

## Facing Up To It

May 8, 1983

T. S. Elliot may have said – “humanity can take only so much reality.” But Jung was wont to say to his students: “To stay sane, you must stay in touch with reality, no matter how bad it is.”

And he was right. For example, I have often seen hospital patients, enduring great pain or crippled by disease, far more alive, more accepting, more awake to reality, more able to face up to it – than their visiting family or friends who keep up the silly pretense, the illusion, the “front” that says “Now don’t you worry, everything will soon be rosy again.” I recall a terminally ill young patient, finally all but screaming at his father “For God’s sake, Dad, face up to it. I’m dying!”

It is, I think, the main point of the book of Prov. that God and faith are on the side of facing facts.

No matter how bad reality is, it’s better than make-believe. + So much make-believe is available now. Have you noticed that people who live in the soap-opera world of T.V. or the dribble of the drug store romance how they get that vacant nursing-home stare on their faces, the rather wall-eyed look others get from too much stereo music. Or too many little nips + puffs + scents of you know what. They also become peevish and querulous like the child when faced by actuality – when reality intrudes their fantasy world. Reality like the demands of daily work + the responsibility of home + spouse + children.

On the other hand, I remember one retired executive, a delightful old gentleman, who took drastic measures to stay in touch with the real world – he became so enraged with his entire “electronic amusement center” which he had set up to escape into when he quit work – that he throw the whole contraption out the door. Kit + caboodle including the earphone, and got himself a volunteer no-pay job in a low-cost housing project, helping real people, in real need, find real help for real kids in the fighting, scrambling, mean, but actual world. After that, he worked for the church feeding the hungry in Ecuador. He became as alive again at 74, as he once was, in that company where he had been the chairman of the board (not bored either.) Besides that, his blood-pressure went down + happiness quotient went up. He had faced up and cared and won.

Sometimes, of course, in this day and age, you’re not too sure just where the real world is. In the micro-univ. we are probing genes + the macro univ. we have left our puny Solar-sys. + are pushing towards the stars – today’s future shock is tomorrow’s antique. So where is the reality to stay in touch with? I remembered an uneducated person calling me in the middle of the night. “Where are you?” I asked. “I’m somewhere,” he said, “with my little candle. Wanna know what I’m doing?” “No,” I said. “Then I tell you,” he said. “I’m looking for the real world. And you know what, preach? It’s getting harder and harder to find, preach. The real world is getting harder and harder to find.”

Poor fellow. I wanted to say, “Look, if you find it, call me back, will you?” Call collect. For the real word is getting harder and harder to find. What with diamonds made with paste, + fake suede + make believe everything – from coffee to sex –

It’s like that so called educational toy. It’s a puzzle called “the world today.” the point is – no matter how you put the puzzle together it’s wrong.

“Ah, come, come,” says the writer of the O.T. “Get off of it. Quit kidding yourself. The real world is still there. Wake up. All you have to do is have the faith (sometimes call courage) to face up to it.

Remember “the 30 precepts” in the book of Prov.? No? Well. The 18<sup>th</sup> one makes fun of the people who’ve quit the real world – can’t face up to it – + live in the living death – of the make believe world.

Q. – “Who groans ‘alas!’? Who cries ‘woe is me’?”

Who gets into quarrels? Who has complaints? Who suffers needless wounds? Whose eyes are bloodshot?”

A. - Those who linger over wine, who drain the mixing bowl.

(Q – What happens to you ultimately?)

A. – Your eyes will see strange apparitions and your mind + speech will be confused.

(Q. – And then ... what do you say?)

A. – I say - “as soon as I wake up I shall need another drink!”

(The End)

And that’s 2000+ year-old Hebrew! (Prov. 23:29-35)

The only difference is, the old mixing bowl’s get a lot more electronic clap-trap in it than it used to –

Strange, it seems to me, that the Judaic Christian faith has so often been indicted as a falsely idealist world – and yet the whole thrust of its hawk-man; its wisdom has been to lead persons by faith back to the real world they handle so badly + are so frightened of + so tempted to try to escape – and the faith says to them, “Hold on, pal. Here’s the world as it is. If you want to live at all you’ve got to live in it. So why not face up to it. Make something out of it while you’re here?”

Do the 10 commandments sound like escapist literature to you? They deal with war + peace, don’t they? justice and stealing, don’t they? lies + truth, don’t they? family + social order, the rules males + females live and/or die by. Wisdom is personified here – and his name is God.

Or does the O.T. prophetic stream sound false to you? When it calls for “social justice, mercy and a humble work?” or when it says “do not take advantage of the helpless poor”? (Prov. 22:22) “Do not hesitate to discipline a youth”? (Pr. 23:13a) “Do not despise your mother when she is old”? (23:22b) “Do not wear yourself out in pursuit of succ. + wealth”? (23:4a) etc. – etc. –

That’s not taking you out of – that’s pulling you back into the real work of work + pain+ pleasure + wives + kids + in-laws + enemies with some rules to live and love by.

Far from fantasy, it's saying in the words of the wisdom poetry (Pr. 8:4-6)

"To you, O men, I call

And my appeal is to the human race.

You simpletons, learn sense!

You fools, acquire intelligence!

Listen, for I would speak of virtues and open my lips concerning equity."

Don't you understand? That's how virtues got to be virtues – because they faced up to – affirmed, promoted, protected life and that's how vices got to be vices – because they destroy it. Refused to face up to the facts that keep life on the tracks –

And don't you understand that this is also the genius of the N.T. faith? It leads, not away from, but to – "Life." – Even "abundant life." Christian love is not faking it. The mathematician – theologian – Kierkegaard wrote: "To say that love is mainly a feeling or anything of the kind is really an un-Christian concept of love. For to the Christian, love is the works of love. Christ's love was not an inner feeling, a full heart and what not, it was the work of love which was Christ's life." (Journals, p.317)

Jesus fed + still feeds the hungry, healed + still heals the sick, gave + still gives sight to the blind. It was + is to this day the acceptable way of the Lord.

We want to feel the faith. In order to feel it, we often fake it. He didn't bother. He just lived it. This is why God becomes an illusion for us, but was a reality to him. This is why Christianity is a dream – for us, a way for him. Truth is always a way, a life? Don't just verbalize it. Be it. "I am," he said, "the way, the truth, the life."

The life of faith is the work of love. It's the opposite of phony. Many look for it, few, he said, find it – but it's there. It's here. If you face up to it – if you have eyes to see + ears to hear, as Jesus said.