an exclusively spiritual brotherhood of God-knowing individuals. True, such a brotherhood is in itself a new and amazing social phenomenon attended by astounding political and economic repercussions. 99:3.1

Religionists, as a group, must never concern themselves with anything but religion, albeit any one such religionist, as an individual citizen, may become the outstanding leader of some social, economic, or political reconstruction movement.

It is the business of religion to create, sustain, and inspire such a cosmic loyalty in the individual citizen as will direct him to the achievement of success in the advancement of all these difficult but desirable social services. 99:3.15

Genuine religion renders the religionist socially fragrant and creates insights into human fellowship. But the formalization of religious groups many times destroys the very values for the promotion of which the group was organized. Human friendship and divine religion are mutually helpful and significantly illuminating if the growth in each is equalized and harmonized. Religion puts new meaning into all group associations—families, schools, and clubs. It imparts new values to play and exalts all true humor.

Social leadership is transformed by spiritual insight; religion prevents all collective movements from losing sight of their true objectives. Together with children, religion is the great unifier of family life, provided it is a living and growing faith. Family life cannot be had without children; it can be lived without religion, but such a handicap enormously multiplies the difficulties of this intimate human association. During the early decades of the twentieth century, family life, next to personal religious experience, suffers most from the decadence consequent upon the transition from old religious loyalties to the emerging new meanings and values.

True religion is a meaningful way of living dynamically face to face with the commonplace realities of everyday life. But if religion is to stimulate individual development of character and augment integration of personality, it must not be standardized. If it is to stimulate evaluation of experience and serve as a value-lure, it must not be stereotyped. If religion is to promote supreme loyalties, it must not be formalized.

No matter what upheavals may attend the social and economic growth of civilization, religion is genuine and worth while if it fosters in the individual an experience in which the sovereignty of truth, beauty, and goodness prevails, for such is the true spiritual concept of supreme reality. And through love and worship this becomes meaningful as fellowship with man and sonship with God. 99:4.1

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