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The Modern Day Morality Play, delivered at the Allen Park Council of Churches on March 12, 1970

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I GUESS THAT IF I WERE TO SUCCINCTLY STATE MY MESSAGE TODAY, IT WOULD BE: "DELIVER US FROM FURTHER PROGRESS." THIS PHRASE IS A CONSCIOUS IMITATION OF THE TITLE OF A LITTLE KNOWN PHILOSOPHICAL WORK BY SWEDISH WRITER KARL TJERLOV-KNUDSEN. PROFESSOR TJERLOV-KNUDSEN CLAIMED THAT THE WESTERN WORLD IS DRIFTING AWAY FROM MORAL AND SPIRITUAL COMMITMENTS, AND THAT THIS DRIFT IS HAVING DILATORY EFFECTS UPON THE FUTURE OF WESTERN MAN. I WAS FASCINATED TO FIND IN THE BOOK'S INTRODUCTION THE BRUTALLY FRANK COMMENT THAT "I AM WRITING BECAUSE I MUST SAY SOMETHING, BUT I KNOW THAT THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE MY WORDS."

I TURNED BACK TO THE COVER OF THE BOOK, AND FOUND THAT IT HAD BEEN WRITTEN IN 1962. AT THE TIME WHEN I REMOVED IT FROM THE BUSY LIBRARY WHERE IS WAS HOUSED, IT WAS 1967, AND I WAS THE FIRST PERSON TO HAVE USED THE BOOK.

I WANT TO START TODAY FROM THE THEME IN THIS REMARKABLY PERCEPTIVE LITTLE TRACT, FOR I THINK WE ARE DRIFTING AWAY FROM VALUE COMMITMENTS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY, AND, AS PROFESSOR TJERLOV-KNUDSEN INDICATED, AND THE OBSCURITY OF HIS BOOK VERIFIED, THERE SEEM TO BE VERY FEW PEOPLE WHO ARE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS TREND IN HISTORY. AMERICANS HAVE MADE THE MISTAKE OF ASSIGNING TRUTH TO THE ABILITY OF THE INTELLECT TO MANIPULATE MATERIAL SURROUNDINGS, AND PUT THEM TO PRACTICAL USE. MAN'S FASCINATION WITH THE POWER OVER NATURE YIELDED TO HIM BY HIS SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS HAS LED TO SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES IN RECENT GENERATIONS WHICH HAVE BECOME SO RAPID THAT WE ARE ALMOST
ENTIRELY AWED BY THEIR PROPORTIONS. THE EVENTUAL RESULT OF THESE TREMENDOUS SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES, AND THE ACCOMPANYING TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS, WAS VERY SIMPLY THAT MAN HAS FOUND HIMSELF TODAY, INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD THAT SURROUNDS HIM. THE GADGETRY AND MACHINERY THAT COMPRISES THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WE LIVE BECOME OBSOLESCENT, AND IS REPLACED FAR MORE QUICKLY THAN WE CAN REACT AND ADAPT TO THE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES. BECAUSE MAN HAS BEEN UNABLE TO FORM VALUE AND MORAL THEORIES TO ENCOMPASS HIS NEW TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD, HE HAS BEEN UNABLE, NOT ONLY TO UNDERSTAND HIS SITUATION, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY THAN THAT, HE HAS BEEN UNABLE TO CONTROL OR GUIDE IT. OUR SOCIETY TODAY IS WHAT ONLY CAN BE CALLED A HISTORICAL DRIFT.

AS WE FACE AN AGE IN WHICH WE HAVE LOST CONTROL OF OUR ENVIRONMENT, IT WOULD ALMOST SEEM THAT MAN WOULD RISE UP IN ANGER AGAINST THE DOMINATION OF HIS SURROUNDINGS BY MATERIALISM AND EXPEDIENCY. YET IN THE FACE OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL AGE IN WHICH WE LIVE, THERE HAS BEEN A QUEER SILENCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL AND SPIRITUAL ALTERNATIVES. MAN SEEMS ALMOST AS WILLING TO ACCEPT HIS OWN DEMISE AS A SPIRITUAL BEING IN AMERICA AS HE WAS WILLING TO WATCH NATURE FALL TO HIS TECHNOLOGICAL CONQUEST. HIS SOUL IS BECOMING AS POLLUTED TODAY AS HIS ENVIRONMENT.

IT'S NOT THAT THE CHRISTIAN VALUES WHICH FORM THE BASIS OF THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE HAVE BEEN ENTIRELY FORGOTTEN, WE STILL HAVE PEOPLE WHO ARE CONCERNED ENOUGH TO TALK ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF AMERICAN LIFE.
BUT WHERE IS THE REAL CONCERN WITH SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL QUESTIONS IN A NATION THAT IS ALMOST FANATICALLY PREOCCUPIED WITH MATERIAL ACTIVITIES? THE FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD HAS WRITTEN: "ALL THOUGHT CONCERNED WITH SOCIAL ORGANIZATION EXPRESSES ITSELF IN TERMS OF MATERIAL THINGS AND OF CAPITAL. ULTIMATE VALUES ARE EXCLUDED. THEY ARE POLITELY BOWED TO AND THEN HANDED OVER TO THE CLERGY TO BE KEPT FOR SUNDAYS."

OUR LOVE FOR MATERIAL THINGS IS BECOMING A KIND OF IDOLATRY, IN THE TRUE BIBLICAL SENSE OF THE WORD. PHILOSOPHER GABRIEL MARCEL WRITES: "I OUGHT TO EMPHASIZE THAT THERE IS NO POINT IN THINKING OF TECHNICAL PROGRESS AS BEING IN ITSELF AN EXPRESSION OF SIN. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS CLEAR THAT TECHNICAL PROGRESS IS INCREASINGLY TEMPTING MAN TO CLAIM FOR HIS ACHIEVEMENTS AT THIS LEVEL AN INTRINSIC VALUE THAT CANNOT REALLY BELONG TO THEM. QUITE SIMPLY, WE CAN SAY THAT THERE IS GREAT DANGER OF TECHNICAL PROGRESS MAKING MEN INTO IDOLATORS." THE AMERICAN SOCIETY IS INCREASINGLY HELD TOGETHER BY A NATIONWIDE CONCERN WITH SOCIAL ECONOMIC STATUS AND MAKING A LIVING. IT IS DECREASINGLY HELD TOGETHER BY A COMMON COMMITMENT TO THE VALUES, BELIEFS AND GOALS OF OUR JUDEO-CHRISTIAN HEIRITAGE. IT HAS BEEN THE PHENOMENON OF THE LATE 1960'S THAT IT HAS BEEN OUR YOUTH WHO HAVE FINALLY DECRIED THE MORAL AND ETHICAL VACUUM IN OUR SOCIETY. WE IN THE MEANTIME HAVE BEEN WATCHING TOO MUCH THE LONG HAIR AND BEARDS,
AND LISTENING TOO CLOSELY TO THE BARBAROUS LANGUAGE. WE HAVE NOT THOUGHT CAREFULLY ENOUGH OF WHAT LIES BEHIND THESE TORTURED YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN. I FIND IT PERSONALLY VERY DISCONCERTING TO PREACH TO YOUNGSTERS ABOUT MORAL DECAY WHEN I, AND MY GENERATION, ARE UNDER INDICMENT FOR THE SAME CHARGE. IF YOU WOULD DOUBT THAT THERE IS SOME VALIDITY BEHIND OUR YOUNGSTERS' CONTEMPT FOR SOCIETY, LET ME DRAG OUT A LITTLE OF AMERICA'S DIRTY LINEN IN THE FORM OF POPULAR SLOGANS AND IDIOMS.

WE INSTILL OUR CHILDREN WITH IDEAS OF EQUALITY. THE GOOD OLD AMERICAN SLOGAN IS "EVERY MAN'S AS GOOD AS THE NEXT," AND YET WE KNOW THAT THOSE WHO DO NOT ACHIEVE "THE AMERICAN SUCCESS STORY" HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME BEING AS GOOD AS THE NEXT MAN. THOSE WHO DO NOT GO "FROM RAGS TO RICHES" ARE OFTEN DESPISED AS HAVING SOMETHING WRONG WITH THEM. WHILE HE IS TOLD ABOUT DEMOCRACY IN GOVERNMENT CLASS, A STUDENT SOON FINDS THAT IT IS A VERY BAD IDEA TO QUESTION THE WAY THE PRINCIPAL RUNS THE SCHOOL. AND SO WE GET THE CONVERSE VERSIONS OF THE "THIS IS A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY" SLOGAN AS SHOWN IN THE EQUALLY GOOD OLD AMERICAN SLOGANS, "KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN, AND YOUR MOUTH SHUT" OR "YOU'LL GET MORE FLIES WITH HONEY, THAN YOU WILL WITH VINEGAR."

WE TELL OUR CHILDREN THAT THIS IS A COUNTRY WITH "FREE SPEECH," WHERE A PERSON IS ABLE TO SAY WITHOUT FEAR HOW HE FEELS ABOUT POLITICAL
SOCIAL, AND MORAL MATTERS. AND SO THE FIRST TIME THAT ONE OF OUR YOUNGSTERS Explains his opposition to the war in Vietnam, he is accused of "not supporting the boys on the fighting front," or "aiding and abetting the communist cause." We tell our youngsters that they, the people, are the nation's rulers. At the same time, when they question foreign policy matters, they are told that "they do not know as much as our leaders," and "to follow the advice of the experts." We tell our youngsters that in order to be good citizens they must be informed citizens, and then they are told that information is "being withheld in the national interest." Americans praise themselves for "giving the other guy a fair shake," and "being honest," but youngsters rapidly find out that organized crime syndicatism make more than large car companies. They discover that if you don't play the economic game, that you are suddenly subject to the other side of America's double standard phraseology, and are admonished that "he's too honest" or "a fool and his money are soon parted." Americans extol the virtues of "the plain folks." Yet our youngsters soon realize that they are supposed to show respect and admiration for the guy who "made a success of himself." When I think about this double standard in the American way of life, the great gap between what we preach and what we practice as adults, I have great empathy with the youth rebellion. But today we see an even more pitiful commentary on our times: but as our younger generations protest, so well founded in the basis of its criticism, has itself degenerated into a wandering, aimless, goalless, system of social behavior.
THE PROTEST HAS YIELDED NO PLANS FOR THE FUTURE. THE ANSWER TO
THE MATERIALIST AND BUREAUCRAT IS CERTAINLY NOT THE FREAKED-OUT
DRUG USER. THE ANSWER TO A MILITARISTIC FOREIGN POLICY IS CERTAINLY
NOT BROKEN WINDOWS, BOMBED OUT POLICE STATIONS, AND VILE LANGUAGE.
The protest that we needed against an increasingly valueless society
has in itself become valueless. And so as we approach the 1970's
we are in a historical impasse. We live in a vacuum of social,
political, and religious belief. America is becoming a nation with
a very confused identity. So where do we go now in our polarized
nation? Surely we do not want to remain on opposite sides of the
fence from the young, nor do I think they really want to continue
the generation gap any more than we do. It seems to me that both
the old and the young are under indictment for the same charge: the
failure to carry out action which is commensurate with their goals,
values, and ideals. Perhaps if we admit that we have a common problem,
the young and old can find a common solution. But this solution
is going to take human energy, human time, human resources, and
human money. First, the sooner we realize that there are no technical
solutions to human problems, the better off we will all be as human
beings, and the closer will be our ties with our growing youngsters.
The money we are pouring into the ghettos can't in itself eliminate
human misery and poverty. How surprised we have been in the last
generation when we built splendid new housing developments in the
GHETTO, ONLY TO SEE THESE IN TURN BECOME GHETTOS IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. WITHOUT A CHANGE IN THE ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS, AND WILLINGNESS TO CONTRIBUTE BY PEOPLE WHO ARE IN POSITIONS TO DO SO ALL ACROSS AMERICA, WE ARE NOT GOING TO SOLVE ANY OF OUR PROBLEMS OF EQUALITY. WE ARE NOT DEVOID OF PROGRESS. THERE ARE THOSE OF US, MOSTLY OUR YOUNGSTERS, WHO ARE SACRIFICING THEIR OWN MATERIAL WELL-BEING TO HELP THOSE LESS FORTUNATE BY BIRTH AND EDUCATION. I KNOW OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN LIVING AND TEACHING IN THE GHETTO SO THAT THEY MIGHT, EVEN IN SOME SMALL INSIGNIFICANT WAY, BEGIN TO SPAN THE GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR, THE EDUCATED AND THE UNEDUCATED. BUT WE ARE NOT DOING ENOUGH, AND THE EXAMPLES OF WHICH I CITE ARE FAR TOO FEW.

SECONDLY, IN OUR CORPORATE AND ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE, WE MUST BEGIN TO DEMAND THE DEMOCRATIC AND HUMANITARIAN GOALS WHICH WE ENDORSE AS CONSTITUTIONAL PEROGATIVES IN THIS NATION. THE FACT THAT A MAN WORKS FOR A LARGE CORPORATION SHOULD MAKE HIM NO MORE SUBJECT TO THE TYRANNY OF THAT CORPORATION THAN IT SHOULD TO THE LARGER ORGANIZATION OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. AS WILLIAM WHITE PUT IT IN HIS NOW FAMOUS BOOK "THE ORGANIZATIONAL MAN," IT IS NOT ORGANIZATION ITSELF THAT IS CAUSE OF FRUSTRATION AND ALIENATION, THE PROBLEM IS THE UNWILLINGNESS OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION TO PRESERVE THEIR DIGNITY, THEIR RESPECTABILITY, AND THEIR COURAGE, IN THE FACE OF WHAT SOMETIMES SEEM TO BE OVERWHELMING AND ANONYMOUS FORCES. I HAVE A FRIEND WHO RECENTLY SENT ME A COPY OF A PLAN BEING FOLLOWED IN THE CORPORATION OF WHICH HE IS PRESIDENT. IN THIS FIRM, THE MOST DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES ARE ENCOURAGED IN EVERYTHING FROM PROFIT ALLOCATION TO INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES. HE REPORTS ASTOUNDING SUCCESS. INITIATIVE AND INDIVIDUALITY
ARE INCREASING, AS ARE THE PROFITS OF HIS BUSINESS. AND YET THIS EXAMPLE IS FAR TOO RARE ON THE AMERICAN SCENE. THIRDLY, WE NEED A REVITALIZED INTEREST IN OUR COMMUNITIES. IT IS THE COMMUNITY THAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE CORE OF AMERICAN'S DEMOCRATIC STRENGTH. OVER A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, ALEXIS DE TOQUEVILLE, A FAMOUS FRENCH PHILOSOPHER, VISITED AMERICA AND WROTE A BOOK CALLED "DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA." IN THIS BOOK DE TOQUEVILLE STATED THAT THE STRENGTH OF THE GROWING AND THRIVING AMERICA WAS THE INITIATIVE OF THE MANY COMMUNITIES OF WHICH IT WAS COMPRISED. WE NEED INTEREST IN THE COMMUNITY FOR INTEGRATING OUR SCHOOLS, FOR SOLVING OUR PROBLEMS OF POLLUTION, FOR MAKING PLAYGROUNDS AND RECREATION CENTERS. FOURTH, AND FINALLY, AND I BELIEVE MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE NEED EDUCATION. EDUCATION IS GOING TO HAVE TO BE AN ALMOST PREDOMINENT ASPECT OF THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE IN THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS. AMERICANS MUST BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE AGE IN WHICH THEY LIVE, AND GUIDE IT AND CONTROL IT FOR HUMAN PURPOSES. THIS COMPREHENSION CAN ONLY COME THROUGH LEARNING, LEARNING FROM THE FIRST YEARS OF A YOUNGSTER'S LIFE, UNTIL THE DAY WHEN HE PASSES FROM OUR SOCIETY. ONE OF OUR MOST TRYING PROBLEMS IN CURRENT AMERICA IS NOT EVEN SO MUCH THE EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG, IT IS THE RE-EDUCATION OF THE MIDDLE AGED AND THE ELDERLY. EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO GIVING THE POOR JOBS; EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON RACE RELATIONS; EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO BEING ABLE TO COMPREHEND AND THRIVE IN A CORPORATE ORGANIZATION; EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO BEING A DEMANDING AND INTELLIGENT CITIZEN IN VOTING AND PARTICIPATING ON PUBLIC QUESTIONS; EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO SEEING, UNDER-
STANDING, AND FOLLOWING THE PROBLEMS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS: RALPH
BARTON PERRY, A WELL-KNOWN LITERARY CRITIC, HAS WRITTEN OF EDUCATION
AND SOCIETY: "THE EXTENT TO WHICH A MAN IS FREE DEPENDS IN THE FIRST
PLACE UPON HIS EXTENT TO WHICH HE IS AWARE OF THE POSSIBILITIES. WE
MUST ENLARGE THE SPAN OF MAN'S CONSCIOUSNESS BY ACQUAINTING HIM BOTH
WITH THE WORLD AND WITH THE BEST THAT HAS BEEN KNOWN AND THOUGHT IN
THE WORLD. THE FREE MAN MUST ENJOY POSSESSION OF HIS NATURAL, INTELLECT-
UAL, AND MORAL INHERITANCE."