

# Freiheit und Bindung

Festschrift für  
Heinz Schlotermann zum 60. Geburtstag

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## A NATURALISTIK GARLAND FOR HEINZ SCHLOTTERMANN

My title remembers a contribution to a Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan Festschrift by Professor George P. Conger. As a visiting professor, during my student days, he helped me understand the profound religious significance of John Dewey's naturalism. Now, *mutatis mutandis*, I am teaching at Conger's university and I offer that same garland to my esteemed senior colleague in Germany, Heinz Schlotermann.

Most philosophers of the nineteenth century drank deeply of German idealistic philosophy, and John Dewey was no exception. His mature years were devoted to an undoing of the various dualisms that these idealisms had forced upon human thinking. Grounded in biological and pedagogical sciences, Dewey struggled to a fresh conception of human experiencing as the flow of transactions between human organisms and their environments. Most important of all is the developing capacity of these organisms (us) to reflect upon, learn from, and restructure our environments.

For American Unitarians and Universalists, Dewey's naturalism provided the climactic synthesis for rethinking of traditional relationships to Christianity and Judaism. From the 1930's on, the central thrust of this movement has been "religious liberalism" rather than "liberal Protestantism." Let me try to characterize this shift by discussing certain problems and offering some tentative suggestions.

If it is to meet the needs of modern man, religious liberalism must effectively link knowledge and values. When this is properly done, religion may fulfil man's highest hopes in ways that have never been possible before. Western man is now entering a new stage of social evolution, which should and can become available to all mankind in the foreseeable future.

Previous cultures have had to adjust to the stark fact that grinding physical toil by most of the members of a society was unable to produce enough food and goods for everyone. Degrading poverty for the many and an almost equally degrading wealth for the few were accepted as inevitable. Religions typically lived with the situation by promising men another, better "world" or by teaching them to cultivate their "souls," which were said to be separate from their bodies and unaffected by their physical circumstances.

Scientifically, technologically, and economically, this is no longer true. If the traditional religions have lost their relevance and power to guide human actions, it is not because they have retained some particular doctrines or failed to communicate. Rather have they failed to recognize, embrace, and thus deserve the right to guide into maturity this

new stage of world history which increasing numbers of men look upon and see as good.

To ask religious liberalism for a new linking of knowledge and values is both to relate it to previous traditional religions and to point to its unique opportunity in the modern age. By "knowledge", we mean preeminently the knowledge that flows from the sciences - a vast and growing network of concepts that enable us to understand our experiences and, within limits, to predict and control future experiences. When modern man says "I know ....", he refers to such concepts which he can share with all other men, and which all other men can, in principle, verify for themselves. Scientific knowledge is essentially universal and public. While the words and mathematical symbols in which it is expressed may be extremely difficult, it is never the private monopoly of any group or religion.

This knowledge is about "reality", which is in man and surrounds him. While each of us personally experiences it, none of us, and none of our religions, should speak of "special ways" of knowing reality, or of "special realities" which can only be known by certain men. Reality is one, and our knowledge of it is never fixed or final or absolute.

Earlier religions have spoken of knowledge through reason, through their contemporary sciences. At one time, most Jews and Christians, for instance, "knew" that our earth was a flat surface at the center of the universe. When a better scientific picture emerged, many religious persons had difficulty accepting it because they were confused as to the sources of reliable knowledge.

Even greater difficulties have resulted from the traditional religious terms of faith and belief. When men say "I believe... ", they sometimes finish the sentence with a vague, tentative assertion ("I believe that there is progress"). More often, faith-sentences refer to that which is held absolutely, beyond any possible evidence or refutation ("I believe in the body").

The greatest difficulty for modern man comes at just this point. He is told that knowledge alone is not enough for his salvation or highest goal; that he must add "faith" to it. Yet those things he is asked to believe, or the reasons he is asked to believe them (authority, tradition), seem incredible or irrelevant. If the things he is asked to believe really do describe reality, then they are properly knowledge and not faith. If they are matters of knowledge, they do not need any religious sanction nor does any religion have an inside track to them. The tremendous increase of scientific knowledge in our time has made belief-statements unnecessary as well as confusing.

Our proposal is that liberal religion should make no claims to knowledge apart from the sciences, that it should have no need for supplementary, belief-type statements; and that it should instead focus upon

the real religious issue guiding human behavior. This is the meaning of our call to link knowledge and values.

By "values", we mean ways of responding and acting that men hold to be good and desirable. Virtue, or values, or good works have, for traditional Christianity, usually been secondary matters. Right belief was the primary thing. For more religious persecution has occurred over matters of opinion than over matters of ethics. Liberal Christianity, liberal Judaism, and secular humanism - whose heirs we are - all agreed in making ethics the central matter of religion.

We move beyond our predecessors by seeing values for what they are - choices made by human beings from among many possible options. We do not claim to get our values from scientific knowledge, nor do we contend that they are somehow related to any objects of "faith" or realms of "non-scientific reality."

When man says "I value...," he means "I choose and cherish ...." He is describing the whole process by which his decisions about action are made and sustained. Values, thus understood, are more fragile than many have supposed; they come with no cosmic guarantees. Nor can they simply be discovered and accumulated, as in the case with knowledge. Values require a constant nurture. If they are to survive their discoverers, they must be built into the lives of man and cultures.

This is why every human society has had a religion: to choose and cherish its values. When the values become irrelevant (as in otherworldly religions), the religion withers. When the values are inherently destructive (as in Nazism), the society becomes pathological. Since values are many and often conflict with each other, a viable religion must have some overall goal to guide the selection and ranking of its values. The goal of modern religious liberalism is the expansion of the quality of life, for the individual and for society. Such a goal can speak directly to modern men, and be related to their own experiences. It presupposes that they both desire and are experiencing an expansion of the quantity of life - the so-called "material" side: health, leisure, abundance, longevity. We have direct awareness of our experiences of quality, even when we are unprepared to give sharp philosophical definition to them. We experience meanings, we sense our growing abilities for appreciation, we realize wider understanding, we recognize increases of sensitivity. All of these will be readily agreed to contribute to the quality of our lives. We are equally aware that the individual and his society each contribute to this expansion of quality; his new discoveries are potentially shareable by his neighbors, and the measure of the neighbors' richness is in some sense his possession and starting point.

Our formulation, the expansion of the quality of life, puts into words what we see as the core goal of modern religious liberalism. It would

also seem to be a good statement of what is central for many liberal churches and individuals. While distinguishing us from most traditional religions, it takes account of the unorganized, often even unnamed, religiousness felt by many modern men.

What we are calling modern religious liberalism is obviously much larger than the International Association for Religious Freedom or its member groups. Nevertheless, this organization must become an effective potential spokesman for a vital religion for modern man. Insofar as it can revive a deeper religious commitment among its member churches, this potential may be achieved. This will involve a much more honest facing of the meaning of religious pluralism within the Association. The healthy form of pluralism is when our commitment to democracy keeps us from ever being tempted to achieve consensus by coercion. Pluralism can become pathological, however, when it leads us to avoid seeking common goals and action in the name of an alleged "respect" for differences. Without ongoing discussion, differences can never even be discovered let alone faced and resolved. Our democratic structures and traditions must be continually tested and used, not sentimentalized about!

#### Six Value - Pairs

Modern religion must be centrally concerned with values, involving men in discovery, dialogue, and community which makes them more able to choose more wisely from among the alternative courses of action that life involves. Of equal concern to a church is the process of cherishing those values that are chosen - deepening our commitment, strengthening our motivation, refining our understanding. Choosing and cherishing values is always more than an intellectual process. Our whole beings are involved, including our sense of sharing in a community of fellow-valuers. All the arts of man properly enter into this supporting values in a number of verbal and non-verbal ways. No other human institution has yet been devised to do this as effectively, for as many people of as many ages and backgrounds, as the church. Should such an institution ever arise, we will no doubt quickly (and rightly) call it a "church".

Let us move to more specific examples of the values chosen and cherished by religious liberalism. We will use simple nouns for them, although values are inevitably action words. When we use them, we describe the way we intend to act as well as our intention to become ready and able so to act. If we commit ourselves to the value "love", we mean we intend to love, to act in a loving manner rather than any alternatives. The values in our list, which seem to be of the highest importance for

religious liberalism, fall into pairs. This is not because of any "either/or" quality. It is simply the case that no value stands alone in any of our actions, and some values are more closely related than others. In our pairings, the expansion of one value necessarily calls for the expansion of the others, and the two affect each other as they grow.

1. Curiosity and Awe. These values are closely related to our knowing one stimulating it and the other accompanying it. Philosophy, accompanying it. Philosophy, according to Socrates, begins in "wonder". And so do science and religion. How to develop this curiosity, how to keep ourselves opening doors and looking for new pathways - this has been a typical liberal theme. We have perhaps been less concerned to develop an appropriate response to the vastness and intricacy of the cosmos. If we use a special metaphor, when we push out the horizons of our knowledge, we expand the circumference. However we choose to visualize it, we are confronted with an increasingly knowable orderliness that does far more than give us a sense of our human power. We understand at the same time more fully the limits and channels within which our desires must operate. We may never be certain whether this order is really a characteristic of the universe itself or simply a characteristic of the mental-conceptual equipment we use in knowing the universe. Even if only the latter, however, order is a reality for our part of the universe.

What we mean by "the sacred" and "reverence" is related to this pair of values. When we lose sight of them, science can become simply a seedbed of future technology, and our action within the universe then descend to a kind of cosmic rape rather than the exalted love affair that these values should elicit.

2. Reason and Truth. That quality within us which either perceives or imposes the order of nature is reason. For modern men, this is no fixed mental category that finds truths apart from experience. Instead it is the best term we have to describe our most appropriate ways of thinking and speaking about experience. There are no "laws of thought", but we continually search for more fruitful ways of linking our experiences together and relating them to those of others. When those ways enable us to return to the common ground of our experience with better prediction and understanding, we call them reasonable.

Reasoning is a searching, but we must remember that past reasoning has accumulated vast stores of knowledge. This we call truth. Until disproved, it has a special status, and we act in specially respectful ways toward it. In religious language, these two values become "seeking" and "celebrating." The religious liberal is indeed committed to ongoing inquiry, but he contemplates with a kind of joy the results of inquiry. This seeking and celebrating is as germane to ethical and artistic values as it is to scientific knowledge.

3. Freedom and Responsibility. Whatever else freedom may involve, it means that we are not totally bound by instinct and habit. Within a range of options, choices are made. In traditional societies many of those choices are made collectively and are seldom subject to revision. A more open society moves away from behavior-absolutes because of its experiences with social change and its awareness of the changing contexts of men's actions.

Our concern is to move the centers of freedom from societies to individuals. This is an extremely complicated thing. Only to a limited extent can people be "given" freedom. To the unprepared person, freedom is a frightening thing. To realize our value, therefore, will find ourselves exploring the seeming paradox that freedom depends upon discipline. The trained pianist is far freer to produce new and varied chords than is the beginner. In other words, freedom increases as our ability to envisage more alternatives increases.

For this reason, we can speak of responsibility as necessarily related to freedom. It is not that freedom is dangerous unless people use it "responsibly", or that freedom without responsibility is "licence". Rather is it a mistake to ever to ever view "rebellion" as freedom. To rebel is to move away from some particular thing. This may often be necessary, but it should not be confused with freedom. Once the rebel has established his new position (which was partly determined by his old position), he is probably in a better position to move toward actual freedom.

To see a wide number of alternatives and be able to select therefrom is both freedom and responsibility since the alternatives will involve people and things and consequences. The trust in freedom that has characterized religious liberalism is by no means misplaced or naive.

4. Self-exploration and Self-fulfillment. Freedom finds its real justification in the expansion of the selves that achieve it. For want of a better term, we are calling those ventures that open up our human potentials "self-exploration." These ventures are trans-moral and we must work hard to free the explorations of the self from cultural and theological inhibitions. To uncover one's own possibility for a range of feelings cannot occur without freedom from the need to censor feelings. We need not necessarily engage in external behavior in order to experience certain feelings (we may experience our homicidal feeling, for instance, without acting out an impulse to murder!).

When the full range of our feeling-potential is set in a context of reflectiveness, self-fulfillment occurs. We would not be too far wrong in describing a fulfilled self as a self with "good taste," connoting the development of evaluations and categories that can only appear with wide exposure and reflection.

On the religious levels, these values correspond to a "respect for individual dignity" and a genuine acceptance of the "pluralism" that emerges from the growing uniquenesses of free individuals. To simply tolerate these is not enough; we must welcome and cherish them.

5. Love and Justice. Exploration and fulfillment occur primarily within individuals (although with obvious social implications). The reverse is the case with love and justice. These are inter-personal and social but, equally obviously, have individual implications. Love is something defined as the urge to find reunion where separation has occurred. This is true, but it also must include the quest for genuinely new union, and ultimately for a total union of all selves and their experiences. Justice is the quality that intelligence brings to this urge to unite and be united. It is the way we try to make things joinable (i.e. lovable). Justice is also the way we try to give a social semi-permanence to values we have achieved in the past in order that love, which is more spontaneous and less reflective, might operate more readily and fully.

Love, in this sense, means drawing into one's ownself the experiences of other selves. But it also means drawing selves nearer to each other even though full incorporation could not occur without the destruction of selfhood. Justice is finding ways of achieving this blend of union and separated integrity.

6. Creativity and Beauty. These values are somewhat parallel to reason and truth, yet they describe a far fuller range of our experiences. Creativity is the search for the "not-yet" and beauty is the quality of the "already" that resulted from yesterday's creativity.

This final pair of values is perhaps the most inclusive of all, and with little distortion we could group all the other pairs under them. The virtue, after all, of any discussion of values is not that it leads us to a once-for-all precision and finality, but that, at different points in the discussion for different persons, it opens fresh vistas for action. However religious liberalism chooses to name or describe its values, they must never lose this tentative, expansive, and evocative quality. In pointing out the centrality of value-discourse in liberal religious thought, and of value-behavior in liberal religious living, we are trying to do just this.

### The Place of Knowledge in a Value-centered Religion

The religious liberalism we are describing is in no sense anti-intellectual. To be concerned for values is to be involved in a continuing process of weighing, choosing, and rejecting. Our values are not arbitrary or chosen by any kind of blind leaps. We choose them by exploring their outcomes and their relation to other values. Values are inseparably re-

lated to desired ends. This discovery is a moral discourse that will become most effective in the kind of church community we are commending.

Knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, is not directly related to these values. But it is by no means irrelevant. No religion has ever existed without incorporating what men considered to be known, nor should ours try to exist apart from knowledge. Everything that we know about the universe and man is of some significance for religion, and some facts are extremely important. The more we know about human action, the more useful our discussions of freedom, for instance, will become. The more we discover about cosmic origins and the origins and evolution of life, the deeper our sense of awe. The more we know of biology and biochemistry, the more profound becomes our feeling of kinship with the total universe. The more we know of the social sciences, the wider our vision of the possibilities of human action.

In short, our religious education programs make no claim to be promulgating religious knowledge but they are continually trying to select and synthesize those elements of our common human scientific knowledge that will evoke the values central to religion.

#### The Place of a Value-centered Religion in a Knowledge-centered Society

In the first place, liberal religion will stimulate the expansion of knowledge by keeping lively our curiosity. By focussing upon our ethical problems, we continually discover where we need more, and better, knowledge.

Secondly, liberal religion continually expands the reality that we seek to know. Human action is not only a part of reality, it is probably the most dynamic part of it. As we explore possible life-styles, we expand the meaning of man, what man "is". Consider the non-violent revolution of our times, which has opened essentially new modes of mass human actions and is vastly altering our social structures. Quite obviously, science can only study reality ("whatever is"). But religion and human values, as they operate within our lives, are a real part of this reality which must be studied. Science is the way we know reality, religion is the way we expand **it!**

Finally, religious liberalism should give order and meaning to our expanding knowledge. We may speak of knowledge as morally neutral. But if we do, we must be quiet clear that the application and use of knowledge have profound human and ethical implications. Scientists, as scientists, possess no special moral wisdom or insight to guide mankind in the use of our knowledge. They help us by assisting us see the implica-

tions of knowledge. All of us, however, must assess these implications and act with whatever moral wisdom we can discover. This search for moral wisdom is the central task, and central contribution, of a modern religious liberalism.

We inherited a body of moral experience that has been sufficient thus far in history to transmute neutral scientific knowledge into an overall force for human good. This wisdom fails us, however, in such new occasions as mass destruction and over-population. Unless we learn to choose and cherish new values adequate to these growing problems, all of our gains to this point may be wiped out. We have no cosmic guarantee of success. Never before has humankind, or its religions, faced such a challenge.