

## **“FACING CHANGE”**

*Isaiah 40:27 - 31, 43:18-19, 2 Corinthians 5:17*

**We prefer to see the cosmos as perfect order -- every star in its course, every atom in its place -- the social order stable and secure. (With ourselves -- if not on top -- at least near the top!) Believe me, we are not.**

**We expect family life to be all peace and tranquillity. It is a cozy world view. It is a picture postcard view of the universe with a white picket fence around it, climbing roses, smoke curling from the chimney, and sound of happy voices, everything so comfy, so snug, so secure, so sweet ..... and so utterly untenable a dream, a dream based largely on the inability to face change.**

**When -- as a matter of straight fact, the universe is not neat and tidy. The cosmos, the country of the stars, like that of the atom, actually is savage country, forever challenging, unconquerable, forever unpredictable, full of novelty and contingency, whose inner-ness, whose hidden-ness will ever elude the mind and the machines (those mind extensions) of humankind. Our space probes and gene manipulation are but first, toddling steps out of the nursery door into the endless forest. As my dad used to say: “I wish I could be here 100 years from now to see what happens next and next and next.”**

**Well -- the universe is open-ended and ever will be -- “world without end -- amen.” And the society, the social order, follows suit. We have always dreamed of social security, and ordered society that is stable, if not stationary. Even Plato feared as evil, constant innovation, writing in his laws, as though writing a letter to the editor: The legislator must somehow find a way of implanting reverence for antiquity .....” Hobbes, in his Levithan, feared diversity of opinion, longed for uniformity, consensus. But even Milton in his Arcopagitica saw that social diversity and change is not only inevitable, but desirable. No one in sanity, of course, wants anarchy (always quite a few insane around), but no one wants totalitarianism either. The dictatorship, militarily or otherwise may try to keep society neat and tidy -- but it fails, for the social order, like the natural order, remains open-ended ... and will forever .... as does the life of the family and the individual. Some of you will recall Montaigne in one of his essays writing of the primitive tribe in which the young men, as part of the rites of passage into adulthood, pushed, shoved, dragged their fathers down the village street. And the fathers were ashamed if their sons were not either willing or strong enough to do it. If the son faltered, it was a sign of family weakness.**

Though some sons probably over-did it and unduly roughed up the old man, it was intended as a ritual of relief to an aging father (“I have someone to take over!”) and of liberation and joy to a young man (“At last, I get my chance!”). This, at least, is a balanced ritual. It does not go to the extreme either of “ancestor worship” as among the ancient Chinese, which was foolish -- or of “descendant worship” (child worship, the worship of youth) as in contemporary America, which is also foolish (the tyranny of the high chair). Somewhere, there must be and is a balance of reason and faith between “too far, too fast”, and “too slow, too seldom”. But change is inevitable, and the changeless universe is only a dream that quickly becomes a nightmare if you try to live in it.

If you do not believe this, then try as an individual to deny time. You just try to deny, for example, that you are aging and changing. Refuse to face that -- try to unbelieve the changes time is making in your way of life -- as in your face, along your arteries, in your muscle and your bone. Do this, and all patched and painted up, like a plaster mannequin in a shop window -- you are at once pitiful, pathetic. Or you just try and hold on to, clutch at, try to keep your family as they now are, and they will finally deny you, die to you, and leave you either in anger or apathy. Life itself is open-ended. You better believe it. Face up to it now.

This is Biblical. Neither Old Testament Judaism or New Testament Christianity is marked by any “cozy” concept of life. No, the mainstream of Biblical prophetic encounter is always out of the past, for the present, facing the future, and facing it unafraid, because in faith. It is Deutero-Isaiah, in the terror of military defeat, political collapse, deportation, in the midst of a displaced people, prophesying, “Remember not the things of old and pay no heed to the former things. For behold (saith the Lord) I wish to create a new thing; now it must grow and you will experience it.” (Isaiah 43:18-19). It is St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17 saying, “The old has passed away; behold the new has come.”

This is no foolish denial of the fathers, no foolhardy cutting away from the roots of religion, of reason and value, but it is the faith that a Creator God can still create, that God, if he ever had a past, also has a future, and that you do not go back with God, you go on with him, “grow” with him, that you yourself “experience” this.

Said the same Isaiah, “They that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:27-31)

**This was said to a people who were weary, who thought they had no future, only a past. That is dangerous doctrine. This “wait” on the Lord does not mean “stand stock still” and let God do it. It means “wait on” in the sense of “get up from there and wait on, get busy, get going, for God’s sake, keep moving, as a waiter should.” It means expectant obedience. It means walk, run, fly. And it’s all forward motion. Isaiah knew eagles do not fly backwards.**

**So, if you want to be miserable, if you want to die by degrees, just try sitting down in your no-longer cozy world -- be a “used to” person -- look back, to when you were healthy, to when you were young, to when you were prosperous, to when your family was intact -- look back and wring your hands, and cry -- and cry, and cry, and cry.**

**This was not for Isaiah. It was not for St. Paul. In the resurrection of Christ, he saw “all things new”, a fulfillment of a past, and a promise of a future.**

**“In Christ”, as one of our young associates once said -- “God is walking you home” -- not back home, but toward home. Like Jesus, Paul saw everywhere a kingdom coming, a will being done, on earth as in heaven. Throughout the New Testament, there is expectancy, the excitement of change in the air. Because there is faith, there is hope. The past gives way to the present, the present to the future, and death is there, but so is life, and life is eternal. That’s why (for the Christian) death has lost its sting and the grave its victory -- Why? Because there is the ever-open possibility of love and love is eternal. And “God is love”, says the New Testament, and says it again and again.**

**Small wonder the mid-20th Century still finds the New Testament exactly that -- eternally “New”.**

**Let us pray:**

**O Lord Christ, we thy people,  
Do not ask to go back to you,  
But to go on with you,  
In the great adventure of life and love,  
Into the new world,  
Into the Kingdom that is coming. Amen!**