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## Remarks, delivered at Lakeshore Chapel on August 15, 1982

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Lakeshore Chapel - August 15, 1982

Have you ever asked yourself the question, "What's at the end of the universe?" That question hardly pushes itself upon you during the busyness of everyday life. What's at the end of the universe is not a pressing issue when there is food to be cooked, money to be earned, relationships to sort out, and all kinds of health considerations. One of the difficulties about the question if we do ask it is that we really cannot answer it except with answers like eternity, or black holes. These are answers that require explanation we cannot provide.

If we are honest with ourselves we must admit that it is impossible for us to give rational content to the concept of "never ending," just as it is impossible to accept the fact that eventually the universe has a boundary and beyond is nothing. If that's the case, nothing becomes something. It really is a rather tricky question. What we come up with when we pose the question is an acute awareness that our minds are able to probe and think about dimensions that it cannot yet grasp or explain.

We have been taught that we are made in the image of God, but we can't quite replace him or her. Most people deal with this question

much as they deal with their own mortality. They have faith. They believe that what is beyond our consciousness has order and meaning, and is ultimately good because it is in the nature of things, and God is at the heart of the nature of things. There is reality, and we see part of it, but we believe strongly in the reality of the part we do not see.

Before wheels and boats and written language I wonder if people ever thought with a sense of mystery what was beyond the great mountains that loomed above them, majestic and impassable in so many parts of the earth? There have been so many questions that at first cross the mind. Sooner or later they obsess some people. They live with the questions. Finally, through hard work, using the mind, some rather complicated and complete answers emerge that in turn lead to more questions and more answers. Life has been an evolving process for homo sapiens from the time we first appeared, unable to write or maybe even speak except in grunts and screeches. No matter how much feather bedding of ideas or obscurantist thought, the questions come and the answers follow, sometimes faulty, but often with some truth that leads to new vistas of understanding.

There is a theory, appealing to me, that consciousness as we understand it, developed over a period of time, that man was man before he was conscious of the fact as we are conscious of it. My discussion this morning will assume it to be fact, fully recognizing that some communions would consider such a statement heresy. Fortunately, I cannot be defrocked since I am not a minister. Freedom of speech is guaranteed in our Constitution so my only risk is that of offending some of you, which I would regret. To those whom I might offend, I will not offend long for this is not a long sermon.

There is no doubt that man existed before written language. The development of a sophisticated language is evidence of a developing consciousness and the use of that language, both linguistic and mathematical, propelled the race into more communication, greater discoveries, deeper knowledge, a more highly developed sense of what being human is, and an awareness of the future possibilities of knowing. This process does not come evenly throughout the earth, nor has it eradicated brutality or what we call inhumanity. Our expectation that life can and should be good, our belief in the possibility of human goodness, causes us to label the brutality

inhuman. We are concerned, even worried, about this failure of the race to live in peace and understanding. Why has it always been that way? Our religion, which is the expression of what we believe and need, has provided content and structure for us to reach our highest aspirations for the human spirit, but too often it contributes to the misunderstanding and animosities that lead to our warring. Religion becomes an intermix of our best and our worst.

Our strong beliefs often compel us to act in ways that change and improve the human condition. They also bring us into confrontations with those who believe just as strongly what we cannot tolerate. Sometimes the confrontation leads to better understanding, sometimes to conflict, sometimes to understanding after conflict, and sometimes to continuing conflict.

In our religious experience we can reflect on the teachings of Christ. When I read the accounts of what he said I come to the conclusion that he was trying to free people from some limiting religious and social ideas and structures. He didn't condemn all; he gave new perspectives. Those new perspectives have not been lost. They gave and give people a higher consciousness of their own value, and a different concept of God. Yet, man has also used Christ to fashion

limited religious and social ideas and structures. Perhaps the problem is that some people are just limited in thought and spirit or have a grasping need to control all that is a part of their lives, even the ideas of others. More than that, they cannot live with ambiguity or their own lack of knowledge, a condition all of us must live with.

After all this discussion, what I am saying is that these steps in human experience that lead to more, new, and better insight do not lead to unmitigated goodness. Better is not always the best for everyone. People can take what is good and mold it into something that is not. Advancement in human knowledge and understanding of the universe , and specifically that part that is human nature, does not always bring immediate improvement for everyone in spiritual life, philosophical insight, or economic circumstance. But it makes a difference because life for man has changed. The birth of a child in Bethlehem, the manufacture of a sail, the carving on the Rosetta stone, harnessing electricity, the printing press, a man named Plato, breaking the atom, have changed life, have improved life, even though on occasion they have been used to destroy and dehumanize it.

When we look back to the earliest evidence that man exists and compare homo sapiens then and now, we cannot deny an unusual progress in all fields of knowledge. This evolutionary track has not carried goodness exclusively, but man knows more and has continuing potential to break through to greater knowledge and understanding if the past is a mirror for the future.

I wonder across whose mind the question first flitted and at what period, "If I could fly, how fast could I travel?" When that question was first posed, did it seem as impossible to answer scientifically as the one I asked, "What's at the end of the universe?" Remember, too, it is less than 500 years ago that people of considerable intelligence thought the world was flat.

We have reached a stage where we are beginning to probe outer space and measure time. We have ideas based on research about the life of a star, even a galaxy. Put in that perspective, we know what a short period of time is filled by the human experience on earth. For me that makes the human experience all the more impressive. To see the development of consciousness and the increase of knowledge

through consciousness in such a short period of time compared to the life of our galaxy, the sun or the earth, leads me to believe that the next 5,000 years provide the possibility for man to live in dimensions that are hard for us to conceive. Whether or not he will know what's beyond the boundary of the universe I don't know, but he probably will have expanded those boundaries. One of the interesting prospects about death is the possibility of more dimensions of experience beyond. We live in a three dimensional world with beginnings and endings and color. We are aware of that at an early age. A cow lives in a three dimensional world with beginnings and endings, and no color. She is not aware of any of that. She lives on the same earth, but she cannot fully comprehend our world though we live side by side. Is there a fourth or fifth dimension, or a quality of life that we are blind to, that we do not comprehend; dimensions and qualities that are within the province of God? I don't know whether cows know more now than they did 5,000 years ago if there were animals then resembling cows, but man certainly does. He is now conscious of dimension, and knows infinitely more than his ancestors. That is why I believe what lies beyond man and in the province of God is open



territory for discovery and settlement when man is ready and has the will for it. We are made in God's image in so much as we know and understand.

What I have tried to do is analyze the human condition and the process of human life. From that analysis I draw certain principles that one might call doctrine, religious principles, or canons. You have all heard of canon law in the Catholic church. Canon law comprises rules for church and religious life. I choose to call mine the Lakeshore Canons. They will not make a big explosion.

Number one is "Keep the Faith." Belief has been the engine for survival and progress for the human race. Belief has caused bloodshed. It has been and is mistaken. It is also a comfort and, I believe, often a right understanding. Martin Luther and John Calvin used the concept to address particular theological problems in their time which still have relevance. My particular brand of faith is a belief that man's seeking will lead to useful discovery, that what we do not know may be known for the enrichment of man and therefore to the glory of God. I believe that human life is sacred, and must be treated

with dignity and respect. When it is, the conditions are right for more discovery and understanding. Man must believe in himself and the worthiness of the life given him. There is some evidence that faith has worked in the past, but that is no guarantee for the future. One's belief in the future is faith.

Number two is "Think Rationally." One does not have to believe that rational conscious thought is the only means to understanding or knowing. Much extra conscious machinery was installed in the species long before consciousness became an overriding characteristic. Having said that, I will contend that most trouble in the world emanates from man's failure to use the power of his reason. Rational thought is the best means we have to continue our quest for knowledge, the best means we have to understand ourselves.

Rational thought is a demanding master. It keeps you honest with yourself. To betray it is to betray your mind, your brain. It may not be the fount of all truth, but it makes you examine what you believe and why you believe it. Without it you become the victim of impulses and theories that play to hidden needs without

restriction. The bad consequences of good discoveries and insight can usually be traced to the breakdown of reason, and the rampage of emotion unchecked. The knowledge explosion and its consequent opportunities for the species was and is impossible without it.

Number three is "respect mystery." Reason may unravel mystery, but there is always more that is unknown and mysterious to be unravelled. What we don't know, yet anticipate, holds us in awe. At least it should. Those who do not respect mystery usually lack humility. Their sin of hubris is a sin against all that is, and all that is to be learned. It is important to accept ourselves as unknowing at times.

We must be aware of and respect strong and deep feelings that we cannot yet understand, that our reason has not or perhaps cannot penetrate. To respect mystery, however, is to respect also the human process that has replaced mysterious explanations with scientific understanding. What was mystery to an ancient, something that to him was for the Gods to hold in secret, is for us often a rationally explained phenomenon. Respecting mystery, then, is to be grateful for the route and distance we have come and it is to be respectful of our and our progeny's future journey. It is also to bask in the

wonder, love and joy of life without understanding it all.

You have heard my three Lakeshore Canons. That is enough for today. After all, we have to play on the beach, eat lunch, and look for those boundaries at the end of the universe!

## BRIEF HISTORY OF LAKE SHORE CHAPEL.

A dozen cottages had been built along the lake shore by 1900 and to reach the village churches on foot was not easy. Accordingly, the summer community accepted the offer from one of the centrally located owners to hold a Sabbath Meeting at their cottage. The dwelling next door served as a place to which the young children could retire for their lesson during the main portion of the service.

No collection was taken, but the children continued to take their pennies. Not knowing what to do with them, someone suggested with a laugh, "Save them to build a Chapel." And this was done.

Lake Shore Chapel was erected, and dedicated on July 17, 1904. The early service was like an adult Sunday School as frequently one of the members of the group discussed the International Sunday School lesson for the day and six or seven hymns were sung. Ministers from along the shore or at Camp Gray preached, but the president presided.

As the mode of travel changed from boat, horse, and interurban to automobile and airplane, the area from which the ministers could be invited greatly increased. Pastors for the entire season could be selected. The present form of service was adopted to meet the needs of Lake Shore Chapel which has no connection with any religious denomination. The children who used to retire to the back of the Chapel or to a nearby dune or porch now go to the Children's Chapel which is a memorial to one of the former children. The bell and bell tower, the planting around the Children's Chapel, the piano, and flower vases are also memorials to former members of the community. The flag and the Bible used at the dedication have been preserved.

To all a warm welcome is extended and a cordial invitation to participate

## ORDER OF WORSHIP

Call to Worship

The Invocation

The Opening Hymn

Responsive Reading

A Hymn

The Reading of the Scripture

The Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Announcements

The Offertory Music

The Offertory

A Hymn – Children Retire to Sunday School  
On Singing of Second Verse

The Sermon

A Hymn

The Benediction

*Chapel convenes at 11:00 A.M.*

In our worship together our time of prayer is our time to acknowledge gratitude and quietly petition. In ~~one~~ <sup>this past</sup> week, ~~as~~ <sup>our minds have had time</sup> ~~one year, we have~~ so much ~~our minds can~~ <sup>to</sup> overflow with gratitude for all things that make life good; people to love, to be loved, health, a happy spirit, play, work, thought, the grace to accept what we must, the will to change and accomplish what we can, the thrill of being alive and having possession of our own lives, the equanimity to face disappointment, difficulty and even death. For all of these and <sup>the</sup> many more <sup>things</sup> ~~gratitudes~~ and ~~things~~ that each person sees that cross the minds of ~~each~~ all assembled here in corporate worship we offer thanks. And by our gratitude we re-commit ourselves to the goodness of life.

And we ask for ourselves clearness of mind so that we may understand what is going on around us. We ask calmness of spirit so we may treat others with dignity and unselfishness. We ask depth of insight so that we may understand ourselves and others and therefore live more fully and experience to the fullest the good feelings, thoughts and knowledge that life has to offer. We ask for good relationships so that we may be bound to family and friends in happiness and mutual support. We ask for continuing freedom so that in body, mind, and spirit we may move along any path that beckons us to a better life, and ~~that~~ we may express our opinions, feelings and joys to all who will listen and appreciate us. That we may worship God freely and pray as his son taught us to pray —