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Graceful Courage: A Venture in Christian Humanism by Roger Hazelton

Whatever must be borne can be borne by virtue of strength working in each and all of us which has immemorially been known as courage. This power is available and reliable. The best celebration of courage is to understand and affirm its common, constant presence in uniquely human life.

Introduction

Here we have to do with the very texture of lived and felt experience, as it dips and thrusts from failure to success with its perplexing mixture of wariness and boldness.

Chapter 1: Taking the Human Measure

Courage is a way of taking the human measure of one's world. Being human implies and requires being humane as well. Taking the human measure means not only finding but also holding one's place in the world.

Chapter 2: A Necessary Virtue

If morality is a late arrival on the evolutionary scene, its presence has still to be acknowledged and appreciated. Granted that virtue is the wrong word for describing rats in mazes or two chimpanzees sharing one banana; but is it not entirely appropriate for grasping what human beings do to survive in times of dearth, disaster, or other life-threatening situations? In such cases a sense of self-worth, or " I'm I" is clearly present, and also that rather frightening but bracing "freedom of choice," even if it is only the choice between living and dying.

Chapter 3: Courage to Endure

Martyrdom left its profound mark on the life and thought of the historic Christian community. Martyrdom and conscious imitation of the way of the cross are but striking instances of the stuff out of which all human life is made, with or without the support of a religious faith. Enduring courage enlists all one's powers, bodily and spiritual alike.

Chapter 4: From Coping to Daring

Does not endurance, standing fast or holding ground, have a real gallantry, an *élan* of its own?

Audacity and integrity, spontaneity and stubbornness, belong together in any inventory of the types and styles of human courage.

Chapter 5: From Fear to Faith

He to whom we belong is *vere homo*, who began life under threat of death, worked hard and long at his father's trade, encountered temptation and opposition, spoke out against authority, cast his lot with the oppressed, went steadfastly up to Jerusalem to suffer under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried. His brief life was one long exercise in courage. God has highly exalted him, as witnessed by his resurrection, making him the way, the truth, and above all the life of those who take his name as their own.

Chapter 6: Beyond Humility and Obedience?

Obedience and humility are almost interchangeable terms, and both imply the same paradoxical idea -- that lowliness is the way to greatness. Brave and honest acceptance of oneself and others, warts and all, is certainly required and rewarded in a life that is fittingly termed Christian.

Chapter 7: Graceful Courage

Women and men of every age have borne eager witness that God is a very present help in time of trouble, discovering God's presence in the midst of life and not in some imaginary Beyond. If their testimony has truth it is true for us as well.

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Introduction

This is a book about human courage. It is one which I had intended to write for a long time and it would wait no longer. What I had in mind is not an exercise in ethical theory or psychological analysis, important as these may be in the long run. Still less do I propose to make an appeal for practicing a virtue that is presently in short supply by recommending a sure-fire method for attaining it. My concern is both more modest and more earnest. It is simply to lift up to the level of visibility a truth that is true to ourselves -- namely, that whatever must be borne can be borne by virtue of a strength working in each and all of us which has immemorially been known as courage. I propose to show how available and reliable this power really is, believing as I do that the best celebration of courage is to understand and affirm its common, constant presence in uniquely human life. Some years ago I came across a poem which began:

> The bravest soldiers that I ever knew
> Were those who never went away to war.
> They wore no khaki, nor gray, nor blue,
> And made no mention of a scar.

A rather ordinary verse, perhaps, but that may be because it is a tribute to what very ordinary people can do and become when faced with difficulty or disaster. Bravery and heroism are not confined to particular vocations or special occasions but belong surely to the rank and file of humankind. Of all the so-called virtues courage is, probably the least public and therefore the most universal. In fact, it is all the more to be admired because it is so often hidden and anonymous. What is lacking is not examples or incentives but our grateful recognition and generous praise whenever and wherever courage appears in the sort of living we know best.

Some may object that what courage needs is not interpretation or even celebration, but rendition pure and simple. Making it the subject of a book may only risk increasing the gap, already far too great, between theory and practice. Is it not a non sequitur of the grossest kind to assume that when something has been said or written, something has therefore been done? "Everybody talking about heaven ain’t going there." That holds true of other subjects too, such as wisdom, love, or justice. Why should it be different when the topic of courage comes up?

But in our current zeal for practicality let us not be misled by the notion that only action matters, uncontaminated by the detours and hesitations of careful thought. Socrates' famous statement that an unexamined life is not worth living still has the clear ring of truth. Such a life would not be living at all in any recognizably human sense. That is why, as Robert Frost observed once, there is a "book-side to everything -- by which he meant that living in the active mode is only part of life, and not even the best part, unless it is reinforced by the work of imagining and reflecting from which books are made. Although it is plain enough that writing a book about courage is not the same as a courageous act (or may be, for that matter), such an act itself will sooner or later reverberate in speech, song, or story -- as indeed it should.

Therefore it is not surprising that the theme of courage has called forth a considerable literature of its own; the list of writer-thinkers runs all the way from Plato and Aristotle down to John F. Kennedy and Paul Tillich. It is an inexhaustible theme which will always attract us, however, as its roots and fruits in human being are perennially present. Here we have to do with the very texture of lived and felt experience, as it dips and thrusts from failure to success with its perplexing mixture of wariness and boldness. Courage is no bloodless category but has very much to do with the fact that "out of the heart are the issues of life." Each generation has much to learn, and not a little to teach, concerning this most common and vulgar of the virtues, as Herman Melville called courage.

Any book on such a theme is bound to be in some respects a heart-to-heart talk for which both reader and writer ought to be prepared. While this does not excuse us from speaking and thinking as clearly as possible, or from relying on resources coming from the human past, it does mean finally that conversing about courage will contain an element of honest self-disclosure too. The purpose of a book like this, then, must be to shift the burden of proof from author to reader by a risky strategy of mutual engagement. In that spirit and intention let the conversation begin.

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Chapter 1: Taking the Human Measure

The measure you give will be the measure you get. —Matthew 7:2

Measuring Humanly

Whatever we may decide to call it ultimately, courage is a way of taking the human measure of one's world. Ordinary speech makes this quite clear. Courageous people, we say, are those who take things in their stride, or lay their bodies on the line, as yesterday's idiom had it. They match their own strength against distress or disaster; they calculate chances of success in the face of possible failure; or they wager present certainties for the sake of gaining an uncertain future happiness. We might say that such persons take the measure of what is measuring them.

While this can hardly be termed a full and proper definition of the word courage, it does provide a useful frame of reference within which any talk of courage can make genuine sense. For unless we are able to locate and acknowledge some distinctively human frame for viewing and taking the world, the kind of behavior usually called courageous will seem either superfluous or absurd. This is true of all the ways in which courage is required and revealed, such as scientific inquiry or artistic creation, not to mention choosing a vocation or raising a family.

But is it not just a bit strange to begin this study in such a roundabout manner? Surely someone will protest: "Being human" is no great mystery. Isn't it merely a synonym for what l call 'my life'? " No, not exactly, since even to call my life mine is to assert some degree of leverage or advantage over it -- a measured and measuring distance not to be accounted for by subhuman reflexes, mutations, or conditioning. Indeed I am more than my life, not merely because I am the one who is living it, but also in the more important sense of William James's familiar pun, "It all depends upon the liver."

So it is scarcely to be wondered at that human beings, like animated question marks, should ask what being human really means. Past efforts to define that meaning -- Homo Sapiens, *homo faber, homo ludens,* and the rest -- are confusingly many, but none has entirely lost its force and each has its advocates in contemporary thought. Human being *is* rational, political, spiritual; the

same animal who makes tools, solves problems, and builds cities also plays, laughs, loves, and worships. Each attempt to reduce these signs of humanness to a single formula falls of its own weight into special pleading and irrelevance sooner or later. It is easy to share the impatience of Ludwig Feuerbach, who wanted to put a stop to all this by declaring *Man ist wass er isst*-- man is what he eats. But the questioning and answering will never end, as any definition offered must include the fact that to be human is to try to define oneself.

Taking the human measure, therefore, is part and parcel of our very humanity. Efforts in this direction are fraught with considerable ambiguity and not a little anxiety. It is foolish to suppose that such a measure can be found by adding head counts or subtracting body counts, any more than by test scores and opinion polls, typologies and ideologies, or any other kind of simulated accuracy. No fair sample or statistical average can ever yield a human measure, as these methods and devices only complicate the matter without being able to address it.

No act of measuring is as simple as it seems. "Measure" is both a noun and a verb, referring either to a unitary interval of time or space taken as a basis for determining distance or duration, or to the process by which such determinations are made. One dictionary gives no less than fourteen meanings for the single word. That should discourage the idea that measuring is only laying one object alongside another, then reading and recording what the facts are. As methods and instruments of measurement become more delicate and sophisticated, this illusion of simple objectivity grows stronger, oddly enough. Yet margins of error still have to be allowed for; better means of measuring must be devised; a full and final reading of "the facts" continues to elude thermometers and speedometers, X-rays and polygraphs.

A human measure is unavoidably at work in even the most elementary calculations at the physical level. I cannot determine the length of a room or the height of a tree without employing the human language of inches and feet. I read into the situation quite as much as I read off from it. And this is still more strikingly true of the "nicely calculated less and more" of moral judgments, as it is of the notoriously variable estimates of artistic worth. The rule here seems to be, no measurement without a measurer. Once an astronomer was asked whether dealing with such vast magnitudes as light-years produced a sense of human littleness and insignificance. "No," he replied, "for man is the astronomer."

Every measurement reacts upon, as it reflects, the one who makes it. Astronomers find that what is seen through telescopes requires finer tools and operations for better seeing. The Copernican revolution was revolutionary because it brought about necessary changes in human self-understanding quite as much as in the physical sciences. As men and women take the measure of the medium into which they venture, they become both measuring and measured. Have you ever watched an inchworm make its way across a sidewalk? It covers the distance to be traveled by a curious rhythm of arching and stretching movements, laying its body on the line over and over until the crossing is made. So, too, human beings measure what they are measured by, as they insist upon being heard and felt within the total drift of things, making

their own way from here to there, through time and space that do not belong to them. The way from birth to death is marked by obstacles turned into opportunities, capabilities called forth by limiting circumstances. Thus courage may be described in its most elementary form.

A Question From Protagoras

In ancient Athens there was a Sophist named Protagoras who made a handsome reputation teaching *arete* or human excellence to young men preparing for political leadership. He claimed to be able to impart civic virtue to those who paid for his instruction. His specialty was rhetoric, as the art of speaking well had much to do with molding public opinion and decision-making in the new Athenian democracy. Like other Sophists he was confident that virtue could be taught and learned -- "shaping the soul," he called it -- and was among the first to hold up the ideal of an ethical culture open in principle to all members of a given society. As Plato's dialogue about him indicates, he related in mythical form his belief that Zeus gave a sense of justice and the idea of law to all humankind, thereby distinguishing men and women from the animals that eat one another, and enabling them to learn to live together in peaceable polities of their own choosing.

Protagoras is best-known, however, for his statement "Man is the measure of all things, of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not." The oratorical, not to say oracular, tone of this saying, wrenched out of context, has offended high-minded moralists in every age, who have pounced upon it in order to ridicule or refute it. Standing by itself, is it not merely an excuse for doing whatever comes naturally without having to acknowledge any more-than-human standard of behavior or belief? Apparently the Platonic Socrates thought so. If Protagoras meant only that nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so, then he is properly charged with solipsism as to knowledge, relativism as to morals, and perhaps atheism as to religion.

But notice that none of this is what the controversial sentence actually says. Call Protagoras's statement only partly true, if you will; but most truth usually reaches us in the form of part-truths such as this. The maxim has been described as a masterpiece of overstatement; but at times the truth cannot even be heard unless it is couched in an exaggerated style.

Suppose we take Protagoras's saying as an observation rather than as an opinion; is it not utterly obvious? I cannot reject its portion of truth unless I grant its validity as well, unless I claim for my rejection an absolute position of advantage to which I am not entitled. If I deny its truth with the front of my mind it will very soon demand entrance at the back. In other words, the world is measured humanly or not at all. Ages before the metric system was invented, lengths and distances were measured in terms of relation to hands, arms, or feet. Is this so different, actually, from modern relativity theory, at least in principle? According to the general form of the theory, the observer in the act of observing physical phenomena ought -- theoretically, of course -- to be included in the observation itself. If taken seriously this has a devastating effect

upon the notion that the world is somehow divided into subjects and objects, human minds and natural facts, existing independently of one another. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* puts into story form the truth that if somebody becomes suddenly large his or her world shrinks to diminutive size, while if one grows small the world seems monstrously huge. Whatever theories may be derived from it, the point that all things are measured humanly or not at all holds true.

Protagoras could speak of "man" as many still do, which suggests the human measure without specifying it. The word has a long and honorable usage, though present-day feminists may object that it is patronizing if not downright insulting to women. But can a better word be found? "Humanity" is probably too abstract to be useful, with its collective overtones coming from the Age of Reason. A much older word, "Everyman," once carried allegorical, dramatic value, bringing upon the stage as a single figure that which is both individually and universally human, but many people today regard it as hopelessly medieval. We seem to be left then with such limp expressions as "humankind" or "humanness" for saying what the *homo mensura* signifies. Perhaps "humanhood" is better, but only future usage can tell. The Latin term *humanitas* may appeal to some academic types. Or we may find occasional help in borrowing words from other languages (*Mensch, uomo*, etc.) that convey nonsexist meaning. Hybrid or hyphenated words are awkward for most purposes, and we need to be alert to the subtle ways in which gender gets embedded in grammar itself. So we are left with an intractable problem.

One would like to be as positive and definite about the human measure as Protagoras believed he was, but it is much easier to say what it is not than what it actually is. No such measure can be detected and read off as merely another piece of the world, more of the same, for the good reason that the measure is doing the measuring. No piling up of scientific data can either produce it or eliminate it. If an act of courage, for example, could be traced to a convolution in the frontal lobe of the brain's left hemisphere, would that "explain" the act? Well, yes and no, but mostly no. Embarrassed by such difficulties, one may almost apply to the *homo mensura* the answer Louis Armstrong gave when asked what jazz is: "Man, if you gotta ask what it is, you ain't never gonna get to know." Almost, but not quite, as the question of a human measure will persist after all the unsatisfactory answers have been discarded.

And surely that was the very point Protagoras wished to make. His own way of posing the question as a pronouncement may seem overconfident, but that could be our problem and not his. Are we on safer ground when we presume to quantify "all things" as if a human measure did not exist? Can truth be limited to fact?

For instance, is time merely a unit interval indefinitely repeated with nonhuman regularity and machinelike precision ? No, for clocks and calendars fall far short of measuring those rushes and pauses that make Up the lived reality of human time. The very tempo of the times in which and through which we live, forever changing yet strangely recurrent, is as elusive as it is decisive. Short or long, trivial or momentous, our time is "the unperceived prism through which the world's duration manifests itself to me.''[1]

Or consider space: I apprehend it only by moving within it, since only with and through my body am I aware of anything at all. I orient myself front and back, left and right, up and down, from wherever I am in space. I distinguish near from far and high from low, as my standpoint defines my viewpoint. H. Richard Niebuhr used to tell his students that whereas we have always known that the human mind is in space and time, the past two centuries have shown us that time and space are also in the human mind. Just so; and here comes Protagoras again, to haunt us in our age of supersonic speeds and microwaves.

Most of the criticisms directed against Protagoras's famous maxim fall very wide of the mark. His sentence as it stands, and from what we know of his thought elsewhere, does not indicate a purely individualistic or subjective view of humanly recognized truth. This is ruled out because the word man in his sentence clearly refers to humankind as a whole. Goethe's comment is perceptive: "We may watch Nature, measure her, reckon her, weigh her, etc., as we will. It is yet but our measure and weight, since man (*Mensch*) is the measure of all things."[2]

Nor can Protagoras's principle be fairly taken to mean ethical relativism or skepticism as is often charged. He does not refuse to distinguish between what merely seems good or bad and what is really so. If, as he claimed, virtue can be taught, then it should be possible to correct errors in moral judgment. Although he had obviously given up the attempt to locate norms for moral conduct in either natural law or divine commandment, Protagoras nevertheless believed that *dike* or justice is written into the very stuff of human character and civilization. It is innate, not imposed or conventional. Therefore it cannot be neglected, or evaded, by any member of the *polis* or city-state, but remains the touchstone of all human acts and motives. Justice, or fairness toward a fellow human being, is the measure of our humanity itself.

As for his presumed irreligion, what Protagoras actually said, or is credited with saying, was that he was unable to affirm either the existence or the nonexistence of God. He was therefore an agnostic who suspended judgment on the matter, rather than an atheist who regarded belief in God as unreasonable and indefensible. In his view, atheists claim to know too much about not knowing God. Still, Protagoras left us with a question, ours as much as his, that Werner Jaeger poses in the following way: "Are religious skepticism and indifference, which Plato opposed so bitterly and which made him a fierce and lifelong opponent of the Sophists, essential elements of humanism ?"[3] This, writes Jaeger, is clearly a question of history, but any answer we may give to it will be a profession of faith or unfaith. The Sophists were the first in ancient Greece to open the rift between rational culture and religion. Thus they raised what Jaeger calls "the fundamental problem of all education": that of having to look backward to the rich religious and moral roots of tradition, but also forward to the religious and philosophical problem of reaching "a concept of life which surrounds and protects humanity like a tender root, but also gives it back the fertile soil in which to grow." In Jaeger's own judgment Plato did not destroy but perfected the humanism of the Sophists: "By going behind the ideal of the Sophists, he went beyond it."[4]

A Clue from Pascal

Three centuries ago, feeling the first full shock of the Copernican revolution which abandoned once and for all the picture of a flat earth at the center of the universe, a young scientist named Blaise Pascal confessed that he was terrified by "the eternal silence of those infinite spaces." He continued:

> So let us take our measure. We are something, not everything ... extremes etude us.... Nothing stays for us.... Man, for instance, is related to all he knows. His existence requires space, time, movement elements to compose him, warmth and food to nourish him, air to breathe.... He is in a dependent relationship to everything.... Man is to himself the most amazing thing in nature.... This is the height of his problem and yet it is his very being.[5]

Human being is struck by its own "disproportion" in relation to other states and levels of being. We try to be at home in a world at once too great and too small for us. We even invent telescopes and microscopes -- "two instruments of nearly equal hope," Robert Frost wrote ironically -- in order to perfect our measuring powers. We are adrift, it seems, between two infinities that bracket our existence: "How many realms there are which know us not!" To be human in the world disclosed by modern science means to be woefully out of scale and yet determined to find one's own place within the baffling, silent whole of things. But how may a part of the picture see the picture? And how may one ask the right questions when the questioner remains a question to oneself?

As a celebrated mathematician and physicist who invented the first mechanical computer, Pascal was thoroughly familiar with many kinds of measuring. But his words, "Let us take our measure," suggest a different sort of method and standard than the sciences can provide. This difference he expressed in his distinction between the "geometrical" and the "intuitive" mind. In human matters, he asserted, the poets and prophets have a real advantage over those expert mathematicians who "would take me for a proposition." Pascal argued that the method used in study should vary with the subject being studied; when "man" is in question, qualities such as empathy, imaginative finesse, and conversational wit have their own right and force.

"We are something, not everything," the *pensée* of Pascal continues, thus modifying classical self-confidence by a more ironic, tragic wisdom with both scientific and Christian sources. It is by measuring what we are measured by that we learn not to think more highly, or indeed less highly, of ourselves than we ought to think. So we make our presence felt within "the ample bosom of Nature"; but so also we pick up strange signals which cannot honestly be thought to be the amplified echoes of our own. Hence our most ingenious calculations and calibrations still leave us with a very loose fit between mind and world, and this is the veritable human situation as Pascal sees it.

In writing that "man is related to all he knows" this scientist turned humanist meant to propose that knowing is more a matter of participation than of simple observation. John Dewey in our century voiced his agreement with this view with the statement "Knowledge is not a glassy eye beholding a ready-made reality." In other words, I am not a camera even though I try to think or act like one. That is because self-knowledge enters into every form of knowing, all the way from its initial fixing of attention to its reflective interpretation. Being in what Pascal terms "a dependent relationship to everything," the knower cannot dominate or be controlled by what he knows without disturbing the fine balances and linkages that make knowledge possible in the first place. And this, as Pascal notes, is both the height of my problem and my very being as a knower.

"There is much that is strange," intones the chorus in Sophocles's *Antigone*, "but nothing that surpasses man in strangeness." This is repeated by Pascal with admirable terseness: ‘’Man is to himself the most amazing thing in nature." How significant it is that the onset of modern scientific thought has not been able to dislodge the Christian and also classical tradition that there is sheer mystery in the fact of being human! Today that same mystery is more aggravated and accentuated than ever before.

By restating Protagoras's proposition in the form of a question, Pascal puts the accent upon seeking rather than stating the truth about what it takes to make and keep human life human in the world. Important as it may be to distinguish what is human from the extrahuman, infrahuman, or superhuman features of the experienced world, there can be little cause for self-congratulation in making any such distinction. "All men are mortal ... therefore Socrates is mortal": finiteness remains the signature of everything human. And yet one knows oneself to be finite only because one knows, or at least believes, something else and more. In Pascal's words, "we are made for infinity"; that is, we have our being-in-the-world as bounded by what is unbounded, not as something that is self-evident and self-explaining.

It is only fair to acknowledge that Pascal has his own motives for emphasizing human disproportion, insecurity, and anxiety, which he sums up under the word wretchedness. In his Pensées he hopes to lead his reader by the route of self-despair into readiness for the remedy of Christian faith. Thus he evokes the "misery of man without God" so powerfully only in order to prepare room in man's heart for the "greatness of man with God." In this vein he writes: "Man infinitely transcends man, and without the aid of faith he is incomprehensible to himself."[6] What are we to make of so paradoxical a statement? Does Pascal want to have it both ways, Christian and classical-pagan, at once?

Plainly, Pascal shares the Renaissance view of human being as self-transcending without discarding the Christian view that human greatness is a gift of God known only in faith. According to Pascal, faith in God does not remove the human mystery by giving certainty instead. It offers no "answer" to the human "problem" in any back-of-the-book sense. Nor does

faith in his view mean the denial or displacement of human reason as a guide of life, for it is reason that must decide when it has gotten out of its depth and whether it should embrace the claims of faith. Believing or not believing in God is a choice that involves risk, for as William James was to write later, "in either case we act, taking our life in our hands."[7]

It is thought, Pascal declares, that is the dignifying mark of human nature: "All our dignity consists in thought.... Let us labor then to think well.... It is thought which constitutes the greatness of man."[8] This reminds us of Descartes's more famous formula, "I think, therefore I am." But Pascal prefers to say it in reverse. The fact that we are visibly made to think is not so much a proof of our existing humanly as it is the measure of our capacity to make existence more human. The worth of thinking depends entirely upon what use is made of it, what its objects and intentions are. Thus, while the classic Western view that "man is a rational animal" is certainly safe with Pascal, he knows as well as Marx or Freud that reasoning may easily become mere rationalizing. This inveterate habit of making the worse appear the better reason he calls by its religious name: sin.

For Pascal, then, taking the human measure means adopting a standard of measurement that is more than human without being other than human. Knowing who I really am, he thinks, is not an innate faculty that is self-intuited and self-possessed, but an ability or potency that needs always to be repaired and renewed from beyond itself. Pascal would have welcomed the conviction tersely expressed by the English poet Samuel Daniel:

> Unless he can above himself erect himself
> How poor a thing is man!

Vision and the Human Measure

In our own epoch the effort to find and use a truly human measure goes on. It is made more pressing by those dehumanizing forces and conditions that threaten people everywhere today. Especially in contemporary art around the world this urgency is being felt and given significant shape. Here, for example, is Jacques Maritain commenting on the paintings of Picasso's middle period: "His distorted human faces are perhaps our true likeness, when we are seen by the angels."[9] One need not believe literally in angels to get the point of this remark. The human face is a likeness, not a mere datum alongside other data. It is a more-than-meets-the-eye recognition that to exist humanly is to be seen as well as to see, yet normally not to see ourselves as others see us.

Pascal had wished to guard the human measure by adopting a common Renaissance formula *ni ange ni bête*, neither animal nor angel. His great contemporary Rembrandt, sitting for hours with his sketch pad before his mirror, returned again and again to taking his own measure. How keenly Rembrandt in his candid self-portraits understood the mystery of the human face!

A set of colored slides prepared by UNESCO gives striking documentation to this mysterious measure in human portraiture. The first slide shows a kneeling prisoner bound and blinded, from Chinese sculpture of perhaps the fifth century B.C. There follows a series of portrayals from Hellenistic, Roman, Coptic, Mayan, East Asian, African, Byzantine, and late medieval sources, concluding with a quizzical self-portrait by the German expressionist Max Beckmann. In viewing these figures, the variables of condition, class, or culture seem far less significant than the constants of a shared humanness. A viewer is confronted with an existence very like one's own; a bond is drawn close across boundaries of every kind. Indeed, a rendezvous or meeting place is made possible by such works of art, as the following quotation from Paul Cézanne shows:

> Our canvasses are the milestones of Man -- from the reindeer on the walls of the caves to the cliffs of Monet -- from the hunters, the fishermen who inhabit the tombs of Egypt, the comical scenes of Pompeii, the frescoes of Pisa and Siena, the mythological compositions of Veronese and Rubens, from all these the same spirit comes down to us.... We are all the same man. I shall add another link to the chain of color My own blue link.[10]

Even when human beings are not the explicit subject matter of a work of art, the work itself elucidates and celebrates the human measure. Neither a bird's-eye nor a God's-eye view is available to artists, although they may be able to reveal within their work itself how limited is the all-too-human vision that informs it. Imaginative or artistic vision, just because it assumes the rather awesome task of seeing things as they are, pursues that task through what Maritain calls "the region of obscurity" where a spade is not simply a spade and where a face out of the distant past may question me about my own future.

The importance of this matter of vision may be glimpsed, first, by noting how often we use this particular metaphor in everyday conversation. A metaphor it surely is -- that is, stating one thing in order to signify another -- and it permeates our speech and thought, especially our speech regarding thought. So when I say "I see" my meaning is "I understand." Just what is there in thinking that resembles seeing? Throughout the centuries scientists and philosophers have warned against confusing image with idea, precept with concept; yet it is safe to predict that metaphors of sight for insight will persist in general use. Is there perhaps something unavoidable about this habit?

It is true that our traditions in the West have emphasized the positive connections between seeing and knowing; but exactly how this relation should be understood has been a matter of endless debate. Is it the case that neurosensory responses to visual stimuli are model situations for all instances of knowing or thinking correctly? Or is it rather the case that even visual perception is interpreted, or preinterpreted, by means of some prior human measure as to what is knowable or thinkable? After all, there are optical illusions like mirages to be reckoned with. What we see is not necessarily what we know. Are there, then, any ground rules for this

metaphor of vision by which confusion can be lessened and clarity assured?

Language usage gives at least two clues in this direction. One is that while the adjective "visual" is ordinarily tied to sense perception taken literally, the noun "vision" has in most cases a more spacious metaphorical suggestiveness. That is, the noun refers to moments of extraordinary insight, almost a kind of *super*ception. This is actually the first, preferred definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where one might expect to find a more restricted optical meaning given: "1. Something which is apparently seen otherwise than by ordinary sight; especially an appearance of a prophetic or mystical character, or having the nature of a revelation. "[11]

A further clue comes from the fact that in common talk the visual arts often stand proxy for the arts in general. If someone says "art" the initial association is likely to be with museum-housed works of painting or sculpture. Now there is certainly a visual element in all the arts insofar as they *show* or *present* meanings that are verbal, mimetic, formal, or musical. But in what sense is a combination of sounds, for instance, a mode of seeing and being seen? Composers like Leonard Bernstein write freely of "images" and "colors" in music. Is this way of speaking merely a metaphor that has gotten out of control? Or is it an added bit of evidence that whatever else an artwork may be, it is an occasion for visioning -- attending, apprehending, realizing -- rather than of simple visualizing?

The word vision does indeed carry a more-than-sensory meaning even when it refers chiefly to sensory perceiving. Its proper *tenor* is that of seeing more than meets the eye although its *vehicle* may only be the registering of optical impressions. Hence imaging and imagining may not be such radically different functions as a literal-minded age assumes. If vision as a metaphor "works" it must do so because the making of metaphors is itself a genuine kind of vision. Here is a circuit of meaning, kept open by the fact that vehicle and tenor in the metaphor of vision are interchangeable. Seeing is not merely something eyes do, as "the eyes are a part of the mind" (Leo Steinberg).

Vision, then, is a metaphorical and not a literal activity. We "see" one thing in terms of another through a transfer of meaning, a transfer all the more remarkable since it is usually not conscious of itself when being made. Maritain’s point about the angels is not so farfetched, after all. The seeing and making-seen which is the quality of artistic visioning helps us to understand ;understand what goes on in visualizing at every level of human experience.

It is by metaphor and image, by stating or showing one thing so as to signify another, that we human beings have our being in the world. Why then should we profess to be astonished by the kind of vision that the arts exemplify so clearly? Every woman, child, or man is by nature a certain kind of artist -- measuring by myth and metaphor, by symbol and sign, the world in which our true likeness is disclosed to us.

Merely or Truly Human?

There are urgent reasons why a human measure ought to be protected and defended at the present time, for it is threatened on all sides. A computerized and consumerized mentality knows little and cares less about taking such a measure of oneself or one's world. Happiness comes in a package, preferably gift-wrapped, purchased at the store. Health is a commodity marketed by expert entrepreneurs. Identity is conferred by labeling the many roles one is required to play. There is the oddly stubborn habit --why not admit that it is a prejudice? -- of accounting for lived experiences in the foreign language of mechanical operations. "Getting involved" is what gears do when they mesh. "Adjustment" takes place at the back of a garage. "Interaction" is borrowed from physics to apply to close encounters of a personal kind. And what shall be said of the dismal notion that we can somehow get "beyond freedom and dignity" by supposedly scientific means?

A truly human measure is grotesquely lacking in today's lifeworld. That world has been flawed horribly enough already by "man's inhumanity to man." A century that began in great hope is drawing to its close in a mood of equally great despair. It must be obvious to every thinking, feeling person that the processes of dehumanization have reached insidious proportions. Tender-minded humanists lay the responsibility for the debacle at the door of tough-minded scientists, forgetting that science is among the noblest ways of measuring all things humanly. Blaming our predicament on technology is hardly pertinent, either. What, really, is a "mechanical failure"? It is easy enough to agree with Emerson's earlier warning, "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind," but that is scarcely a situation for which "things" are to blame. It is only human beings who can dehumanize themselves.

Do we not seem to be caught in the grip of a mode of control that has less and less control over itself? We have been at this self-destructing business for a very long while. From Roger Bacon's ominous announcement of the modern principle that knowledge is power to the recent statement by an American astronaut that we can now "put space to work for us," the direction taken has been all too clear. It is time to take again the human measure of what humankind is doing and where all this violation and exploitation are leading us. The question to be asked now, "groaningly" as Pascal would say, is whether the deceptive simplifications by which a human measure is avoided may not simply be deceptions.

For our encouragement let us recall that the same question has been raised in ages long before our own. It was addressed by statesmen like Cicero, by slaves like Epictetus, scientists like Galileo. Indeed the *homo mensura* has been alive and well in many centuries and cultures; actually, it is irresistible and irrepressible despite all appearances to the contrary. For instance, it came slyly to the fore in an elderly patient who complained to Erik Erikson: "Doctor, my bowels are sluggish, my feet hurt, my heart jumps, and, you know, Doctor, I don't feel so good myself."

In no way can the feeling self be factored out from what is felt. True, the body's aches and pains

can and should be treated in practical isolation from the human being who suffers them; so to treat them is a necessary part of the medical procedures that safeguard and promote health. I submit to anesthesia on an operating table because I really want the surgeon to treat me objectively, as an organism and not a person. Yet that does not argue for the view that regards self or soul or spirit as merely ephemeral to bodily existence, any more than that personal concerns are to be dismissed or bypassed in the total situation. Present-day debates in biomedical ethics all revolve about this point, in fact. They have to do with when a definitely human life begins in utero and when it ends *in extremis*, with what its signs and warrants are.

Exactly what, then, is to be gained by adding the adjective "human" to qualify such large amorphous nouns as "experience," "nature," or "history"? Much every way, as the apostle Paul wrote on another matter. The adjective is not superfluous; it can serve as a warning signal, a kind of semantic watchdog buffering oversimplified and understated distortions of the human measure. The qualifying word has metrical, perspectival force, suggesting without presuming to spell out or pin down what it nevertheless insists upon saying. If one agrees with the philosopher Wittgenstein (the "later" Wittgenstein, that is) in his view that the function of language is not so much to state as to show the truth, then the word human has its rightful place. Even when not inserted it should be understood, as Pascal or Protagoras argued. Omitting it is actually to bracket it, thus calling attention to its absence.

However, a further question now begins to form. Is the word *human* only a limiting, depreciating adjective or does it have a broadening, amplifying resonance in speech? Spoken or written, does it conjure up phantoms like Desmond Morris’s "naked ape" or Shakespeare’s "forked radish"? Or is it to be aligned with Shakespeare’s other view, "What a piece of work is man!"? In short, does it mean merely human or fully human?

Whichever meaning is intended, both a nothing-but and a more-than measure of the human are essential. One is complementary to the other. So, when we ask what it takes to keep human life human in the world, we bring together both senses in a single sentence. For the word, instead of pointing to some fixed and stable quantity, is flexibly qualitative without ceasing to be factual. It affirms, let us say, an *anthropomorphic* meaning while disclaiming an *anthropocentric* meaning. Or, if this seems too didactic, being human implies and requires being humane as well. Taking the human measure means not only finding but also holding one’s place in the world. These goals are not pursued by persons isolated from each other, nor in competition with each other. Whole communities concerned with the quality of their common life must be engaged in furthering these pursuits, realizing that the good of each is the good of all. These things being so, it is the order of the day to stand up and be counted in support of a truly human measure.

NOTES

1. Edmond Barbotin, *Humanity of Man* (New York: Orbis Books,1975), 107.

2. Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*.

3. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939-1944), I:301.

4. Ibid., 302-303.

5. Pascal, *Pensées* Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1960), no. 390.

6. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 242.

7. William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays* (New York and London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897), 30.

8. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 232.

9. Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), 79.

10. Quoted by Theodore Rousseau, Jr., "Cézanne as an Old Master,"*Art News* (April 1962).

11. Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), 273.

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Graceful Courage: A Venture in Christian Humanism by Roger Hazelton

Chapter 2: A Necessary Virtue

Courage mounteth with occasion. -- Shakespeare, King Lear

The Uses of Adversity

Making virtue out of necessity may seem a rather hackneyed phrase, but it provides a useful vantage point for understanding courage. By almost all accounts, courage is thought to be some kind of virtue -- that is, a capability of character deserving praise and practice. As Robert Louis Stevenson put it, courage is the footstool of the virtues, for unless other virtues such as temperance or justice are exercised courageously, they will be honored more in the breach than in the observance.

Courage is also rightly linked with necessity, sometimes called fate, which is supposed to be written into the very nature of things. The old word always had a forbidding ring because it kept in view those untoward circumstances and conditions that have to be faced but cannot be prevented or controlled. What is bound to happen and cannot be helped suggests a picture of reality as ruled by forces that frustrate hope and foil effort. Or a single force may be suggested, nonaccommodating and even threatening, which beings like ourselves are up against and which has all the earmarks of sublime indifference, if not hostility, to human will and effort. Seers and sages have never quite made up their minds whether to call the force Doom or Chance, fateful or fortuitous; either way, necessity has come to stand for that which has to be, cannot be helped, and must be faced.

Making virtue out of necessity is sometimes understood as an insidious form of hypocrisy, throwing a cloak of moral worth over one’s inevitable self-interest by a cynical cover-up. Or it may be identified with passively adapting oneself to the unavoidable, not expecting more than niggardly nature can deliver. Yet neither of these is the real meaning of the commonly used phrase. Making virtue out of necessity is not swimming with the stream; it is better illustrated by the person who met the wolf at the door and emerged the next day wearing a fur coat. It has to do with the uses of adversity, whether in the shape of built-in handicaps or public structures that inhibit private purpose.

At first glance, making virtue out of necessity seems not to be an exclusively human trait. All living beings, in varying degrees of capability, develop mechanisms of protection and flight against predators. Under a microscope one watches tiny organisms in what seems to be a rhythm of attack and avoidance. Contending with harsh climates, hostile neighbors, cramping environments would appear to be the rule of life itself. Human courage is no doubt part of a much longer evolutionary process, yet it has characteristics of its own as well. While it is foolish to deny that animal ancestry plays an indispensable part in human behavior, it would be just as foolish to suppose that human responses are nothing more than animal reflexes. Making virtue of necessity is based on qualities of consciousness and purpose, quite as much as upon chemical stimuli and environmental pressures. In other words, it is a rising or mounting to the occasion in which a human measure of the world is taken.

On Virtue-in-General

Everyone wants to be virtuous or at least to be thought so. Rascals at heart and other devious people try to conceal their actual intentions under a mask of virtue. The truth is not in their mouths; their throats are open sepulchers, as Psalm 5 observes. But people whose moral soundness is unquestioned have also been known to present their actions in a most favorable light, knowing the importance of setting a good example. Doing the best one can with what one has is never simply a private, hidden matter. And yet virtue, being rather shy by nature, cannot be made to put on a command performance. No sort of incantation or bargain with the powers that be can summon it forth. Virtue, then, if and when it does appear, is not only a matter of appearance. For instance, an actor on stage may be required to simulate sincerity, although in real life sincerity is perhaps the one thing that cannot be simulated. There a "sincere performance" is a contradiction in terms, or worse.

Before focusing upon the virtue of courage in particular, it is useful to inquire as to the meaning of virtue in general. Does virtue consist chiefly in the act, in the decision or intention leading to the act, or in the character of the one who decides and acts? Is virtue something we do, something we have, or something we are? As might be expected, moral philosophers in the past have answered these questions positively yet differently. Recently, the active behavioral side of virtue has been stressed with special interest in its practical, public aspects. In Jewish and Christian Scriptures, on the other hand, virtue was typically located in the heart or will where action is first formed and initiated. Thinkers in ancient Greece and Rome generally depicted virtue as a settled quality of human nature, dependably present even when dormant or perverted, and thus capable of being aroused and trained to good and wise ends.

Through these diverse, contrasting ethical traditions runs a thread of genuine consensus, however. Wherever virtue is finally to be situated, it lies within the range of distinctly human experience and endeavor. Human beings are virtuous insofar as they take upon themselves the task and art of becoming fully human. Knowing the difference between right and wrong, following the one and avoiding the other, does not come naturally; but virtue means developing

what Aristotle called a state of character into a kind of "second nature." It means a learning by doing which is also a doing by learning. Virtue is exercised before it can be fully possessed and in order to be possessed more fully.

"Being good," or virtue, is thus in fact a becoming that is guided and given shape by visioning, deciding, acting beings who thereby demonstrate their humanhood. Aristotle liked to compare it with the crafts of building or music making, implying thereby that virtue is a kind of virtuosity or expertise. The word itself, to cite the dictionary, originally meant an "inherent power, efficacy, strength"; although it may be applied to such things as sap in trees or the healing potency of certain herbs, the word is grounded psychologically in what are ordinarily called human feelings of value. Interestingly, the word's circuit of meaning travels in both directions, as when Psalm 1 compares the upright person to "a tree planted by the rivers of water," and when a later Christian writer calls the world "a vale of soulmaking." In both instances, a primitive sense of being at one with physical nature is compounded with an equally elemental intuition that persons are not merely things.

Human goodness in the sense of moral virtue, therefore, is an excellence attained through exercise; as Aristotle says, it is concerned "with what is harder -- for even the good is better when it is harder.''[1] Plato's unforgettable figure of the soul as a charioteer driving two horses, one intractable and stubborn (the passions), the other intelligent and teachable (reason), was intended to show how much a life according to virtue is informed by conflict and crisis. Such a life is a struggle or *agon* between opposing forces threatening to divide the self against itself unless they are brought into harmony by that same self. We see this ancient pagan view of the virtuous athlete carried forward in the images of the Christian warrior and pilgrim that were so cherished in the Middle Ages.

A second principle for interpreting virtue comes from the classical idea that it represents a mean between extreme or opposite kinds of behavior. Our present difficulty in understanding it is due mainly to the fact that we take "mean" as a synonym for "average." A mean temperature, for example, is an average, a statistical abstraction which may help in predicting long-range weather changes but cannot tell whether it will rain or shine tomorrow. That is obviously not the sort of mean that virtue can be said to strike, in the classical sense of the term. No arithmetic is available for changing human conduct into standard quantities which can be measured or controlled. The life expectancy tables drawn up for use by insurance companies cannot furnish me with the date of my own death. A polygraph test administered by a police officer falls short of answering the question, "Is the subject lying?" An average, statistical morality, or mortality, does not exist. A standard of rightness in conduct is very different indeed from taking an opinion poll and averaging out its results. Sampling techniques or majority votes are quite beside the point when moral virtue is in question, despite what technocrats and politicians may say or think.

No, the mean that is struck by virtuous conduct is more accurately described as a midpoint

vibrating between too little and too much of a good thing. Let us call it, then, standing one's ground between deficiency and excess (representing not quantities, but qualitative possibilities that are relevant to choice and action). Here we are back at the drawing board of a human measure that is not uniformly applicable to all cases but only relatively to each human situation as it arises. Such a moral measuring of oneself or others, nevertheless, is as imperative as it is also elusive. It may easily be mistaken but its errors can be corrected, and should be, as self-understanding and social sensitivity become more mature. A virtuous mean is situational, pragmatic, ever changing with the requirements of "necessity." It is as far as can be imagined from that middle-of-the-road maneuvering that seeks safety at all costs, proceeds with caution, looking apprehensively to see what others think, and moving gingerly through peril and promise alike. That is to say, living virtuously is bent on attainment, not on mere avoidance of unpleasant options. It is not a "safe middle" but a "live middle" that strives for some consistency amidst the pull of contrary lures and pressures. Striking a balance between acting and being acted upon, holding the center, has been well set forth by Pascal as embracing contrary qualities of response while occupying the whole distance between them. That always takes a bit of doing, as the saying goes, since most of us most of the time are fairly predictable types whose responses tend to run in single file. Or are we? The classical view of virtue allows that we may be more complicated, interesting beings than we customarily think.

Let us give some illustrations. A good-tempered person is neither irritable nor complacent. A liberal person holds the balance between miserliness and showy extravagance. A friendly person steers clear of both surliness and flattery. Diogenes, you recall, had a hard time searching for an honest man; if he had found one, he would have been recognized by the absence of undue modesty and immoderate self-assurance. Persons of virtue do not spend their time sitting on the moral fence; they seem rather to be in constant motion, make surprising moves in search of basic integrity, and know when to fall back as well as when to press forward. No wonder then that "it is no easy task to be good" (Aristotle again).

This traditional idea of virtue has little in common with the "don't" and "mustn't" negativism that mark Puritan and Victorian morality still in force today. Portrayed in strenuous, dynamic colors, the classical view sees virtue as hard-won integrity made possible by contrast and tension in the moral life. Consistency must keep close company with spontaneity if one is to escape the deadening effects of rigid legalism or moralism. No virtue comes from blending copybook abstractions such as honesty or purity into a character mixture according to some recipe or prescription.

Rather, virtue combines traits of human character and conduct that are potentially in conflict with each other, yet over which some measure of direction may be established by a centered and centering self. Robert Frost once wrote a poem about what virtue is like:

> For every parcel I stoop down to seize,
> I lose some other off my arms and knees,

> And the whole pile is slipping, bottles, buns,
> Extremes too hard to comprehend at once,
> Yet nothing I should care to leave behind . . .

After the image comes the "moral":

> With all I have to hold with, hand and mind,
> And heart, if need be, I will do my best
> To keep their building balanced at my breast.
> I crouch down to prevent them as they fall;
> Then sit down in the middle of them all
> I had to drop the armful in the road
> And try to stack them in a better load.[2]

Virtue, then, is a bending from one's center, living on purpose in the middle range, touching and being touched by the confusions of experience without becoming utterly confused oneself. It is a theme with many variations, one of which is clearly that of courage.

Resilient Steadfastness

This particular kind of virtue has been documented and acclaimed by a multitude of voices in world history. Campfire fables and courtly allegories, ballads and sagas from every known literature bring to the theme of courage a universal concreteness and appeal. One thinks at random of the Hindu Ramayana, the No dramas of Japan, the epics of Norsemen, or the songs and stories of the American frontier. We may be embarrassed by such cultural riches but no one can claim to be without resources or examples for guidance in the matter of courage, as thought and speech concerning it have become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

So what is virtuous about courage? Ethical theories both East and West have offered definitions. These may appear sterile and "academic" when contrasted with real situations or vital choices, whether actual or imagined. Yet if we are to take our own bearings from the images and symbols of courage some effort at definition should be made. Only so can practice become pliable to thought instead of being pushed and pulled about by throbs of feeling or by doctrinal winds which sow the seeds of moral confusion and eventual disaster.

One of the best definitions is that found in a little-known treatise from the period between the Old and New Testaments entitled *Letter to Aristeas*. Written in Greek yet reflecting Jewish ethical concerns as well, the letter asks a question: "What is the true aim of courage?" The Jewish sage answers: "To execute in the hour of danger, in accordance with one's plans, resolutions that have been rightly formed."[3] What makes this definition commendable and useful is the fact that it reflects a nondogmatic stance at a cultural crossroads, voicing what may

be termed a *humane minimum* with no religious or philosophical strings attached. Its value as a working, preliminary definition makes it worthy of notice and respect.

Courage thus defined is no fixed posture or attitude that is available for instant inspection. That is a first point. Often this virtue goes by other names like valor or honor; it may be deliberately disguised, as in the windmill tilting of Don Quixote, who is certainly courageous despite his frequent lapses from good judgment. Again, courage may be quite at home with meekness, no less than with the tone of bravura or panache too generally associated with it.

Not all virtues are equally appropriate at all times. On the occasion when justice is called for, wisdom may have to take a back seat, not delaying or diluting matters with the pale cast of thought. Or if the possibility of angry confrontation with another person looms, does this mean that keeping my temper must take precedence over honesty in speaking out? Single-issue people tend to forget that virtue is not confined to one side of a conflict over principles, namely their own.

It comes down to the fact that courage like any other virtue comes in a wide array of shapes and guises, some more quickly visible than others. Benjamin Franklin, who should have known better, contrived his checklist of thirteen virtues each of which was to be strictly practiced for one week at a time -- "A Course compleat in Thirteen weeks, and four Courses a Year" -- thereby making moral endeavor trivial and fatuous. Jonathan Edwards came much closer to the mark in *The Nature of True Virtue*, perhaps just because he would not specify the "excellencies" that belong to it. A phrase such as his "consent to Being in general" gives no detailed directions for day-to-day behavior, but it does bring resonance and even grandeur into daily moral striving which by making it deeply meaningful also makes it truly practical.

Carrying through resolutions that have been rightly formed is not, as we shall frequently need to emphasize, a simple problem-solving technique. There is no "how to" book capable of being written on the subject of courage. Who can say what form my portion of courage will assume tomorrow or next week? What resolutions are to be required of me then?

Second, courage is by no means an easily identified trait. It does not separate the men from the boys, or the strong from the weak, or the mature from the immature. Recently a television program zoomed in on some children who were facing death. These terminally ill youngsters displayed no heroics and yet their bravery was unmistakable. It was not so much how they looked or what they said as their candor in replying to hard questions, their willingness to be quite vulnerable and open toward their own dying, which struck the resolute note of courage.

Soldiering has probably received undue attention as a school of courage, but what about parenting or teaching or farming? In central Michigan many small farms have stump fences that mark the boundaries of pasture and field. Several generations ago when this country was first settled, trees were felled and the stumps pulled out by teams of oxen before the land could be

tilled and planted. Then the stumps were dragged and placed where they remain today, roots touching, gnarled and tilted against predators or intruders -- mute testimony to the courage of these settlers and their animal partners.

And third, we shall be disappointed if we expect to find courage confined to some particular life style where it puts in a positive appearance. Humanity has proved to be amazingly versatile in dealing with the dangers and hazards of everyday existence. When the range of free choice narrows abruptly, when resources are badly straitened, and frustration comes in like fog from the sea, then virtue must be made out of necessity if it is going to be made at all. To take but one example, is obedience to orders always morally right? No, for there are times and places in which civil disobedience may be the only true test of courage. Joan of Arc before her clerical accusers at Rouen, or Billy Budd protesting his innocence on shipboard, provide dramatic examples of an "inherent power, efficacy, strength" which human living exemplifies in well-nigh infinite diversity. Rising to the occasion courageously assumes a great variety of forms that defy classification and analysis.

Here is a biographer's account of Saint Francis of Assisi:

> A certain precipitancy was the very poise of his soul. This saint should be represented among the other saints as angels were sometimes represented . . . with flying feet or even with feathers, in the spirit of the text that makes angels winds and messengers a flaming fire. It is a curiosity of language that courage means running; and some of our skeptics will no doubt demonstrate that courage really means running away. But his courage was running, in the sense of rushing. With all his gentleness, there was originally something of impatience in his impetuosity.[4]

How full of surprises, how changeable in his constancy, is this little poor man, whether standing before the Pope or preaching to the birds!

If it is true that we lack stable norms or behavior patterns for recognizing courage in others and ourselves, does this mean that we should give up trying to say anything more? Hardly, since our folkways and thought-ways have treated the subject so volubly and so enthusiastically. At least its temper and tendency can be described with something like humane truth. Building on the working definition borrowed from the past, let us say that the courageous temper is a *resilient steadfastness*, which takes things in stride without presuming to dictate outcomes or to disown responsibility for bringing them about. When the time came for Saint Francis to plead the cause of his sisters and brothers before the Pope, his precipitancy took the form of persistence and his meekness became boldness. But rushing or standing, Francis gave singular expression to the extraordinary gift in ordinary people of living with resilient steadfastness. This is a sign of courage in every condition and situation that make human beings human. Yet how words stumble and fumble when they stand for deeds!

Courage in All Virtue

Saint Ambrose of Milan, whose preaching was influential in converting his younger contemporary Saint Augustine, once wrote a long essay on courage in which he declared: "Courage . . . defends the glories and protects the decisions of all the virtues. It wages relentless war against all the vices." Quoting this, six centuries later, Saint Thomas Aquinas commented that this virtue is both special and general, as it has its own work to do while it contributes at the same time to those virtuous habits and dispositions of every other kind.[5]

To be sure, there is something decidedly old-fashioned about this personalizing of a virtue such as courage, as if it were itself a moral agent or actor. But the point made by Aquinas quoting Ambrose is important and can be updated. Any striving for moral excellence has what may be called a courageous component. Without supposing that it somehow has a life of its own apart from the rough-and-tumble of experience itself, courage does possess distinguishable marks which can be thought and spoken about, especially in relation to those resolutions formed and carried out in the face of danger, and which seem always to be called for and indeed called forth.

So, while courage is not a separate ingredient or additive within the morally virtuous life, it enters into that life at every point in human time and space. The road from plan to execution must be paved with more than good intentions. Choosing a particular goal of conduct for oneself is but a first step and may be revised many times over. There must also be a resolution to follow through from intent to act, and a flexibility in using available resources and strategies to that end. Such resiliency and steadfastness may seem to be in tension with each other, and they often are; but the very tension can be creative of good. At all events the one cannot be exercised without the other, unless some kind of rigor mortis sets in early.

But what most needs to be said about the "general" virtue of courage is that it is a virtue utterly necessary to all others. Hence any course of conduct that deserves to be called virtuous is bound to have its courageous aspects. Example: a relationship between a man and woman that can be described as "loving," if it is determined chiefly by the ups and downs of sexual attraction, may well be only a "sometime thing" unless courage enters in to create what may be termed a loving situation. Another: a professional therapist whose counsel is sought by others supplies expert know-how on demand, turning it on and off in time-clock fashion, thereby betraying the truth that "it is not wisdom to be only wise" (Santayana). Plainly it is courage that makes the vital difference, although it travels under such assumed names as fidelity in love or humility in wisdom.

A similar case might be made for other virtues too, of course. Take wisdom: Plato and most ancient thinkers believed that seeking after the good in any form implies discernment and discrimination -- comparing possibilities, previewing outcomes, aligning preferences with

options -- all of which is the work of wisdom as they saw it. Or take justice: without it, can we dare to speak of other moral values such as temperance or prudence? Are these values actually available to victims of political oppression and economic inequity? A union organizer in Chicago kept this framed slogan on his desk: "Love thy neighbor, but organize him." Moral life is all of one piece even if it is not all cut from the same cloth, and the virtues support and enhance one another.

Here, however, our business is with courage. Not being a brand name, it does not always come properly labeled. The Bible, for instance, seems oddly reticent in speaking of courage, in striking contrast with nonbiblical writings over the same period of time and open to similar influences. Human excellence of any sort, it seems, must be related or referred to God. Thus the great patriarchs are remembered and praised for their faith, not their courage: Abraham who went out not knowing where he was to go, Jacob wrestling with the dark angel at the ford of Jabbok, Noah building the ark amidst the jeers and insults of his neighbors, Job who dared to expostulate with God over his undeserved misery. Although human courage runs like a bright thread through the patterns of biblical history, it is almost always rendered as "faith" -- as if to call it by its proper name might be taken as a challenge to the divine authority over human life. Later, we must inquire as to the reasons for this reticence in Scripture; here the fact is simply noted.

With courage, as with any sort of virtue, most of us are determined allegorizers. That is, we keep looking for a simon-pure instance embodied in a single individual or group of our fellow human beings. This leads to some curious oversimplifications. At election time a politician may be lauded for his "compassion" or "honesty" although these are scarcely the most conspicuous marks in his public record of canny, hard-nosed ambition. How strange it is that "the patience of Job" has become proverbial, despite the fact that what strikes the reader most forcefully is Job’s *im*patience in demanding an audience with God, the urgency with which he clamors to be vindicated. And in the plays of Shakespeare "honor" is the subject of some powerful monologues, which can be easily detached from the occasions and encounters that alone give such a virtue its true dramatic, human worth.

Following the American Civil War, some enterprising manufacturer cast a single statue of an infantryman which was reproduced many times and stands today in village squares both South and North memorializing those soldiers who lost their lives on opposite sides of the tragic conflict. Such figures are more artificial than genuine, representing the inveterate tendency to allegorize a given virtue by personalizing it. Worn smooth by popular legends, all but neutralized by the passage of time, these figures of generalized virtue leave us as much in the dark as ever about the actual weight and color of courage in a human life.

But courage runs deep, and its sources and outcomes remain hidden, not readily open to public acclaim or verification. Every artistic effort to portray it in direct allegorical fashion runs the risk of losing the very virtue that one attempts to locate and celebrate. Thus Sandro Botticelli

painted a mural figure of Fortitude as a sullen, strapping young woman looking for a fight. And Bertolt Brecht's play "Mother Courage" tried to convey in similar fashion the human sense of this particular virtue, but its chief protagonist suggests that courage is associated with a grubby self-assertiveness. Only the greatest allegorizers like Bunyan or Dante have been above such unmeaning and demeaning characterizations.

There is indeed an allegorical strain in all depictions of courage, as in any effort to portray a universal character of life in an indubitably concrete form. Courage is both monumental and elemental as it appears amidst the pressures and complexities of "this mortal life also," to quote from Luther's great hymn. Of all the images of courage, ancient or modern, surely the battered, headless sculpture known as the Victory of Samothrace comes closest to achieving this quality of awesome particularity. "Wind-beaten but ascending," the female figure at the head of the grand staircase in the Louvre continues to evoke not only the admiration but the participation of generations of beholders in the very presence of courage. No more can be asked of any symbol than this.

It is certainly true that some situations seem to require the exercise of courage more than others, and so may be chosen to reveal its presence in singular and uncomplicated ways. When I must make the best of a bad bargain or choose the lesser of two evils, courage seems to be stripped down to its bare essentials and stands clear for anyone to see. Such low-keyed wrestling with necessity, verging perhaps on desperation, affords a genuine perspective upon how courage becomes necessary in all virtuous conduct. Having to make a choice where very little choice is possible, where the available options are equally unappealing, may represent the only sort of heroism that is open to oneself -- a heroism quite without heroics -- where one's true measure is taken simply by being demanded. Such courage, being strictly proportional to need, calls for neither display nor defense. Its value is just that it exists and is therefore good, quite apart from any motives that produce it or from any results to which it may lead.

Only Self-Preservation?

Thus far, it may seem, a rather negative route has been taken to approach an understanding of courage. Instead of giving shining examples of this much-honored virtue in its most conspicuous instances, we have chosen to describe it as a kind of moral minimum, close to the grain of human being in its simplest, starkest moments. The approach here has been somewhat like that of an old French peasant woman whose home has been burned and whose husband and son had been killed in the last days of the Second World War. Asked by her priest to define faith, she said, "Faith is what you have when nothing else is left."

This approach is not without its risks, to be sure. The more courage is identified with necessity in the form of straitened circumstances or unmanageable conditions, the less it seems to be a matter of genuine virtue. For is not virtue, in itself and as such, our human way of rising above necessity, refusing to allow the course of one's life to be determined by whatever hinders or

harasses it? In other words, does not virtue always express a strong No spoken in the face of necessity rather than a servile or supine Yes? At least this seems to be true of the particular virtue called courage.

There are several questions here instead of only one. The first concerns the weight of moral value to be given to passive over against active behavior. Obviously, ours is an activistic age that gives scant respect to what it calls passivity. The child in school who fails to respond is often labeled "passive" -- a code word signifying listlessness, daydreaming, or some other form of inattention to the task at hand. And the elderly person who does not go out much, merely lets things happen, preferring solitude to company, draws a similar reproach. Is it not an axiom of our time and place that activity is the very sign of life while passivity is but the ominous prefiguring of death itself?

Yet something is plainly amiss here. Living in the middle human range cannot be calculated merely in terms of energy output; that would only confuse persons with machinery. Nor can action pure and simple be allowed to lord it over the claims of thoughtful judgment, taste, or belief. Indeed, the notion that passivity, or letting things be, is no more than a regrettable lapse into inertia is a prejudice that ought to be exposed for what it is. The growing absence of quiet reflection and concentration among us, abetted by scientific-technical activism in its drive for acquiring power and profit, threatens to make a wasteland out of human experience. Hurried and harried by incessant calls to action, abandoning oneself in reflex submission to whatever overt functioning or role playing is demanded at the moment, can only lead to tragic results for persons and communities. Activism very easily becomes an unwitting form of escapism, as it grossly neglects what Socrates liked to call the tendance of the soul.

Small wonder, then, that people in all walks of life should be turning eagerly toward Eastern forms of meditation or to Western disciplines of contemplation. Yet how ironical too is the tendency of these seekers to promote such practices into techniques for acquiring financial, vocational, or amatory success!

So far as courage goes, our age’s announced preference for active over passive virtue is especially questionable. The solid moral worth of sheer stasis, staying in a difficult place, should not be slighted by those who suppose that keeping busy or in motion is the meaning of life. Is not strength held in reserve often more powerful in its impact than strength expended and perhaps wasted? In today’s world, resistance against oppression is generally accounted virtuous, except of course by the oppressors themselves; but is not such resistance always as much a holding fast as surely as it is a fighting back? The apostle Paul, after comparing Christian virtue to the various pieces of a soldier’s armor, summed up his counsel with the words, "and having done all, to stand."

A second question to be asked about this view of courage is whether it is not merely a kind of self-preservation. Is courage so described anything more than the inveterate instinct of any

organism to persist in being, to hang on to life in spite of change or crisis? And if so, why dignify it with the name of virtue?

In reply let us admit that survival is indeed an instinctual fact noticed in all living beings, not excepting humans. But how is the instinct of self-preservation to be accounted for? Is it to be dismissed as no more than a biological drive, or is it better understood as a goal suggesting the presence of something like consciousness and purpose, however minimal or undeveloped?

Comparative psychologists quite properly hesitate to draw sharp lines between human and animal behavior, preferring to speak of differences in degree rather than of differences in kind. But can self-preservation or survival even be conceived without assuming that some degree of "subjective aim" is at work? Hardly, for even a carrot-and-stick psychology must assume that pain is avoided while pleasure is desired, if not desirable. Saving one’s own skin is not, apparently, an exclusively human trait, yet this does not mean that it is nonhuman or subhuman only. The sheer fact that courage is based in animal instinct does not "prove" that instinct may not take the human form of courage. Even exact science measures all things humanly even when it leans over backward not to do so. A thoroughgoing objectivity is always something of a psychic if not a "spiritual" achievement.

If morality is a late arrival on the evolutionary scene, its presence has still to be acknowledged and appreciated. Granted that virtue is the wrong word for describing rats in mazes or two chimpanzees sharing one banana; but is it not entirely appropriate for grasping what human beings do to survive in times of dearth, disaster, or other life-threatening situations? In such cases a sense of self-worth, or " I’m I" is clearly present, and also that rather frightening but bracing "freedom of choice," even if it is only the choice between living and dying. These are the morally necessary factors out of which any sort of virtue must be made. And courage, as a virtue necessary to all others, arises in this same primeval grappling with necessity.

Being neither simply animal nor purely angel, I exist in that precarious middle zone where flesh and spirit mix and mesh inextricably. I cannot abandon the mean, as Pascal says, without forsaking my humanity. Hence I live necessarily within the tension struck by needs, interests, and instinctual drives -- some of which I share with animals and others of which appear to place me on the side of the angels. I must make such life as I can out of materials as contrary as body and soul, instinct and intelligence, the necessary and the possible. This stance may well be both my misery and my grandeur as a human being. It marks where I live as well as where I come from and where I am going. Neither more nor less can be expected of me. In this sense, courage is the sine qua non which by keeping humanity alive also keeps living human.

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.3.

2. *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), 343.

3. Moses Hadas, *Aristeas to Philocrates* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 179.

4. G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), 42.

5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* pt. 2. question 123.art. 2.

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Graceful Courage: A Venture in Christian Humanism by Roger Hazelton

Chapter 3: Courage to Endure

But he who endures to the end will be saved. -- Matthew 10:22

Stoicism Then and Now

Some philosophies, like the proverbial old soldiers, never die but live on as attitudes long after they have ceased to function as schools of thought. Who has not heard of "Platonic" love? A pleasure-loving person is called "epicurean," just as a surly, sarcastic individual may be termed "cynical." These epithets not only risk being quite unfair to those so labeled, but also may not accurately designate the philosophies from which they have been borrowed.

Stoicism is one such term. Ever since a merchant turned philosopher, Zeno, did his teaching in the Stoa ("Painted Porch") at Athens in the third century B.C., the Stoic view of life in the world has exerted a decisive if diffused influence upon Western humanity. As Gilbert Murray wrote some years ago, Stoicism "possesses still a permanent interest for the human race, and a permanent power of inspiration.''[1] Even today a man or woman who undergoes severe pain without flinching is said to "take it stoically." Of all the influences inherited from classical antiquity the stoical temper and posture may well be the most persistent and widespread among us. Not even two thousand years of Christianity have been able to efface that impulse, for it is continually being renewed at the sources of experience itself. In fact, Stoicism is not an "ism" at all any longer, but has come to mean the essential ground of human courage as such, although not now expressed in a particular set of ideas and beliefs.

From its beginning, however, Stoicism was understood as the joining of theory to practice. Never perhaps have the connections between true thinking and right acting been more clearly grasped. Those ancient teachers knew as well as we do that reflective thought is shaped by actual experience, and must answer to experience if it is to bear the imprint of honesty without degenerating into irresponsible irrelevance. Nevertheless, they were also cognizant of the fact that a life from which all thought was absent could scarcely be called living. Their view of life and the world took shape from both sides of this two-sided truth. Courage, they believed, was a way of thinking as well as acting. Their philosophy was drawn from the vantage point of courage with a view to furthering and strengthening that same courage. Naturally, it came to

have a wide appeal in a period that historians have frequently compared with our own -- one marked by general "failure of nerve" when anxious seeking after personal security and identity reached almost epidemic proportions, induced by social upheaval and religious rootlessness. Coming as it did in the midst of easier, cheaper alternatives, including the revival of old superstitions and the invention of new ones, the Stoic call to courage could not have been more timely or persuasive.

Nor does this same call go unheeded in our present age. Can it be doubted that there is a definite trace of Stoicism in most of us? The battery of belief in "progress" has gone dead for many in the world today. The problem-solving optimism of past decades has worn dangerously thin. In private and public life alike, former enthusiasm for programs and techniques as improving the quality of life in all directions is noticeably lacking. Now there is only more to watch, more to go wrong, as in airplane crashes and terrorist takeovers. The suspicion grows that the world we have made is too much for us to manage; an undertone, or monotone, of stoical endurance is distinctly audible. So, chary of ultimate commitments and wary of grand illusions, we keep "hanging in there" amidst noise and danger, in some sense or other stoics in spite of ourselves.

Now one may be forgiven for believing that this minimal, residual stoicism is pretty good, all things considered. For there is surely something right in scaling down one’s expenses to the size of one’s purse, making do with whatever one has and knows when destinations and directions reach a kind of vanishing point. Courage stripped down to bare endurance is still courage. However battered from without or eroded from within, it deserves respect and practice always. And that is as it should be, for such courage makes blood sisters and brothers of us all.

What are the salient features of such enduring courage? To endure, as even the dictionary knows, is to sustain or undergo without breaking or yielding. The Latin root word means to harden or make hard, which suggests thickening or stiffening, possibly freezing. Humanly speaking, to endure means to persist or stay in being, yet through the changes that threaten to undo being.

Endurance is a metaphorical word that eludes literal interpretation. It refers not to a solid or single state; it may or may not be an attitude deliberately assumed; and it is best described in somewhat paradoxical fashion. There is toughness in enduring courage, to be sure, but it is a coming together of opposite yet complementary tendencies -- a sustaining as well as a submitting, a permitting joined with a persisting. I can endure hardship only by accepting it, yet also by resisting its weakening effects. This may seem to be an unstable compound of incompatible responses when judged by the ordinary rules of grammar and logic; but here as always, actual experience knows better. Living with liability in the enduring mode requires the exercise of moral flexibility and firmness, both together, each drawing its strength from the other.

For example, in Christian history the word "martyr" has been used to identify those women and

men who choose death in preference to abandoning their faith. It comes to mean a witness for whom the price of faith is death; and who shall say whether death or faith is the winner? So "the noble company of the martyrs" has borne testimony to the truth that whoever endures to the end shall be saved. Martyrdom is the extreme instance of the precept in the Christian gospel that life is gained only by being lost.

Or consider this word from the lame slave Epictetus. He wrote: "Of course you will suffer. I do not say that you must not even groan aloud. But in the center of your being do not groan!"[2] It would be hard to find a more expressive instance of stoical, enduring courage. What Epictetus is saying is that whatever must be undergone can be, in strictly human measure, overcome. Distress need not entail despair, for the distressing cause may be held at spirit's length, neither fought like an enemy nor allowed to dominate one's situation. Here is the ancient Stoic principle that what finally matters is not what happens to you but how you take it; and it is as up-to-date as the latest airplane crash or terrorist kidnapping with its weight of human woe.

So, although the courage to endure may be compared with solidifying under pressure, it is no mere shrinkage of the self; and if it resembles narrowing and hardening in some respects it demonstrates remarkable elasticity in others. In other words, it shows the same resilient steadfastness that is evident in all courage. This is the stuff of which human character must always be made -- the very process by which, in Emmanuel Mounier's striking phrase, "anguish has been made flesh, or rather, steel."

Submission and Resistance

Enduring courage merits a much higher valuation than an age like ours, prizing "openness" and "vulnerability," is disposed to give it. Doubtless a willing exposure to new experiences and a ready acceptance of rapid rates of change are called for in today's life-world, just in order to survive as fully human beings. By the same token, however, an equally strong case can be made for nurturing habits of self-restraint and self-reserve, if change and novelty are not to be allowed to threaten us with faceless, rootless substitutes for genuinely human existence. All too often the accepted dogma that it is better to produce change than merely to endure it becomes an alibi for "going along," like the man in Auden's poem "The Unknown Citizen": "When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went."

Along with this unfortunate mind-set goes a tendency to undervalue the stoical temper simply by stereotyping it. One such stereotype dismisses the classic Stoic apathy as merely a synonym for indifference bordering on inertia. Although it may be mechanically transcribed as "without feeling," in ancient thought *apatheia* meant something else. A much better rendering would be "tranquillity" or "imperturbability." The word's authentic meaning comes through splendidly in the familiar prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr:

> O God, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, courage to change

what should be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.[3]

Here, too, an oversharp contrast is drawn in modern fashion between courage and serenity, as if quiet acceptance of what is inevitable were not itself courageous. Yet for all that, Niebuhr's prayer has more than a smidgin of moral truth, as it recalls the wise discrimination proper to all courage, and also the rhythm of drawing back and letting go which is, like breathing, utterly necessary to the pursuit of truly human life.

Anguish does not go away when it is made into steel. Every bereaved person is aware of that. The experience of losing a loved one by death can shatter one's habitual defenses and expose the nerve of painful loneliness. Realizing this, counselors and therapists to the bereaved are rightly concerned that the survivor's "grief work" should be done, instead of recommending losing oneself in new relationships or projects. And yet the work of grief is simply grieving, which partakes largely of enduring courage. The fact of loss has got to be faced and not avoided. The discipline of sorrowing should not be foreshortened but prolonged until its necessary task is done. This means that giving way to grief is needed for the purpose of getting over grief; and this is followed, as Emily Dickinson observed, by a "formal feeling" which may well signal the re-forming of the grieving self to "go it alone" into a forbidding future.

In any case, enduring courage should not be confused with a brittle insensitiveness. Persons who have gone through divorce may resolve never to let themselves be hurt again; as a result they may develop a protective shell against further disappointment in their intimate relationships. Accepting what cannot be changed does not mean building dikes against despair any more than it means trying to sidestep future danger. For most of us, serenity is hard to come by and remains a lifelong hope rather than an achieved goal. Such glimpses as we have of it, however, disclose a whole new world of psychic energy quite at variance with the emotional turbulence we know so well. The calmness that follows upon a deliberate slowing down and holding fast can indeed be a precious, luminous experience. Of course it may be cultivated for its own sweet sake and often is, yet the common witness of humankind holds that it is not meant to last indefinitely. The shocks and changes we need to keep us sane will come anyhow, but life's tempo can be at least in part controlled by courage to endure them.

Stoic thinkers have laid great emphasis on self-control -- a stress that seems to have gone out with the Victorians of yesteryear. A term more suited to present taste, probably, is "inner-directed": whether one rolls with the punches or keeps a stiff upper lip, the self is in charge of itself, not at the mercy of others or of Otherness. An ability to make a distinction between self and world and then to act upon it is among the surest marks of human maturity; in science it is called objectivity, as in morality it is termed integrity. A proper self-control may be only " the thin edge of the wedge" in D.H. Lawrence's words, but its leverage for changing what can and should be changed is truly remarkable. That Stoic lesson needs to be learned well by every generation.

Another stereotype of Stoic thought has to do with "resignation" -- that is, taking things as they come without expecting too much, submitting to whatever seems unchangeable or inevitable. This "quietism," so runs the charge, should not be called courageous at all; it appears instead to be the very essence of discouragement, a surrendering of all initiative and will before the things that cannot be changed.

At this point we may be tempted to engage in one of those sterile debates, more verbal than real, which opposes "submission" to "resistance" as if each ruled out the other. Single-issue people fall easily into this temptation, but it is only a form of intellectual impatience, if not cowardice. If resignation merely means submitting, giving up such power as one has to change the shape and style of one's own life, then one surely ought to avoid it.

But resignation in the Stoic sense rests always upon knowing the difference between what can and cannot be changed, as in Niebuhr's prayer. That is, it calls into play what Marcus Aurelius liked to call the ruling faculty of reason. Taking the course of least resistance is by no means intended by this word of moral counsel. For is it not clear that to be resigned to a situation or condition means selecting this among other possible ways of dealing with it? True enough, resignation can become habitual, even pathological, thus losing its uniquely human quality as the exercise of responsible, reasonable freedom. But in most cases, resignation is an attitude taken after some survey of the relevant possibilities, in which a passive role is actively chosen as the best available manner of responding to unfavorable, limiting circumstances. Being one option among several, resignation like any other pattern of conduct may be vitiated or perverted. Nevertheless it is altogether compatible with a wise, discriminating selectiveness.

Moreover there are times and places in which resignation has a singular appropriateness, though it can hardly be regarded as the sole and single norm of moral virtue. The great monotheistic religions of the West have recognized its strength and nobility in human character, as the words Islam and shalom indicate. And as for Christianity, the worth of submission to the will of God has been constantly held before the faithful. Writing from prison shortly before his execution for conspiring to kill Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected:

> I've often wondered here where we are to draw the line between necessary resistance to "fate" and equally necessary submission. Don Quixote is the symbol of resistance carried to the point of absurdity, even lunacy . . . resistance at last defeats its own object, and evaporates in theoretical fantasy. Sancho Panza is the type of complacent and artful accommodation to things as they are.... we must confront fate -- to me the neuter gender of the word "fate" (*Schicksal*) is significant -- as resolutely as we submit to it at the right time.... It is therefore impossible to define the boundary between resistance and submission on abstract principles. Faith demands this elasticity of behavior. Only so can we stand our ground in each situation as it arises, and turn it to gain.[4]

Bonhoeffer's point, of course, is that resistance and submission are but different tactics in an overall strategy of courage. If one had to choose between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza as role models, one had better not choose at all, for each is a caricature of real humanity. In life, unlike literature, resisting may assume the form of submitting, as in nonviolent demonstrations that lead to arrest and imprisonment for the demonstrators. Always, new occasions teach new duties; the self's integrity is not splintered but strengthened by moving from an active to a passive role, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer's own life makes entirely clear.

The reference to fate in his letter opens up a theme of prime importance in considering courage. The word admittedly does not carry the same force for us today that it must have had for ancient peoples. Rightly or wrongly, we are prone to believe that we are not subjected in like manner to inexorable powers that work above our heads and behind our backs to ride roughshod over hope and purpose. Doom and destiny are not among the common words in modern speech. An age that puts great confidence in planning is not likely to dwell overmuch on the inevitable and inexorable features of life. Nevertheless, these features are there to be reckoned with by even the most fortunate among us, and resignation is an appropriate response to them. The artist Lucas Samaras has said that there is a strange dignity in being visited by a catastrophe. That is because there is a true courage in accepting what cannot be changed, a courage visible and indeed indubitable in folk who must contend with suffering caused by destructive forces over which they have no control.

No control, that is, except self-control, as Stoic thinkers kept insisting. "In the center of your being, do not groan!" Why is it that self-control should be so quickly identified with self-repression, when actually it is a form of self-expression? The self-control (*autarkeia*) taught by the Stoics has little to do with those inhibitions that modern counselors warn against. The psychic, perhaps physical, dangers involved in "letting it all hang out" are surely as great as those associated with "bottling up" our feelings. Before talk of self-expression can make any sense, there must be a self to express. The contours of selfhood are defined by what must be endured no less than by what can be achieved. Repression is scarcely the term to use for holding one's temper under provocation, or for reserving judgment on another person's intentions until sufficient evidence is at hand. In any case, self-control is not the repressing of courage but its expression and verification. Not only modesty in distinguishing what lies within one's power from what does not, but also dignity in exercising that power in the form of reserve and restraint, belong to it.

When all is said and done, taking the measure of one's life merely in terms of successes and failures gives no indication of its real, durable worth. Existing humanly consists of both ordeals and exploits; the relationship between them is far closer than we sometimes think. Poets seem better able to understand this than professors. Edwin Markham in "The Man with the Hoe" puts it well:

> Defeat may serve as well as victory

To shake the soul and let the glory out.

Courage in the Christian Mode

What, then, is the role of enduring courage in the Christian mode? Historically the Stoic impulse was not extinguished by the rise of Christianity in Europe. Instead, it was incorporated into the newer viewpoint, but with a difference. There was both loss and gain in this recontexting of courage to endure. Christian morality and ethics had little room for that element of self-assertion which was thought to be implied in ancient pagan virtue, since pride was regarded as the essence of sinful rebellion against God. Also, the rule of reason praised by the Stoics gave way to the rule of faith in determining standards of moral conduct. Preachers and teachers in the early church had much to say about obedience and humility before God but surprisingly little concerning courage.

Yet hints and echoes of a Christianized Stoicism can be detected in some unexpected quarters, especially those within Hellenistic spheres of influence. Roman culture, too, brought unmistakably Stoic ideas into Christian thought. The pagan statesman Cicero and the Christian bishop Ambrose of Milan are not as far apart as might be supposed from their different outlooks and circumstances. Writing on courage, they agree in presenting this Stoic virtue in the masculinized, militarized form to which cultured Romans were accustomed.

Christians of course had motives of their own for prizing and practicing the courage of endurance. They found its very type or pattern in the suffering and dying Lordship of Jesus Christ, "who went not up to joy before he suffered pain." His example was followed and confirmed by the experience of the martyrs. Although the persecution of Christians did not become general or systematic until the third century, Christianity had its martyrs from the outset, as the case of Stephen reported in the Book of Acts attests.

The assertion that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church has been amply confirmed in Christian history. As early as the second century a person who accepted death as the price of faith was venerated as a martyr, or witness; congregations were established at or near the place of death; often their tombs became the altars of these churches. Mementos and relics of these martyrs were preserved and to see or touch them was considered meritorious for one’s salvation. Also, the church’s memory of its blood-soaked origins was kept alive by the names given to parishes and basilicas. The very instruments of torture or execution were emblems of the costly, blessed victory won over sin and death. The cross itself became the sign of Christian triumph shared by all those who went not up to joy before they suffered pain.

Martyrdom, then, left its profound mark on the life and thought of the historic Christian community. The accounts of individual martyrs were unforgettable -- Saint Lawrence portrayed with the griddle on which he was burned to death, Saint Perpetua and Saint Felicity attacked and killed in the arena, Saint Sebastian done to death by archers -- the innumerable beheadings,

stranglings, maulings by wild beasts, all of which gave a tragic credibility to the Christian faith and were naturally believed to witness to the supernatural origin and end of that faith. Canonization as saints and a place in the liturgical calendar followed in due course.

Following Jesus, therefore, cut much deeper and went much further than merely obeying his counsels and precepts as recorded in the gospels. It required nothing less than patterning one's whole life on the model of the cross. *Si crucem portabis crux portaloit te* -- if you carry the cross, the cross will carry you -- was the watchword of an enduring faithfulness. Persecution and execution might no longer be a believer's lot, yet "we must join our wounds to his" (Pascal) if Christ's victory over death is also to be ours. There are no shortcuts into eternal life. But a way has been reached and set up in this world, the way of the cross, in which the souls of the righteous may find blessed rest in the hands of God.

The great theme of the *imitatio Christi* appears and reappears in medieval Christendom. It was brought home to the faithful by the fourteen stations of the cross on church walls, as of course by the very shape and substance of the Mass itself, repeating over and over the sacrifice on Calvary. The increased emphasis on the divinity of Christ, it is significant to note, meant also that great stress was placed on his fellow humanity with those who would seek to follow him. So Saint Bernard of Clairvaux advised his monks to meditate upon the wounds of Christ as the sure, effective "embrace" of his divinity. The man Jesus, taught Bernard, gives every believer a model to be imitated day by day and deed by deed, thus confirming pious contemplation with the works of suffering love for God and neighbor. True faith then joins practical with mystical life, for only so can come the personal perfecting that Christ commands and offers. One must do the will if she or he is to know the doctrine.

The same theme is voiced in forms of devotion inspired by the monastic and mendicant orders of the late Middle Ages. Saint Francis of Assisi, it was said, followed the Christ-pattern so closely that a crucifix spoke to him and his own body bore the *stigmata* or scars of the wounds inflicted on his Lord. And from the Brethren of the Common Life in Holland came the influential *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis with its challenge: "Go where you will, seek where you will, and you will find no higher way above nor safer way below, than the way of the Holy Cross."[5]

Radical reformers leading popular revolts against the clergy-dominated church also took up the theme, as the writings of such leaders as Wycliffe and Menno Simons illustrate. This was neither the first time nor the last when the example of Christ was lifted up to fortify struggling against oppression. And in the gentler humanism of a scholar like Erasmus of Rotterdam one catches the same note, but now with a distinctly "modern," even "liberal" accent:

> Let this be your rule . . . set Christ before you as the sole center of your whole life, to whom alone you may bring all your studies, all your efforts, all your leisure and your business.... I think Christ to be not an empty word, but nothing else than

love, simplicity, patience, purity, in short, everything which he taught.[5]

Martin Luther, on the contrary, was ambivalent about the *imitatio Christi*. He wanted to cling to the thought of Christ as "our pattern" while at the same time scorning the notion that Christ serves only as an example or teacher. Thus he liked to declare that imitation does not make sons, but sonship makes imitators, on the ground that good works proceed from faith and not faith from good works. Still, the ancient motif lives on in Protestant piety today, as any current hymnbook or prayerbook shows. John Bunyan's poem gives it vigorous expression: "He who would valiant be against all disaster/Let him in constancy follow the Master." Being a Christian means, now as always, taking up one's own cross, letting Christ go before and following after. Faithful endurance is still a *martyreia* witnessing constancy and valor -- in short, a courage that draws inspiration from lifelong commitment to Christ.

A serious question has been raised about this Christian version of the courage to endure, "that gruesome way of perishing," as Nietzsche dubbed it. May not all this fixation upon the cross have skewed the healthy-minded virtue of courage into something like its own denial? In short, does not endurance so described have the suspicious features of a martyr complex? This term is rather generally used to mean a morbid craving for self-injury associated with the Freudian "death wish." Must we conclude that such a complex is at work in those for whom this malady is named? Is it perhaps clinically true that a readiness to die for one's faith involves preferring death to life? Here once again the issue is joined between a Christian and a humanist view of courage.

Whatever the case may be in certain individual figures -- one does worry about Polycarp or Justin, for example -- there has been an impressive Christian consensus on the matter among major Christian thinkers. Thomas Aquinas, for one, could not be more emphatic on the point. A Christian's love of life, he stated, is not only a natural characteristic shared with humankind at large, but also a moral obligation that springs from faith's sense that existing as such is God's gift. So a Christian naturally loves his or her life, says Thomas, not simply because it cannot be helped but because it is good and right to do so. Since life is indeed given to us it cannot be ours to give away -- unless preserving it threatens what Josef Pieper, interpreting Thomas, calls "a deeper, more essential intactness." Hence health and happiness are to be highly valued although they do not carry the highest possible value. They exist, after all, in order to support higher goods "the loss of which would injure more deeply the inmost core of human existence."[7]

To endure courageously and faithfully in the Christian sense is neither to invite death nor to despise life. It cannot mean setting up my own cross alongside that of Jesus as if his sacrifice could not be made perfect without mine. Nor can it mean that martyrdom is the only or the best pattern for a Christian's obedience unto death. Lifelong discipleship may have greater and more durable worth. However, Christian courage to endure is hardly thinkable apart from the prolonging of the cross through the experience of martyrdom which has entered so intimately into the church's memory and conscience. Some things in life are worth more than living,

although this does not diminish but enhances the value of life. The good is always better when it is harder. As the great Augustine declared, it is not the inflicting of injury that makes the martyr, but the fact that he or she acts according to the truth.

That truth is not exclusively Christian but is inclusively human. Our life at best is precious just because it is precarious. Always subject to hazard, pain, and loss, the human way of existing in the world both requires and rewards enduring courage. Martyrdom and conscious imitation of the way of the cross are but striking instances of the stuff out of which all human life is made, with or without the support of a religious faith. Enduring courage enlists all one's powers, bodily and spiritual alike. It both presupposes danger and opposes danger. And its apparent passivity actually expresses a firm resolution to preserve at all costs one's essential intactness as a human being.

Meaning Versus Meaninglessness

We have no dearth of martyrs in our secularized world. True, they suffer more frequently for their political allegiance or ethnic identity than for religious conviction. But is martyrdom the right word for those ordeals of imprisonment, torture, execution which have become nauseatingly common across the earth ? In former ages Stoics and Christians met their trials believing to some degree in the eternal rightness of things, appearances to the contrary. It is a fair question whether any such resource is still available. By and large, the modern world has tended to answer the question in the negative, although fanatical devotion to secular, chiefly political aims is visible on every hand.

It cannot be denied that evidence of real support for philosophical or religious assurances is hard to come by any longer. The facts with which we must contend at present -- senseless violence, rule by fear and terror, physical and psychic abuse of the powerless by the powerful -- would seem to impel us, rather, toward a dogged stance of secular humanism and away from old beliefs and incentives. At all events, have we not enough to do cleaning up pollution, resisting oppression, alleviating world hunger, or putting down corruption in high places without stopping to consider matters of final allegiance and ultimate concern?

As always, when the gods depart the half-gods arrive. Then ancient myths return to haunt us, although in strangely different form. So Albert Camus, keenly sensitive to the spirit of the age, retold the classical story of Sisyphus, the Corinthian king whose disrespect toward Zeus, father of the gods, caused him to be condemned to everlasting punishment.[8] He was made to push a heavy stone up a steep hill; just as it reached the top it would escape his grasp and hurtle down, to be pushed up again, and so on ad infinitum. Here is an up-to-date version of the courage to endure in the face of foregone failure. Life gives no reasons and asks none. Absurdity is the bottom line of human existence. Endurance thus becomes an exercise in senseless, vain repetition, going through motions that add up to nothing, from which there can be no relief, and for which no justifying truth can be given.

That there is a kind of Sisyphus in most of us is plain enough. Senseless repetition doomed to failure is the motif behind those metaphors of the treadmill or the rat race which are presently in common use. The retold myth is bound to have a ring of truth to those who feel trapped and victimized by conditions over which they seem to have no control. Does it do more, though, than match a recurring mood of hopelessness, and can it be taken seriously as a persuasive portrayal of how matters really stand with us?

Camus's retelling of this ancient story doubtless shows a necessary truth: sheer endurance is a significant part of the human condition everywhere and always. But "significant" may not be the right word, as the endurance here set forth is strictly speaking without any meaning; in Camus's view, it represents the very height (or depth) of what is meaningless and absurd. This new-style Sisyphus appears to be under condemnation, sentenced as it were to life for life, although no "higher court" has condemned him. Nothing in his character or, situation can account for what he must endure. The servitude under which this Sisyphus labors is crazy and absurd, for the very reason that it has no reason; it is uncalled for and unfounded.

The ancient myth was different. It had its dramatis personae, its story line with actions producing consequences. But Camus's Sisyphus is in no way responsible for his fate even though he must endure it; there is no question of guilt and retribution here. Further, in the atheistic world view that informs the retold myth there is no seat of judgment from which condemnation could possibly come. What must be endured has no cause and no purpose; it can neither be accepted nor rejected; resignation and submission are alike unthinkable where human freedom is altogether lacking. This is evidently the point of Camus's retelling -- that existence itself is at bottom an absurdity simply to be endured in a pseudoworld beyond, or perhaps beneath, good and evil.

But notice that the modern Sisyphus is not portrayed as anything but a faceless being subjected to nameless pressures and foregone failures. His endurance is utterly without any trace of courage. His robotlike existing gives off no sparks of resentment, no signs of even minimal or instinctual freedom. His helpless condition can scarcely be termed tragic, as it inspires neither pity nor terror but only a mood of acquiescence: "That's the way it is." Used as a literary or mythic motif, the absurd may well mirror those feelings of senseless, helpless nonexistence that much in daily human life seems to confirm. But as a philosophical category, the absurd leaves all real issues open and unresolved. When meaninglessness is proposed as meaning, indeed as *the* meaning, of being human, then language itself ceases to function reliably and thought is set adrift to be victimized by winds of bleak despair.

Nevertheless every myth is the selective amplifying of some humanly lived reality, and that of the absurd is no exception. Has not the age in which we live shown beyond all doubt its bent toward self-deception and self-defeat? Dreams of a just and peaceable world are repeatedly shattered by the facts of conflict and oppression. The noblest aims are infected with the most sordid motives. Absurdity must be the name of the game when we, unable to profit from our

own mistakes, are brought to grief by our own successes. Call it a cabaret or a carousel if you will, but life today does have some characteristics of a bad joke, and the joke appears to be on us.

Of all the monstrous happenings in our century, none is so terrible as the Nazi persecution and attempted extermination of the Jewish people. Only now after a whole generation has come and gone do we dare to speak and think about the Holocaust. It is well that we should do so, for these events must not be forgotten. To those who are religious by temperament or by conviction, the Holocaust must call sharply into question any assurance of the goodness of God. To them and to all others, the Holocaust must cast appalling doubt on the humaneness of humanity. All that stands out with Sisyphean clarity is that every person now alive is a survivor of the death camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

For the Holocaust has made all "we/they" thinking obsolete, whether it takes the form of distinguishing between heroes and villains or onlookers and perpetrators. This is particularly true of Jewish-Christian relationships in Western and Middle Eastern communities. The old fanaticism lives on, to be sure; but after 1945 it has become much harder to sustain self-righteous attitudes or policies. A kind of troubled, tentative unanimity has been assuming shape, expressed in large-scale commercial ventures, scientific institutes, artistic organizations, and even religious cooperation. The "Jewish problem" has in short become a human problem. Questions of guilt and retribution have not been put to rest but they have lost much of their former sting, in a world where good and evil are so desperately mixed.

A person who is Jewish in either the religious or ethnic sense is bound to experience his or her identity with a new and anxious force. Living in the lengthened shadow of this nightmare, one must ask whether the Holocaust can ever be understood as a whole people’s burnt offering, or living sacrifice, to some transcendent good. Is it in fact a kind of martyrdom that folk of one’s own blood or faith were led like sheep to genocidal slaughter? Can there indeed be martyrdom when there is no choice? Asking that question, Emil Fackenheim answers, "There can be a faithfulness resembling it, when a man has no choice between life and death but only between faith and despair."[9]

A similar question and answer marks the situation of those who for whatever reason may not be considered Jewish. Obviously Christians are most urgently involved since it is their particular heritage of ghetto and pogrom that bore such bitter fruit in Nazi Germany. To have once endured and remembered martyrdom provides no guarantee against inflicting it again on others. Furthermore, Christian responsibility for the Holocaust consists not merely in having furnished history with preliminaries and preconditions for it. The guilt also includes that ignorance and silence that allowed Hitler’s engineers of death to proceed without abandoning their aims or disguising their methods.

If it is still argued that Christians were as helpless as the Jews, this only underscores the growing

recognition of a common cause and destiny for both alike. Now as never before these two peoples and their faiths have come to share the mystery of evil undeserved and good undone. They also share the costly witness to the truth that unless we can endure as truly human beings we shall not be saved but must all perish. Whether this is taken to be a divine command or a human insight may not greatly matter in the long run. What does matter is that it should be nourished, affirmed, and acted upon, precisely when the dignity and efficacy of such endurance have largely ceased to function as articles of faith.

Elie Wiesel, whose writings have been instrumental in achieving such a community of conscious resolution, retells the biblical narrative of Jacob's dream-ladder in the following way:

> In his dream Jacob saw a ladder whose top reached into heaven. It still exists. There are those who have seen it, somewhere in Poland, at the side of an out-of-the-way railroad station. And an entire people was climbing, climbing toward the clouds on fire. Such was the nature of the dread our ancestor Jacob must have felt.[10]

Is not sheer endurance, even without choice between life and death, always the transfiguring of necessity? And does it not, perhaps in spite of itself, remain a stubborn witness to that resilient steadfastness which is human courage?

NOTES

l. Gilbert Murray, *Stoic, Christian, and Humanist* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940), 89.

2. From the *Discourses* of Epictetus.

3. This widely-quoted prayer is on the flyleaf of Reinhold Niebuhr, *Justice and Mercy*, ed. Ursula Niebuhr (New York: Harper & Row,1974).

4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, The Enlarged Edition (London SCM Press; New York: Macmillan & Co.,1971),217 - 18.

5. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, book 1, chap. 12.

6. Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion*, 4.

7. Josef Pieper, *Fortitude and Temperance* (London: Faber & Faber, 1955), 19, 21.

8. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955).

9. Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 74.

10. Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends* (New York: Random House, 1976), 138.

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Graceful Courage: A Venture in Christian Humanism by Roger Hazelton

Chapter 4: From Coping to Daring

What a new face courage puts on everything! -- Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Letters and Social Aims*

A Courage-Spectrum

While endurance is an indispensable part of all courageous conduct, it is by no means the last word to be said on the subject. For courage is a most elastic and therefore elusive virtue. That is why efforts to personify it usually fall of their own weight into bland irrelevance. Such larger-than-life models end up by becoming less than life. Taken too literally they can only bring distance and perhaps despondency into the moral picture. Who can possibly be so good, so pure, so wholly dedicated as this?

The case may be somewhat different with respect to other virtues -- justice, for example. Pictured on courthouse walls, an allegorical figure blindfolded and holding scales represents evenhanded impartiality. As the figure is invariably female the added quality of sympathy for individuals is suggested. Just how these different traits are to be combined in one decision is far from clear. And what this monumental personage has to do with the words and actions over which she is supposed to preside is even less apparent.

But courage, unlike justice, is not to be fixed in any particular institution or tradition. Throughout history, it is true, it has been closely associated with warfare and a soldier under fire may still serve as a prime example. So the names of Bunker Hill or Bull Run are treasured in a nation's memory, and marines raise the flag on Iwo Jima. That is understandable enough, the world being what is is. But see how Emily Dickinson amends the military image of courage:

> To fight aloud is very brave,
> But gallanter, I know,
> Who charge within the bosom
> The cavalry of woe.

Because courage is so often anonymous, even in wartime an unknown soldier represents it best.

Every language and culture has shining examples kept alive in song and story, yet their very diversity is as striking as their universality. What strange company Cyrano de Bergerac keeps with Joan of Arc, or Samson with Sojourner Truth! Courage is a theme with endless variations. It can be traced all the way from Ice Age to space age, in all walks of life, among enemies and friends alike, through all the modules and modulations that constitute the human world. What people of all times and places have most in common, let it be noted, is their uncommon personhood or selfhood, which is the perennial seedbed of courage.

We should not lose sight of this larger, longer picture when considering our own favorite examples of courage. Any random sampling opens out upon an entire panorama, or pilgrimage, perhaps, of people very like ourselves, hard pressed (we are all in this together) but still resolute (we shall overcome). Before us is a whole spectrum of behavior and belief that is somehow to be included in describing courage, along with its synonyms like bravery, valor, fortitude, honor, and many others. The analogy of a spectrum will guide us through the following.

Of course, no single standard spectrum exists for elucidating the full range of meanings and bearings in the one term, courage. One must choose from many that are possible. The range may run from bare survival at one end to bold aggression at the other. Or it may go all the way from physical vitality to lofty spirituality, say, from Tarzan to Parsifal. Again, it may cover in Pascalian manner the distance from human wretchedness to human grandeur. Medieval moralists, following Aristotle, considered courage as gradations from endurance to attack. It should be noted too that we have no moral spectroscope available for analyzing into its component colors the common-uncommon virtue known as courage. Nevertheless the work of understanding its varied shades and tones of meaning, or what might be called the chromatics of courage, should prove both intriguing and important. Passing the light of human courage through the prism of speech and thought regarding it, what are some of its more readily acknowledged expressions?

Coping

One of the dimmer bands in our courage-spectrum is lighted up by the word "coping." Today we use it constantly to indicate very specific chores like getting meals or making business deals, so that it may have lost the very aura or feel of courage. Ordinarily, when a word like this is employed to cover almost everything, it manages to identify nothing. All the same, its use is significant as it reveals a sense of life as marked by difficult, demanding tasks. Far from being as recent a word as might be thought, "coping" was employed in Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s England to refer to such activities as fighting on a battlefield or trading in a marketplace. I cope with my enemy by contending with him according to rules of combat binding us both. Or I cope in the market by buying or selling goods or services, bargaining with others under conditions of supply and demand. In either case, coping implied some measure of success in field or market, due to strength or shrewdness on the coper’s part.

Presently we use the word in a much wider frame of reference. Almost every publishing season brings out books on coping with illness, coping with a family budget, coping with midlife crises, divorce, job pressures, religious doubts, and so forth. The word has come to mean any kind of problem solving with a prospect of success.

Probably the field of work provides our most conspicuous kinds of coping. Getting the work out makes the whole world kin, whether one is a homemaker on a lonely farm or an executive in a skyscraper office. Each is a worker whose work is new each morning and old each night. The most glamorous of occupations is not free from piecework and chore work, going through motions that have been learned, adapting simple means to short-range ends. Even the temporary occupant of Washington's Oval Office must meet a rigid schedule of people to be seen, reports to be read, letters to be answered, speeches to be written under deadlines -- all of which means coping with the toil and drudgery that is a part of all work.

We used to hear about the dignity of labor. That made sense when the worker was essentially a person with a craft learned after a period spent as an apprentice, at home, shop, or school. A loaf of bread baked in the family oven, a basket, chair, or cupboard, a field plowed for planting -- here were sturdy tributes to human ingenuity and effort. As in all coping, the monotony and persistence of the job itself might outweigh the satisfactions to be found in it. And yet a certain degree of pleasure could be given by the fact that a worker's task was his or her own; credit and compensation came from doing it well, so that a direct, obvious connection between materials and methods used placed the worker above the work for which responsibility had been assigned.

Today, however, the craftsmanship which formerly went into the making of a better mousetrap or a well-wrought urn has all but disappeared from most work. The dignity of labor has become an empty phrase for many workers. Credit and blame are not so easy to fix; standards of beauty and utility do not support one another; mass-produced articles designed to sell cannot provide a sense of participation and contribution to the worker in the work. A certain amount of training and skill are still required, but they are soon offset by the tending and operating of machines that seem more necessary to the work than the worker can ever claim to be. Making bricks without straw has its modern counterpart in Charlie Chaplin's assembly-line clowning ("Modern Times") or Arthur Miller's tragically bumbling, ever-smiling "Salesman."

The question every worker asks sooner or later is, Do I control my work or does my work control me? Whether or not robots-monitoring-robots is a preview of things to come, the present *alienation* of the worker from his or her work is a signal ominous enough. This term, borrowed of course from the writings of Karl Marx, points not only to an increased distancing of workers from the goals or aims of their working, but even more to their detachment from the means of production as the work is speeded up, fragmented, and depersonalized. The proliferating of labor-saving devices only makes work more laborious. And have we not been learning to our sorrow that health and welfare for the worker do not result automatically from the technical advances that were supposed to guarantee them? Instead there are more things to watch, more things to go

wrong, more possibilities of failure and accident, as workers come to be controlled more and more completely by the built-in demands of their work.

The alienation of workers from their work has created a syndrome of lowered self-esteem and chronic anxiety. Today, millions of so-called skilled or unskilled workers must cope not simply with the wearisome drudgery that is involved in all work, but even more with their own feelings of powerlessness and aggressiveness, which are bound at some time to explode in street violence, general strikes, or political revolt. Capitalist as well as socialist countries have known the bitter fruit of this unholy, inhuman alliance. The deepest effect, however, is that upon individual workers themselves. A vicious circle of resistance and repression leading to new resistance begins. As the collaborative and contributive nature of work disappears from view, earning one's living becomes the wresting of private gain from whatever work place one happens to occupy. With few exceptions, compensation comes not from work itself but is ulterior to the work; and this reduction of work to its cash value puts an effective end to craftsmanship and cooperation while at the same time it hastens the advanced stages of oppression and alienation. It is scarcely to be wondered that the battling and bargaining for workers' rights should become almost an obsession on almost every job. Whether in Poland or in Appalachia, in the British Midlands or in California vineyards, the news is not good.

Now there is something entirely healthy and honorable in recognizing that work is essential to living humanely in any time or place. For the majority of men and women most days are work days, as they have always been. Home keeping, bread winning, and family rearing have been the common lot of humankind ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. And such work is necessarily coping, for it is done largely in bits and pieces, broken up into specific tasks and duties, endlessly repeated yet always strangely unfinished.

Let it be granted that coping in the work place is a life style without very much style. Lacking the flourish of final accomplishment, its benchmarks are instead those of patient adjustment to the job immediately at hand. Such coping, however, should not be denied its rightful name of courage. In its own, perhaps small, way it shares in the resilient steadfastness embodied and enacted in all courage. Staying on the job, refusing to cut corners or patch over blemishes in one's work, may not add up to anything like a victory march; but the very absence of personal recognition and reward may greatly enhance the moral excellence of coping. Moreover, it can yield genuine personal pleasure and a sense that progress is being made. There is a story of a priest who stopped to talk with a farmer in his parish. The priest said, "You see, my good man, what you and God have wrought together." "You should have seen this place," replied the farmer, "when God had it all to himself."

If coping keeps a low profile on the spectrum of courage it does manage nonetheless to give concrete expression to significant moral truth. It is a principle to be reckoned with that the higher moral values are weaker than the lower values on which they depend, even if the stronger exist for the sake of the higher. Thus Scripture tells us that we do not live by bread alone, while

common sense insists that without bread we cannot live at all. By the same token, skills performed routinely and chores carried out on schedule are the necessary steps that make possible all pure science and fine art. Practice does make perfect, which is to say that humankind's most splendid achievements are based solidly upon coping effectively with available materials by appropriate methods.

Courageous coping, or problem solving, may appear quite unreflective just because it is so clearly practical in nature. Becoming preoccupied with practicalities does not exempt us from the rigors and ardors of careful, honest thinking. Merely venting our antagonisms or discussing our difficulties may only make them greater and less manageable. This is a lesson that those much given to "talking it out" find hard to learn. But there are problems that problem solving cannot really cope with, for a truly human world includes mysteries not amenable to coping, such as those informing our relationships to one another -- all the way from intimacy to hostility. Those predicaments and emergencies to which mortal flesh is heir may not lend themselves to any all-out problematic, manipulative approach. Rather, they demand and invite the sort of wisdom undergirded by courage that is more intent on understanding than on getting things done.

But for all that, coping goes part way if not the whole since it is a low-keyed kind of courage not to be underestimated or disregarded. Keeping on and bearing up, if not indeed the entire meaning of life, nevertheless has been known to repay stubbornness with a precious gleam of confidence; and that is always worth remembering in any time of toil or trouble.

Timing

Another band in the courage-spectrum is suggested by the familiar word timing. Earlier we noted the difference between mechanically kept time and humanly realized time. But there is a sadness about time in either sense; for it is as plain as day and as mysterious as night that everything mortal bears the mark of sheer temporality. We never step into the same river twice, declared an ancient philosopher. The only permanence is actually change, his modern colleague added. Time waits for no one, never comes to a full stop, leaves its mark on everything we do or have or are. A suspicion forms and grows that time may be the very meaning of reality as we know it.

Is time only another word for change? Think of what we do in telling time. Checking a date on the calendar or glancing at a wristwatch may seem simple enough, but is it? My ancestors used hourglasses and sundials for the same purpose, while I employ split-second instruments and standardized procedures. Does this give me great advantage over them in knowing what time it is, humanly speaking? Perhaps then change is not the last word about time, if it is so important to fix the right time with its signals of delight or duty, promise or warning, good fortune or bad. Creatures of change we certainly are, who know not what a day may bring forth or what response will be required of us. Nevertheless we go on taking the measure of that which is

measuring us. Our life in time is not all drift and waste, or we would long ago have given up the effort to determine where we stand in it. Which is to say that our clocks are always striking the hour of courage.

Courageous timing strikes a mean between two oddly contradictory attitudes toward time. "There are times that make us happy, there are times that make us blue," as the song says. When under stress of future peril or past failure, I am tempted to regard time as the enemy of all I hold dear, perhaps even as Fate itself, carrying me along with everything else in the world through endless cycles of change from which no escape is possible. Forever in transit, in motion from life to death, growth to decay, I can see no signs of anything resembling progress. All I can be sure of is that "time like an everlasting stream bears all its sons away" -- and daughters, too, let it be added to keep the record straight. Such a mood of fatalism with regard to time grips all of us from time to time. It holds, with the writer of Ecclesiastes, that there is nothing new under the sun, and with the modern philosopher Whitehead that time is a "perpetual perishing" from which no good may finally be expected.

But then in moments of relative security and happiness I may slide easily into a mood of optimism about time, feeling its passage as a benign undercurrent to my purposes and projects. "There's always tomorrow." Time gives me room to move in so that everything does not have to be done or decided at once. In such a mood swing I will cherish the image of time's arrow flying from the known past toward an unknown future that is pregnant with possibility, opening up range upon range of opportunities long wished-for.

What matters, then, is to make the best of time, as those who watch for the morning, like Zona Gale's father of whom it was said, "He loved to stand at the prow of the boat and let the spray of the future splash against his face." Although this opportunism with respect to time is chiefly emotional and practical, like its opposite number fatalism, it can usually come up with enough theory to justify itself. Indeed, whole philosophies of progress, creativity, or evolutionary advance have been constructed on this basis.

These contrasting attitudes, if crystallized into beliefs, would merely cancel each other out. One cannot be both fatalistic and opportunistic about time, at least not at the same time. Still, courageous timing must somehow include both, for each reading must be noted and reckoned with. The whole truth concerning time is not available to those who must be "birds of passage" living from one moment to the next. We can simulate it, to be sure. On the chancel screen in Chartres Cathedral a visitor may see one of those curiously complicated medieval clocks that tell not only the time of the day but the day of the week, the month of the year, the hours of sunrise and sunset, the phase of the moon, and the sign of the Zodiac -- a feat not quite duplicated by our digital timepieces today. Yet no mechanical device, however artful and accurate, can yield an overall idea of time-in-general. There is still a time to sow and a time to reap, a time to save and a time to spend, a time to mourn and a time to dance. Whereas the fatalist is tied mainly to the past and the opportunist is fascinated by the future, courageous common sense accepts the

present as the only time that actually exists, whatever may be its signs and portents.

True, every present moment is heavy with the weight of past moments, recollected and refocused. Likewise, each present is formed partly by the lure of future urgency, moved and moving by a kind of forward motion of its own. Not every future is bright nor every past regrettable, and so instead of wandering in times that do not belong to us, the better part of wisdom -- and of courage --is to live in the present, the only time there actually is, with its mixed signals and the tension they provoke.

"Life is so daily," a friend used to sigh. The same truth can produce a smile, too. Since time is forever shaping itself into successive moments, a series of unique and unrepeatable presents, I have to take such readings and bearings as I can. They are bound to be provisional and partial simply because time is moving and I am moving with and through it. For discerning what the time is, a good rule of thumb is the Bible's "in the time of prosperity, be joyful; in the time of adversity, consider." Since I live in a time between the times, one dying and the other being born, I cannot wait till all the evidence is in to make my rendezvous with temporality. I can however move ahead with the risky resolve of courage, trying to understand as best I can the meaning behind Shakespeare's "the readiness in all."

For our encouragement let it be said that every Now is really new, at any rate for persons who can do what they must and must do what they can to leave their signatures upon time with discriminating and decisive timing. Being creatures of time does not make us its hostages or heroes, any more than it makes time a treadmill or a turnpike. Is it a paradox, beyond belief, that the present, which seems so ephemeral, is the only real time? No, for every present moment, no matter how fleeting, constitutes the only viewpoint and standpoint from which decisive action can be taken. Perhaps it is providential that time is not all of one piece and does not last forever, but is singularly plural, presenting us with "now or never" choices and decisions. Not that we are able to hold back time's flow, much less to manipulate its momentum to our advantage; nevertheless time bears on its face an indelible witness to humankind's capacity for producing change as well as suffering change. The question, then, is always whether beings like ourselves can act to make the best out of even the worst of times; and only courageous timing can give the answer.

Choosing

Moving further across the courage-spectrum a brighter band shows up, which is indicated by the word *choosing*. Leon Blum, a French Socialist writer, reflected toward the end of his political career, "I have often thought morality may perhaps consist in the courage of making a choice." This is surely a lead worth following in our survey of the modes or types of courage.

How frequently today one hears talk about options and alternatives! These are the latest terms in what has long been called the problem of free will. They signify possible courses of action lying

open to the chooser, who surveys the field and then selects from it what he or she is going to do. It all seems simple and direct enough. The picture here is that of moral agents choosing freely, taking full charge of the situation, acting decisively and effectively.

These much-used words are not as clear-cut as they sound, however. Their familiarity masks a certain ambiguity. Freedom of choice is not wide open but is limited by the very plurality of the options that may be envisaged. If I choose to be a butcher then I cannot be a baker and candlestickmaker too. If I marry Jane then Julia is excluded. So it comes down to the fact that I am free to choose only because I am forced to choose. I cannot have things both ways, and the actualizing of one option means annulling another option. No real choice exists without rejection, whether of mere postponement or deliberate avoidance.

A further cause of ambiguity in the vocabulary of alternatives and options arises from the fact that my choices are not as completely free as I would like to suppose, as they are partly determined by the kind of person I am, by what an earlier vocabulary called my heredity and my environment. Into every choice I make I carry habits and tendencies that make my choice mine and not another's. If I seem to be acting "out of character" that is probably due to the sense of narrowing restraint imposed upon my freedom. In other words, my freedom is determined by limits that make choosing both possible and necessary. And that is something of a problem, if not a mystery.

Again, free will or choice is qualified because some options are more workable or achievable than others, which is why we draw up "feasibility studies" and "priority charts." What are the chances that my choices may result in actions? So it is the better part of prudence (another ancient virtue lately in eclipse) to sort out the available alternatives according to norms of practical effectiveness, even though there are occasions when prudence ought to yield to courage. But of course practicability is not the only norm for selecting an option, and its exclusive use results in a confusion of ends with means, of the "why" with the "how" of an intended outcome. Cannily sizing up one's chances of success should not be taken as essential to moral endeavor.

Freedom of will or choice is only the emptiest of phrases unless it signifies action that follows decision. In his landmark treatment of this whole subject Jonathan Edwards defined freedom of will as "power to choose and to do what is chosen." The point he made so thoroughly needs to be reemphasized: choosing is always choosing *to do*, to act in some specific way to remedy or improve some concrete situation. Real freedom means power to carry through from intention to action. Indeed, making a choice is itself an action ventured in view of further, future action. It is taken in freedom for the sake of greater freedom. Being free to choose, then, expresses choosing to be free.

Tidying up one's misconceptions of freedom is all very well, and yet falls short of gaining a profoundly positive approach. One step in this direction comes when it is recognized that

"freedom from" is not the same as "freedom for" (a truism, to be sure, but don't neglect the truth that lurks in truisms!). Independence of "outside" control is obviously a necessary part of freedom, but a lesser part. The person just released from prison is legally free, yet it remains to be seen whether this new status can support the burden of a greater, growing freedom. Healthy progress from childhood toward maturity involves removing parental discipline and peer-group pressure to a large extent, although getting rid of such constraining influences has value only as it frees the adult for new relationships and responsibilities that open up a future more productive and creative than the past.

After all, freedom is what freedom does and what it does can hardly be called "conditioning" or "behavior modification." Unlike rats in laboratory mazes, Homo sapiens possesses the power to choose and to do what is chosen. That this power belongs within a long evolutionary inheritance, extending all the way from self-preserving instinct to self-realizing intelligence, goes without saying. Truly human life does not merely repeat but reshapes the wider life process out of which it emerges. And by devising out of these materials what may be termed breakthroughs of becoming, human freedom brings into play the operation of courageous choosing.

In what does the courage of making a choice consist? Traditionally, it has been situated in the human will, thought to occupy a place midway between emotion and reason. These older ways of mapping selfhood viewed willing as neither feeling nor thinking but containing characteristics of both. Will, they asserted, has the energy associated with "passions" or "affections" while displaying also the vision proper to "mental" or "intellectual" comprehension. Recent psychology and philosophy has largely given up this rather hybrid term in favor of more objective language. Yet there are signs that will is coming back, as the sheer human fact of willing -- intending, choosing, purposing -- still has to be accounted for and not explained away. In Gordon Kaufman's words, human nature is fundamentally agential, which may be said more colloquially by observing that persons are characteristically "up to something" rather than being only parrots or puppets controlled by nonhuman processes and structures. Neither chemistry nor genetics, it would seem, can provide the answer to Freud's wryly revealing question: "Why does the ego fall in love?"

The presence of real motives in the human psyche may be well disguised, but they will not go away. And one may choose not to choose, or be unwilling to take the consequences of a choice already made; but this in no way eliminates the phenomenon of will itself, or something quite akin to it. A politician may slough off charges of wrongdoing by admitting only an error of judgment, but his alibi is actually a limp avowal of accountability. Human deeds demand a human measure, even if new words must be found and used for old meanings.

"Planning" is an overworked word that extends the vocabulary of free choice or will in several directions at once. Often it carries a rather grandiose sense, especially when linked with "development." Large-scale projects involving huge changes made by powerful groups are

called to mind. Here, however, let it mean any effort made to bridge the gap between a chosen outcome and the means of realizing it. Engineers and managers make planning their business, calculating in advance the conditions to be met if an intended result is to be reached. Blueprints and guidelines spell out these conditions for those at work on the project. Planning has a tendency of its own to become so technical and operational that its moral complications are easily forgotten. But that should not lead anyone to believe that such considerations are to be dispensed with, any more than one must blindly accept the current dogma that "bigger is better." Corporate enterprises are in fact as vulnerable to moral failure as the lonely choices made by private persons; there are risks (which planning tries to reduce) involved in all choosing. These risks engage the planners in a venture of mutual trust and common purpose. Technology has not yet rendered obsolete the claims of moral responsibility, nor is it likely to do so.

In a tantalizingly brief essay Karl Rahner writes that an engineer who knows in advance that his bridge will hold may have no need of courage, but the workers who execute his plan will need courage in order to span the distance from calculated success to its actual accomplishment, so long as the outcome remains uncertain. Such courage, Rahner observes, is more obviously technical and instrumental than it is radical or total, since in the latter case it would approach the character of all-out faith. Yet without such courage there would be no bridge at all.[2]

Courageous choosing is by no means a merely private act, and it does not become unfree simply by being compounded with other wills in planned, cooperative endeavor. No human self can be free of itself or by itself. Freedom is only sham and bogus if it is exercised in isolation from one’s fellows. The meshing of individual wills in common action yields perhaps the surest, most complete meaning of freedom. Which is to say, of course, that courage too is emphatically *a social virtue*, precisely because it centers in the will of persons who choose to act and be acted upon in the company of other persons, with all the precious yet risky possibilities that their choices help to bring about.

Learning

Let no one suppose that courage is the prerogative of busy, project-pushing types; it also finds ways of expressing itself in what activists refer to as the "ivory tower" of intellectual pursuits. Therefore a word or two about the intellectual forms of courage may be in order.

The widely accepted notion that intellectuals are indecisive, eccentric people who steer clear of responsible engagement with harsh reality will not stand. The stereotype is proved false by the fact that science has its martyrs no less than religion. How often in the past and present have novel inventions or discoveries been resented and resisted by heavy investors in the status quo! Serious seekers after truth in any field are likely to be suspected, if not silenced, by multitudes of their contemporaries. The Spinozas and Madame Curies of the modern world are but conspicuous examples of a whole intellectual martyrology. Rather than list names, however, let us take intelligence as we find it in familiar kinds of *learning*.

It is probably unfortunate that most recent research into the nature of intelligence has been school-oriented. Henry Adams spoke for many others when he declared bluntly that going to school had practically nothing to do with his own education. For all that, learning has been known to happen sometimes in libraries and classrooms under the guidance of teachers appointed for this purpose. If the paraphernalia of courses, assignments, and tests cannot guarantee this result, any more than giving grades and degrees, they have yet not been totally ineffective or irrelevant. Learning flourishes, to be sure, on spurts of curiosity, shifts of attention, moments when bare facts take on the luster of felt value for the learner. So, as John F. Kennedy said, to Thomas Jefferson knowledge was fuel to light the fires of his mind, not wood to be piled neatly in the woodbox.

Learning, if and when it does occur, is mind-kindling and ardent. It may even become lifelong, offering a continuous invitation to surprise. As information is stretched and strengthened by imagination, seasoned by the disciplines of patient study and open-minded inquiry, authentic learning happens. Actually, a learner is engaged in unlearning and relearning, as fresh clues are given and methods are refined; old explanations cease to satisfy and must be discarded or revised. The wonder is that learning should be kindled by the sort of education that may seem designed to stifle it at birth.

Courageous learning is Abraham Lincoln saying, "I shall study and get ready and someday my time will come." Reading Shakespeare and Blackstone had little to do with storekeeping or railsplitting; but the lonely hours of study did more than prepare Lincoln for a hoped-for opportunity; they actually helped to create the shape of his vocational future. "Rather than be idle," a college teacher said once, "I would take up a book and read." Study is to learning what practice is to performance. More than simple preparation for a future goal, it grasps and fashions that goal through an eager patience which is the very gist of intellectual courage.

It may sound paradoxical to say so, but learning promotes in any learner a spirit of inquiry that is both tenacious and tentative. "I don’t know, let’s see" can be taken as its constant motto. The idea that learning is only acquiring and amassing quantities of knowledge must be decisively rejected. Knowledge is really not quantitative, despite our well-intentioned efforts to divide it into "fields" for our exploring or exploiting. Hence it will not do to suppose that learning represents a kind of mastery over inert data by mental attack, as if education were no more than manipulation. Why is it that a beginning student in physics, for example, seems more sure of what he or she claims to know than the professor? It is because the professor has become far more aware of a greater range of problems to be solved as well as the possible sources of error in solving them.

The Middle Ages called this built-in tentativeness of intellectual inquiry a *docta ignorantia* or "learned ignorance," as when it was affirmed that "ignorance learned the hard way leads best to God." If in modern fashion we substitute "truth" for "God" this statement still hold good.

Knowing what one does not know is a significant part of knowledge and a strong incentive for knowing more. Being aware that one may be mistaken, and willing to admit it, may indeed be rough on a learner's pride, yet without such a tentative attitude all actual progress in learning and knowing becomes impossible.

As learning is a growing word, it signifies more than the acquisition of knowledge and leans toward wisdom. Cerebral changes can be monitored and charted with a fair degree of accuracy, but growth from limited parochial perspectives toward more humane and universal ones is less amenable to measurement. Such growth may prove painful, even traumatic, since it threatens earlier securities and certainties so-called. To sustain the shock of moving out of provincial into truly objective ways of thinking is bound to require courage. Intellectual courage may be less conspicuous than physical courage, and yet its demands and rewards may be greater, too. As knowing becomes nurtured and confirmed in being, as intelligence matures in understanding, the virtue of wisdom comes positively into play.

A life devoted to learning is far more strenuous than its detractors would have us believe. The learner must match his or her strength against ignorant inertia or willful error, whether they are lodged in the learner's own self or in powerful institutions. In a society that is chiefly acquisitive and managerial, real learners must be something of an embattled minority. A serious searcher after truth will experience intellectual struggle and hardship, as John Donne in his "Third Satire" wrote:

> On a huge hill, cragged and steep,
> Truth stands, and he that would win her
> About must and about must go,
> And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so . ..

Daring

Most folk, when asked offhand to give a prime example of courage, would probably cite cases of *daring*. Climbing Annapurna Mountain in Nepal, capturing an enemy battery single-handed, blazing a new trail through unmapped wilderness, innoculating oneself with an untested serum -- exploits like these do give striking evidence of courage. They usually involve great personal risk and demonstrate beyond all doubt the boldness and originality of which humans are capable.

Why is it, then, that traditional ethics should have given such short shrift to daring as a form of courage? One likely reason is that daring exploits have a reckless, audacious quality that upsets the balance every virtue tries to maintain, throwing caution to the winds and forsaking the standards of prudence and patience. So Thomas Aquinas insisted that "fiery daring" is neither sin nor virtue but is actually an excess of courage -- courage out of bounds, gone wild, off-center, and beyond control. The same ground rules led Plato and Aristotle to exclude daring from the spectrum of courage. How else could ethical tradition deal with a case like Charles

Péguy, the French poet, charging alone across no man's land in his brilliant Zouave uniform to certain death at German hands during the First World War?

Most of us, however, would prefer to see in Péguy's act an authentic if extreme evidence of human courage. For is there not in all truly courageous conduct, even in mere coping, an unmistakable boldness and spontaneity? Courage always exhibits daring in some sense or other. An occasional burst of unexpected bravado can always be expected where humans are concerned. Psychologists have a term for this: "inappropriate affect. " Laughing on the outside while crying on the inside is a good example. Unprecedented challenges call forth responses equally unprecedented. Daring is indeed a spur-of-the-moment kind of courage, impromptu and perhaps capricious, which seers and sages are not likely to recommend. Napoleon in exile, recalling his military experience, said that he had found courage a very rare commodity at two o'clock in the morning; he called it "improvised courage."

Although there is a hint of daring in almost every sort of courage, it should be clear that courage goes well beyond sheer daring. Daredevils can always draw crowds and enjoy short-lived popularity, whether they scale skyscraper walls or race cars around a speedway; but their feats are not to be confused with the courage of a politician who confesses publicly his wrongdoing or a labor leader who is sent to jail for protesting injustice to fellow workers. Then too, not all daring acts are truly courageous, even if they do share something of the true tone of all courage. Playing with fire or tilting at windmills may be only foolish and best forgotten. A failed rescue mission, for instance, is just that and no more, despite the commander-in-chief's face-saving estimate of it as, of all things, "an incomplete success." Probably Aquinas was on the right track after all when he asserted that daring is not the essence of courage and should neither be condemned nor praised for itself alone.

Still, courage without a modicum of daring would be a poor, pedestrian thing indeed. All thoughtful interpretations recognize this. Bravery at two o'clock in the morning, or at two o'clock in the afternoon, holds in tension the contrasting traits of enduring and attacking courage. Courage to attack is brief, inspired by future danger and a strong hope that it may be overcome. Courage to endure is long-term, where danger is present and seems stronger than one's own ability to meet it. Yet these forms of courage also have much in common with each other. Does not endurance, standing fast or holding ground, have a real gallantry, an *élan* of its own? Audacity and integrity, spontaneity and stubbornness, belong together in any inventory of the types and styles of human courage.

Courage, then, ranges as widely and deeply as our humanness itself. No condition or contingency can be imagined where it is inadmissible. This may be what Pascal had in mind when he wrote that "our very miseries prove our greatness." Only in weakness can we be made strong. Frail and vulnerable as we all are, courage must be the name of the game that consists in being and becoming human. From coping to daring, and all the way between, our life is dignified and fortified by the new face courage puts on everything.

NOTES

1. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., n. d.), 59.

2. Karl Rahner, S.J., *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit,* Crossroad Books (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 15 16.

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Graceful Courage: A Venture in Christian Humanism by Roger Hazelton

Chapter 5: From Fear to Faith

In the harsh face of life, faith can read a bracing gospel. -- Robert Louis Stevenson, "Pulvis et Umbra"

Any spectrum of the types of courage will show something of its many-hued character. Now a further feature claims our attention, however, to which no series of still pictures can do justice. A different, more dynamic guiding image is needed -- that of progress or advance through a forbidding terrain. Normally, courage grows by being called forth, in situations of challenge-and-response, to borrow Arnold Toynbee's phrase. And ideally, at any rate, this deepening of one's capacity for courage should release potentialities formerly untapped. One such line of advance worth mentioning is that from fear to faith.

Courage and Fearing

Most people, if asked, would probably say that courage can be defined as fearlessness. Isn't it obvious that cowardice or timidity are telltale signs of fear, while courageous persons are neither frightened nor fainthearted? Why not then simply identify fearlessness with courage?

But this conventional wisdom does not stand up when it is examined carefully. Psychologists know better, and say so.[1] A cartoon strip of "Fearless Fosdick," or a John Wayne movie extolling "true grit" may be diverting enough, but do not expect much insight into real-life courage from them. In folktales and fables the lion often stands for human courage, so that a cowardly lion in *The Wizard of Oz* strikes us as an amusing anomaly. Yet a beast without a heart, where courage is concerned, is no match at all for those wounded lions on Assyrian bas-reliefs, or the mythical beasts of Kipling or C.S. Lewis The latter's Aslan, in fact, is a very special sort of lion, fiercely gentle, capable of fear and wisdom alike, as befits a figure for courageous humanity.

Only mythical demigods and the "tough guys" and "supermen" of popular song or story are

fearless. Real people make no such claim, at least about themselves, for they know better. The fact is that courage arises on the occasion of fear, as an advance action taken in spite of fear, with a view to overcoming fear. So without the presence of some fear there is evidently no courage, although courage always seeks to banish fear. One might describe fear as the shadow-side of courage, furtive and insidious, yet serving as the necessary spur to courage.

Thus an understanding of courage means also to understand the place and force of fear experiences in distinctly human life, and many analyses of fear have been made, especially in our century. Studies of fear made in this period have generally tended to be of two kinds. On the one hand, they have been chiefly clinical and psychological, reducing the phenomenon of fear to its behavioral or emotive elements according to some given school or theory. Or, on the other, they have been carried on under the aegis of "existential" philosophy, treating fear's ramifications and reverberations in the human psyche as clues to some more inclusive reality such as selfhood or the paradoxes of being and nonbeing. In either case fear is regarded as a problem to be solved, whether in the form of sickness to be cured or of an "encounter with nothingness" awaiting philosophical solution.

What is curiously missing from these analyses and explanations, however, is quite frankly the humanly recognizable experience of being afraid of something or someone. This has been studied more intently by the creative art of storytellers and image-makers than by those who look for radical causes and profounder meanings. Novelists or composers are able to transcribe the feeling of fear without abandoning a human measure in favor of abstractions that presume to furnish answers when the real question has not even been heard.

Fearing is probably best described as an affective attitude that is assumed toward impending peril or hazard, usually accompanied by organic changes like the tensing-up of muscles and a quickened rate of breathing, perhaps also by optical dilation and cerebral agitation. Feelings of fear are prospective, stopping the normal flow of vital functions in shocked hesitation before an approaching danger. And they are imaginative, in the sense that they preview or "body forth" what has not yet come to pass, but as if it were a present fact. Since it is a common experience of what is uncommon, therefore shocking, fearing is bound to express itself in bizarre or grotesque images, arresting tones and colors, which recur frequently in every language and culture of the world.

Fear "causes us to tremble," as the black spiritual has it, just because fear brackets what is real with what is unreal in a single experience. That is why no one symbol or category can suffice for interpreting it. There are no "pure states" of fear, which places it beyond the reach of logical argument or controlled clinical analysis. Especially when measured by the counterpoint of courage, fear has an arresting multiplicity of faces. For a proper analogy for representing courage before fear, one naturally thinks of music. Only a dynamic patterning of sounds, progressing through strident opposition toward harmonic resolution, perhaps even reassurance, can rightly grasp the hard-won victory of courage over fear. A distinctly contrapuntal

movement, resolving at the end a minor into a major key, winding and winning its way through confrontation toward completeness -- such would appear to be the kind of clue to follow.

Facing Anxiety

When the United States was going through what has come to be known as the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt told his fellow citizens, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." His words had a tonic effect at the time, sounding a call to courage when inducements to discouragement had reached epidemic proportions. If the rhetorical strength of the President's words has abated since then, their measure of humane truth still may be assessed.

For one thing, it is always interesting to watch a noun being made into a verb, as sentence structure shifts to take into account the significant change from being acted upon to acting. Did Roosevelt intend to say that it is fear that casts out fear? That would be nonsense apart from the transition from passive to active carried by the same word.

And the President's statement has an even more important resonance. There are things we ought to be afraid of, and fear is one of them. Or is it? Long before, Aristotle had spelled out other useful, healthy kinds of fear: fear of losing a good reputation, fear of harm to one's family or friends. Yet "fear itself" is scarcely an item on a list of things to be feared. It gives no information as to what should actually be feared. What, then? The only way to make sense out of the sentence is to see that one word, verb and noun, has two quite different meanings. The verb means fear in the sense of avoiding, while the noun means fear in the sense of panic or general apprehensiveness -- that which is to be avoided. An apparent selfcontradiction gives the sentence its memorable, compelling tone, and yet it is courage rather than fear that the speaker is actually recommending to his hearers.

For all that, the seeming paradox in Roosevelt's challenge will not go away. Overcoming fear with fear may be compared to "fighting fire with fire'' -- a metaphor that has decidedly literal import to a forest ranger working to contain a conflagration threatening acres of woodland. So too the arousal of fear may be a danger signal that should not be neglected or shrugged off. Moreover, it may act as a strong deterrent against rash or panicky behavior, rushing in where angels fear to tread. Probably it should not surprise us that courage itself sometimes wears a mask of fear, the better to contend with it on its own terms, so to speak.

Fear is a strange enemy indeed, as it is seldom if ever vanquished outright by sheer will power any more than by logical explanations. There is no arguing with a nightmare, no reasoning with a convulsion. And yet women and men have made repeated efforts to comprehend the spasms of fear that grip us all from time to time. Primitive humanity soon discovered that fear feelings are provoked by particular situations and objects. Their causes can be singled out for blame and targeted for removal; and when the snake slithers off or the storm passes over, the fear departs

too. If that were the whole truth about fear it could be kept within practical, rational bounds. But as a matter of fact, fear remains a permanent possibility of feeling, set off by one stimulus or another. This being so, experiences of fear, far from being self-contained, open up a "window of vulnerability" that looks out upon the exposed, fragile nature of our existence in the world. Occasional shocks or spasms of fear are not enough to explain a liability to dismay or dread that seems more constitutional than incidental. What kind of life-world is it where brushes with danger, agitating and unsettling, can occur? And why should fearfulness be so visibly a part of humanness itself?

Hence it is not astonishing that feelings of fear should be accompanied by symbols of insecurity and inadequacy that dramatize and mythologize the universe. We tell each other stories of hostile demons and guardian angels, and entertain ideas of an underworld and overworld impinging upon this world. Whether by projecting our fears or by compensating for them, we seek their cause and cure in powers that are not of this world.

When Lucretius wrote, "Fear made the gods," he meant to assert that this inveterate habit of humankind is without real foundation, as the gods are but creatures of fearful imagination. Reality is material and atomic; the better part of wisdom is to accept this world as sheer fact with no religious implications. Yet when the Hebrew psalmist claimed that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" his words placed a very different stress on human weakness before alarming eventualities. Is fear a source of insight or only a symptom of ignorance?

It may be helpful to distinguish various forms of fear. Fear has an entire spectrum of its own, ranging from Kierkegaard’s "nameless dread" through worry and care to the holy awe of which the psalmist spoke. One such distinction is that made by clinical psychologists and therapists today, who regard fear as an emotion aroused by specific objects or events, while anxiety is the term used to describe "free-floating" or "indeterminate" feelings without apparent cause. Here it seems simpler to continue using "fear" as including "anxiety," but to recognize the depth dimension that the latter term denotes. At this point we turn for assistance to modern existentialist philosophies that have described a more radical and general uneasiness about the why and wherefore of human existing itself: Sartre’s "nausea," Heidegger’s "anxious care," not to mention the variations upon these themes found in all the arts of our time. This root misgiving is popularly called an "encounter with nothingness." It is conveyed by images of shrinking, slipping, dangling, aimless wandering, evoking feelings of dizziness, queasiness, vertigo. Such descriptions are repeatedly corroborated by testimony of patients in mental hospitals, as by the notebooks of medical and psychiatric counselors.

Now when looked at from the vantage point of courage, the "nothingness" that fuels anxiety is neither a metaphysical vanishing point nor a symptom of incipient psychosis. Rather, it is an absentee partner lurking in every threat to human well-being, trivial or momentous. In other words, to be or not to be is *always* the question. When Gabriel Marcel compares the world with a watch that does not tick or a heart that has stopped beating in his play *The Broken World,*

what is evoked by these symbols may be merely petty worries or acute depression. Encounters with nothingness are by no means as rare, or as lurid, as they are sometimes pictured. They are as painfully familiar to most persons as the experience of staring at absolute zero may be for a few. Their signals are boredom or distraction as well as violent or suicidal tendencies. Such signals may be typically transient rather than chronic, yet they represent what can only be called the presence of an absence, an aching void not unlike "vanity" as it is documented in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Part of the work of courage in facing anxious fear consists in distinguishing what is really dreadful from what is fanciful or uncalled-for. People who dwell in private hells of their own making are seldom helped by criticism from their peers. There are better ways of identifying and cordoning off anxiety than mockery or ridicule, which often only make matters worse for the sufferer. Although the sharing of similar feelings by friends may greatly help, confrontation with anxiety is lonely work which is finally one’s own.

It was an axiom of ancient science that nature abhors a vacuum. The same holds true of human nature. Those "passive diminishments" of which Teilhard de Chardin writes can harass and even halt the progress of any human life toward meaningful integrity. But courage alone is able to meet the enemy on its own ground, adapting modest strategies to the task of winning humble victories. Bearding the lion in his den or twisting the tiger’s tail looks brave enough at a circus; however, it is a waste of precious strength to presume to attack that which must he endured. As always, the true toughness of the human spirit lies in its amazing plasticity. Choosing to be over not-being is the normal response of average people. This bedrock courage to be, so memorably yet abstractly described by Paul Tillich, show its mettle in guerrilla tactics waged in what medieval mystics called "the dark night of the soul." In this irregular, unprogrammed warfare, humor is perhaps the best freedom fighter of all. Sly innuendoes and knowing smiles deflect the full onslaught of anxious fear by keeping it at arm’s and soul’s length, just as stories about monstrous nonexistent creatures absorb the shock of anxiety precisely by expressing it. Instead of taking drugs for my depression, it may be time for courage to send in the clowns. Their stock in trade is ambiguity, quick-changing irony, a refusal to take grimness grimly.

Isn’t this what Roosevelt meant, or should have meant, by saying that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself? A proper respect for anxious fear, coupled with stout refusal to let fear become a general apprehensiveness dominating one’s life, may well be among the best gifts and strengths of courage.

The Heart of Courage

In the vocabulary of courage, the heart has a conspicuous place. To a friend undergoing some ordeal or other one may say, "Take heart" or "Don’t lose heart." When my own courage is in short supply I may confess, " I haven’t got the heart." How does it happen that a hollow muscular organ beneath the breastbone which maintains blood circulation should come to stand

for courage? Like any other metaphor this one sets up a tension between fact and meaning, as things unlike are likened to each other. That is the source of much of language's energy and richness. Yet in taking off from a literal object, metaphor does not abandon the object altogether but invests it with new vigor and tenor. Thus it is as true to say that courage means the heart as that the heart means courage. A prominent surgeon, fresh from a poetry reading, recently remarked that the heart seems to be "a remarkably distended organ." In the index of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* six columns of references are listed for "heart," touching upon such various realms of experience as romantic attachment, moral duty, or religious devotion. A remarkably distended organ, indeed!

Let this serve as an added reminder that courage is physical or it is nothing. Socrates drinking the hemlock is indubitably a moral act but also a bodily event; and it is one only because it is also the other. The body is not a mere thing which I wear or have; I am my body, and all my relations with the world are bodily relations. "Everything is symbolic," writes Norman 0. Brown, "including the human body."[2] And Brown's statement cuts both ways. Since all my experience is anchored in and mediated by my body, I never step out of body into something else called mind or soul; while at the same time and for the same reason, my body is not a mere self-evident fact but an entire arsenal of feelings and meanings, as gesture and posture, speech and thought, make constantly clear. So, when we use the old words "flesh" and "spirit," for example, in each case the wholeness of our humanhood is being referred to; and the heart stands as a significant reminder of that same unity.

This being so, it is not surprising that the heart, signifying the centered wholeness of human being, should have come to stand for many things besides courage. It may be prey to fear, as the biblical prophet Jeremiah confessed that his heart beat wildly or was broken, and accused his fellow countryfolk of acting with desperately corrupt hearts. Or it may be seen as the very organ of loving, hoping faith, as in Paul's repeated admonition, "Do not lose heart!" There are brittle, stubborn hearts and sensitive, caring hearts, open to both good and evil influences, depending on whose hearts they are. But whether fickle or firm, the human heart is what makes human beings human, what makes us "tick"; and so it is a telling symbol of that potential courage of which life is always capable.

Yet how difficult it is to understand the real motives and impulses that govern human hearts! Passage from anxious fear to confident faith is hampered by the fact that we become strangers to our own hearts, which grow more and more adept at keeping their secrets, so concealing us from ourselves. Out of touch with what I really live for and care most about, I lose contact with my capacity for courage, as Hilaire Belloc's poem "The False Heart" suggests:

> I said to Heart, "How goes it?" Heart replied,
> "Right as a Ribstone Pippin!" But it lied.[3]

To carry on a dialogue with one's heart, attentive to its pulsing beat beneath the surface noises

that would drown it out, is to know oneself more and more fully. The prayer "Create in me a clean heart" is a plea for self-understanding in the form of courageous self-acceptance, neither overestimating nor underestimating one's own inherent strength.

As the heart has its reasons which reason does not know and may not even guess correctly, it can trick us into thinking more highly, or less highly, of ourselves than we ought to think. Yet it is a fair question whether such misjudgments are to be laid simply at the door of a foolish or a fibrillating heart. Inaccurate readings and irregular rhythms are hazards that arise in life itself, organic to both self and world, but they are not fixed or incorrigible. Rather than blaming the heart, as prophets and preachers are wont to do, the wiser course would be to view the heart as the locus of human ambivalence whose soundness as a vital organ depends upon what its deepest attractions and aversions are. Out of the heart are the issues of life, for as a person thinks in his or her heart, so that person is.

Here is a human truth at once sobering and bracing. The heart maintains a leverage of its own in shaping the outcomes of an ongoing life. As the brain is nourished by blood coming from the heart, so the mind or the soul receives its élan vital from the deeply centered source I call myself. Yet it is not what enters into myself so much as what comes from myself that reveals who I am and shall become. I am never all there is of me and it does not yet appear what I shall be.

Knowing who one is in one's "heart" means striking the balance between fearing the worst and believing the best. That such a balance is hard to sustain cannot be denied. Expressing it in words is even harder, though folk wisdom always manages to find ways, as in the upcountry proverb, "Us Maine women make good wives; we've always seen worse." It has little to do with teetering from pessimism to optimism, as these are but temperamental habit patterns with no real staying power. (Gabriel Marcel has said that an optimist is essentially a maker of speeches, while a pessimist is a writer of books.) Nor is this balancing act of the heart to be defined as swinging from a realistic to an idealistic attitude; for it can only be termed a realistic idealism, fully aware of the heart's potential for appalling failure and amazing achievements.

Being human is as much mind-set as metabolism, goal orientation no less than genetic inheritance. The heart's balance, upset by fear, needs to be repaired by faith -- faith in my power to change and be changed, no matter what may happen, whatever pressures may be put upon me. Leaving aside for the moment the question of a favoring, enabling God, let us at least acknowledge that the self must discover in itself resources of life-changing vigor and worth. Tilting the balance toward "what man can make of man" and away from the fearfulness that religious traditions call "sin" is a task that only courage can perform.

It is entirely natural, then, that a sound, healthy heart should symbolize what courage means and does. For the heart is where the action is, where what matters most for human weal or woe is happening. Poets, it appears, understand this: "Batter my heart, three-person'd God" (John

Donne); "My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here" (Robert Burns); "The world stands out on either side / No wider than the heart is wide" (Edna St. Vincent Millay). Courage in this perspective is the measured soundness of the heart, based on a will to live, beating in time with those profounder rhythms that keep life moving toward its own fulfillment. If the maladies that plague the heart are chiefly due to fear, must we not say that the heart's rightness and ardor are best seen as the gifts of faith?

Courageous Faith

Before answering this question, it is well to ask another: What faith, whose faith is intended? People have faith in many things from the ridiculous to the sublime; and one person's faith may be another's poison. Must we conclude, then, that faith is only a private matter? Hardly, since large numbers of people share a common allegiance and embody it in rituals and institutions of worldwide importance. Cults and crusades inspired by faith punctuate the course of history. The religious sphere alone contains many gods and many lords, each demanding and receiving worship from their devotees. Civil society, too, has its measure of faith, with its patriotic pieties and heroic sagas reinforcing the sense of community through times of peace or war.

George Santayana, the Harvard philosopher, went so far as to suggest that "animal faith" is a general feature of all human existence, tied closely to the will to live which implies confidence in the natural processes that support life. However inarticulate such faith may be, it nonetheless acts as an antidote to basic anxiety and as a spur to life-affirming purposes. Primordial and universal, it extends well beyond the human range. John Dewey has described a common faith, sometimes called humanism, showing again that faith is natural to humankind.

Faith in its broadest sense is ubiquitous just because it is indispensable to any human effort or endeavor. Whatever its immediate object and attending circumstances may be, it is marked by a sense of worth in life itself enhanced by wonder at life's possibilities and constancies. As Tony Stoneburner has written, faith is "a viewpoint available to a standpoint" which is adopted "as orientation and energy for being human."[4] Neither an additive nor an ingredient, by no means a panacea or prescription made up to solve momentary problems, such faith goes deeper and lasts longer than any sort of fear.

Some, like Lucretius, would have us believe that faith in the generic sense is only fear magnified, but this is disproved by the very disposition of confident assurance that always indicates the presence of faith. "The soul can think of no devotion / greater than being shore to ocean" (Robert Frost). Any faith viewpoint is shaped by feelings, by what has been termed "passionate subjectivity," which may indeed be attached to unworthy, even evil objects. Not every star to which we hitch our wagons deserves the worship it evokes. Nevertheless, faith cannot be explained as a mere symptom of fear. Negative aversion and shuddering do not produce positive commitment and communion.

Faith is natural to humankind; we are predisposed to accept what favors life and growth as normal while regarding malign influences as abnormal. We hold fast to that which matters most to us, clinging stubbornly to it despite strong evidence to the contrary. Faithfulness, not fearfulness, is where the orientation and energy for being human comes from; it is a sign of health, organic to the interplay between self and world. Being in love, belonging to a family or some larger community, giving oneself in loyalty to a transcendent cause, are in this sense all matters of faith.

The point needs to be stressed, since several generations have been told that the emotional texture of faith is a mixed picture of attraction and repulsion -- *mana* and *tabu*, evoked by the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, in Rudolf Otto's formula. Without denying that there is real ambivalence in all experiences of valuing highly, as much in sheer delight as in sublime awe, there can be no doubt as to where the primary accent is to be placed. It is upon the excellence and worth of the experience itself, not upon its mind-boggling effects. Faithfulness does not erase all distance between myself and the worthful Other, but its keynote is a strong sense of attachment and assurance in the Other's presence.

Now perhaps we may venture a formula of our own: Faith is an experience of trusting belief or believing trust. Any act of trust involves the belief that what is trusted is indeed trustworthy; and any act of believing must express a basic trust or confidence in what is believed in, come what may. One without the other would not be itself. Therefore faith is not to be discounted as merely emotional, just as it cannot be said to consist in arguments or propositions at the purely rational level. It is as absurd to speak of unbelieving trust as of trusting unbelief.

But it is not in any way absurd to recognize in human faithfulness a significant unity of emotional depth with mental grasp, joining the poles of intimacy and ultimacy in one experience. A marriage vow, an oath of allegiance, or a churchly creed all manifest this remarkable quality, which has about it something of a venturing or wagering beyond rules of safety and certainty. The orientation and energy for being human have their source in such faith, in confidence approaching conviction, in assurance on the way to affirmation.

Of course, one's belief may be mistaken just as one's trust may be misplaced. The world is littered with the wreckage of discarded faiths, and with the chagrin and disillusionment they left behind them. People do grow up and out of childish attachments, provincial loyalties, demeaning relationships. Such growth, however, is seldom programmed in advance and never automatic. Most often it occurs by "the expulsive power of a new affection" more trusting, because more trustworthy, than the old. The cure for bad faith is always better faith. And that means steering clear of both blind trust and empty belief, while a more reliable, credible faith is being formed.

Progress in faith is difficult to measure. Generally, though, it is in the direction of clearer and greater conviction, and away from the perils of fanaticism and fundamentalism. "My country,

right or wrong" indicates an arrested faith. So does this prayer of an elderly, prosperous farmer:

> Bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife;
> Us four and no more. Amen.

Today, with so many faith groups making claims on behalf of their chosen objectives, it is easy to dismiss all or some of these claims as so much propaganda. But in fact they are truth-claims that state not simply what is believed but what ought to be believed. Not every truth-claim stands up under testing, but it invites such testing as soon as it is made and by virtue of being made. In a pluralistic society it is harder than ever before to protect convictions from hostile criticism. Merely reasserting them with added emphasis does not guarantee their truth. Indeed, fervent reiteration usually works in the opposite direction; it protests too much as if the "true believer" had some doubt to hide. But how can a believer be expected to sit loosely in the saddle of his or her beliefs?

As believing is bound so closely to trusting in the vital issues of our life, it is admittedly difficult to keep one's beliefs under constant review. That would seem to partake more of fear than faith -- the fear of being mistaken and misled -- rather like the child who kept pulling up the carrots in the garden to see how they were coming along. But we are not talking about making skepticism a habit, nor recommending a chronic case of intellectual jitters as the road to truth. All that is meant is that belief ought not to be confused with knowledge, nor subjective certitude with objective certainty. Reading the prophecies of Second Isaiah as if they were predictions with a dateline, or the Genesis account of the creation as if it were a scientific theory, ignores this most necessary distinction. If I believe I should not presume to know, and if I know I do not need to believe. For believing has its proper place in the broad zone lying between guesswork and known truth. I believe in order to know, and so I do not grow in either knowledge or wisdom by denying as false what I do not yet see to be true. I must act on my beliefs as if they were true or I shall never know whether they are true or not. Still, I do all my believing in what Pascal called an uncertain certitude, not altogether unlike what the apostle Paul described as the "foolish wisdom" of the Christian gospel.

Genuine faith, then, is in constant motion toward its own amendment and enlargement. Thus it is as far from sheer intransigence in believing as it is from that wide-open, anything-goes hunger for absolutes that characterizes personal and public life at present. In short, it possesses the same resilient steadfastness that all courage embodies. As trusting belief or believing trust, faith valiantly accepts change as the law of life, while seeking durable truth as the guide of life.

"Test all things, hold fast to what is good" is still the best rule to follow where humane truth is at issue. The search of faith for truth is never at an end but is always beginning all over again. Passing from fearful mistrust to confident conviction may indeed prove to be a rough journey marked by storms and setbacks, as many stouthearted believers know. It is no small matter to have found one's way *per aspera ad astra*, through difficulties to the stars, for the way itself is

pioneered by courage. Surely Robert Louis Stevenson's observation is much to the point:

> As courage and intelligence are the two qualities best worth a good man's cultivation, so it is the first part of intelligence to recognize our precarious estate in life, and the first part of courage to be not at all abashed before the fact.[5]

Christian Authenticity

The fact that faith can be described in general terms does not mean that it exists in any universal, standard form. On the contrary, faith is always somebody's faith, with specific traits and giveaway expressions of its own. This is most true, naturally, of faith in the religious mode where total trust and right belief are expected, and in many ways enforced. Parson Thwackum in Fielding's *Tom Jones* said it bluntly enough: "When I say religion, I mean the Christian religion; and when I say the Christian religion, I mean the Protestant religion; and when I say the Protestant religion, I mean the Church of England."

Yet consider, as sympathetically as possible, the situation of someone who is asked, "What is your faith ?" Definitions like this call for no checklist of sentiments or opinions distinguishing any Christian, for example, from any Jew, Hindu, or Muslim; that would be an exercise in unreality. Rather, the question can be answered only by an avowal of where the would-be definer stands religiously. But since when is a confession to be taken as a definition? The reader may have suspected all along, and rightly, that when faith is mentioned it is some kind of Christian faith that is implied, so that the time has come for acknowledging the fact.

"We are Christians; we belong to Christ." That is how St. Augustine answered our question, and surely his words come close to the heart of the matter. A Christian is a person who consents with other persons to be placed under the influence of Christ, remembered and known still in the institution bearing his name. "Belonging" is not too strong a word to describe such an attachment, if it serves to make clear that it is we who belong to Christ, not Christ who belongs to us. What makes Christians indeed Christian is the covenanted devotion that defines one's being as a belonging, rather than a set of true beliefs or standards of church membership. While this may discourage statisticians or sociologists it is the stuff of which real faithfulness is always made.

There is nothing especially Christian about wanting to be distinguished from non-Christians; that, as Kierkegaard might have said, is the least of the disciple's concerns. Authenticity, not mere identity, must be the test in these matters. Still, if only a non-Christian can ask the question What is a Christian? Only a devotee of Christ is able to answer it. Actually I need the other's question to give body to my answer. I grow in my allegiance by being required to give an accounting of my faith to those who claim not to share it.

Also, it is useful to recall that "Christian" was originally an outsider's designation, a

disparaging term, which those inside the new-found faith were quick to accept as their own. In the New Testament other names such as "the saints" are preferred for indicating those who have "accepted Christ." Was this perhaps because the earliest Christians were less sure of their faith than we are today? That is by no means likely; but they may have better understood that a Christian is never simply what one is, but always what one desires and decides to become. Praying may well be more germane to this becoming than believing, and yet it is belief that keeps prayer honest no less than sincere. "Every man must do his own believing," declared Martin Luther, "just as every man must do his own dying."

Here again the note of courage is distinctly sounded. Christian faithfulness does not supplant the need for courage but intensifies that need. Trusting and believing in Jesus of Nazareth as pioneer and perfecter of my faith in the final goodness of existence means to sustain a kind of double vision in myself: a more-than-appears view of my life which is also an in-spite-of view, as it must contradict fear-producing and anxiety-justifying evidence. In order to keep such double vision from lapsing into double talk one needs more than a modicum of self-critical rigor and integrity. And if my loyalty to Jesus as the Christ of God is not to be a sometime thing, I shall do well not to stand mute but to be articulate and active in declaring the ground and goal of my allegiance.

Set speeches and fixed postures are poor indicators of faithful courage, more suited to commercial "messages" than to honest dialogue in an evangelical spirit. The sheer wonder of Christmas and Easter, shared gladly and surely, gives to Christian witness an air of generous, buoyant eagerness which translates poorly into the language of creed and dogma. I who consent to be known as a Christian can nevertheless testify to the joy of my desiring, pinpointed in historic fact and yet universally human, trusted and believed in as the very wisdom and power of God.

Are there, perhaps, "anonymous Christians," as Karl Rahner has suggested? The idea is attractive to those who find loyalty tests divisive. There appears to be good New Testament warrant for it when Jesus speaks of having other sheep not of this fold whom he knows and who know him. The possibility is strengthened by a vibrant reading of the doctrine of the incarnation, which does not hold that Jesus is God but rather that God was and is in Jesus reconciling the world to God’s own self. A Christ incognito in the least of these our sisters and brothers (Matt. 25:40) can hardly be restricted to the home base of explicit faith in him. That is worth remembering when Christians are asked to give reasons for their faith. Since we believe that God has claimed the whole of worldly life for the love of Christ, a Christian may be best defined as one who wills to make good that claim, neither fencing in its mystery nor ignoring its eventful reality.

Christian faithfulness, therefore, is a veritable school of courage. Its pattern is that found in the person and work of Jesus Christ who, in Augustine’s words, "took our death and killed him, out of the abundance of his own life." The same pattern is repeated in the sacraments of the church.

Baptism, as the rite of initiation, reenacts the gospel of new birth out of old death; and the communion service, under different names, embodies memory and hope in a rite of incorporation with the dying and rising Lord. Far from being a pageant manipulated by supernatural intervention, the Christ-event represents human struggle and stress in overcoming by enduring, winning through to victory over enemies as real as fear and death.

Christians have always believed in Jesus' full and true humanity. Nothing could be further from the faith than a view of his life and work as God playing a human role; that is the rankest of heresies against which the church has repeatedly spoken. He to whom we belong is *vere homo*, who began life under threat of death, worked hard and long at his father's trade, encountered temptation and opposition, spoke out against authority, cast his lot with the oppressed, went steadfastly up to Jerusalem to suffer under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried. His brief life was one long exercise in courage, both fortified and gentled by his faith in the God whom he called Father. And *therefore* -- the word from the Gospel is significant -- God has highly exalted him, as witnessed by his resurrection, making him the way, the truth, and above all the life of those who take his name as their own.

The faith that God speaks and acts uniquely in the man Jesus, then, in no way lessens the force of Christian courage. There are no shortcuts into eternal life. In the world we too have tribulation. It is here, not elsewhere, that we must run the race that is set before us. However, faith not only demands courage but inspires and nourishes it. Belonging to Christ, we trust in God's goodness to bring strength out of weakness, victory through defeat. It has happened before and it can happen again to those whose life is hid with Christ in God.

Notes

1. See for example David T. Lykken, "Fearlessness, Its Carefree Charm and Deadly Risks," *Psychology Today* (September 1982) 20-28.

2. In his book *Love's Body* (New York: Vintage Books,1966),225.

3. A ribstone pippin is a variety of English apple.

4. Tony Stoneburner, "Triad From Great Britain," in *The Poetics of Faith,* ed. Beardslee (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1978), 116.

5. From his essay "Aes Triplex."

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Graceful Courage: A Venture in Christian Humanism by Roger Hazelton

Chapter 6: Beyond Humility and Obedience?

What is sanctity in a creature, if not to adhere to God with the maximum of his strength? -- Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu

Recovering a Missing Note

Teilhard's question, rhetorical as it is, goes straight to the core of the connection between courage and religious faith. His point seems obvious enough until it is recognized that the Bible generally, and Christianity in particular, gives but short shrift to courage, preferring to regard it as the result of a lively faith in God rather than as the ground and springboard of such faith. For is it not true that faith is an indication of human weakness instead of an innate creaturely strength? If so, may not faith see in courage little more than whistling in the dark, possibly even a form of self-assertion in the presence of trial or trouble which Christians have been taught to call the sin of pride?

It is odd that the books of the Bible, as we have already noted, abound in evidences of courageous conduct while seldom calling them by their right human name. Is it accidental that Abraham's courage in leaving his homeland for an unknown destination should be termed "faith"? Or that Job's "patience" has become proverbial, when the text itself suggests an impertinent courage in daring to argue with God? How is it that Queen Esther's bold confrontation with her husband the king, strong-willed as it is, gets all but lost in God's manipulation of the power conflict between Mordecai and Haman? Daniel in the lion's den is interpreted not as a type of human bravery but as an instance of divine deliverance. The same underplaying of courage can be seen all through biblical narrative and prophecy. It is almost as if courage were always there, conspicuously present, but remained unnoticed or possibly suppressed in the writers' intention to give all the glory to God.

The New Testament is as reticent about courage as the Old. Nevertheless it is implicit on almost every page, taking shape as steadfast endurance, unabashed devotion, bravery in speaking out, bearing up under betrayal, torture, shipwreck, threat of death. Jesus sets his face to go to

Jerusalem; disciples become apostles through the strangely transforming power of the Spirit (one of the most ancient words for courage) as out of weakness men and women are made strong for living a new life in a new community of unquenchable love and hope. All this is made possible, most assuredly, by the presence of what can only be termed faith of an unprecedented and amazing kind. But when Paul recounts his tribulations in preaching the gospel, or the Letter to the Hebrews in chapter 11 recollects those exemplary persons of whom the world was not worthy, is it not courage as well as faith that is being witnessed to and celebrated? Or rather, has not faith in such cases shown itself to be the stuff of which heroic, valiant virtue is made, so that we who follow them "may not grow weary or fainthearted" (Heb. 12:3)?

It may not take much of a man to be a Christian, said a bishop once, but it takes all there is of him. The bishop did not intend to exclude women, of course, but the point to be made here is that faith in God depends on courage quite as much as faith produces courage. God is not rightly praised by human weakness but by the maximum of human strength, expended and expressed at its most honorable, high-spirited levels.

It is tempting to suggest that at least part of the current difficulty in communicating biblical and Christian truth may be due to the fact that courage is so largely a missing note, perhaps a lost accent, in presenting the case for faith in God. Efforts to repair this lack are constantly being made, it is true. More recent translations of Scripture are a case in point. Whereas the King James Version of the Bible used "courage" infrequently (fourteen times in the New Testament), for the good reason that the noun and its adjective occur so seldom in the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, more recent English translations like the Revised Standard Version and the Jerusalem Bible employ these words far more often, in conformity with modern, indeed secular sensibility and taste. Exactly what this vocabulary shift may mean its not at all easy to determine; yet it does seem to support the view that the lost note of courage may at last be finding its voice in biblical interpretation -- a discovery, or rediscovery, that is as welcome as it is overdue.

Still, in the popular teaching and preaching of the churches the idea persists that "all you need is love," or hope, or faith, without so much as a bow in the direction of the necessary grain and grit of courage. One searches in vain through the writings on Christian ethics of theologians like Barth or Küng for explicit treatment of the courageous dimension in all living that deserves to be called Christian. One wonders: Is this because courage is suspected of being a "pagan" virtue long ago transcended, or is it so much taken for granted that it goes without saying when more crucial matters are at stake? Christians living under oppression, and their numbers are legion, know better and think differently. Whatever the reason, the loss to Christian understanding and discipleship is great. No wonder believers and nonbelievers, not to mention unbelievers, should be feeling this unfortunate lack.

Whatever may have been the case in former times when, we are assured, the tide of faith was at the full, our present age is well aware that it takes a deliberate and decisive measure of courage

actually to believe in God. Reiterating old sanctities and orthodoxies, as if faith came already packaged needing only to be reaffirmed, cannot help. Faith is no substitute for downright courage, nor does it automatically generate courage. Becoming a believer in the Christian mode does not afford exemption from the common frailties and liabilities of human existence. Rather, faith itself must learn to live with honest doubt, hard struggle, dulling sorrow as these engage to the utmost the maximum of human, creaturely strength.

Oftentimes, lay people and the general public seem to understand this better than religious professionals do. This can be seen as saints' days become feast days in religious tradition. Persons whose names are on the church calendar because of their singular piety go down in history as folk heroes or heroines instead: Saint George the dragonkiller, Saint Patrick the snake-charmer. Saint Cecilia, though canonized as a virgin martyr, is honored in popular imagination as the patroness of music represented sitting at an organ. There is something almost infinitely touching in the way legend making surrounds the lives of the saints, quite apart from official sanction and intent. It is as if worshipers kept stubbornly insisting that sanctity is humanly achievable, not merely the fallout of divine grace.

Considerations such as these may be put in the form of questions worth exploring further. Is there not a courageous quality in biblical and Christian faith that needs to be made more explicit by its advocates today? What does the traditional reluctance to use courage-language have to tell us about ways of viewing the divine human relationship? Rephrasing Teilhard's query, with an assisting accent from the apostle Paul, is not the prize of faith given to those who run life's race so as to obtain it?

Christian Courage

When the text of courage is read within the context of biblical motifs and Christian concerns, both text and context are affected. While some rather explosive repercussions may be expected, there will be surprising confirmations and agreements as well. Christian thought and practice, indeed, has always had the task of contexting and recontexting this virtue so necessary to the very pursuit of human existence. Thus, for example, Saint Ambrose repeats the viewpoint of Cicero regarding the duty of courage, but with what a difference! Unlike the pagan statesman the Christian bishop holds that all human strength comes solely from God and therefore has no virtue of its own. Medieval theologians translated classical Stoic courage as *fortitudo*, with late Roman overtones of stouthearted militancy; often it was seen as the corrective of *accedie* or apathy which is one form of sinning against God. Abelard is a case in point. He wrote:

> Fortitude seems to us to be comprised of two parts magnanimity and endurance.... Magnanimity is that by which we are prepared to take on the most arduous tasks when there is a reasonable cause.... Endurance is that by which we steadfastly persevere in carrying out this resolution. [1]

Abelard's portrayal of courage as large-souled constancy makes no explicit reference to God or faith; instead he stresses "that by which" human beings generally summon up the strength to do reasonably arduous tasks, in quite a classical vein.

Later, of course, Saint Thomas Aquinas treats the virtue of courage by baptizing it, so to speak, in a two-level structuring of all the cardinal virtues with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love -- subordinating the former to the latter. However, a different interpretation of Aquinas's effort at synthesis can be given. A cardinal virtue such as courage may be thought of as a human minimum or *sine qua non* that is basic and substantial to any Christian character formation. If Thomas appears to distinguish two kinds of virtue, that may be only for the sake of relating them more positively to each other. At all events, a Thomistic rendering of Christian ethics scarcely justifies any belittling of robust humanness as "filthy rags" compared with the superior majesty of God.

The modern period saw the rise of other attitudes and patterns of thought that were distinctly hostile to these older views of courage. One was pietism, a code word summing up a many-sided movement intent upon recovering for Christianity a devotional sincerity and inwardness of experience through self-surrender and submission to God's will. Moralism, equally prominent in Roman Catholic and Protestant circles, saw doing God's will as the supreme end of Christian development, hence setting itself squarely against any view of human good as including self-reliance or self-realization. Either way, human nature is seen as weak and wretched as it stands, needing the saving help of divine omnipotence even to become its own true self. Leafing through any hymnal or prayer book still in church use, one finds these same themes of human ineptitude and the divine sovereignty repeated many times over.

Conditioned thus to portrayals of the Christian life as an exercise in absolute humility and strict obedience, what then becomes of courage? Our life-world at present gives a distinct urgency to this question, not to say poignancy. For one thing, we are told over and over by therapists and counselors that what many of their patients suffer from is not excessive self-confidence at all, but rather "a low threshold of self-esteem." Therefore it would seem that to go on berating people for their pride, so-called, falls rather wide of the clinical target. And for another thing, it should by now be clear enough that persons have enough real hang-ups about authority and power in high places without adding any further distrust and grounds for their present helplessness. How then shall we respond to this situation, perhaps unprecedented, in world history? Rehabilitating a greater measure of courage in the Christian context ought surely to have a high priority among us. Resources both practical and theological are by no means lacking for taking on this timely and compassionate task.

There is an enfeebling of Christian fortitude that has been going on for a long while to which attention should he given now. Insofar as this has been abetted and prolonged by pietistic and moralistic notions of the Christian life style, these notions ought to be corrected. There is too much at stake in the threatened future of humanity, and too little to be lost in any supposed

orthodox or authoritative readings of the Gospel, not to make the effort needed to reconstitute the primeval, ever-present virtue of courage.

In short, when pietism degenerates into privatism and moralism hardens into legalism, the living wholeness of religious faith is torn asunder. The fabric of faith is always fragile at best, vulnerable to the ups and downs of personal fortune and of public happenings. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief" has been the cry of many for whom faith is no longer capable of giving either certainty or authority. The difficulty is compounded by those dehumanizing forces at work in our present world. It is ordinarily supposed that religion brings ethical seriousness and moral stamina into the common life; but when its resources become liabilities, what should be our response to them? It is plain that some rethinking is in order.

Is Obedience Enough?

Consider first the standard of obedience that has occupied so large a place in Christian tradition. Obviously its force depends upon ideas and images of God as sovereign Lawgiver and Judge. These have their roots in the Mosaic covenant centered in the Ten Commandments, and they have reappeared continually in Christian history as well.

Basic to this traditional norm is the age-old understanding of the will of God as law, revealed precisely in order to be obeyed, whatever the human consequences. Here is one with whom we have to come to terms, who makes demands and sets requirements, rewarding or punishing according to our merits or demerits. The life of faith, therefore, must always take the shape of obedience to the divine imperative. For is not doing the will of God the sum and substance of what being faithful means? Surely at any rate a Christian’s discipleship involves discipline, modeled upon Jesus’ own obedience even unto death, bringing law and order into an otherwise fretful, wayward life. The massive fact of human sinfulness, rooted in "man’s first disobedience" when Paradise was lost forever, gives a grim credibility to the need for a God whose will is law.

All well and good; yet there are questions raised by this understanding of faith as obedience. Does it not omit as much as it includes? On these terms, what becomes of the freedom for which Christ has set us free? And where on this reading is the glorious liberty of the sons and daughters of God? If keeping the commandments, following the injunctions and imperatives of the Gospel constitute the main thrust of a Christian life, what room is left for the wondering freshness and childlike spontaneity that Jesus more than once set forth by his own teaching and example?

Well-meaning defenders and protectors of the faith have often scored the "antinomian" tendencies of fellow Christians who, they felt, presumed to be above the law. Mystics and charismatics, it is true, have never made up the rank and file of Christianity, but theirs is a precious testimony nevertheless. There may be whole ranges of communion with God in any vital faith that the obedience-ideal is bound to miss entirely. Assuredly such faith cannot be programmed into rules and regulations claiming divine authority, as prophets have always

insisted. Fidelity to the God whom Christ revealed is not definable as submission or subjection, any more than as mere conformity or compliance.

Then there is the question of the right use of Scripture. Literal-minded readers treat it as a rule book of actions forbidden or demanded, as if it contained all possible answers to all possible moral problems. They find it rather easy to confuse the Word of God with the very words of God, as if biblical texts had been produced by supernatural dictation. But Scripture is no collection of mere "must" words, orders to be carried out, although its central imperative is plain enough for any Christian's conscience: To love, as we are loved, God with all my heart and soul and mind and strength, and my neighbor as myself. If all that is required of us is "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God," as the prophet Micah summarized the law, then that law is violated when it is splintered into prescriptions for making it in this mad, bad, sad world.

A further question has to do with the effects of the obedience ideal upon Christian motivation in the human struggle for a more just, more peaceable world. Recently some sharp protests against this way of defining faith have been launched in the churches, chiefly by workers and writers committed to a theology of liberation. They point out how frequently in the past Christian obedience has been distorted to cover up social, racial, political, and sexual oppression, to pacify those who suffered from it, and to excuse those who perpetrated it. This misuse of faith, they insist rightly, is a gross betrayal of the Gospel mandate; did not Jesus begin his own ministry at Nazareth by applying to himself Isaiah's words about releasing the captives and setting at liberty those who are oppressed?

"Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" -- not in some attenuated spiritual sense, not as a Utopian program, but as the energy to carry out the liberating work laid upon every Christian conscience. That is bound to mean contending with structures in society that oppress many to the profit of a few, and so following Jesus in his mission of human liberation.

It is in this vein that Dorothee Soelle asks "whether obedience is not precisely one of those ideas which are no longer valid after the holocaust? . . . Can one want and develop an attitude towards God which one criticizes in people in their attitude towards men and human institutions?"[2] She believes the answer to be plainly No. When we recall the self-excusing alibis of Gestapo henchmen and their leaders at the Nuremberg trials that they were only acting under orders, it is hard not to agree. Obedience should not become the ideal of conduct for a faith of truly radical and revolutionary implications, Soelle believes; it belongs, rather, to an outgrown type of authoritarian religion shored up by centuries of patriarchal and monarchical models for the human-divine relationship. Furthermore, in actual practice such a norm can only mean complying with the dictates of official authority, whether in church or state.

We who must live in a time of massacres and purges, violence and torture carried out by people under orders upon fellow human beings, are very likely to find this criticism of traditional

obedience convincing. How could it be otherwise? Not surprisingly, those of us who would defend and promote genuine Christian faith will turn instead to supporting acts of civil and religious disobedience on behalf of our victimized neighbors in the world. We may well ask whether such disobedience is not, as it has always been, the ground of every creative advance in science, art, politics, or religious faith. For we cannot doubt that in our kind of world it takes more courage to disobey than to obey, and this sort of courage belongs to honest, responsible Christianity in every age.[3]

All this is true, and yet there is more to be said. Obedience, like any other criterion of behavior, may easily become subject to atrophy and abuse. In the hands of some hierarchy or another designed to uphold the status quo of privileged power, it assumes all too often the shape of servile conformity. There are times when any deliberate break in the chain of command seems a good and necessary thing. But the worth of a moral ideal like obedience is not to be measured by its misuse alone, as if the best were always at the mercy of the worst in human conduct. At its moral best, obedience represents the choice of one alternative over another: "We must obey God rather than men"; "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." When obedience is given to a freely chosen authority, it takes on the clear quality of courage; and if that quality is lacking, a truly human measure has gone out of it.

Then too, obedience is not merely institutional but deeply personal. I *observe* a law but I *obey* a person whose authority I trust and accept. Those who would discard this rubric from contemporary faith seem to have forgotten this. Allowing the world to write the agenda for Christian action denotes more than dismissing ideas whose time has gone; it also requires facing up to the fullness of tradition whether or not it accords with the needs of the moment. Only so can wise and durable choices he made and followed through.

Hence courageous obedience will continue to be a vital part of Christian character, however refined and revised by the sort of world in which our living must be done. That is because it means taking upon oneself the life pattern of the Lord Jesus, who learned to obey through suffering and has the right to claim it of his disciples since it was the very thrust of his own earthly vocation.

What About Humility?

Another theme in moral teaching which has come under present criticism, both secular and Christian, is the familiar one of humility. Manuals of devotion and discipline have emphasized this virtue for so long that it can hardly be overlooked in any discussion of courage. Humility is abundantly warranted by biblical example and precept; it "goes before honor" (Prov. 15:33) but "whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23: 12). Thus in Scripture humility is not only commanded but is joined to a promise of spiritual reward, which goes far beyond suggesting that this virtue is its own compensation.

In discussing this virtue, Edward Schillebeeckx shows that the ideal of humility arose in conscious reaction against pagan notions of human grandeur. The conviction of the ancient church, he holds, was summed up by Saint Augustine's statement that humility "consists in knowing that you are man, because humanity is firstly being God's creature and secondly being bruised by sin"; Schillebeeckx comments that "by means of a radical change in the pagan concept, this obedience is called magnanimity or human grandeur."[4] Obedience and humility are almost interchangeable terms, and both imply the same paradoxical idea -- that lowliness is the way to greatness.

Medieval spirituality often expressed similar convictions. Saint Bernard, writing for his monks at Clairvaux, compared the degrees of humility to steps of a ladder ("your life in this world") leading upward to the final goal of charity. From candid self-scrutiny ("the despising of your own excellence") though compassion (mercifully aware of similar frailty in others), the truly humble person reaches loving purity of heart as God's reward and gift.[5] This "journey not of feet," a favorite phrase of Augustine, has often been stressed by writers as familiar as Thomas à Kempis, John Bunyan, even François de Sales, whose influence has been most important within Christianity.

Humility is a lesson more quickly taught than learned, of course. Hence its teachers usually mingle demand with promise, presenting it as a necessary step to some more attractive blessing. This may be divine approval at the end of one's life, but almost certainly the ultimate goal will be said to include human well-being here and now as well. Claims for humility seldom are allowed to rest on humility alone. This fact gives some curious twists and tangles, not to say contradictions, to moral teaching on the subject. Mixing material images of benefit or profit with spiritual ideals is always a tricky business. The popular radio comedian Fred Allen used to put it crisply: "I've heard that the meek will inherit the earth, and I'm standing by to collect." His parody of the Third Beatitude has an amusing ring of truth.

Since no one wants to be humble merely for humility's sake, there is bound to be a certain amount of ambiguity in practicing it. One senses this throughout the Psalms and in the parables of Jesus, which are not averse to suggesting that humility pays off in something better and more delectable. Dickens's Uriah Heep had his own version of this virtue, but one need not accept this caricature to recognize that some hypocrisy, playacting, is inevitable; humility is like something forever being tried on for size, a costume that never quite fits.

Furthermore, if we are to mean by humility what Saint Bernard called it, "the despising of your own excellence," we are in for some real psychological trouble. Making a habit of self-disapproval and self-distaste can be a bitter, destructive thing. Monastic history contains many instances of confusion and struggle over this point. How far may one safely go in judging oneself to be worthless and without promise? Moreover, has there not been a "poor-me" strain in Christianity from its beginnings, detected by its severest critics such as Nietzsche, Marx, or Freud? We come upon this strain in ritual confessions, "there is no health in us," or in hymns of

the breastbeating sort, "such a worm as I." Surely in everybody's world of fantasy, reality, or both there is quite enough to be ashamed of, without exaggerating blame beyond the limits of decent self-appraisal. Behind Saint Bernard's definition lurks the double jeopardy of pride masked as self-pity, more a sign of sickness than of health in the soul. This psychological state is better described clinically as masochistic and narcissistic than as humility in any humanly acceptable sense.

Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us that humility may be a source of pride to the humble. Cultivated deliberately, it can only lead to bleak and suicidal despair. Its side effects may far outweigh any intended remedy. Self-blaming, whether only finicky or noisily fanatical, is only made worse by confusing it with genuine humbleness of heart. For there is such a genuine article, which in its own strange way witnesses to human excellence and greatness. The *root* of authentic humility is to be found in an unsparing self-scrutiny that refuses to ignore the standing gap between my ideals and my actions. Without blaming or boasting, I can see that I am weak and wrong just when I am tempted to feel strong and right. The *fruit* of real humility consists in clemency toward others in the same moral boat as myself; as Saint Bernard wrote truly, it is impossible to think of anyone who is merciful and not meek at the same time.

In other words, the truly humble are those who acknowledge the sinful nature of all life, beginning with their own. They are not the sorry specimens of humankind who grow adept at despising their undoubted excellence; on the contrary, they think neither too highly nor too poorly of themselves. For humility is above all a social and not a purely private virtue. Its other names are equity and fairness.

The song of Mary called the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) highlights the meaning of genuine humility in the original Christian context. The tone is that of down-to-earth happiness at being chosen by God, heightened by wonder that the usual order of things is reversed, for Mary sees her election as a further evidence of God's exalting the oppressed and putting down their oppressors. Only the greatest artists such as Bach and Fra Angelico have been able to express this tone, as far removed as possible from that downcast, demure, downtrodden state that often passes for humility.

In Clarence Day's *Life with Father* there is an amusing boyhood incident, describing how Day learned French by reading with his tutor some passages from the Douay version of the Bible. Assigned one day the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, Clarence was utterly charmed to see "*Heureux sont les debonnaires*" in place of the familiar "Blessed are the meek." Delighted by the thought that the gay and urbane might find a place in the kingdom of heaven, he drew closer than he realized to the Gospel meaning of humility (in French, *débonnaire* means gentle, easy-tempered).

Meekness of spirit, then, is a precious sign of human greatness in those who learn to let themselves go, traveling light through the troubles of this world. No amount of humiliation

applied externally can produce it, whatever the cause or source may be. True, biblical portraits of humility associate it closely with poverty or childhood as if destitution or dependence were essential. Taken literally, this association can be very misleading, however. Humiliation produces resentment or rebellion, not humility; its only advantage comes from the fact that the humiliated ones of the earth are not likely to confound might with right, or prosperity with blessedness. Social injustice, far from creating conditions for promoting humility, sooner or later sets the stage for hostility instead.[6]

Despite the malformations and maladies to which it has been subjected, the humility ideal has permanent validity in Christian morality. When it has failed, the failure has been due to the missing element of courage. As in the case of obedience, humility has lost much of its evangelical motivation, tending to become cheerless and supine. True discipleship cannot be generated out of an inventory of personal faults, any more than by a "yes-sir" kind of compliance with orders from above. But brave and honest acceptance of oneself and others, warts and all, is certainly required and rewarded in a life that is fittingly termed Christian.

God and Human Empowering

The words we have been considering function not only as shorthand descriptions of human conduct and character, but plainly derive their moral force from the belief in a more-than-human reality known as God. Both terms refer to a source and standard of behavior which, although other than human, are taken to define and determine our humanity itself. Apart from such a reference obedience and humility are ultimately meaningless --and this despite the obvious fact that they are drawn from all-too-human experiences of subordination and submission.

Relationship to God has immemorially been expressed in such terms, carrying the implied view that human life stands under God, demanding obedience, and before God, signifying humility. We are not our own light, as Flannery O’Connor wrote to a friend, but have our being in dependence on Another. Our very existence, bracketed by the mystery of birth and death, points beyond itself to that Other’s will. Most forms of religious tradition seek to penetrate these mysteries through prayer and worship issuing in active devotion to the One believed to "hold the whole world in his hands." The only right response must be that of avowed humility and unconditional obedience.

The sense of life as something given, held in trust, and rendered back to God is probably strongest in the great monotheistic religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam accentuate in various ways the almost universal persuasion that living is a precarious business at best, requiring that the guidance of a superior, surrounding Being should be acknowledged and accepted absolutely. Rituals of penitence and praise reinforce the sense of finiteness and temporality felt in the presence of what is infinite and eternal.

In the religious West, God is generally addressed in power-language, however modified by

motifs of mercy and forgiveness coming from the Most High. This language is buttressed by images of ownership, command, or sovereignty which arise naturally in domestic and political experience. Thus God is named in sacred writings and in the creeds, prayers, and hymns of the faithful as King or Lord or Father -- all of which are titles given to those who stand in power and authority over others who have only to assent and accept.

Thoroughly accustomed to such language, Christians in particular tend to forget that it carries the burden of models drawn from long experience of monarchy, hierarchy, and patriarchy in human affairs. How indeed could it have been otherwise if men and women were to think of God at all? King of the universe, Lord of hosts, Judge of all history, God is deemed to have absolute control over everything natural and human. Not even family living escapes the all-seeing eye of God the Father, whose will is law and whose word is always right.

The article of faith in God as Power has come under criticism recently from believers and nonbelievers alike. An age as power-hungry and as power-threatened as ours is peculiarly able to understand the traditional fascination with divine omnipotence. Not surprisingly, some argue that the older ways of belief are not for us, as they have been too deeply eroded by modern encounters with power in its most perverse, corrupting forms. Others of course assert that power-language with God as its object remains indispensable, if not sacred, and is not to be rejected for whatever reason. Either way, a crisis of credibility is upon us, as the stoutest reassertions of old doctrine grow more tense and frayed, and as it is suspected that Almightiness is more demonic that divine.

How then shall men and women of religious faith respond? Neither repeating nor rejecting ancient names for God, but aware that we have this faith-treasure in very earthen vessels, is it not a believer’s duty to try to discriminate one from the other? Not to do so means willfully abandoning the prophetic task of faith itself. A far better way is that of courageous questioning, and being questioned, by God’s truth which is ever old and ever new in its concern for making human life more human.

Following this clue of faith does not mean denying any kind of power to God. The choice, rather, is between two very different understandings of divine efficacy and energy. The first is strikingly expressed in John Calvin’s statement that "not a drop of rain falls to the ground except at the deliberate command of God." The second finds its voice in Saint Paul’s conviction that "in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

There is a world of difference here which faith must learn to read and grasp. Belief in God cannot tell us why everything that happens must happen, from raindrops to revolutions. We are not thereby provided with an explanation of the way the universe acts, for that would make faith quite irrelevant. If I know, I do not need to believe. But that is a far cry from Paul’s confidence that God works in everything for good with those who love the purpose that has called them into

being. God's power here assumes the form of empowerment, favoring and fostering the work of love, never coercing but always constraining humankind in manifold and wondrous ways. We shall not go wrong if we keep in view this gentler, more humane understanding of divine power.

Recently a prominent rabbi declared that he could not believe in a God who willed the Holocaust. There is surely something darkly and doggedly perverse in any so-called faith that can regard the suffering and dying of fellow humans as ordered or permitted by God. Divine omnipotence is the shabbiest possible excuse for the harm and hurt persons inflict upon each other; it is scarcely less suspect when it is used to explain weather changes or freak accidents or sudden death.

To ascribe unlimited, indiscriminate power to God is plainly unworthy of religious faith. Omnipotence raises far more questions than it answers; it is bad ethics and worse theology. There are better images for God than potentates or dictators, and the Bible is closer to the truth of faith in speaking of God as a wronged husband, a pleading advocate, an unselfish giver, a devoted lover, a long-suffering parent. Unilateral control that rules by force and fear, claiming our homage in servile obedience and downcast humility, belongs not to God but to a usurping idol which has no right to that name.

NOTES

1. Peter Abelard, *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979),121.

2. Dorothee Soelle, "Paternalistic Religion as Experienced by Women," in *Concilium*, "God As Father?" (New York: Seabury Press, March 1981), 75.

3. See Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950), for the distinction between authoritarian and humanitarian religion cited by Soelle here and elsewhere in her writings.

4. From his essay, "Secular Criticism of Christian Obedience and the Christian Reaction to That Criticism," in *Concilium*, "Christian Obedience" (New York: Seabury Press, November 1980), 14.

5. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Steps of Humility* (London: Mowbray, 1957), 21-43.

6. James Cone says that when black people read "Blessed are the meek" it does not mean that "black people are going to let white people beat the hell out of them."

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Graceful Courage: A Venture in Christian Humanism by Roger Hazelton

Chapter 7: Graceful Courage

Grace makes us fall *towards* the heights. -- Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

The preceding chapters have approached the subject of courage in deliberately human terms. Resisting the temptation to "explain" it in either clinically precise or cosmically grandiose ways, we have called courage by many names in ways compatible with common sense. Maintaining this perspective has required that the sheer phenomenon of courage should be seen from more than one angle and without being forced into a single frame of understanding. Only so can we treat a theme that is almost infinitely varied by the changing contours of lived experience itself.

Hence courage has been termed a way of taking the human measure of one's world, a kind of virtue necessary to becoming human, a resilient steadfastness before life's hazards and setbacks. Neither physical energy nor spiritual inspiration alone accounts for its presence, as it arises in the middle zone between bare survival and devotion to superior, self-surpassing values. It vibrates within the tension set up by fear and faith. Its resources come from contrary directions although they meet at that mysterious juncture called "the heart." Why not simply leave the matter there?

The reason why we cannot do so is already evident from the challenge issued in the previous chapter. Does not courage by its very presence suggest a "more-than" rather than a "nothing-but" reading of our humanity itself? In other words, can courage even be conceived apart from the conviction that here humanity is overreaching itself, harnessing possibility to actuality, moving slowly but surely toward its own fulfillment? Such a belief has always been a salient feature of humanistic thought. However, as we ask whence comes this power to produce as well as to endure change, we are led to think of a source of energy resembling what religions call God. Does faith in humankind imply a faith in God, or are these two faiths on a collision course with one another? That is the question posed by considering courage in fully human terms.

Courage Grounded in Grace

It was not a theologian but a novelist, Ernest Hemingway, who liked to define courage as "grace under pressure." Whatever he may have had in mind, Hemingway borrowed from religion a word used to describe God. The same word applies to human character, of course, especially in its most appealing and gallant aspects. Yet grace clearly embraces both meanings. A Godless humanity would be graceless too; the one word seeks to express what Karl Barth called the humanity of God.

So an Appalachian congregation sings "Amazing Grace," which its members know by heart, and a Roman Catholic worshiper prays "Hail, Mary, full of grace"; in each instance what is being said is that those qualities of generous and kindly good will that make and keep life human belong preeminently to God as well.

Grace, then, delineates a common bond, even a common ground, between what is known to he human and what is believed tof be divine. It is not an "either/or" word for enforcing what Sf ren Kierkegaard declared to be "the infinite qualitative distinction" between Creator and creature, but a "both/and" word of intimate relationship. Yet its primary, positive emphasis is surely placed upon God-in-action seeking out, surprising, saving creatures like ourselves. Probably the best synonym for grace is "lovingkindness," by which the King James Version of the Bible translates the Hebrew *chesed* and the Greek *charis* -- given gratis with no strings attached, as abounding as it is amazing.

Small wonder that this accent on grace should be lifted up so eagerly when God is being praised or prayed to as the object of worship. However, it also greatly complicates the work of theologians who must think clearly about God as the object of belief. For if we adopt such a human measure for our thought of God then how may we be sure that it is really God of whom we think? And how may grace be recognized if and when it appears on the human scene?

Therefore, as one might expect, theologians have discussed and debated the meaning of grace interminably during the long course of biblical and Christian thinking about God. One of the ironies of that history is the fact that disputes over God’s goodness should have so divided the faithful and disturbed the peace of the church. Legitimate differences of viewpoint are hardened into controversies over matters of undoubted importance to the faith; but how stale and unprofitable all this arguing over grace has become!

But we are not thereby exempted from the task of thinking carefully about grace, for the old antitheses and arguments are still with us, virulent as ever. Is grace predestinating or only permissive? Is it irresistible when offered or can it be refused? Is it all-sufficient or auxiliary to human effort? These and similar questions show how easily thinking about grace falls into "either/or" formats in which words are taken as the things they represent, as if one had to choose between contradictory views with no hope of any reasonable resolution. This hardening process sets the stage for what can only be "a dialogue of the deaf" carried on by groups of

thinkers each pushing their own truth, quite unable to hear what other groups are saying, making the questions fit the answers already given.

In general, these debates revolve around the issue of God's power -- its nature and extent and effects on human freedom. This, as we have seen, is most significant for understanding courage in relation to such themes as humility and obedience. It is possible that by concentrating upon courage some new light can be cast on these old antagonistic positions, however, with a view to their removal.

The place to begin, of course, is with those experiences of grace in freedom that provoke feelings of wonder or gratitude in the first place. Sometimes when looking back on moments of unforseen ability to rise to a difficult occasion or to succeed where failure seemed inevitable, I may say, "I didn't know I had it in me to do that." Here is an experience of grace, if you will, in its most ordinary, daily form. Instead of succumbing to the suffering brought on by illness I find in myself a quite astonishing will to live that brings me through crisis back to health. Or, agitated by severe depression, I may catch a brief glimpse of hope in the smile of a friend that calms and steadies me, "restoring my soul." Or again, inured to being a nonachiever when thrown in competition with others, I discover that my real battle is with myself, which makes a manageable and auspicious difference. In such instances of new-found courage to survive or succeed, an unexpected factor enters into situations, one calculated to yield only discouragement. Why not call it grace? Grace, that is, in the sense of enabling and resourceful energy coming from a source as much beyond as within myself.

But perhaps these experiences of heightened resolve or increased strength are not due to anything except my own natural forces; they may quite as well be traced to an influx of adrenaline so that chemistry and not theology provides their explanation. What then? May not such experiences only confirm our good opinion of ourselves as normal, healthy human beings? You remember William Ernest Henley's often-quoted poem, *Invictus*:

> Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul.

Is this not simply a witness to that bulldog courage, "bloody but unbowed," determined to master fate by sheer force of will, relying therefore more on pride or chutzpah than on anything resembling faith ?

Yet notice that even Henley does not fail to mention "whatever gods may be," as if to bow in the direction of some energy source other than his personal resources. For it is after all the common testimony of men and women in every age that any experience of surmounting or subduing adverse circumstance carries with it a sure sense of surplus power not entirely their

own and for which one can only be somehow thankful. By whatever name it is called, God or fate or genetic constitution, it is something with which we have to do because it has to do with us, and it is something that is invoked precisely to account for the very fact of courage.

Long before the rise of modern medical technology doctors spoke of the *vis medicatrix naturae,* the healing strength of nature. It referred to nature's way of establishing a turning point or breakthrough toward recovery at the very crisis of an illness, which led to the belief in a power not ourselves that makes for health. Nature is not always so benign, to be sure, and yet its curative powers, favoring growth and fostering health, are by no means to be discounted. Thus it would seem that what religious people name as grace or God is not utterly foreign to general, common experience, however variously described.

Names may not greatly matter; what does matter is that our thought should not lose its moorings in lived and shared reality. Paul's words, "I, yet not I," chosen to describe his own experience of grace, might well serve in accounting for courage too. If I can be said to act bravely or honorably under pressure, it is entirely right that my act should be affirmed as mine by myself and others. I do well to be assured of the self-respect and dignity that courage exhibits so remarkably. And I do even better to be grateful to "whatever gods may be" for those available means and reserves that make courage possible to me and others like me.

Paul's "paradox of grace" holds a significant truth. "I" and "not I" carry equal weight, each necessary to the meaning of the other. If one has to make a choice one must choose both. Theologically speaking, grace does not exclude freedom but includes and implies it; freedom does not repel or reject grace but relies upon it, when it is most itself. The great Augustine, who is sometimes cited as the doctor of grace, wrote pages and pages of prickly prose to show that grace is liberating and assisting, rather than supplanting or overwhelming human energies and ends. At the same time he insisted that we do not acquire grace by freedom, but freedom by grace -- something that can assuredly be said of courage too.

There are lesser theologians whose opinion of human powers and values is so low that they cannot accept this Augustinian conviction. Either unable or unwilling to grant humanhood its essential rightness in the sight of God, they persist in setting grace and freedom over against each other as if a great gulf loomed between them. They forget the salutary truth in Robert Frost's "You can't trust God to be unmerciful." And by the same token they do not know what to make of courage, taken simply as it stands and shows itself. A wiser, more ample theology would accept the general proposition that grace does not destroy but perfects our human nature. There *is* a wideness in God's mercy, as a familiar hymn sings.

Samuel Terrien, in *The Elusive Presence,* voices this same conviction with singular suggestiveness. Writing on Psalm 51, Terrien regards its prayer "Create in me a clean heart, O God" as a significant breakthrough theologically. He comments on the passage:

> He [the psalmist] viewed the holy no longer as the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*, forever exterior to man as the numinous force which attracts and repels him at the same time, but as the source of vitality which sharpens conscience, activates the will to shun evil, and stirs the imagination to do the good. A world is aborning also within man. Creation may be microcosmic as well as macrocosmic. Presence and spirit coalesce to animate the new being.[1]

If one were to try to capture in a single phrase the active attitude of the psalmist's prayer, prayerful courage would be the right term. No passage in the whole psalter is more burdened by consciousness of ingrained, "original" sin, and yet the prayer for a new and right spirit places sin in a quite different perspective. The prayer indeed changes the situation altogether, as sincere praying always does, for it declares the speaker's ready willingness to *be* changed and the new world stirring within the heart.

Power in God

Returning to the theme of power, how are we to understand the kind of power that is implied in exercising courage? Plainly, no real sense can he made of such behavior without introducing the element of power to some degree: power to make possibilities actual, to choose and do what is chosen, to enter the course of events as a cause and not merely as an effect. But such power is not unlimited or absolute; its very exercise depends upon the recognition of centers of power other than my own within the total situation in which I act, so that my action although free also exhibits those constraints and conditions placed upon my freedom. These limits cannot be disregarded without eventual disaster. The modern world should have learned by now the lesson that unbounded, open-ended power is a mirage that corrupts its instigators and a nightmare to its victims.

Must we not take the same view with regard to the sort of power that is attributed to God? By choosing to think of God in terms of grace we have already rejected any idea that divine power is sheer unqualified omnipotence. Not everything that happens can rightly be assigned to the working of an Almighty Will. The power experienced in grace can hardly be the sort which in human beings is called sin -- overbearing, all-coercing, self-asserting. No, God's power, being gracious not gratuitous, works *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* -- sweetly and strongly, as the theological formula goes—by invitation and not compulsion, as indeed all high religion has repeatedly affirmed.

This throws a new and very different light upon the old question about the power of God, as it asks not how much but what kind of power may be termed divine. Obviously to deny all power to God amounts to a refusal to regard God as real in any proper sense. A powerless God would be no God at all, religious faith would be only a useless passion, and theology no more than beating about the bush of futile imaginings. But the kind of power that belongs to God according to our faith is that which works by persuasion, not by compulsion. It is far better

symbolized by the Virgin than by a dynamo, as Henry Adams wrote. Such power draws and invites but it does not coerce. And what is still more to the point of our present need, the divine power is nonviolent, achieving its ends by peaceable and patient means

How far this faith-truth is from the obstinate, desperate notion, still inserted into legal documents, that an "act of God" is what cannot otherwise be accounted for, the inexplicable and catastrophic happening! No honor is paid to God by holding this power-idol responsible for explosions and earthquakes, massacres and shipwrecks. On the contrary, it is a sound theological principle that what is deemed blameworthy in human action ought not to be thought praiseworthy in God.

The most reliable clue to God’s kind of power is that seen to be at work in human love at its sweetest and strongest. A lover cherishes the loved one for the beloved’s own sake, exulting in the otherness of the other, letting the other be herself or himself. When the ego falls in love it abandons egoism’s claims and so-called rights. We might say that the center of emotional gravity has shifted so that possessing and being possessed become interchangeable in the shared mutuality of belonging to one another. This is an awkward way of saying what love itself always finds warmer, brighter words for, to be sure.

The leitmotif of Christian faith is indubitably the confidence that God is love. However, this good news is likely to come as bad news to those who do not realize, or have forgotten, the authentic power of loving. For love, both human and divine, is not an "anything goes" permissiveness; it clearly has built-in constraints and warning signals of its own which we disregard at our peril. Following love’s leading requires keeping faith with that which inspires and fortifies love. Among other things it means being willing to be changed by "the expulsive power of a new affection," as old habits are broken and the grip of bondage to self is loosened. That power can be resisted or refused, of course, with what may be ominous results. We all know that the struggle to love and be loved goes on amidst traps and temptations, so that courage must be its watchword always. Was this not perhaps what Paul meant in writing the Corinthians that love bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things?

Such loving courage may not constitute a simple answer to the woes and wrongs that beset our world, but it can serve as a powerful antidote to them. That is why it is worthy of being called more than human, as it goes against the grain of what is only human. Dante’s poetic intuition discovered love in the motion of the sun and other stars; Francis of Assisi recognized love in the nearer tokens of our common creaturehood; and Jesus of Nazareth more than once found love’s emblems in birds of passage as in lilies of the field. All these, and more too, signify God to us, as Francis sang delightedly.

And what shall we say of the love that so powerfully strengthens and sweetens "this mortal life also," in Luther’s words? It can, and does, make a heart of flesh out of a heart of stone. It walks the second unrequired mile in guarding the beloved’s freedom. And it makes the first move

without being shown the reasons for giving itself, so that its generosity may even seem a little crazy, going well beyond what prudent self-protection would advise. Only power, and power of unparalleled virtue, is able to take such risks and make such strides of courage.

Here of course we are speaking of grace under its other name of love. And now the old theological words return to firm up our thought. Grace is prevenient, going before, dependably there in every enterprise or encounter, working already with us for our good. It is efficacious; not to be earned or paid for by "good deeds" or by any other quid pro quo. No matter how sanctified religiously, grace acts beyond and above the law. And grace is cooperating; it accompanies and assists us, eliciting not compliance but consent, greatening our courage precisely by gentling it, adapting itself to our condition while accepting no condition as final.

A life lived in the ambiance of grace is not under the control of an exterior, superior power. That is not the intention behind Simon Weil's memorable sentence, "Grace makes us fall *towards* the heights.'' Or it should not be, at any rate, for Weil was so attracted by the contrast between gravity and grace that she tended to make it into a contradiction. As gravity seeks the lowest level by a law of nature, she suggested, so grace raises what it touches to the highest level by the law of God. But she evidently forgot an important truth -- that while the rule of gravity is all-compelling and passionless, the beckoning of grace is strangely selective and alluring. Grace is as much a fact of our existence as gravity is, and therefore we are constantly being drawn in contrary directions; that is true. According to Weil's view, our only right response to grace can be through what she calls "decreation," making ourselves as small and light as possible, stripping down the self to nothingness so that God may fill the vacuum that remains. The route she recommends is that of ecstatic asceticism which has always been followed by extreme mystics who want to get lost in God. However, it finds little if any warrant in either the Gospel or in Christian common sense. There we come upon an equally strenuous but paradoxically humbler view. Life itself is a gift, a trust, a charge to keep. Let it be held then reverently and joyously, invested and reinvested, not abused or wasted. The right response to grace is gratitude, for what do we have that we have not received?

A life so lived, according to the power working in us, will proceed on the premise that it is lent to be spent, given to be given away. "Freely you have received; freely give." Oliver Twist begging for more is hardly the model of such a life; its type instead is found among those whose cup runs over with the gift of grace. And living out of the overflow has social consequences, for the gift includes a task. As Saint Augustine wrote, while the love of God comes first in the order of enjoining, the love of the neighbor comes first in the order of doing. Both loves are made one by the power of grace.

Wrestling With God

From his Samoan sickbed Robert Louis Stevenson spoke this unorthodox benediction: "Now may the grace of courage and of gaiety and the quiet mind, together with all such blessedness as

belongeth to the children of the Father in heaven, be yours" -- a blessing that bears out the line of thought traced in these pages.[2]

A craftsman as good as Stevenson does not string words along at random, and it may be assumed that he chose these particular terms with care. The courage that is companioned by gaiety and the quiet mind is far removed from stereotypes scrawled in shorthand. Let us just call it *graceful courage.*

Ordinarily, courage is not associated with feelings of a gay, lighthearted sort. The more's the pity, for is it not the case that such an alliance is both natural and right? Otherwise, "be of good cheer" would not make sense when linked to exhortations like "take heart." Of course courageous persons do make up a very motley group; they exhibit a great range of temperamental traits, some gay and some sober. Yet for that very reason courage cannot be confined to what goes under the name of serious or solemn behavior, like the unsmiling face on a Marine Corps poster.

You may have heard of the Protestant pastor who was said to take his religion very seriously, but cheerfulness was always breaking in. How else could he be faithful to his Lord who counseled "Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world"? Or how might he respond to Paul's "Rejoice, and again I say rejoice"? The point is that the gospel yields an affective tone of glad, even exuberant happiness or it is not the gospel. You may know it by its fruits of joy within and among people as hard pressed as yourself. One of the surest signs is a face radiant with the gaiety of truly *gracious* living.

Yet there is more here than meets the casual eye, for this blessing tells us something precious and profound about human courage. I can meet the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune because they have already been met and overcome by folk whose names I know, who have been there before me. Self-pity is ruled out in principle if not yet in fact just by virtue of my own membership in the company of those as beset or bereaved as I am. I am never a mere island washed by the streams of a humanity to which I do not belong. No, I am part and parcel of an ongoing pilgrimage from which I draw and to which I add my own characteristic strength. "Success may be counted sweetest by those who ne'er succeed," in Emily Dickinson's words, and yet there is always a real sense in which the failures of the world have only themselves to blame. This is so because no one is without examples or incentives for the race to be run and won. Heroes and heroines may seem at times to have vanished into the dust of yesteryear, but there are plenty of them near at hand for those who have the knack of recognizing them.

Courage that is lifted and lightened by grace is a Joseph's coat of many colors, predominantly bright and rich with inward happiness. For one thus gifted there can be no final discouragement, as life consists of second chances, new beginnings at every turn. The ups and downs of success and failure lose their importance when winning or losing ceases to be the measure of well-being. There is always some better thing ahead for those whose courage acts to shape the future.

Self-fulfilling prophecies of doom more than meet their match when anxious care is overcome by grace.

The gaiety that goes with graceful courage has wonder in it, too, which keeps it from becoming self-congratulating or self-satisfied. I cannot honestly take credit for the many ways in which the world of facts around me serves to support the world of purposes within me. Not invariably, to be sure; but when I think of all the times I have been spared the consequences of my own folly, or have seen apparently fortuitous events turn into really fortunate ones, I can only wonder at such strange outcomes. They almost seem to have my good at heart, if not my convenience or comfort. By these conspirings and concurrings of inner with outer happenings I am enabled, made strong, even as I am changed and challenged at the same time.

Grace under pressure is a good name for courage because it conveys the sense of wondering gratitude that steadies and sustains truly human life. Its benchmark is not relaxed quiescence but the quiet-mindedness that comes from knowing who one is and what one has to do to be oneself. That kind of poised integrity, let it be said, is as far as possible from an unmoved, unmoving stolidity. The ancients tended to believe that the natural state of a physical body was one of rest. Scientists today, however, tell us that a natural state is that of uniform motion in a straight line, allowing of course for the curvature of space itself. Human nature, in any case, is defined by its plastic, pliable qualities. Quietness of mind is not achieved by staying in one and the same place but by moving with and through a world of objects and events in constant motion.

For all that, mere mobility and mutability do not constitute the whole of a courageous life. Readiness to change and be changed are intrinsic to it, surely, but this does not mean that change as such is necessarily good and right. Change is not a synonym for progress any more than it is a certain guarantee of growth in persons or societies. We humans also have a great need to maintain in ourselves the sense of what is permanent, durable, abiding; only so can we keep pace with the changes that occur and recur throughout life. We do well to pray for the blessing of a quiet-minded grace which can meet turbulence without agitation, the shalom of the Jewish Scriptures.

The quiet mind is a peaceable mind, concentrated on seeking and pursuing the way of peace. That pursuit is described by Augustine as adhering to God. If it were only a question of finding and using the right technique the search would be quite easy, but like all good things peace of mind is difficult and rare. It eludes all packaging and programming, however well-intentioned, for it is not available simply on demand. Instead, it comes as the byproduct of struggling after a selfhood that is truly one’s own. To seek it directly is already to have lost it. Merely avoiding conflict cannot ensure it. Like Jacob wrestling with his mysterious antagonist until daybreak by the brook Jabbok, each and all of us must say, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

It would, however, be wide of the mark indeed to suggest that quietness of mind is no more than

the result of an identity search. To be at peace with oneself is undoubtedly a great good, but the whole point of what we have been saying is that it has something to do with God as well. I cannot make it happen in myself, earning it by my own efforts, although it will not happen without such efforts either. The general witness of humankind is that the quiet mind comes as a gift to those who seek it with all their hearts, which places it within the order of grace. The so-called paradox of "I, yet not I" remains.

Marc Chagall's portrayal of Jacob wrestling with the angel is most illuminating here. The central figures are shown at the moment of Jacob's refusal to let the angel go until his blessing is given. The strenuous encounter is almost over; the angel upright, Jacob on his knees but clinging to his adversary, his wounded thigh showing the mark of the angel's wrenching touch. Extending one arm in blessing, the angel gives Jacob his new name, Israel, "for you have striven with God and men, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). But who is the victor in this unequal combat? It is difficult to say. Perhaps this question is not the right one to ask, since it has been made irrelevant by the astonishing outcome of the struggle, to which the categories of winning and losing do not apply.

At the end of his life, according to the ancient story, Jacob gave his own blessing to his sons, "blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath" (Gen. 49:25). Here once more we are shown the coinciding opposites that make up the grace of courage: serenity and perseverance, brought together in a resilient steadfastness that is neither wholly spiritual nor natural but strangely, surely both.

The Nearer Side of God

Our consideration of human courage has led us unavoidably to the thought of God. Some may regard this as forcing the theological issue, others as a leisurely unwrapping of a foregone conclusion. Self-styled humanists who keep on insisting that God is a fiction compensating for the ills and woes of earthly life will prefer to give attention to "what man can make of man." And there will always be some theologians who persist in declaring that grace is solely the property of God even when it acquires definite human shape in courageous attitudes and actions. The trouble seems to arise from a common assumption that "God" and "humanity" are simply nouns standing for distinct and separate entities with mutually exclusive meanings.

But this assumption cannot stand the scrutiny of either reason or faith. Those who make it are right in what they affirm but wrong in what they deny. The fact is, these traditional attempts to make contradictions out of felt contrasts, antitheses out of real tensions, tell us very little about ourselves or God. There has to be a better and a truer way.

That way is indicated by the central, fundamentally coherent understanding that whoever says "humanity" also says "God." This means that all our images for God are drawn inevitably from our own experiences as earthbound creaturely beings who live in families and communities,

must make our living by our wits and labor, create useful and beautiful objects, and cope with trials and hardships too numerous to mention. Yet this can never be the whole story, since we keep searching for a kind of happiness and self-fulfillment that these conditions fail of themselves to provide. Enter God, as the guarantor and agent of desires, hopes, purposes otherwise unfounded and unaccounted for.

Therefore it should not come as a surprise that the word "God" should have come to signify a cosmic overlord or superbeing whose supreme and sovereign power makes up for human deficiency by overriding and overruling our poor, pitiful pretense of freedom. From here it is but a short step to the belief that such a God is totally other, utterly unlike anything we know in ourselves or in our world. What we forget is that these claims made for God bear bitter fruit in belittling human self-respect and self-worth. They are demeaning in a very precise sense of that word, based on the odd and really outrageous premise that if God does everything then human beings can do nothing except to let God have absolute control over their lives in the world.

This view of an all-powerful deity, if followed through logically would eliminate the need and motivation for courage. But there is another and far more salutary implication to be drawn from the circuit of meaning from humanity to deity and back again. It is that whoever says "God" also says "humanity" -- what we believe ourselves to be is reflected by our belief in God.

How we think of ourselves is disclosed by how we think of God. Such revelations may be inadvertent or fugitive, but they are not less significant on that account. So psychologists and sociologists read theology for clues concerning human self-understanding, as they have every right to do. Although some theologians question this approach, they are nevertheless in the same plight. No one has the privilege of certainty in describing or defining the Godhood of God; that option is simply not available. But such descriptions, taken seriously and not literally, yield something better than mere information; they are valuable indicators of the meaning of God in human experience, and that is no small matter.

"God and the soul I desire to know, nothing more" -- Augustine’s terse avowal can scarcely be improved upon, as it makes perfectly clear that God and the soul are intrinsically related, bound together in life and thought alike. This is why, for example, we cannot speak of courage without speaking at last of God. When expressed in theological language, this relatedness has been described in terms of the divine immanence. This rather technical word stands for the truth of faith that God is no outsider-God but an intimate, indwelling God. Its Latin root suggests a permanent and not a temporary indwelling (*maneo* means "stay" or "remain"). God does not come or go according to divine pleasure or human deserving, but is so dependably present as to be "closer than hands or feet," "nearer than breathing," so that in God "we live and move and have our being."

The complementary term in theology is of course transcendence, which means to protect God’s very Godhood from becoming confused with human powers and values even at their highest

and best. It is a good and necessary word, reminding us that "we do not say God merely by saying Man in a loud voice" (Karl Barth). Yet is it not odd that this term should be used to contradict and not to complement "the nearer side of God," as if it meant God's utter difference and distance from everything human? The old Scholastic principle, to distinguish is not to separate, is worth repeating at this point. Indeed, transcendence requires immanence in order to make its meaning clear. One term without the other is a foreshortened, truncated view of what is meant by God.[3]

Now however our concern is with the immemorial conviction voiced by the apostle Paul that God is not far from any one of us (Acts 17:27). That tells us a great deal about the grace of courage, among other things. Women and men of every age have borne eager witness that God is a very present help in time of trouble, discovering God's presence in the midst of life and not in some imaginary Beyond. If their testimony has truth it is true for us as well.

There may have been few atheists in foxholes, as was said during the Second World War. Yet we do not have to reach the limit of our competence to be aware of God's helping grace, like the sailors in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* crying, "All is lost. To prayer, to prayer!" On the contrary, very ordinary deeds of chivalry or gallantry reveal an extraordinary quality which can only be called graceful courage. Here is more than meets the casual eye, for such events are not to be accounted for by any least common denominator of humanness. Their true measure may be found, rather, in the degree to which folk like ourselves are enabled, yes ennobled, by a grace that is bodied forth in life itself.

Nothing in this way of viewing grace suggests that God remains in heaven while we stay on earth (Barth again), acting upon our lifeworld at a distance by a kind of gravity in reverse. The perfecting of our nature, evidenced in courage, includes us and engages us in what Teilhard called the divine milieu, where we live and breathe and are most at home. Only because the sense of divine presence, inescapable and elusive at once, empowers our most valorous or venturesome efforts can we truly be ourselves. Grace means participating in the "power of being in everything that has being" (Paul Tillich).

This accent has been missing for too long from orthodox theology and the various humanisms alike. It is high time that it should be recovered. By now it should be obvious that whatever can be done to make human life more human ought to be done. That will of course involve framing policies and pursuing projects at every level of society, by those responsible for structuring the common life in ways consistent with the common good. For them and for all others, whoever or wherever they may be, it will demand and call forth courage of a high order, graced by the fullness of God.

NOTES

1. Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (New York Harper & Row, 1978), 325.2. From his *Vailima Prayers*.

2. From his *Vailima prayers*.

3. I have written more fully on transcendence elsewhere, e.g., "Transcendence and Theological Method," in *Science, Faith, and Revelation* (Nashville Broadman Press, 1979) and "Relocating Transcendence," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (Winter-Summer 1975) 101-109.