

READINGS:

(1) INFINITE IN ALL DIRECTIONS, Freeman Dyson (Harper & Row N.Y. 1988).

Since 1953, Freeman Dyson has been a professor of Physics at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. At one point in his book, he quotes Steven Weinberg, the author of THE FIRST 3 MINUTES, who gives an account of the origins of the universe. Weinberg states:

"The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless."

Dyson, however, responds in this way:

... I do not wish to leave you with the impression... that Weinberg's nihilistic voice speaks for all twentieth century scientists. The universe that I have explored in a preliminary way in this book is very different from the universe which Weinberg envisaged when he called it pointless. I have found a universe of life surviving forever and making itself known to its neighbors across unimaginable gulfs of space and time. Whether the details of calculations turn out to be correct or not, there are good scientific reasons for taking seriously the possibility that life and intelligence can succeed in molding this universe of ours to their own purposes. Twentieth-century science, when it looks to the future, provides a solid foundation for a philosophy of hope....(p. 117)

Like the majority of scientists in this century, I have not concerned myself with theology.... My personal theology is the theology of an amateur. But I did once have some help from a professional theologian in formulating my ideas in an intellectually coherent fashion. I happened to meet Charles Hartshorne at a meeting in Minnesota and we had a serious conversation. After we had talked for a while, he informed me that my theological standpoint is Socinian. Socinus was an Italian heretic who lived in the sixteenth century. If I remember correctly what Hartshorne said, the main tenet of

the Socinian heresy is that God is neither *omniscient nor* omnipotent. He learns and grows as the universe unfolds.... I find this congenial, and consistent with scientific common sense. I do not make any clear distinction between mind and God. God is what mind becomes when it has passed beyond the scale of our comprehension.... We are the chief inlets of God on this planet at the present stage of his development. We may later grow with him as he grows, or we may be *left* behind.... (p. 119) My own faith ... (is) that we are here to some purpose.. .. If you like, you can call the transcendent purpose God.... (p. 295)

Why do we suffer? Why is the world so unjust? What is the purpose of pain and tragedy? I would like to have answers to these questions, answers which are valid at our childish level of understanding even if they do not penetrate far into the mind of God. My answers are based on a hypothesis.... The hypothesis is that the universe is constructed according to a principle of maximum diversity. The principle of maximum diversity operates both at the physical *and at* the mental level. It says that the laws of nature and the initial conditions are such as to make the universe as interesting as possible. As a result, life is possible but not too easy. Always when things are dull, something new turns up to challenge us and to stop us from settling into a rut. Examples of things which make life difficult are all around us: comet impacts, ice ages, weapons, plagues, nuclear fission, computers, sex, sin and death. Not all challenges can be overcome, and so we have tragedy. Maximum diversity often leads to maximum stress. In the end we survive, but only by the skin of our teeth.... To this process of growth and diversification I see no end. (p. 298)

(2) WITH HEAD AND HEART, Howard Thurman (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, N.Y. 1979)

Nightfall was meaningful to my childhood, for the night was more than a companion. It was a presence, an articulate climate. There was something about the night that seemed to cover my spirit like a gentle blanket. The nights in Florida, as I grew up, seemed to have certain dominant characteristics.

They were not dark, they were black. When there was no moon, the stars hung like lanterns, so close I felt that one could reach up and pluck them from the heavens. The night had its own language. Sometimes, the night seemed to have movement in it, as if it were a great ocean wave. Other times, it was deathly still, no rhythm, no movement. At such times I could hear the night think, and feel the night feel. This comforted me and I found myself wishing that the night would hurry and come, for under its cover, my mind would roam. I felt embraced, enveloped, held secure. In some fantastic way, the night belonged to me. All the little secrets of my life and heart and all of my most intimate and private thoughts would not be violated, I knew, if I spread them out before me in the night. When things went badly during the day, I would sort them out in the dark as I lay in my bed cradled by the night sky.

The night has been my companion all my life.... The ocean and the river befriended me when I was a child. During those days the beach in Daytona was not segregated as it was later to become. White and black had equal access to it.... Here I found, alone, a special benediction. The ocean and the night surrounded my little life with a reassurance that could not be affronted by the behavior of human beings. The ocean at night gave me a sense of timelessness, of existing beyond the reach of the ebb and flow of circumstances. Death would be a minor thing, I felt, in the sweep of that natural embrace.

I was made keenly aware when a storm came sweeping up seemingly from the depths of the sea. First there was a quieting--a lull during which the waves seemed to lack the strength to wash fully up the shore; the sea grass along the top of the dunes was still; no wind blew in the treacherous quiet. Then a stirring like a gentle moan broke the silence. Suddenly, the winds were ferocious and the waves, now ten feet high, dashed into the shore. Again, the boundaries of self did not hold me. Unafraid, I was *held by* the storm's embrace. The experience of these storms gave me a certain overriding immunity against much of the pain with which I would have to deal in the years ahead when the ocean was only a memory. The sense held; I felt rooted in life, in nature, in existence. (p. 8)

We become intimate with infinity - we come to know God - as we establish the mutuality of Buber's "I-Thou"; as we build inter-personal relationships on sharing, compassion and concern rather than selfishness and greed; as we come to see each other human being as a sister or brother; as we develop our social ethic in a life of giving, sharing and service; as we become truly a neighbour to our neighbour.

I finish with words from a prayer entitled "Divine Kinship" by Richard M Fewkes:

We do not know how or why, but Something beyond our selves has brought us into being, has fathered and mothered us all, and sustained us all our days. We are made aware of our kinship with the Divine, our fragile human spirit an image and reflection of the Infinite Spirit which dwells in all.

O Thou Who art the Depth of Life within us, make us One with Thee in mind and heart and body. Restore us to our rightful selves. Heal the brokenness of our fragmented lives. Enable us to channel the forces of destruction and evil within ourselves and the world to the upbuilding of life and the enhancing of beauty. Let the Oneness of the Infinite Life within all be made manifest in us and in the life of the world. May love become the law of our being, even the love of God made known by a Son of Man of long ago.

Amen .

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