The Dying Time

Late winter has always been the most trying of times, at least until the rise of industrialism. For all people whose lives are tied more closely (or is it more obviously) to the earth and the cycles of the seasons, late winter is the time when they either make it or they don't, depending upon whether they have prepared adequately—whether they have stored enough food and gathered enough wood. If the winter is much longer or harder than expected, death becomes a frequent visitor in the homes of such people. This, I think, is what Lent and Easter are all about; and surely such concerns and such celebrations as are expressed in Lent and Easter didn't just spring upon western Europe full blown and out of a clear blue sky when Christianity first appeared. Christianity simply responded to the deepest felt needs of people confronted with the dying time. And surely we, however temporarily insulated from the realities of late winter, the starvation, the disease incurred through malnutrition, surely we are not more removed really from the dying time, though our society (and probably our innermost selves, too) would like to help us deny death's grim proximity. Lent has always been a grim time; today it is teaching and observation have become downplayed. Death has always been at the center of Life's meaning in western civilization; today it is avoided by our funeral customs, our medicine, our psychology, almost every aspect of the society as a whole. Our machines and our "conveniences" help us pretend that we live unrelated to the natural world where death and life are one.

Recently I have seen two works of art (a film and a play) in which death is again central. Certainly murder, guns, and violence are familiar to American audiences, but I at least experience a kind of surrealistic intellectualizing in which the guns and the violence have nothing to do with life or death. Perhaps it's just that our movies focus only upon the act, not upon either the characters as people or any kind of meaning or human concern. The violent act itself is the concern for the most part in our films, not any human feeling or meaning. No so in the South American film El Topo. In this film violence, sadness, and death are searingly, painfully human, part of the suffering of the human condition. And there is no flinching or delicacy to the violence of El Topo; I have never seen a more violent work, nor a more explicit one. But neither is there any easy message, any glorification or moralising about violence in El Topo. In this film, death, violence, and blood give birth to a quest for meaning and value in life. The world and the meaning of life are defined within the clearly limiting parameters of our own deaths and our implication in the deaths of others. And you can't miraculously get free of those limits; they simply are. Meaning will not separate from dying. In another way, this is true of Michel deGiderode's play Pantagliese; but in another way must be emphasized. Pantagliese (the main character) wishes to have some destiny, some meaning. But he is a fool, a ridiculous, almost idiotic fool. Where the main character of El Topo is one desperately and very actively seeking his own meaning, Pantagliese seems to think that his destiny will happen willy-nilly and that he is not responsible to forge a meaning: "When he has a meaning, it is by accident, and he accepts no responsibility for it. It just happens, by itself. The irony is that Pantagliese, the foolish clown, by accident causes a revolution. Of course the revolution fails, it becomes a blood-bath, and in the end Pantagliese is executed along with the true revolutionaries: whether he accepts his responsibility or not, he has to live (and die) with it.

Perhaps the most interesting, most searing and evocative element in both of these works is the fact that death becomes a very matter-of-fact part of life, albeit perhaps the most important matter of fact. I think that it is this attitude of the centrality of death, which these works present without morbidity, which our society would deny with all its might if only it could in the end. This year, as the Easter season comes upon us, I hope to try to focus a bit more directly—and for me at least more honestly—upon the intertwined and inextricable natures of death, life, meaning, and the fullness thereof. In an attempt to face some of this in a most interesting but not morbid way, a group of us will be presenting as part of the Good Friday service a short play by Michel deGiderode called The Blind Man. This play, a version of the old tale of the blind leading the blind, is a simple and evocative piece mixing comedy and tragedy, character and caricature, lightness and grimness. Thus in mood, though not in explicit subject matter, the play fits nicely at the end of Lent.
1972 PARISH POLL

Two Prairie Society members are urged to attend, as delegates, the 1972 Dallas General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association, May 30 through June 4 in Dallas Texas. Registration fees will be paid by the Prairie Society, and delegates’ travel and lodging costs will possibly be defrayed by UUA after the convention. For more information call Rachel Siegfried.

The Planning Committee of the convention will be guided by the results of the following poll in drawing up the final agenda for the assembly. Please complete this poll and return it to Rachel by March 20.

I. Do you believe that the General Assembly should continue to consider General Resolutions? Yes No

II. Regardless of your answer to the above question, please respond to each of the following resolutions in these ways:

a. Write "Y" if you think "Yes" the resolution should be considered at the 1972 Assembly
   Write "N" if you think "No" the resolution is not worthy of consideration
   Write "S" if you think the resolution should be studied for a year before consideration

b. Indicate your ranking of the importance of the resolution for consideration at the Assembly. Please be sure to rank all resolutions.

c. On a separate sheet write your comments or recommended changes in the text.

1. BE IT RESOLVED that the assembly urges
   1) that all Unitarian Societies ban smoking in all of their meetings held within buildings and provide reasonable recesses for smokers to leave such meetings to smoke,
   2) that all Unitarian Societies undertake public information programs to make smokers aware of the physical harm they do to others by subjecting them to tobacco smoke in closed places, and
   3) that appropriate authorities ban smoking in all closed places of public meeting.

2. BE IT RESOLVED that the assembly recommends uniform gun legislation as follows:
   1) Licensing for the purchase and possession of all usable firearms;
   2) Firearm registration holding owners legally accountable for all their firearms;
   3) State codes for responsible firearms ownership regarding how they are kept and to whom they may be transferred; and
   4) Sound standards for the responsible use of firearms by law enforcement agencies.

3. BE IT RESOLVED that the assembly recommend that off-the-road recreational vehicles be limited to designated areas in provincial, national, state and county parks, in national forests, wilderness areas, and game preserves and that the UUA members support legislation to restrict the use of such vehicles to these designated areas.

4. BE IT RESOLVED That the assembly commends the Beacon Press for its publication of The Pentagon Papers.

5. BE IT RESOLVED that the assembly urges that the Senate of the US ratify by June 1, 1973, the several conventions on Human Rights drafted under the auspices of the United Nations, including those on racial discrimination, education, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights; and discrimination in education.

6. BE IT RESOLVED that the assembly recommends that the manufacture, sale and possession of ammunition of any kind be declared illegal.

7. BE IT RESOLVED that the assembly strongly urges that the US government lift its ban on free travel to and from the island of Cuba.
CALENDAR

March 5 - Yoga with Boyce Totz - 10 a.m. at Portal Foster Center
March 8 - Program committee meeting at Richard Roznoy's home.
March 11 - Circle dinner - Betsy Roberts
March 12 - "School Without Walls" by Baxter Richardson - 10 a.m. at Portal Foster Center
March 13 - Social Action committee meeting, 7:30 p.m. at Rou Leu's home
March 15 - Winter warmup #3, 10 a.m. at the Karakahl Inn, Mt. Horeb, sauna, pool, lunch. Average total cost: $2. WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN A SUNDAY AFTERNOON FAMILY SWIM: OR FRIDAY NIGHT COUPLES SWIM? Call Betty French or Lilo Koehl.

The SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE has inaugurated a broadening of its activities by setting up small sub-committees of 3 or 4 people each headed by a liaison person to report to the committee. The sub-committees were formed on the basis of the postcard poll taken by Bob Koehl several months ago. The committees are: Ecology, Population, Community concerns, Minorities, Welfare, Schools and youth, and Women. Persons who did not get or return a postcard should notify Bob Koehl at 233-7383.

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THE SPRING RE PROGRAM
The Spring trimester of the RE Program begins March 5. Bill Caldwell's work with the Jr. Hi class will emphasize doing rather than discussing. Bill urges all to come and help plan activities. Ori Eloucks and Mary Miracle join Hermine Davidson and Pat Meyer in work on "Our Place in Nature" with the intermediate grades. Plans include adventurous trips to the Arboretum to discover the Lost City and other mysteries. Storytelling and more craft work are planned by Pat Cautley, Marilyn Hemstead, and Norma Magnuson for the four and five year olds and the first and second grades. Nancy McElrath continues to coordinate the nursery. Remember all ages and sexes are needed to help --- have you?

When we moved to the Portal Foster Center in December, the RE committee made some changes in the program. Because of sporadic and/or small attendance and the difficulty of recruiting teachers for single-age-group classes, we decided to combine the four and five year olds with the first and second graders; and also combine the third through sixth grades. Several people were asked to work with each class, thus relieving any one person of full responsibility for a class. A week ago the RE committee met to evaluate this approach. The response of the teachers was most positive. We felt strongly about these points: 1) Preparation and evaluation of a class with other adults was better than by one's self; 2) with several teachers and a larger number of children several activities could be done by interested children rather than the same number of activities done only by a single age group without a choice in the matter; and 3) dealing with a variety of class problems is facilitated by work as a team. Certainly the reorganization is not the end to any RE conflict. Attendance is still sporadic and many of the children don't know each other well. But we are attempting to improve this situation. One of the biggest assets is the large room downstairs where the children can play together before and after classes. For example, in this room two weeks ago the children remained after they were dismissed, playing together rather than going upstairs to retrieve their parents. NO ONE left the group--a sign, we think, of increasing cohesion in the Sunday School kids relationships.

This spring the RE committee will write a statement of purpose and some projected goals for the program. If you wish to share your ideas (and we urge you to) please phone any member of the committee. They are: Pat Cautley, Marilyn Hemstead, Nancy McElrath, Norma Magnuson (chmn.) Pat Meyer (RE director), and Diane Miracle. We also urge you to attend a meeting at Pat Cautley's, 1605 Regent St., 8 p.m. Wednesday, March 8. This meeting will focus on a statement of purpose and goals for the RE program.

Many thanks go to the following people for teaching this past term: Rou Leu (6th grade); Theron Caldwell, Elinor Cautley, Hermine Davidson, Aileen Nettleton and Pat Meyer (intermediate grades); Judy Richardson, Melinda Roznoy and Barb Willard (4 & 5 year olds, 1st and 2nd grades) and Nancy McElrath, et al., in the nursery.
SPRING (BY GOD) RETREAT
Upham Woods, March 24, 25, 26, 1972

Program (participation optional, but...)
- fun and games
- discussions
- hikes
- fireside gathering
- scavenger hunt
- evening warm up
- marshmallows, snacks
- bird watching
- and maybe even a group gope!

Programs for school age persons; baby sitting at moderate cost for pre-school persons.
COST: $13 per adult, $10 per child under 12, no cost for children under 3.
Accommodations: heated dormitory, 4-bed rooms, indoor plumbing, towels and bedding provided, janitor service
Registration limited to 56 persons. Fill in form below and return to Sydney Mannering, 3202 Bluff St. Any questions call Sydney at 238-2829. Registrations close March 8.

NAMES
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
I need transportation

AGES OF CHILDREN
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
I can offer transportation

Downpayment $10 for families, $5 for singles should accompany registration, rest payable on arrival. Checks to Prairie Unitarian Society.

Camp arrival - Friday March 24 anytime from 4 on. Friday evening meal begins at 5:15
Meals served: Friday - supper
Saturday - breakfast, lunch and dinner
Sunday - breakfast and noon dinner

Minimum age for participants is 18 years unless accompanied by parent or sponsor.
Parents are responsible for children at all times except during scheduled children and teen programs.

If you would like to come but feel your financial circumstances do not allow it, contact Dave Meyer at 221-0255. We have a small sum available for scholarships.

Bring flashlights, soap, binoculars, cameras, warm clothes and hiking boots!
Directions: Turn off I 90-94 at North Wisconsin Dells exit, go east to stoplight (hwy 12) turn left (north) ½ mile to County Trunk A; turn right on County Trunk A for ½ mile and drive through railroad underpass. The Upham Woods Gate is ½ mile beyond the underpass on the right.

Prairie Unitarian Universalist
Society of Madison
P. O. Box 4037
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