

HOPE

Recently, a few of us went to see a very wealthy manufacturer who is 71 years old. We went filled with hope that we could tell him about something that would really excite him. We took him to a fine restaurant in a fine old hotel and the four of us sat down at a table. This gentleman proceeded to talk for the next two hours straight. I barely had three minutes to bring up the subject we had paid for the lunch to talk about and by the time the three minutes came up, I did not want to say a thing. I just wanted to leave.

For two hours, this man spouted nothing but cynicism, cynicism, cynicism. He did not come up for air. The interesting thing was that in no time, he had the three of us down under the table with him because everything he said was true. There was no contradicting him because he was right. He talked about business, about politics--there was scarcely a subject he missed. He was highly informed. I kept trying to muster a debate with him, but my head kept shaking up and down, affirming what he was saying.

We were all in sheer despair. We were grateful when he finally left so we could drag ourselves back to our hotel and sink into our misery.

This is an experience you have had. It was in the midst of this oppressive despair that I became aware of an objectivity called hope. It is an objectivity called hope but it is beyond hope. Camus suggested that the last point on the journey to a man waking up has to do with when he finally surrenders hope.

What have you got to hope about? There is no hope. The only image left you is a funeral director's office where you, naked as a jaybird, lie, as cold as his refrigerator will make you. It is that simple. Everything you spend your life for -- your children, your nation, your fine company -- the day after tomorrow, they are not going to be there any longer. That is finally surrendering the last vestige of hope.

The old man we visited with was spelling out exactly the way life is, in its deeps. He did not know that, but he was still preaching for hope. Kazantzakis calls hope the last temptation. When you grasp this, you have become a believer --and not in any religion-- but just a believer. Camus, in the last page of The Stranger called it a "benign indifference to the universe." It is like what the Arab people, the Semitic people mean when they say "believer." To use theological language, it is a believer in God, a believer in the Mystery, a believer that you are this relationship.

When you take that belief and grind it into your being, which is the Dark Night of the Soul, and grasp that all of life is humiliation, weakness and suffering, then you have entered into what I call profound belief.

When you have become a believer, sooner or later you grasp that you are responsible for the whole world. Belief and care are simply two sides of the same coin. If you are a believer, you care. Taking that love and burning it through every fibre of your being, takes you through what I call the Long March, the sense of eternal rootlessness. You have no home, no home at all.

The moment you pick up care for the world, you become aware of your final ineffectivity. You become deeply aware of your depletion. You are burned out at that moment, but you become aware of lifelong fulfillment. When that happens, you are in the state of being called Profound Love.

When profound belief and profound love become realities in your consciousness, then, "there appeareth" Hope. Hope that is beyond hope, as Paul put it, the hope against hope. It is not you hoping. You just find yourself with new hope. The difference between that old manufacturer and a Man of Faith is that in the midst of participating in exactly the same world, the Man of Faith gets a crunching experience because he cares profoundly. He finds himself hoping with an everlasting hope.

Do you want to know the very secret of the wellsprings of motivity? It is hope. It seems to belong to the mystery itself. If you start out on the journey you have already started on, and are not aware of secrets like this one, then you are not going to make it. And if that sounds religious, then you will just have to make the best of it.

--Joseph W. Mathews

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