

PSEUDO SOURCES OF SECURITY

A sermon delivered by the
 Reverend Ernest D. Pipes, Jr., at
 the Unitarian Community Church
 Santa Monica, California
 January 17, 1965

"The Idols of the Tribe," wrote Francis Bacon in NOVUM ORGANUM, "have their foundation in human nature itself...It is a false assertion that the sense of man is the (proper) measure of things...For the human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolors the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it..." Nowhere is this observation of Bacon's better illustrated than in the area of the supernatural religions of mankind. For example we, especially in a church like this one, look mainly at the intellectual formulations of religion, its theology, its cosmology, its metaphysics, its ethical code, forgetting that this theorizing, this superstructure of doctrine, rests less upon a foundation of objective fact out there in the world than on subjective human feelings and emotions, in here within the nervous system. It is the fears and hopes, the anxieties and uncertainties, the dreams and aspirations within the breasts of men and women that create ritual and doctrine and, eventually, sect and church. The human needs themselves give rise to the ceremonies and formal belief constructs. Hence the belief-constructs and ritual patterns of the religions of mankind portray subjective need, not necessarily outside realities in the world. Religion reflects psychic reality much more than outer reality; as a mirror of the outside world it is typically very false, its irregularity distorting and discoloring the nature of things; as a mirror of the subjective yearnings and needs of people, religion is an amazingly true gatherer of light.

If this is at all so, there are some important questions to be raised. What are some of the hungers, the appetites, the needs of the psyche that the religions of man have, in their widely varying ways, sought to meet? Are the ways in which supernatural religion has fed these needs conducive to the mental health of the individual? Are they biologically adaptive as well as emotionally satisfying? Granting that the belief and ritual systems of supernatural are not reality assessing in a scientific-empirical sense, and granting that they allay the fears and anxieties of the individual and provide a sense of relief and security, do not these belief and ritual systems we call religion nevertheless provide a pseudo security, a spurious security because they relate to a subjective world, not an objective world? And, finally, is it the case that all human yearnings and hungers can be met without resort to reality distortion? Is it not time for at least one religion to dare to say, "that this hunger simply cannot be fulfilled if you also insist on holding to a lucid understanding of the world?" I think these are significant questions and ones which it is crucial for religious liberals to raise. I want to struggle with them, out loud, both this Sunday morning and next, and would invite you to think along with me.

We must begin with some understanding of the relationship between man and his religions. Religion is rooted in man; no society ever has been discovered without religion. But what is it in man that has made religion a universal human institution? Why does this particular primate everywhere create it? Well, evidently because of certain hungers and emotional needs unique to him. He has, after all, a large brain, a highly developed nervous system and a set of senses which, together, give him an acute awareness of the world around him. Our nervous organization, moreover, is matched by and

related to a highly excitable temperament and emotional complex. That is to say, the species of mammal which evolved into man has a keyed-up temperament and complex emotional reactions. Thus for him the final effect of beholding the moon, a bolt of lightning or a dead man can be infinitely greater than on his other primate cousins. Not only has he an intensified awareness of outer stimuli, but he is at the same time capable of variable internal weather; his own psychic make-up is finely tuned, easily out of kilter, capable of wide-eyed imaginings, fertile fantasies and possessed by a will-to-believe what is emotionally comforting to believe.

He is a complex apparatus individually, "fearfully and wonderfully made" as the psalmist put it, and, more than this, he lives in social groups which develop memory banks called culture, made possible by language, adumbrated by thought and belief systems which carry over from generation to generation, providing a shield, sometimes a thin shield indeed, from the problems of human existence. Certainly for primitive or pre-scientific man, religion was a means of handling fear - by which I mean not simply the Anglo-Saxon four letter word, but a list of longer Latin words - including anxiety, insecurity, apprehensiveness, vulnerability and all those lesser cares which rob one of peace and calm. We have managed to compress our fears into a much smaller compass because we have spread a net of naturalistic understanding and scientific control over many of the things, such as famine and disease, that threaten our security. But a backward society has so little that can be called understanding or science at its disposal that it is left with no certain answer to a great many of its urgent necessities, not to mention its lesser wishes. And an answer it must have, to forestall fear, even panic. The principal answer is religion, supernatural religion, which is used to piece out the ground between what man can attend to himself and what his inner needs demand. Religion therefore may be said to complement science; its function is to give man access to the powers which seem to control his destiny and its purpose is somehow to induce those powers to be friendly to him. Religion is what needful man believes and does to help make the wished-for-things come true and to keep the fearsome things from occurring; it provides things to do and a belief framework which helps the unbearable things to be borne, which offers perspective, orientation, even meaning and significance to life. It is man's refusal to be helpless in the face of need and before the pull of hope; it is what he has learned to do and believe in order to overcome the sense of helplessness and in order to underwrite hope. Born in stress, a barrier against fear, supernatural religion is a uniquely human adaptation to the predicaments of life. It is an adaptation to life that, to be sure, may not be reality assessing in the scientific sense and which, in its reality distortions, may provide a spurious security. It is an adjustment to life, therefore, only in a narrow sense and, perhaps, in a foolish sense, leaving unexplored many other wiser choices. However we may judge the belief and behavior patterns of mankind's religions, they nevertheless describe his efforts to meet his emotional needs over a very long period of time.

Let's take a few minutes to examine some of the wide range of activities and beliefs which have been employed in this universal effort to adapt to a perplexing, frightening and perpetually dangerous environment. We will be looking at pre-scientific people and their supernatural religion, for these relatively straight-forward behavior and belief systems readily reveal the emotional needs being met. It goes without saying that most of these pre-scientific supernaturalisms have their surrogates in our own day. We shall notice, quite briefly, the notions of magic, divination, soul, totem, demon

and god - and, with these in mind, then seek to grapple with some of the questions raised at the beginning of this talk.

Magic means simply all the formulas for doing things which are beyond one's personal powers; it is a primitive people's science and technology, being used to gain the same ends as science but using supernaturalism as a frame of reference rather than naturalistic explanations. Thus, baiting a hook so that a fish will want to bite it is scientific, while putting a spell on the same hook and bait to make the fish bite, regardless of his appetite, is to use magic; magic is an added bit of supernaturalism to gain a wished-for effect. There are magic medicines, (powdered dragon's scales and unicorn's horns sold in medieval Europe by sorcerers as readily as Helena Rubenstein sells face cream today) magic dances and rituals, magic fetishes and so on. Magic seems logical and in a primitive tribe where everybody believes it and there is a legend to explain its origin, then only a very strong minded person would suspect it. Even if you were a born skeptic but untrained in the laws of logic and the rules of evidence, the chances are largely in magic's favor. Says Wm. Howells, an anthropologist who has studied the use of magic all over the world,

Things happen anyhow: hunting magic is made and the game is duly killed; rain magic is made and sooner or later it rains. If something goes wrong, it is not the magic which is blamed, but the magician. He has slipped up in his spells, or something has been left out, or else the magic has run into some counter-magic, or else the client has not followed instructions. This is doubly sure to be the explanation because most magic is carried out in this magical realm, against other magic or witchcraft. You use magic to protect yourself, your house, or your garden against witchcraft. Nothing happens. That proves the magic was good.

Human nature really wants magic, and gets true good out of it. It is not comforting for man, especially primitive man, to realize how helpless he can be, and magic enables him to avoid realizing it; it gives him a soothing conviction that he can take care of himself, because nature can be bossed around by pulling imaginary wires. It is another form of religion which acts to quiet the nerves of individuals and of society, and to allay the urges of panic and disunion. It gives people something to do in situations where there is really nothing to do; it is the practical answer to the feminine cry of "Don't just stand there! Do something!" If, in a thunderstorm, you do not see how you can fail to be hit by lightning, there are three things you can do: (a) fold your hands and sit still, (b) pray, and (c) work magic (even if it is only crossing your fingers). These alternatives would all be equally efficacious, I should say, but there can be no doubt that (b) and (c) are the more comforting. In some ways magic is the most comforting of all. A prayer to the gods is all right, but it is a request only, and it might even get into the wrong incoming basket, whereas magic, if it is done right, is guaranteed. Finally, if you have magic there is always hope at the bottom of the box. Somewhere there must be an explanation and a formula.

Somehow we still say: There must be an answer - there's got to be a way." - Well - there actually may not be - but hope dies stubbornly and magic is an inviting alternative.

Or take the art of divining, or fortune telling - one of the few non-Christian remnants of supernaturalism that can be found still in the classified pages of the phonebook. Divination means getting information about the future or about things which are otherwise hidden by some use of oracles or omens, signs or portents. I said earlier that the fuel of religion was the necessity of coming to terms with the unknown, and if there is any subject which can be relied upon to be unknown it is the future. And the future is fearsome because it is unknown. Science can take a few hacks at it with the laws of inference and probability, but we are in actuality helpless with regard to what the future may bring. But religion is what men have done to combat this sense of helplessness - so to the entrails of chickens, the lines on the palm of the hand and the bumps on the top of the skull. Cards and dice were invented for divination, not for games, and cards are still occasionally used for extorting an answer from the supernatural about pressing matters of personal or national fortune. There is almost nothing man will not do to get an answer when he feels he has to have one; uncertainty is the worst of all agonies.

In recent centuries religion has moved away from magic and divination, but not from other elements of the supernatural: another world where the soul goes for a life after death, invisible spirits and gods, who inhabit an invisible world, who put order and meaning into an otherwise inexplicable and ungovernable scheme of things, who offer ways to make the wished for things come true and to make the dread things not happen, who allay feelings of helplessness and apprehensiveness as supernatural allies and helpers, who offer mercy to the anguished, codes of conduct to the perplexed and ritual means of release to those possessed by guilt and unredeemed of their sins.

In a word, the evolved paraphernalia of supernaturalism, its magic and foretelling, its invisible worlds and invisible spirits and its formulas and rituals to gain comforting relationship to the supernatural world - have functioned everywhere for thousands of years to bring meaning and orientation and comfort and emotional sustenance to men and women everywhere. These ways of belief and ways of behavior have worked for those who believed in them, but in a limited and rather narrow sense. Their hungers for emotional sustenance and for orientation in a bewildering world were met by supernaturalism; they indeed found a sense of security and an answer to their sense of helplessness, but at the price of reality distortion - for the supernatural world has never existed except in the minds and hopes of needful men and women. And the gain was, accordingly, a pseudo security that, improperly assessing the character of the world, provided an emotional balm but no confrontation with the real environment. Their symbolic systems were undeniably adaptive with regard to their subjective needs, but not with regard to objective realities. Primitive man's introjected symbol substitutes for reality, in short, gave him a spurious adaptation to the objective world even as it gave him a comfortable adjustment to his fears. Put in other words, primitive man's supernatural belief systems and ritual patterns gave him an emotionally satisfying standardization of error, subjectively fulfilling and psychically homeostatic but, in its failure at reality assessment, objectively perilous, biologically unadaptive.

A severe value judgment of supernatural belief systems, for example, has been made by Weston LaBarre, anthropologist and psychoanalyst, in which such belief patterns at the social level have been likened to psychoses at the individual level. Two instructive examples are offered by LaBarre in his fascinating book THE HUMAN ANIMAL:

But the curious fact about the human animal is that individuals are not mentally sick so long as they are in step with the symbols of their fellows - no matter what preposterous things they believe...The folklores of the world consist primarily in such things - indeed, perhaps the bulk of all human belief is in things that are not only not so but cannot possibly be so.

An instructive example of this may be taken from the folk belief of the Cassubians, a peasant group in Poland of Balto-Slavic speech. This is the belief in the mysterious flower of the fern, which blooms only at midnight on Midsummer Night. The uncanny blossom is a strange red in color and appears to be glaring at the onlooker with the unnerving glitter of a glass eye. If a person sees it, he must not stand still, or speak, or look around lest he die by the hand of a witch. The flaming fern flower may be picked with a red silk cloth, but this is very difficult, since access to it is barred by thorns....If a man does succeed in plucking the fern flower, however, he will be able to understand the language of animals and to see great hoards of hidden treasure in the ground, and he will live hale and hearty to a great age. But no one has ever seen it. This fact will not surprise botanists - since all ferns are non-flowering plants. The botanist may, however, be puzzled as to how the legend of a fern flower ever could have arisen, since it has no possible referents in the objective plant world; but the psychiatrist would not be, since he recognizes the legend as a characteristic oedipal fantasy arising from the subjective inner world of human beings. What is surprising to the non-anthropologist is that the Cassubians have so much detailed and circumstantial knowledge about the fern-flower-when no man has ever seen it!

The ability to know things that are not so is an extraordinary and unique peculiarity of man among animals.....The treacherous nature of symbols is that, like the two-faced Roman god Janus, they point two ways: both inside and outside. Symbols arise from our own organic interests; but to have any effective meaning or value as such, they must point to outside realities as well.....

All culture traits evidently carry psychological conviction as to their effectiveness and desirability, else they would not be adopted as behavior patterns. But only some culture traits do secure real adaptation of the societies in the ultimate biological sense. Quite as often as genuine solutions occur, the continuing pressure of the unsolved problem drives the society to a precipitate and spurious defense mechanism: to a merely autistic "solution," a merely fantasied answer, a facile and fallacious psychological homeostatis and "peace of mind" that is unsafe and biologically fraudulent.....

Consider also another characteristic example. The Dinka believe that members of the totemic Crocodile clan can swim the upper Nile rivers without being harmed by crocodiles, since crocodiles are thought to be their blood relatives. However, it may well be doubted whether culturally unindoctrinated crocodiles know the difference between Crocodile clan members and other Dinka - or, even knowing, care. Nevertheless, a man of

this clan will not hesitate to swim a river, even at night, enjoying as he does complete peace of mind. Since, however, this belief and peace of mind may induce Crocodile clan members to swim rivers oftener than other Dinka dare, then in a cold statistical fact the belief undoubtedly accounts for a higher mortality from this cause in the Crocodile clan than in any other clan. What you don't know will hurt you.

This behavior is, in one sense, psychotic: the psychotic rests his case on a blindly defended emotional need to believe; the tribalist supports his belief in finding the same emotional will to believe. Both the psychotic and tribalist alike mistake their needed beliefs for reality. Thus, the function both of supernatural religion and psychosis is homeostatic, to maintain preferred equilibriums. And the same anxiety arises in both psychotic and supernaturalist when his belief system is challenged. We defend our social defense mechanism quite as do all individual neurotics, and for the same reason: we will not know about the painful facts! We are forced to the conclusion that the only objective yardstick we have in measuring the difference between a supernatural religion and a psychosis is the quantitative one of counting noses. To draw again upon the colorful but insightful writing of LaBarre:

A sect of one member defines the religious psychotic; but a psychotic system with adherents is a cult. Indeed, we have cases that are ambiguously in-between being a religion and a psychosis. A folie-a-deux (in which two individuals in a mental hospital come to share the same delusional system by a kind of "cultural diffusion") is already an incipient religion. When two or three gather together in symbolism's name, there abides religion - or where else numerically are you going to draw the line!...Even a religion of the most grandiose proportions may for all that be no more, operationally, than a "folie a nth degree" - n being the number of individuals in the society adhering to that religion,

But there are in fact conceptual alternatives to the inherited anatomy of thought - as Unitarians should surely know. Religion, historically, has been wedded to the supernatural, to magic, to transcendental realms, to supernatural forces, spirits, beings and even supernatural worlds, such as heaven and hell. That there have been emotional rewards and psychic satisfactions in these symbolic projections no one can reasonably deny; that all supernatural religions have been reality distorting delusional systems and, like all psychotic patterns, pseudo sources of security and spuriously adaptive - is also difficult to deny. Their persistence in time and apparent viability are related to their emotional attractiveness and not to their assessment of reality. But over the long haul, I'm persuaded that the value of a religion relates essentially to its reality assessment, to its objective warrantability, even more than to the subjective peace of mind it offers. And it is one of the tragic ironies of our human lot that no religion can do both - for there is, I put it to you, very little peace and comfort in any lucid confrontation of reality.

We close, then, by returning to the questions raised at the opening of this discussion. What are some of the hungers, the appetites, the needs that the supernatural religions of man have sought to meet? I've discussed this at some length. There is no question that supernatural religion is a balm to

emotional yearnings and a very ready emotional help in time of need. Are the ways in which supernatural religion has accommodated these needs non-psychotic and reality-assessing? I've indicated that I believe not. In a pre-scientific age supernaturalism was the modal approach to the problems of life and, while reality distorting, nonetheless provided the needed emotional resources. In our age the delusional aspects of supernaturalism have become so visible as to undercut it as a non-psychotic emotional resource and reveal it as a spurious source of security.

I believe our era is the one in which man must at last come to a lucid awareness of his condition and, without the crutches and props of supernatural religion, find the intellectual, moral and emotional resources for life, without fantasy and delusion, within the context of a scientifically and naturalistically conceived world. The time has come for our race to emerge from its animistic childhood, forego its nursery room of reassuring spirits and, emancipated from dependency relationships with spiritual father figures, grow at last into manhood - as traumatic and painful as that no doubt is. In the words of the hymn we sang earlier:

We are all blind, until we see
That in the human plan Nothing is worth the making if
It does not make the man

Why build these cities glorious
If man unbuilded goes?
In vain we build the work, unless
The builder also grows

We are brought to our last question. What emotional resources and conceptual constructs can a non-supernatural religion provide? In the post-supernatural world into which I hope we are moving, how can apprehensiveness and helplessness and fear be handled? Can the hoped-for-things be assured now and the dreaded things avoided with certainty - or must we at least learn to live without assurance and certainty and find our security and peace amid the ambiguities and absurdities of the human condition? Have we the emotional resources to graduate into a life without supernatural supports? I hope to grapple with these questions next week. Samuel Longfellow's words to our closing hymn offer a foretaste, at least, of our approach to these questions:

With joy we claim the growing light,
Advancing thought, and widening view
The larger freedom, clearer sight,
Which from the old unfold the new.

With wider view, come loftier goal;
With fuller light, more good to see;
With freedom, truer self-control;
With knowledge, deeper reverence be.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE QUEST FOR SECURITY

A sermon delivered by the
Reverend Ernest D. Pipes, Jr., at
Unitarian Community Church
Santa Monica, California
January 24, 1965

The preacher gathered the people around him and said to them:
Because the ancient lights of the world have gone out
Men are everywhere seeking for a new light;
Because the ancient dreams have failed
They are everywhere seeking for a new dream;
Because the old idols are broken they are seeking new idols.
Give us a new banner to march under, they say:
Give us a new cause, new faiths, new ideologies;
Give us slogans, give us soft words to salve the wounds of our souls.

But I say unto you: There shall be no new dreams be given, no soft words.
Ye must learn to live without dreams, without banners, without idols.
Ye must learn that the aura of the world is gone out and cannot be re-
lighted.
Ye must learn to live without the aura as best ye can.

Lo! The day of the great dreams and the great dreamers is gone by.
Beautiful they were and lovely to behold!
But they are broken, fallen down, shattered in pieces.
The lights of the world that lighted men in the ancient days are gone out
No more to shine again.
And though men cry for new lights in the sky, that cannot be;
For there is no light in the sky.
There is no light save the light which Man makes for himself,
As the glowworm makes his own light;
And by that light which Man makes for himself must Man learn to live.

...Men thus far were a race of children.
And their great poets, their great prophets, their great philosophers,
These were the great children among them,
These were the weavers of the fairy tales and the fantasy-worlds of the
childhood of Man.

And now at last the child Man begins to be a man.
Man is adolescent. And as the adolescence of a child is bitter and pain-
ful, Full of perplexities and doubts and painful questionings,
So is the adolescence of Man bitter and painful,
Full of perplexities and doubts and painful questionings,
Because the real world begins atlast to shatter his dreams.

These things I say unto you not in a churlish contempt of Man,
Not in contempt of the poets, prophets, philosophers.
For who loveth not children? Who despiseth children?
Beautiful are the ways of childhood, far more beautiful than the ways of
the grown man.
Lovely are the dreams and fantasies of the world of the child,
Far more lovely than the harsh world of reality.
And when a child grows into a man, who is there who mourns not the loss
of all that beauty?
And beautiful also have been the fantasies of the childhood of Man,

The great dreams, the great illusions, that have sustained him,
Full of the poignancy, the pathos, the sweet yearnings of the human
heart,

The halo of the eternal and the aura of the world.
Who is there who mourns not the loss of all this beauty?
....And I say unto you: Would that these things might not be!
Would that this cup might be taken from us!
But behold! The sun goeth not backward in the sky;
And there is no going back for Man. And what is is.

....Ye must become superior men (Not super-men for there are no super-
men in the world and never will be).
Ye must become superior men because there is no other way,
There is no other way but for the man-child to grow up.
Heretofore ye have been as children...
And they cannot live without their banners and toys and pretendings.
But the superior man is he who has learned to live without toys and
pretenses.
He has learned to grasp the world as it is.
The superior man is the grown man.
Ye must become superior men, ye must grow up.

....Man stands at the crossroads. Man stands in peril of his life,
Because the ancient lights have gone out, and no other light cometh
from the sky. And this then is the final question for Man:
Can he learn to follow the good, Can he learn to put away hate.....
Can he learn to do these things without the aura of the Eternal,
Without fantasies, without dreams, without banners,
Without the crutches and props and supports of the false delusions of
his childhood,
Can he learn to stand upon his feet?
Can he grow up?
If he can do these things, he shall live,
His soul that is now sick shall be healed.
But if not he shall perish.

This, then, was the discourse of the preacher.
And the people bowed respectfully and departed to their homes.
And the preacher stood alone in the desert; And the preacher wept
Because he knew not whether Man could ever do these things which he had
said,
Because he doubted of this and knew not the answer to that riddle,
And because the future of Man was clouded in that mist.
And he sighed and said within his heart:
What if this hope of a world of men grown up,
..Of a world of superior men,
Should be itself no more than the last and greatest of all illusions?

The sun went down over the desert's rim.
And over the head of the preacher was the silence of the sky and the
shining of the stars,
And in his heart was a great questioning..THE GATE OF SILENCE,W.T.Stace

The writing of W. T. Stace offers a lyric example of what is, I'm sure,
an increasingly prevalent feeling. "Lo, the day of the great dreams and the
great dreamers is gone by...The lights of the world that lighted men in the
ancient days are gone out, no more to shine again. And though men cry for
new lights in the sky, that cannot be; for there is no light (enlightenment)

in the sky. There is no light (enlightenment) save that which Man makes for himself - and by that light which Man makes for himself must Man learn to live." There is a truth in what Stace is saying, and to this truth we must harken. There is also, I believe, error or oversight in his thesis, an oversight which renders the sadness and pessimism in THE GATE OF SILENCE overdrawn and, to a degree, unnecessary. Using this writing as something of a text, let me discuss what seems to me valid and what seems insufficient in it and, what is more important, what seems to me to be an appropriate rejoinder.

Let me begin by taking the assertion, "The lights of the world that lighted men in the ancient days are gone out, no more to shine again" - as a statement descriptive of the feelings of many persons concerning their ancestral or tribal religion. The great classic supernatural religions whose belief systems and ceremonials brought intellectual orientation and moral guidance and emotional reassurance to our forefathers are not capable of bringing those same benefits to the children of a different age. We have come to conceptualize the world in other terms than those of metaphysical animism; the unseen forces with which we must reckon we construe as impersonal rather than as personal; our posture toward the unseen and the unknown typically is not that of awe, reverence and worship; we assume the unknown to be an extension of the known and therefore ultimately explainable in terms of natural laws. As an explanatory necessity, supernaturalism has become redundant; we simply explain our world in other terms. It is in this sense that the old lights, that lighted men's ways in the ancient days, are gone out, out, no more to shine again. The familiar and comforting transcendental world, with its accessible protection and amenable reassurances and its very ready help in time of need, has been replaced by an envisagement of the universe that is essentially impersonal and indifferent, without supernatural grace and guidance, without personal consolations, a cosmos in which power is blind, in which law is impersonal and in which mercy is absent. It is such a realization that brings philosopher Stace to write his nostalgic lament. Many a Twentieth Century intellectual feels a similar wistfulness. This was my message last Sunday.

Now the question I raise is: what recourse is there for those of us who lost faith in the supernatural world of our childhood? We can, of course, plead that supernaturalism is not provably false. And, of course, it is not. You can no more absolutely disprove the existence of gods or of transcendental worlds than you can absolutely disprove the existence of unicorns and dragons. Supernaturalism is another frame of reference with its own symbol constructs in terms of which the world can be explained. One can interpret phenomena in terms of leprechauns and elves as readily as in terms of molecules and electrons, just as, presumably, you can explain light phenomena either in terms of wave theory or particle theory. There are similarly a number of geometries, Euclidian, Riemannian and others, each with differing axioms and postulates. Therefore it is certainly possible to hold to a supernatural belief framework, to conceptualize the world in those terms, and to keep the system internally consistent. St. Thomas Aquinas offers us a brilliant example of doing exactly this. But the belief systems of man do tend to change over the centuries and I observe, along with our philosopher Stace, that the various symbol constructs and postulates of scientific naturalism offer a more persuasive and convincing envisagement of our world for a great many of us nowadays. This methodology and these hypotheses, as an approach to the mysteries, give us the most reliable predictive capabilities we have ever enjoyed and offer us a reality-model that tests out remarkably well. Whatever degree of distortion of reality this assessment may contain, it is, nevertheless, the framework of reference for all the sciences, the assumption, increasingly, for the arts, the understanding of things of

most literate and thoughtful people and surely it invites itself as the obvious and proper setting for the religious quest.

More than this, scientific naturalism as a setting for the religious quest, as contrasted with transcendental supernaturalism, offers a productive and promising emancipation of religion from many restricting encumbrances. John Dewey argued this brilliantly in his now classic essay *A COMMON FAITH*, which he wrote in 1934. Let me recall for you his now often quoted observations, "All religions," he writes,

involve specific intellectual beliefs, and they attach importance to assent to these doctrines as true...They have literatures held especially sacred, containing historical material with which the validity of the religion is connected. They have developed a doctrinal apparatus it is incumbent upon "believers" to accept. They also insist that there is some special and isolated channel of access to the truths they hold.

No one will deny, I suppose, that the present crisis in religion is intimately bound up with these claims. The skepticism and agnosticism that are rife and that from the standpoint of the religionist are fatal to the religious spirit are directly bound up with the intellectual contents, historical, cosmological, and theological, asserted to be indispensable in everything religious. There is no need for me here to go with any minuteness into the causes that have generated doubt and disbelief, uncertainty and rejection, as to these contents. It is enough to point out that all the beliefs and ideas in question, whether having to do with historical and literary matters, or with astronomy, geology and biology, or with the creation and structure of the world and man, are connected with the supernatural, and that this connection is the factor that has brought doubt upon them; the factor that from the standpoint of historic and institutional religions is sapping the religious life itself.

Professor Dewey then went ahead to propose the emancipation from supernaturalism of the elements and outlooks that may be called religious. I quote his essay again:

...It is conceivable that the present depression in religion is closely connected with the fact that religions now prevent, because of their weight of historic encumbrances, the religious quality of experience from coming to consciousness and finding the expression that is appropriate to present conditions....I believe that many persons are so repelled from what exists as a religion, by its intellectual and doctrinal implications, that they are not even aware of attitudes in themselves that if they came to fruition would be genuinely religious.

Now this is a significant point, and, really, a rather obvious one. It is also an important rejoinder to W. T. Stace, although it was written nearly 20 years earlier than his lament. If religion and the religious life is inextricably wedded to belief in a supernatural or transcendental realm, and if the credibility of supernatural beliefs is dissolving, then religion and the religious life is indeed in grievous danger. But suppose that religion and the religious life can be "naturalized" as it were, emancipated from dependency on transcendental metaphysics. Suppose the adjective "religious"

can denote not necessarily belief in the supernatural but instead point to sensitivities and value affirmations in the realm of everyday life, in the natural world. Suppose we look beneath the symbols of supernaturalism and the conventions of science to the immediate and direct experiences of life, to first-hand feeling relationships with the natural world around us, to our fellow creatures on this earth, and, inwardly, to our own deepest selves. This is to shift the focus of the religious quest and the religious life away altogether from intellectual constructions of any kind to the feelings and moods and emotions and experiences which always are the heart and foundation of religion. Thus any and all segments of experience can be "religionized," any day of the week, in any place. This means, perhaps, no more than becoming aware of what Tillich has called "the dimension of depth" in any experience, or of gaining a perspective on all things "under the aspect of eternity," to use Spinoza's phrase. Others speak simply of becoming open or awakened or sensitized to the value-dimensions of things, of people, of experience itself. Buber writes of his now well-known "I-Thou relationships" to point to this same possibility of awakening to life's profoundest meanings and significance. However it may be put linguistically, the point to be made is that there is every rich possibility to being open to the religious dimensions and concerns of life by exploiting the depth-capabilities of personal, first-hand experience with the world, and this within any conceptual framework or belief system, be it supernatural or naturalistic, pantheistic or theistic, materialistic or idealistic - the intellectual ingenuity of man having no known limits.

What we are saying here is that the great ends of religion can be attained without any recourse to supernatural beliefs, indeed, within any framework of belief, for the simple reason that the heart and essence of religion has to do with the feeling, experiencing dimensions of life and only subsequently and incidently with theorizing and system-building and intellectual constructs. Without some kind of personal awakening or illumination or sensitizing to depth or value awarenesses in life, religious growth cannot really begin. In this sense religion is caught, not taught, or, more exactly, is cultivated and nurtured, not learned as a content subject-matter.

What are some of the qualities of religious experience? In a fascinating study of religious experience, which he subsumes under the more general heading of peak experiences, Abraham Maslow lists some 25 aspects of the peak experience which exhibit what might well be called religious qualities and, which is more important, elicit what can only be called religious growth.

Practically everything that happens in the peak-experiences, naturalistic though they are, could be listed under the headings of religious happenings, or indeed have been in the past considered to be only religious experiences.

For instance, it is quite characteristic in peak-experiences that the whole universe is perceived as an integrated and unified wholeTo have a clear awareness (rather than a purely intellectual philosophical acceptance) that the universe is all of a piece and that one has his place in it - one is a part of it, one belongs in it - can be so profound and shaking an experience that it can change the person's character and his Weltanschauung forever afterThis, of course, is a basic meaning of religious faith for many people. The peak-experience also brings a kind of religious awe, a non-comparing acceptance of everything, an awareness

that seems to lift us to greater than normal heights so that we can see and perceive in a higher than usual way. We become larger, greater, stronger, bigger, taller people and tend to perceive accordingly....This is like experiencing universality and eternity - a seeing of all things "under the aspect of eternity.".....In the peak-experience, such emotions as wonder, awe, reverence, humility, surrender and even worship before the greatness of the experience are often reported;...the dichotomies, polarities, and conflicts of life tend to be transcended or resolved....Fear, defensiveness, confusion, conflict disappear, a sense of great illumination, great insight is experienced. What has been called the "unitive consciousness" is often given, i.e., a sense of the sacred glimpsed in and through the momentary, the secular, the worldly.

This, then, is a road which all profoundly "serious" or "ultimately concerned" people of good will can travel, whether they be theist or atheist.

....from RELIGIONS, VALUES, AND PEAK-EXPERIENCES by Abraham H. Maslow

These, perhaps, are the answers to Stace's contention that the lights have gone out. The old lights have, yes, but through personal religious encounter with the natural world, new lights are turned on.

Let us see now whether it is possible to pull together our several strands of thought. "The lights that lighted the world in the ancient days have gone out, no more to shine again" - is, we can say, in one sense a descriptive fact, but it need not be a lament. As belief systems, as schemes of orientation and interpretation, the great supernatural religions of mankind are surely dying. As beacons that light the way in a dark world, they are indeed going out, no more to shine again. The non-theists and scientifically oriented have made their point and made it well, and Professor Stace is one among them. But the religious enterprise does not end because certain historically conditioned answers to religious questions must now largely be abandoned. As we stand amid the debris of the fallen City of God, we need not despair even if there is a pull of nostalgia for the undoubted grandeur of those fallen towers. The deficiency of the lament is its blindness to the rich possibilities for the religious life in the present here and now and within the context of the natural instead of the supernatural world. It's like coming out of a great museum and moving out through the heavy doors and down the marble steps into the living day; it's there that religion is to be cultivated and personal growth nurtured, not amid the dusty curios of the museum shelves.

Indeed, the liberation of religion from its historic associations with supernaturalism means a number of very significant things. It, first of all, shifts the setting of the religious quest to natural experiences in a natural world, to appreciations and value perceptions, to marvel and wonder, to reverence and self-dedication and humility and thanksgiving and gratitude and a sense of what is abiding and eternal - all in the available present. In a word, the full range of religious feelings, attitudes and concerns can be evoked and pursued and, if need be, justified and explained without involvement in transcendental metaphysics and free from supernatural encumbrances. This is not an inconsiderable gain; it is impossible to imagine the amount of intellectual and emotional energy that has been diverted from genuinely significant concerns only to be expended on unraveling doctrinal

tangles and in wrestling with theological complexities. I would suggest that bringing religion back to earth where people live, into belief patterns that speak to our ears, and to the living realities of personal experience - is one of the truly significant contributions the liberal churches have to make.

But finally, this gain, this progress, is not without its cost. The comfortable certainties of the ancestral faiths, their assurances of help in time of need, their security-inducing beliefs, their promises to make the wished-for things come true and the dread things not happen - in a word, their ministrations to fear and anxiety and the sense of vulnerability are indeed largely evaporated. With the eclipse of the gods goes, alas, the power of the gods to take the insecurity and the precariousness and the unpredictability out of life, even to relieve us of the burden of mortality and sadness at the certainty of death. To which we can only say that a grown-up religion doesn't always come out all roses and that the price of adulthood is the burden of awareness - of the precariousness the insecurity the impermanence of all things that live. As Stace rightly reminds us :

And now at last the child Man begins to be a man.
Man is adolescent.
As the adolescence of a child is bitter and painful,
Full of perplexities and doubts and painful questionings,
So is the adolescence of Man bitter and painful,
Full of perplexities and doubts and painful questionings,
Because the real world begins at last to shatter his dreams.

Or, as Freud succinctly put it: "Man cannot remain a child forever, he must venture at last into the hostile world." But to those who have tasted life in its fullness and found in experience both its goodness and its terrors, there is a contentment and a gladness to being adult, and of what, after all, is there to be afraid?