

RUSSELL'S RUMINATIONS
A LETTER OF ANALYSIS AND COMMENT ON MANY, BUT
SELECTED, CURRENT ISSUES AND EVENTS

Cobden, Illinois 62920
February, 1978

Dear Friends:

Here beginneth a new venture for me... and, perhaps for you. I like to write, and I have written a great deal and in a number of "styles." And as I assessed this facet of my career and being this past Fall, I concluded that my greatest satisfactions have come in writing letters and editorials. Why not "go with" my satisfactions, then... and create a letter with editorial flavorings to send out to friends who may ponder over issues and events? This No. 1 is my affirmative reply.

Some of the issues will be EDUCATIONAL (unsurprisingly) because this is my profession and one of my continuing interests. Some will be SOCIAL because I am also fascinated with the ways people relate to one another and how society is organized (and reorganized... and reorganized...). Some will be THEOLOGICAL because God's influence is everpresent in this world and should be so recognized. Others will be MORAL issues, wherein Right and Wrong will be explored. Still others will be ECONOMIC, for even though my academic training is devoid of any systematic learning in economics, I have some convictions from much reading, and many of the most provocative issues of our time have a sizeable economic component. Finally, issues ENVIRONMENTAL will be looked at, for the earth has certain limits to be recognized by Man, the Marauder (one of the manifestations of humankind). All in all, the focus will be on issues that somehow affect the Well-Being of us humans and of our ecosystems.

The general projected format will include some definitions of the issue – either as a statement or as specific quotes from an identified source – and then analysis and comment. I shall try to exhibit the artistic capacity to talk enough about an issue to stimulate your thought but not so much that the reading becomes tedious.

I purpose to being in a HUMBLE, INEXPENSIVE STYLE ... photocopied and stapled. It is possible that it never will deserve more than this (or even less). It also is possible that it eventually will merit a more "classy" frame... in which case humble beginnings can be remembered and admired.

ONE LAST INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT-INVITATION... since virtually all of you who receive this Letter are thinkers and letter writers, you may wish to reply to analyses or comments... and, in turn, I might like to respond to you and share it with the others. An on-paper dialogue, of sorts. So, please let me hear, if you feel so inclined.

My first rumination is on the MOOD ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES. The Presbyterian Church Bulletin No. 7811 was part of our day on January 1, 1978, the First Sunday after Christmas. On the

back side was a three paragraph essay entitled “Christian Higher Education,” and it quoted two campus ministers at Cleveland (Ohio) State University as sketching THE TYPICAL campus mood today as:

Global problems of poverty and hunger are so immense... that a new disillusionment has set in, namely, the feeling that all the technological horses and all the technological brains cannot put things back together again. The pressing personal questions, seemingly irresolvable in one’s own lifetime, if ever, are displaced by pressing personal questions: “In a terribly imperfect and broken world, how do I make sense of my personal life?”

Now, first, I doubt that there is a phenomenon that can be honestly titled the typical campus mood. It seems unlikely that students at Bowdoin College, Howard University, Voorhees College, Purdue University, Lewis and Clark College, Oral Roberts University, and Shasta Community College will typically view the world in a common way... like unto students at Cleveland State.

Also, students with different majors and different orientations may vary in their appraisals of reality. For example, most of the students I encounter in senior and graduate level health education courses seem to have concerns for poverty and hunger in the world, have varying faith in science and technology as instruments of salvation, but do not seem to display significant disillusionment.

I encourage the mode of thinking in which issues like global hunger and poverty are not “problems to solve” but “relationships to try to understand... and help change... or accept.” In order to solve a problem there must be basic agreement on the nature of the problem and on the appropriate means that could be part of a solution. We (Americans) are good at defining problems, but we typically use our values in so doing... values that are far from universal, despite our presumptions. We tend to define the hunger “problem” as one of OVER POPOULATION, with birth control as an ultimate solution, while some of those with starvation imminent see our USE OF RESOURCES and our UNWILLINGNESS TO SHARE as the basic culprits. We are unlikely to coerce the majority of Earth citizens into our global view. And therefore it just may not fit as a “problem to solve.”

The other issue in the statement that merits comment is the implication that, with disillusionment in social problems, students turn to INTROSPECTION regarding their personal lives. That could be true, for we have a good American premise to the effect that the best way to accomplish something is to attack it directly. Unfortunately, as I see it, TRYING to make sense of your persona life can never be truly successful. Rather, sense of self develops out of experiences of living, many of which are characterized by a genuine concern for others (and a forgetting of self). I guess my conclusion would be that if students are disillusioned by the intractability of global issues they also will be disillusioned with an active “search for self,” and therefore they’d best be about living... doing what they can do to make life richer and better for some others.

* * *

Another provocative essay encountered me “from out of the pages of” TV Guide, that one dated December 31, 1977. It was generated by Dr. Lewis Thomas, president of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and was presented as a Background for NBC’s 3-hour “Medicine in America” program. One basic theme was a PUT-DOWN of a “better” LIFESTYLE as a way of avoiding cancer, heart disease, and stroke, based on the judgment that this has little merit because for every disease there is “a

single, central, causative mechanism.” Of course these are not known now, so much more extensive research is necessary. Now I guess my present perspective is almost the “turn-around” of Dr. Thomas’... namely, that I have no objection to the continuation of medical research for single causative mechanisms, but the most important means of preventing or postponing these degenerative conditions lie in reducing the threats in the environment and INCREASING the body’s ADAPTABILITY through better nutritional balance, exercise, mental/emotional balance, and more satisfying human interactions. Theoretically, these could not be as effective as the antidote to a single cause, but since these “singles” remain undiscovered (the optimistic view) and their “counters” even less real, it seems foolish not to do what we can do. I have a certain respect for science, but seem to be missing that expectation that science will solve all of our current problems. The notion that humans should do less and less for themselves, while science and technology “do it for them,” while originally having some merit, has now been considerably overdone and is more and more COUNTERPRODUCTIVE to human well-being.

However, after this majority of the article that tingled my critical nature, the scientist-physician closed with a belief that I more nearly share and generally applaud. He said:

I believe that dying is the most natural of events, governed by essentially benign physiological processes of which we still have no knowledge. I believe that the span of human life is set by a kind of genetic clock and cannot be altered. I think there is such a thing as natural death, denied to most of us by the chronic diseases that rattle and incapacitate most of us in our last decades, and when natural death occurs it is like the disintegration all at once of O.W. Holmes one-hoss shay, not a bad way to go.

I like the concept of “NATURAL DEATH,” one that I trust medicine and our whole society eventually will accept, eschewing super-efforts to maintain life when death seems appropriate. Of course, I interpret the “genetic clock that cannot be altered,” as meaning we cannot live beyond our hereditary maximum, but that, by our lifestyle and living choices, we may end up with a shorter earthly time. (I also know that God’s will is the SUPREME REALITY, and that some souls are simply “called Home” before their genetic clock ticks off.) The disintegration all at once is a lovely prospect, but I suspect there will continue to be folks whose hearts outlast their livers, and others whose kidneys remain sound while their lungs quit... and others...

Dr. Thomas concludes by affirming that he is an optimist, a true believer in medical science. I, too, am an optimist, but one that believes we must balance the values of that science with its synergistic destructiveness in order to survive “pretty well.”

* * *

Sometime during the Fall I read an interview with Billy Graham (but didn’t keep a copy, unfortunately) that included a refreshingly Christian attitude toward death. Billy admitted that medical advice to him has been “SLOW DOWN,” particularly because of a family history of stroke and heart disease. But his response is that God called him to be an EVANGELIST, and this is what he is to do, for whatever time God gives him... when God wants him, he’s ready to go.

Now that is a worthy issue, but I use it mainly as a transition to another Billy Graham position, this in the January, 1978 McCall's entitled "I Can't Play God Any More." In this he is quoted as describing a significant change in his perception of this world as:

I used to believe that pagans in far-off countries were lost – were going to hell – if they did not have the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that. I believe that there are OTHER WAYS of recognizing the existence of God – through nature, for instance – and plenty of other opportunities, therefore, of saying "yes" to God... God does the saving... I'm told to preach Christ as the only way to salvation. But it is God who is doing the JUDGING, not Billy Graham.

The idea this provokes is that, while the Western way of thinking delights in EITHER/OR, God is a devotee of BOTH/AND. It is perfectly sound for God to send His Son and have Him say, "I am the Truth and the Life... no one comes unto the Father BUT BY ME"... and still work in other lives in an amazing variety of ways. For Christians, Christ is the ONLY WAY, and in this God surely is sincere. To touch other folks' spirits in other ways just shows God's omnipotence, not His deceitfulness. God does not have to think like an American (however noble that may be).

Another comment: Historian Lynn White gets credit for the observation that the Judeo-Christian ARROGANCE TOWARD NATURE is a big factor in our lack of concern for many of the ecological consequences of the modern American way of life. "The earth is the Lord's," but we want the UMW and the Peabody Coal Company to see that we have ALL the heat and the electricity we WANT... at the lowest price possible. Others' encounters with God may, usefully, encourage American Christians to REENCOUNTER the Scriptures in ever new ways... leading to changes in lifestyle, still under the Lordship of Christ.

* * *

Since I've already tramped on the notion that life is "problems to solve," and then just have used energy needs as an example, I can't resist putting these together in one of my favorite "relationships." Our national wants demand ever-increasing electricity generation capability, and, whatever the long-term means may be, a short term one is nuclear fission. The problem is a need for alternate fuels to oil, and a very good SOLUTION to that problem is radioactive material. But one of the other things to consider is that radiation is dangerous to human well-being and therefore its "harnessing" requires rather PERFECT human FUNCTIONING.

The folks in occupational alcoholism (with whom I've worked on a number of occasions over the past five years) say that 8-10% of the American work force, at all levels and in all settings, are having troubles with drinking that adversely affect job performance. Most users of other drugs (including multi-drug users), legal and illegal, are also working... and perhaps 10% of those who merit pay checks exhibit mental and emotional problems that can affect any judgments they make.

So, without even considering the sporadic effects of physical ailments and just plain carelessness and poor work habits, we can admit that 20-25% of working people are having judgment, memory, and decision-making troubles during working hours. Translated, this suggests that nuclear power plants are

designed, built, inspected, and maintained by people, 20-25% of whom... And this also applies to the design, carrying out, and inspection of nuclear waste disposal.

This, I contend, is not basically a “problem to solve”, because the nature of a society that demands all of this electricity is also one that DEMANDS MORE of some of its citizens than they can provide. Some success in treatment of alcoholics is no indication that the “problem will be solved”; most sufferers are in no form of treatment... and may not want to be.

Paul Ehrlick warns, simply, “Don’t live downwind from a nuclear reactor.” When high pressure is our weather pattern here on the farm, and the wind blows cool from the North where there are such electricity makers, I often entertain the fleeting “prayer”... “Come on, System, keep working... anyway...”

* * *

Yes, we give much reverence to science and technology. In February, 1978 U.S. News and World Report reported a survey that showed Americans rating Science and Technology as the “institution” or “entity” MOST RESPECTED AND DOING THE BEST JOB. (Some of my colleagues in other universities who educate those who will someday health educate do so from Departments of Health Science... even though the “scientific” portion of health is only that... a portion. But Science is a good enterprise with which to be associated.)

Scientists have high regard for ACCURACY and most every field of science has a VOCABULARY that all of its practitioners must learn. This vocabulary purposes to insure accuracy of expression... reflecting a “better science.” Psychologists and sociologists ultimately have to be “scientific” about human beings (the least cooperative with the rigors of the scientific method), and therefore must try hardest to be recognized as scientists.

Almost the ULTIMATE in this endeavor was reported in September, 1977 in the Baltimore Sun. At Swansea University in Wales there was a conference on Love and Attraction, and a female scientist presented a definition of LOVE... to insure dispassionate accuracy of communication:

Amorance, or being in love, is a cognitive, affective state, characterized by intrusive and obsessive fantasizing concerning reciprocity of amorant feelings by the object of the amorance.

It’s probably a reasonable definition, though the terms “intrusive” and “obsessive” give the feeling of UNDESIRABLE EXTREMES... perhaps faintly pathological. It also suggests that love is essentially SELFISH; somebody must “love you back.” (Maybe it’s a “put-on,” after all...) The point is that any “scientific” definition of LOVE... or HEALTH... or RESPONSIBLE... or INTEGRITY misses the unique, varied, not-necessarily repeated ways in which we ARE these. Nice try, Science!

* * *

My last comment for this Numero Uno concerns a new challenge for science, for our social relations, ... for our notions of reality. Dr. Willis Horman, whose career as a scientist began as an electrical engineer but whose concerns now are with “psychic phenomena,” calls the coming recognition

of expanded powers of the mind and spirit “the SECOND COPERNICAN REVOLUTION.” Consider what this implies: at the time of Copernicus authorities “knew how to know,” and both knowledge and wisdom led to the clean conclusion that the sun revolved around the earth. Yet today the Copernican “theory” is accepted, despite the fact that it still appears to me (and most other humans, I’m sure) that the earth is still and the sun rises, goes across the heavens, and then sets. If this is a second Copernican revolution, then in the future it will be accepted that the Spirit lives on and continues to grow, after “death”, that Mind is the Builder, that communication by telepathy is most useful, that it is possible to communicate with spirit worlds... even though present scientific “ways of knowing” may never be satisfied.

* * *

Well, I did it... at least something like I envisioned. I rethought some old thoughts, put on paper some that had only been verbal, and truly considered some new ideas... too. It feels like an experience I’m likely to revisit before next June.

Devotedly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.