



by Dr. Arthur C. Wickenden

## The Simple and the Complex



**I**N FACING this occasion, as I stopped to consider what word of wisdom might be distilled out of virtually a lifetime of association with students, that which impressed me was the fundamental importance of the simple elements of life, and my mind recalled the words of the Psalmist, "Happy is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord." No doubt my conception of what constitutes the law of the Lord differs somewhat from that of the psalmist, but both are concerned with the basic laws of life and to me these are revealed and confirmed in the very process of living. These laws are simple in statement, and they express themselves through simple virtues. But when man exalts them in living, then, again as the Psalmist says, everything he does shall prosper. This will not necessarily be a material prosperity, but one of more significant nature which will make for satisfying living and true enrichment of the self.

In an age which is obviously very complex in the nature of its economic, social and political structures and whose problems are very complicated, we are in real danger of minimizing or of forgetting the importance of the simple components of which these structures are built and the simple values they are meant to promote and protect. To forget them is to invite frustration.

It is hardly necessary to argue the fact that life in our time has grown very complex, but it may be well to remind ourselves of a few aspects of this complexity. I would ask you to call to mind three words which were scarcely ever heard a generation ago, but which today are widely current in contemporary speech. These are "computers," "business machines" and "automation," living symbols of our present-day culture.

Our problems involve so many interlocking factors, and ready answers are so essential, that men have had to construct very complicated machines to augment and accelerate the functions of the human brain. I can never admit that these machines are more wonderful than the minds which conceived and created them. But what marvels they are! Without them modern scientific research would be stymied, and exploits in space exploration would be impossible.

Business machines likewise are marvels of human ingenuity, and without them it would be impossible to carry on large scale industry and marketing after the present manner. When great corporations are owned by as many as two million shareholders, employ an even greater number of workers, and

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serve a vast number of customers, they would soon be bogged down if they had to rely on the old methods of bookkeeping. And how wonderfully automation is lifting the burden of labor from the backs and hands of men! But what critical problems it introduces into our economy, especially that of technological unemployment! It is for this reason that millions of young people with no particular skills are roaming the streets of our cities with nothing to do. How shall we provide jobs enough for all able-bodied persons who want and need to work? That is no little problem.

Ours is indeed a complex society and our leaders must be prepared to deal with very intricate problems. I have great admiration for people who can grasp complex situations and deal constructively with them: presidents and prime ministers of nations, governors of states, corporation executives, and certainly presidents of universities, including our own. I marvel how they can keep track of such a great variety of interests and deal positively with the great problems involved. But if my observations are correct, one essential to success in such posts of responsibility is the ability to resolve complex situations into their simple components and to deal with them on this basis. The ability to do this is a mark of greatness.

For all its complexity the basic laws of nature and life are simple laws, as simple as, every action produces an equal and opposite reaction, or, whatsoever a man sows he shall also reap. If you sow corn, you will not reap wheat. If you sow corruption, you will reap corruption. This is as true in government as in personal affairs. On the other hand, if you sow unselfishness, joy and happiness, sooner or later you will reap these fruits in your own experience.

The fundamental virtues of life, essential to any sound moral structure, are simple virtues, such as, courage, generosity, honesty, sobriety, and purity. These need no comment, but I want to say a word about the last of these. I wish there could be brought home to this sex-obsessed generation the positive value of chastity. And note that I declare it to be a *positive* value. Too often it is thought of as a negative virtue based on deprivation of a natural pleasure. But actually it is the other way around; deprivation results from its non-observance. Let us readily acknowledge that sex experience should be glorious, the source of some of life's highest and greatest joys; but in our day it has become the cause of untold misery in millions of

lives because of its misuse. To try to appropriate the pleasures of sex and at the same time to seek to avoid the responsibility it inevitably involves is to ask for serious trouble. Too many people in this generation are finding that to sow the wind of illicit adventure is to reap a whirlwind of tragic experience. On the other hand, every happily married couple can testify to the positive value of faithfulness and responsibility in sex relations.

The finest values of life are simple in character. Among these are the joys to be found in an appreciation of nature, such as the thrill provided by a fresh spring morning when trees are leafing out or coming into bloom, birds fill the air with their happy songs, and early flowers with their brilliant hues break the drabness of winter. . . .

There are likewise the joys of vocation, and particularly the inner satisfaction that comes from the knowledge of a task well done. When one tackles a job that needs to be done and does it well, it adds to the joy if it is appreciated by others. But even if no one seems to take notice of it, a hard task well done can still be the source of real satisfaction.

Nor dare we overlook the joy of true friendship, that is, a friendship unsullied by any ulterior motive. A person who is rich in his friends is rich indeed. Too many people fail to experience this joy because they fail to realize that to have a friend you must first of all be a friend, and that means expressing a genuine interest in and concern for the welfare of another without thought of reward. Here also the law applies: what you sow you reap.

Only passing mention can be made of the values to be experienced in the fine arts, music, painting, drama, and literature. The tastes of people vary widely in these areas, some preferring the more realistic classical forms of expression, and others thrill to the modern idiom which tends to the impressionist and abstract. But whatever the preference, the basic emotional responses which bring enjoyment are simple and direct.

For most people the greatest source of happiness is found in family life. . . the joys of parenthood associated with the birth of a baby, knowing the affection and perfect trust of a little child, growing up with your children, sharing with them their joys, taking pride in their achievements, and encouraging and comforting them in their disappointments. Time would not permit the mention of all the joys and satisfactions that may emanate from this inexhaustible source. But all of these are simple values, and of such are the true riches of life.

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(continued)

*Great Souls*

I WOULD NOT say that all great men are simple men, for it must be acknowledged that the mental processes of some great minds are very difficult to penetrate. But I have no hesitancy in saying that all great souls are simple souls. Think of the Great Emancipator. No American has been so universally admired and loved as Abraham Lincoln—what a down-to-the-earth and homespun person he was. Or recall Albert Einstein, perhaps the greatest creative scientist of this marvelous twentieth century. What complex problems his great mind tackled and solved! And yet at heart he was a simple and a humble man finding his delight in children, in good music, in pursuit of truth, and in standing in awe before the transcendent reason that rules the universe. And what better symbol could we ask of the unity of the simple and complex than the famous Einstein formula for measuring the amount of energy congealed in a given amount of matter:  $E$  equals  $mc^2$ ! Energy equals the mass multiplied by the velocity of light squared. How simple! But also how terrifying when that energy is released in the form of atomic bombs! I would have you think also of one of the greatest of living souls, Albert Schweitzer. For all his notable accomplishments in philosophy, in New Testament research, in music, and in outstanding medical service in the jungles of Africa he is at heart a very simple man, who in all his work has pursued very simple methods. Among the past presidents of Miami University I doubt if any was abler or made a greater contribution to the development of the University than Raymond M. Hughes. Forty years ago, when in that office, he was projecting plans for the growth of the University for ten years ahead, twenty-five years, fifty years, and one hundred years.

He could not anticipate the rapid acceleration in growth in the last twenty years, so that in many ways we have already gone beyond his 100 year projection, but at the same time the University has benefited tremendously by his foresight. It was my privilege to know him well and I can assure you that with all his administrative ability he was a very simple and modest man. Lastly I think of the most beloved American poet of the century, the late Robert Frost. His charm seemed to lie in the fact that he could take everyday experiences of life and clothe them with interest, with beauty, and with significance. Our own Walter Havighurst knew him well and played host to him when he visited Oxford on several occasions. Of him he has written: "Robert Frost was both simple and profound. . . . He made the profound seem simple. He wrote so simply that none could miss his meaning, though few could find it all." That is the evidence of true greatness.

*The Truths of Religion*

MY FINAL proposition is that the basic truths of religion take the form of simple affirmations of faith. Speaking now as a Christian I assert with confidence that the fundamental truth of that system of faith is that God is like Christ. Notice how I said it, not Christ resembles God, but that God is like Christ. God is the unknown quantity in this equation. Man's basic religious question is, "What is God like?" In the learning process we proceed from the known to the unknown. Christ we can know because he was one like ourselves. What we can see in him of moral purpose and attitudes is accepted as a reflection of what God is like in character and purpose. From him we learn of the depth of God's love for his human creatures. That God is like Christ is by no means the whole of Christianity, but destroy that proposition and the whole structure of Christian faith will crumble.

I should like to say a few words also about the mother faith in which Christ was born, that is Judaism, for which I have great reverence. The great center of this system of faith is the unity and righteousness of God as revealed in the law and the prophets. Altogether too few people realize how great has been the contribution of the Jews to the religious understanding of the world in giving us the principle of ethical monotheism. In this regard most of the people of our world are still caught up in the confusion of belief in a multiplicity of gods of devious character. The Jews started to teach the world monotheism at least twenty-five hundred years ago. Let us not forget also that the Great Commandment, on which we who are Christians put such stress, has come out of the Old Testament scriptures. "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul and mind" is taken from Deuteronomy, and "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself" from the Book of Leviticus. And if one were to ask for a succinct statement of man's duty before God, what better one could be offered than that of Micah 6:8:

*He has showed you, O Man, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
But to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?*

How simple, yet how profound!

Do not shun the complicated problems with which this age confronts you. Rise up and face them courageously and resolutely for they constitute the particular challenge of this generation. But do not permit yourselves to become so absorbed with the complex that you despise or minimize the importance of the simple elements which constitute the basic components of all living structures, the simple laws, the simple virtues, the simple values, and a simple but profound faith. To neglect these elements is to court disaster. To exalt and honor them leads to meaningful and joyous living. "Happy is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord. . . . Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." That you may find it so in those things which make for abundant life in your great venture, is my earnest prayer. Amen.