

Biblical Faith and Erich Fromm's Theory of Personality

INTRODUCTION.

In discussing the possible relationship between human personality growth and Christian faith, there are at least three possible approaches to the problem.

1. The first possibility would be to present personal maturity as a necessary preliminary to faith, i.e. to show that the commitment of faith demands a degree of personal maturity. Conversely, one may attempt to show the detrimental effect of malformation, of immaturity, narcissism or over-dependence on the possibility of a genuine commitment of faith.

2. A second possible approach would consist in a comparison of modern psychology's understanding of human nature with Christian theology's understanding of man, with the purpose of demonstrating that there is no contradiction between human personality growth and the commitment of faith.

3. The present essay represents a third possible approach to the problem. It will be our contention that commitment of faith, understood in the Christian sense, is in itself a pursuit of human maturity and authentic human existence. In other words, man does not arrive at maturity and then make the commitment of faith; he arrives at maturity precisely by making the commitment of faith. In calling man to the life of faith God calls him to authentic human existence. We shall attempt to demonstrate this point within the context of Erich Fromm's theory of personality, i.e. his description of what is required for authentic human existence.

I. — FROMM'S CONCEPT OF MATURITY.

Any discussion of the concept of maturity must begin with a definition of man; with an answer to the question: what is the essence or nature of man? If by the term "maturity" we are referring to the goal of personality growth and if by the process of acquiring maturity

a man realizes his potential or, in other words, becomes what he potentially is, then it is important to know what man is.

The classical answer to this question is that man is a rational animal, a substance composed of body and soul, of spiritual and material elements. Erich Fromm adds an existential dimension to the definition. According to Fromm, man's nature cannot be adequately defined as a quality or substance. The real essence of man — that makes man human — is the contradiction inherent in human existence. In other words, the essence of man consists precisely in the conflict (dichotomy between body and soul, between man's animal and spiritual natures; in the dichotomy implied in the fact that he is an animal and yet has intelligence, that he is part of nature and yet transcends it by reason of his self-awareness and self-determination.

Man transcends all other life because he is, for the first time, life aware of itself. Man is in nature, subject to its dictates and accidents, yet he transcends nature because he lacks the unawareness which makes the animal a part of nature — as one with it. Man is confronted with the frightening conflict of being the prisoner of nature, yet being free in his thoughts; being part of nature, and yet to be, as it were, a break in nature, being neither here nor there. Human self-awareness has made man a stranger in the world, separate, lonely, and frightened.¹

Because of this basic conflict or dichotomy which is basic to man's nature, man's existence is characterized by what Fromm calls "existential dichotomies". The achievement of maturity or authentic personality consists in finding the correct solutions to these dichotomies. Fromm lists² five basic needs of man which are solutions to what he considers to be the five basic dichotomies of human existence. These needs are: (1) the need for relatedness; (2) the need for transcendence; (3) the need for rootedness; (4) the need for a sense of identity; (5) the need for a frame of orientation and devotion. These basic needs may be taken then as the basic qualities or ingredients of maturity and authentic human existence.

1. RELATEDNESS.

The basic dichotomy in man's nature, the tension resulting from being part of nature and yet transcending it through reason and love,

¹ Erich FROMM, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, Harper and Row, 1964, p. 117.

² *Id.*, *The Sane Society*, Greenwich, Conn., Fawcett Publications, Inc., p. 29-66.



gives rise to the need to consciously relate himself to his environment, to nature and his fellow-man, to learn to relate himself rather than being instinctively related to the world. Man's primary, i.e. instinctive, ties with nature have been broken and man must find new ties with which to relate himself to his world. Man is existentially aware of this need because the breaking of his instinctive ties with nature, gives him a sense of self-awareness. But self-awareness is, as it were, a two-sided coin. On the one hand it means that man is aware of himself as a unique and self-determining individual; on the other hand, it means that he is also aware of his aloneness and separation from nature and his fellow-man. He is aware of how powerless and helpless he is as an individual in relation to the universe as a whole.

This awareness of his aloneness and separation is, for man, a source of anxiety, and, in Fromm's view, the need to overcome his isolation is man's greatest need. So great is man's need to relate himself to his environment that Fromm considers it necessary for man's sanity.

The necessity to relate with other beings, to be related to them, is an inspirative need on the fulfillment of which man's sanity depends.³

How, then, is this need for relatedness to be satisfied? More precisely, how is man to achieve relatedness in a way that will be conducive to his maturity, to his growth as a person?

There are two values here which must be balanced against each other. One is relatedness to the world, and the other is awareness of one's individuality and integrity. It is precisely his awareness of his individuality which arouses in man the need for relatedness, but, in seeking relatedness, he must not do so at the expense of his individuality. In other words, the kind of relatedness which is conducive to the growth of the whole personality is that form of relatedness in which one presents the sense of his own individuality, integrity, and unique identity: a form of relatedness by which an individual not only contributes to the welfare of his fellow-man but, in doing so, realizes his own potential as a human person.

So great however, is man's need to be related in some way to his fellow-man and thereby overcome his aloneness and isolation, that he will often unite himself to his environment in a "non-productive" way,

³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

i.e. in such a way that he loses his individuality and integrity. For such a person the freedom which accompanies growing self-awareness is unbearable because of the isolation and anxiety it produces and so he trades his freedom and integrity for the security of a sense of belonging.⁴ Individuals will seek to escape from isolation and find a sense of belonging in various "non-productive" ways. Some will become completely dependent on a strong authority figure (masochism); others will seek to exploit others (sadism); others will seek to overcome their sense of powerlessness by destroying their environment (destructiveness); still others will seek a sense of belonging by being like everybody else at the expense of their unique identity (conformity). "Productive" relatedness, on the other hand involves a love of one's fellow-man which is characterized by care and responsibility—"active concern for the life and growth of that which we love"⁵—as well as respect for the other's individuality. Fromm defines productive love as:

...union with somebody or something outside of oneself, under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self [...]. In the experience of love the paradox happens that two people become one, and remain two at the same time.⁶

2. TRANSCENDENCE.

Closely related to the need for relatedness is the need for transcendence. Since man has broken the primary ties with nature which are characteristic of animal existence, and acquired intelligence and self-determination, he cannot be content to exist as a passive creature. He can no longer be content to be a part of nature; he must transcend it. There are, however, two ways of transcending nature—through creativeness or through destructiveness. Man can create life by producing material goods, by generating children and by loving others. The love of man and woman, for instance, has the power to create new life, and, in a wider sense, all productive love—which assumes responsibility for another's growth—is creative, for creation

⁴ This is the theme of Fromm's book, *Escape from Freedom*. In it, he accounts for the appeal of totalitarian systems such as Nazism and Fascism by pointing out that they offered the individual an "escape from freedom", i.e. an opportunity to escape from the insecurity of being an individual by finding a sense of belonging and relatedness in object submission to a strong leader but at the price of individuality and integrity.

⁵ *Id.*, *The Art of Loving*, N.Y., Bantam Books, 1963, p. 22.

⁶ *Id.*, *The Same Society*, p. 37.

presupposes use and care for what one creates. Thus through love and creativeness man transcends himself as a creature.

But if a man cannot transcend life by creating it, the alternative is to transcend life by destroying it, for in the act of destructiveness man sets himself above life. In Fromm's view, man is the subject of a twofold potentiality — a primary potentiality towards love and creativeness and a secondary potentiality towards hate and destructiveness. Man's existence is characterized by this dichotomy between creativeness and destructiveness both of which are attempts to answer man's basic need for transcendence.

Creation and destructiveness, love and hate, are not two instincts which exist independently. They are both answers to the same need for transcendence.⁷

This dichotomy is described in another way by Fromm when he states that the most basic psychological distinction among human beings is the distinction between those who love life (biophilia) and those who love death (necrophilia). Normal growth of personality is towards biophilia and results from being with warm affectionate people who love life. On the other hand, the destructive lovers of death are characterized by a tendency toward all that is not alive, all that is inorganic and mechanical. They are the cold, distant lovers of "law and order", and are oriented to the past, to the womb, to the animal existence. They are afraid of the future because it is uncertain. The necrophile has a craving for certainty, but the only certainty he is given is death. This is the opposite of the person who loves life and is therefore open to the uncertainty, growth and adventure of the future.

The person who fully loves life is attracted by the process of life and growth in all its spheres. He prefers to construct rather than to gain. He is capable of wondering, and he prefers to see something new to the security of finding confirmation of the old. He loves the adventure of living more than he does certainty.⁸

3. ROOTEDNESS.

Personality growth involves outgrowing the state of dependence on mother which one experiences as a child. This incestuous tie to mother means protection, certainty and love. It is one of man's ties

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁸ *Id.*, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, p. 47.

with nature which are severed by man's growing self-awareness and individuality. But normal development demands the overcoming of this incestuous tie and the achieving of genuine independence and freedom. In this state of independence, the individual must establish new roots for his existence through productive relatedness to his fellow-men. To do so he must overcome the tendency to return to the certainty and security associated with infantile dependence. Such a state is a lost paradise which cannot be regained. The individual must move forward into uncertainty and risk, relying on his own powers.

There is in man a tendency to resist normal growth towards freedom and independence for the sake of the security and certainty of protection afforded by dependence on mother. But since one usually outlives his mother, and because infantile dependence is socially unacceptable in a grown person, the incestuous fixation is transferred in adult life, to one or more mother-figures such as the family, the race, the nation, religion, or political party. In order to overcome this fixation, the individual must find security in a new way of being rooted, i.e. through genuine brotherliness, through productive relatedness with one's fellow-men.

Freud explained the presence of this longing for mother's love in man in terms of the Oedipus complex, i.e. as the result of sexual attraction towards the mother which cannot be fulfilled because of the presence of the father-rival. Fromm, however, refuses to see it as just another aspect of the sex instinct. The tie to mother is something more fundamental. It is a result not of the sex impulse but of the human condition of man. It cannot be fulfilled, not because of the presence of a father-rival, but because it is inconsistent with man's need for independence and integrity. It does not allow a person to be himself, to have his own convictions, to be committed, to be open to the world.

Fromm concludes that the event of birth by which an individual experiences his first separation from mother and his first taste of individual life, must become a continuing process throughout man's life.

If he is to develop into what he potentially is, as a human being, he must continue to be born. That is he must continue to dissolve the primary ties of soil and blood. He must proceed from one act of separation to

the next. He must give up certainty and defenses and take the jump into the act of commitment, concern, and love.⁹

4. IDENTITY.

The fact that man has broken the primary ties with nature which characterize animal existence has made him aware of himself as a separate entity who can reflect on his own existence, and must learn to relate himself to his environment through his human faculties of reason and love. But before a person can relate himself to others, he must discover his own identity. His self-awareness must not be a negative awareness of aloneness and isolation but a positive affirmation of his own identity. He must begin to be aware of his real self and experience that self is the subject of all his actions. Productive activity, as Fromm uses the term, is activity of which my real self is the author. Thus any activity of which I am not the author is not productive from the standpoint of self-realization. This excludes, to a greater or lesser degree, activity which is a reaction to anxiety, or which is based on submission to or dependence on irrational authority, or which results from conformity or rational impulses.

The beginning of this growth toward a sense of individuality is birth which is the beginning of separation from the mother, the beginning of individual existence. But the infant is still united with the mother, bound to her by primary ties, i.e. he is dependent on her in the sense that he has love, protection and security. As he grows in freedom and independence. As he grows in freedom and independence, he breaks his primary ties with mother. His growth has two parallel aspects: as he grows in selfhood, i.e. he grows physically and emotionally into an organized personality guided by his own mind. In other words he begins to develop an individual identity; but at the same time there is a growing awareness of aloneness and isolation, based on the awareness of himself as an entity separate from all others, which causes anxiety as a feeling of powerlessness.

How does the individual solve this dichotomy between selfhood and aloneness? He may do so positively by relating productively to his fellow-men and thus realizing his own individual identity. Or he

⁹ In: "Man is not a Thing", in *Saturday Review*. Vol. 40, March 16, 1957.

may react negatively, and give up his own individuality by seeking his identity in automation conformity, i.e. establishing an identity by being like everyone else. This happens when the growth of selfhood does not keep pace with the process of individuation, i.e. when a person's awareness of his aloneness exceeds his sense of individual identity. Fromm points out that the process of individuation takes place automatically while the growth of selfhood can be hampered by individual and social factors.

The opposite of conformity is spontaneous activity, i.e. activity which is truly one's own, using one's resources of mind and emotions. Spontaneity, in the true sense of the word, is a hallmark of maturity.

The inability to act spontaneously, to express what one genuinely feels and thinks and the resulting necessity to present a pseudo-self to others and oneself, are the root of the feeling of inferiority and weakness. Whether or not we are aware of it, there is nothing of which we are more ashamed than of not being ourselves, and there is nothing that gives us greater pride and happiness than to think, to feel, and to say what is ours.¹⁰

5. A FRAME OF ORIENTATION AND DEVOTION

When Fromm speaks of man's need to relate himself to the world around him, he speaks of a relatedness which engages most of his total personality — intellect, will, and emotion. In the first place man must orient himself to his world in an intellectual way, i.e. he must arrive at an understanding of the world, a consistent way of viewing reality, which makes it meaningful to him. Fromm points out that this need exists on two levels. First, man needs, for the sake of his own sanity, a frame of orientation which explains the world to him, whether this explanation is true or false. This need is more immediate than the need for rational objectivity and thus a frame of orientation which is irrational may be accepted as long as it is subjectively satisfying. But there is a second level and that is the need to grasp the world by reason, to love an objectively valid picture of the world and its meaning.

However, man is not just a disembodied intellect, and therefore his needs in this area are not satisfied by a comprehensive thought system alone. Man is body and soul; he is feeling and activity as well as thought. Thus his frame of orientation should include not only a

¹⁰ In: *Escape from Freedom*, N.Y., Avon Books, 1965, p. 288.

thought system but also an object of devotion and commitment which draws a response from the sensitive and affective and revolutionary side of his nature.

In summary, it might be said that the key word in Fromm's concept of maturity is "productiveness". The mature person is the one who has solved the basic dichotomies of his human existence in a productive way, i.e. in a manner which leads to self-realization. Having outgrown the incestuous ties of childhood, he is aware not only of his separateness but also of his individual identity, and relates himself productively to the world in the areas of action, thought, and feeling. His activity and work are characterized by autonomy, spontaneity, and self-fulfillment; his thought by rationality and objectivity; his feelings by relatedness to and love for his fellow-men without the loss of his own individuality and integrity.

II. — THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF FAITH.

The Bible describes God's calling of man to the life and commitment of faith in three stages. (1) The call is first given to a single man, Abraham. (2) It is extended through Moses to the nation descended from Abraham. (3) Finally, all men are called to faith in Christ. In each of these stages of salvation history, a certain pattern or dynamic can be observed in God's dealings with men. (1) God calls man and promises him a reward. (2) Man responds with faith. This response is not merely an intellectual assent to revealed truth but the total response of one's personality involving acts of belief, trust, and commitment. (3) As a result of God's call and man's response, a new covenant or relationship is established between them.

In the case of Abraham, the call of God is a call to leave his home and family for the land that God would show him. Coupled with this call is the promise of children to the elderly and childless Abraham — descendants who would grow into a great nation and through whom all mankind would receive a blessing.¹¹ What is Abraham's response to this call? Genesis XV, 6 tells us, "Abraham believed the Lord who credited the act to him as justice." Abraham's response was one of faith, but his faith involved more than intellectual belief, more than

¹¹ Genesis XII, 1-3.

an assent to truth. He did believe in the reality of the God who spoke to him but his faith was also a radical act of trust and a commitment of his life. God completely upset Abraham's way of life by the demands he made upon him. Abraham's response is to follow God's lead, to entrust his life to God, in the confidence that God would keep His promises contrary to all human expectations, and confident that his own fulfillment and happiness were to be found in such a commitment.

The faith of Abraham exemplifies something that is fundamental to the act of faith, viz. the acknowledgment that human existence has its foundation outside of itself, the admission that man cannot save himself but God can, the conviction that human existence is made secure by faith and not by reliance on human effort or human possibility. It cannot be stressed too much that, in separating Abraham from his family and kinsfolk, God was separating him from what was, in the ancient world, a man's chief source of security. This separation dramatically underscores what is essential to every man's act of faith, the giving of reliance on human resources in favour of confidence in God's promise, vague though that promise might be. In reference to Abraham's faith, Kierkegaard wrote:

Through the urging of faith, Abraham left the land of his forefathers to become a stranger in the land of promise. He left one thing behind, and took one thing along; he left his worldly wisdom behind and took faith.¹²

Finally, God binds Himself to His promises by entering into a covenant with Abraham.¹³ Abraham, for his part, must circumcise himself and his family as a sign of his acceptance of the covenant.¹⁴ This is the result of faith, a new relationship with God, and the ultimate source of Abraham's confidence is not reliance on human resources but the covenant relationship he enjoys with God who has pledged His loyalty and protection to him.

In the case of the Israelites, the covenant is between God and a nation. God's call, in this instance is mediated by an individual, Moses. It is a call to freedom, a call to the Israelites to escape from their condition of slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. As in

¹² AARON KIERKEGAARD, "Fear and Trembling", in *Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard*, translated by M. HOLLANDER, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, p. 120

¹³ Genesis XV, 9-20.

¹⁴ Genesis XVII, 9-14.





the case of Abraham, the call is accompanied by a promise; the Israelites are promised a land of their own. This promise, like the promise made to Abraham, is vague and challenging. To a people enslaved it goes against all human expectations, and no indication is given as to how the promise will be fulfilled. Thus it demands a response of faith from the Israelites similar to the faith of Abraham, for God was calling them from the security of slavery to the uncertainty of freedom. Faith, for the Israelites, was a commitment to the uncertain future. Yahweh held out to them, an acceptance to the vocation and destiny He offered them.

The story of the exodus and the experiences of the Israelites emphasize the fact that the life of faith is a life of risk and adventure. The call of the Israelites was a call from slavery to freedom, but it was also a call from security to insecurity, from certainty to risk, for freedom always implies risk and responsibility which the man of faith must face in the temptation to exchange the freedom and insecurity of faith for the security of slavery. This was precisely the temptation faced by the Israelites in the desert, who, when faced with hardships, longed to return to the security of their condition of slavery in Egypt. But having responded to God's call and followed Moses into the desert, they too entered into a new relationship or covenant with God on Mt. Sinai. This time the covenant took the form of a solemn pact with the King of the universe who had liberated them. The Covenant of Sinai was based on God's saving act (the exodus) which gave rise to a obligation on the part of the Israelites, i.e. the keeping of the law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

God extended His call to the Israelites through a mediator, Moses, and the result of the response of the people was the Covenant of Sinai. The mediator of the New Covenant is Jesus Christ in whom all mankind is called to the act of faith. In this new economy of salvation, God calls man to faith through the life and teaching of Christ and His Church. But the promise associated with God's call, in this instance, is not the promise of earthly posterity or possessions; it is a promise of eternal life. Christ who proclaims the New Covenant, the "kingdom

¹⁵ Exodus XVI, 3 and XVII, 3.

of God", refuses worldly authority¹⁶ and proclaims that His kingdom is not of this world.¹⁷ Man is to possess eternal life through faith in Christ; and once again this faith is to be a total response on man's part involving the elements of relief, trust, and commitment. Man gives his assent to the truth revealed in and by Christ; he puts his trust and confidence in the redemptive work of Christ; and he commits himself and his life entirely to God in and through Christ.

This response of faith allows the Christian to enter into a new and dynamic relationship with God in Christ. Christian faith is man's response to the saving act of God in Christ and by which man enters into a personal relationship with God. It is this personal relationship which distinguishes Christian faith from the faith of Abraham which is described as a formal contract, and the faith of the Israelites, which gave rise to a relationship of law between God and His people. Christian faith implies a transcending of this legalistic and moralistic relationship in favour of a personal relationship with God in Christ. Man's response to God is precisely his response to the human person of Christ in whom God is revealed.

For St. Paul, this new relationship with God arising from Christian faith is the result of the gift of the Spirit, which is a free gift of God, not something we have merited by good works. For the Christian, this gift of the Spirit means two things. (1) Since the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, his possession of the Spirit gives him a sharing in this bond or relationship. He is caught up into the intersubjective life of the Trinity and shares in Christ's relationship with the Father.¹⁸ Thus his relationship with God through God's free gift (grace) and faith is a personal relationship which transcends the legalistic relationship of the Old Covenant. (2) Since the Holy Spirit is the substantial love of the Father and the Son, the Christian possesses through faith the Spirit of love. He possesses, therefore, an inner capacity for love. And in this respect also it transcends the Old Covenant which gave man the law but not the ability at inner capacity to keep the law.

¹⁶ John VI, 15.

¹⁷ John XVIII, 36.

¹⁸ Galatians IV, 4-7.

St. Paul's conclusion from this last point is that the Christian should walk according to the Spirit and not according to the "flesh". The dichotomy he speaks of is not the dichotomy of spirit and matter or soul and body, but rather between the unselfish spirit of love and other centredness to which the Christian is led by the Spirit of God dwelling within him, and the spirit of self-centredness and self-seeking into which he inevitably falls without the saving encounter with Christ and the gift of His Spirit. It is precisely this gift of the Spirit which liberates man from the bondage of his own self-centredness and allows him to transcend his human condition. At the same time, the Spirit, moving man from within and giving him the ability to love, liberates him from the oppressive burden of the law which he cannot fulfill by his own unaided efforts. Thus the basic law for the Christian is to live according to the spirit of love.¹⁹

The teaching of St. Paul is that the Christian is justified in the eyes of God, not by the observance of a law, but by his faith in God's free gift of the Spirit to him. Justification is not earned, it is a gift (grace) of God, who gratuitously calls him into this personal relationship in Christ. Having, therefore, been relieved of the necessity of justifying himself by the keeping of the law, the Christian is, in a sense, "liberated" from the law. In reference to the moral law, the Christian is liberated from it not objectively, for the law is still objectively valid and expresses moral values,²⁰ but rather subjectively in that he acquires a new attitude to the law.

This new attitude to the law is based on three premises. (1) The law is transcended by the Christian's personal relationship with God. A personal relationship, because it is unlimited, cannot be expressed by laws. There are no artificial limits to the love and service rendered to a friend as there is to the obedience due to an authority. Thus the Christian recognizes the objective validity of the law, but does not make the mistake of thinking that a written law could ever adequately express the relationship he has with God in Christ. (2) Because he is justified by the free gift of God and his faith in that free gift, the Christian no longer depends on the keeping of the law to justify

¹⁹ Galatians V, 16-18.

²⁰ Romans VI, 12.

himself before God. St. Paul points out that Abraham was justified by faith for he lived prior to the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, and the giving of the law does not annul the justifying power of faith.²¹ The Christian like Abraham is justified by his faith in God's promise. (3) Finally, since justification is a free gift of God, the Christian's moral effort is not the cause of his friendship with God but its effect. The moral law is not the means by which man justifies himself before God; it is the framework within which he expresses his love and gratitude for the gift of justification he has received through God's acceptance of him in Christ.

But in transcending the legalism of the law, the Christian must give up the false sense of security it provides and accept the risk and uncertainty of a personal relationship with God. Thus Paul Tillich speaks of faith as a form of courage. To have faith is to renounce the security not only of human wisdom and human resources but also the moral security of legalism and moralism. The courage of faith is not based on one's own accomplishments — even moral accomplishments — but on God's act of acceptance in Christ. For Tillich the courage to affirm one's human existence comes from the fact that one is accepted by God, the ground of being.

One could say that the courage to be is the courage to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable.²²

But, since God infinitely transcends man, there must be some evidence of this acceptance. For Abraham it was the birth of Isaac; for the Israelites it was the wonders he worked in the exodus and in the desert; for the Christian it is the Christ event.

III. — FAITH AND PERSONALITY.

We have briefly investigated Fromm's description of the human condition and of the existential needs which must be satisfied if man is to achieve authentic human existence. We have also inquired into the biblical-existential concept of faith. The question now arises: Is there a relationship between man's existential needs and the type of life and commitment to which he is called by faith? When God calls

²¹ Galatians IV, 17.

²² PAUL TILlich, *The Courage to Be*. N.Y., Fontana Library, 1962, p. 166.

a man to faith, is it, at the same time a call to authentic existence, to human fulfillment and the realization of his human potential? We shall try to see the relationship between Christian faith and man's existential needs as described by Fromm. If faith call man to the achievement of these goals, it calls him to authentic human existence.

1. FAITH AND RELATEDNESS.

Existentialist thought places great emphasis on man's freedom. For the Christian existentialist man's freedom means that he is free to commit himself to various alternatives, not to remain free of commitment for this deprives him of his very humanity. Man is neither an animal, nor is he God; therefore he cannot live on the level of instinctual determination nor that of absolute autonomy. As Fromm maintains, he must develop his self-awareness, his uniqueness, his individuality, his freedom, but at the same time he must overcome the resulting sense of aloneness and isolation by using his freedom to relate himself productively to his fellow-man. Now this is precisely what happens in the act of faith. It is through faith that man enters into a personal relationship with God. As we have seen, Christian faith is essentially a call to a personal relationship rather than a legalistic relationship. Faith is, for the Christian, an existential decision whereby he assumes responsibility for his life, and gives it meaning and direction by fully committing himself to a personal relationship with God in Christ. As such it is a radical act of trust in God as the source of forgiveness and healing, and as the answer to the insufficiency and limitations of human existence.

But faith is not just a response to the invisible transcendent God, for God communicates Himself to man in the Person of Jesus Christ. The response of faith is a response to the person of Christ in whom God is revealed. Now for those who encountered Jesus in his earthly existence, their response was to a living, divine and human being. To whom does the Christian respond today? Is it to an historical figure? Is it to the invisible, transcendent Christ seated at the right hand of His Father? Is it to the Christ present in the sacramental species? The words of Christ Himself give the answer: "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for

me."²³ The response of faith is a response to the Person of Christ — but Christ as He exists in the world today, i.e. in His members, in His Church, the Body of Christ. The New Testament equates one's response to Christ with the response one makes to the members of Christ's Body, the Church. To receive an apostle of Christ is to receive Christ Himself;²⁴ likewise one who rejects an emissary of Christ will reject even the risen Christ.²⁵ Saul's persecution of the early Christians is seen as persecution of Christ Himself;²⁶ Christians are called into an interpersonal unity in the Body of Christ which transcends the interpersonal barriers of nationality, race, social condition and sex;²⁷ husband and wife respond to Christ by their mutual love and service;²⁸ each Christian serves Christ by the particular contribution he makes to the Body of Christ;²⁹ but the greatest contribution one can make is to relate to one's fellow-members of the Church in love and sympathy.³⁰

Thus, the Christian overcomes his tendency to narcissism and isolation and relates to his fellow-man because he sees his fellow-man as a "sacrament" or visible sign of Christ's continuing presence in the world. He responds to Christ's self-gift to him as revealed in his neighbour's love and acceptance of him, or to the needs of Christ as revealed in his neighbour's poverty, suffering, even his human frailty and self-centredness. Faith reveals this new dimension to the reality of the visible, personal presence of others, and makes possible a faith-filled response to them, since faith must always be a response to a person. Thus faith is a call to genuine human relatedness. The very means by which we grow humanly, i.e. human relatedness, is for the Christian, the means of expressing his faith. Likewise, narcissism and isolation are the enemies of faith just as they are the enemies of human growth. Faith is exercised only within the context of the community of believers, and finds its deepest expression in the community's celebration of that interpersonal unity and relatedness in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

²³ Matthew XXV, 40.

²⁴ Matthew X, 40.

²⁵ Luke XVI, 31.

²⁶ Acts IX, 3-5.

²⁷ Galatians III, 28.

²⁸ Ephesians V, 21-33.

²⁹ I Corinthians XII, 4-12, 27-31.

³⁰ I Corinthians XII, 25-26.

2. FAITH AND TRANSCENDENCE.

Fromm has pointed out that the human condition — the condition of self-awareness and self-determination — calls man to transcend his creaturely condition through creativeness. Man realizes that he is no longer merely a pre-individualistic part of nature acting in a determined, instinctual way, but a free, unique, and responsible existence, capable of transcending nature. His transcending of nature, however, can be negatively expressed through destructiveness, through his efforts to turn life into a mechanical process full of certainty and ruled by law and order; or it can be expressed in a positive way — through love (which is creative by its very nature), through an acceptance of life as a process of growth, and through an openness to the risk and adventure implied in human growth. It follows from this that, if man is to achieve genuine transcendence, he must strive to shape his own destiny by assuming responsibility for his unique act of existence, by giving meaning and direction to his life by a free act of commitment, and by resisting all those forces which tend to dehumanize him, to reduce him to the level of an animal or a thing, which reduce him to a mere function or submerge his individuality under categories of race, class, type, etc.

Now if we consider christian faith as an act and commitment by which one enters into a personal relationship with God in Christ, it can be seen that there are several aspects of this personal relationship which involve transcendence. The personal relationship of faith is a relationship which: (1) transcends the legalistic relationship of moralism; (2) is an "open-end" relationship which allows for continual growth and development; (3) involves elements of risk and adventure which transcend the immature desire for security and certainty.

By faith, the Christian transcends the ethical norms of the law, and, in doing so, he liberates himself from what is essentially a depersonalizing and dehumanizing force, for ethics subordinates the personal to the social norm, and legalism subordinates the individual to the law and the group. By faith, the individual "graduates" to a personal relationship which allows for his individuality and uniqueness. The Christian perceives his relationship with God as something unique

and irreplaceable. As the parable of the talents²¹ indicates, each individual is unique in respect to the gifts he receives from God and the return of love and service expected of him.

It is according to this unique, personal relationship that the Christian must live, and to this relationship that he must be faithful. In the words of St. Paul, the Christian must follow the law of the Spirit and not the letter of a legalistic code.²² He must follow the lead of the Spirit of God, for it is through the gift of the Spirit that this personal relationship has been effected.²³ In this respect, it is like any personal relationship, for a personal relationship is guided and directed not by a code of rules and regulations which can be written down, but by the spiritual bond of love or friendship between two persons. By faith, the Christian enters into an "open-end" relationship with God, i.e. one that allows for continual growth and development rather than one which is limited by a mechanical and inorganic code of morality. The relationship of faith implies that openness to growth and development which Fromm considers necessary for a sense of transcendence, for the man of faith is open to the lead of the Spirit, to the suggestion that what God expects of him tomorrow may not be the same as what he expects today. His view of life is organic rather than mechanical.

Moreover, if we recall that one responds to Christ in faith by responding to His members, then faith involves the same risk as does personal growth — the risk of personal encounter. Such a response accepts the risk of the other person's freedom to reject him, or the risk of the other's threatening selfishness. And this is precisely the risk which the Pharisee and the legalist is unwilling to accept.

3. FAITH AND ROOTEDNESS.

As we have seen from Fromm's description of the human condition, the individual must outgrow his state of infantile dependence if he is to obtain freedom and independence. But, in doing so, he loses the security and comfort which goes with dependence, and is constantly

²¹ Matthew XXV, 14-30.

²² Romans VII, 6; Galatians V, 18.

²³ Galatians IV, 4-7.

tempted to regress to a state of dependence in one form or another; to trade his freedom for security, as the Israelites in the desert were tempted to return to their slavery for the sake of being well fed. How does man solve this dichotomy between freedom and authority? Fromm suggests that man, in his freedom and independence must establish new roots, find new sources of security in relating productively to others, i.e. by loving his fellow-man, but in such a way as to preserve his own independence.

The question therefore arises: Is the relationship of faith a form of productive relatedness or does man relate to God in faith at the expense of his own freedom and autonomy? The answer to this question is in an understanding of what constitutes genuine autonomy or independence for man. Just as one cannot achieve maturity if he remains in a state of infantile dependence, it is also true that he cannot achieve authentic human existence by being absolutely autonomous. As Fromm has pointed out, freedom becomes unbearable without relatedness. Moreover, in man, absolute autonomy or freedom without commitment degenerates into narcissism and egoism.

Man, therefore, finds his real autonomy not in isolation but in relatedness; not in freedom from commitment but in freely and responsibly committing himself; not in self-centredness but in other-centredness. Faith, being a commitment to Christ through commitment to one's neighbour, is a call to other-centredness. The paradox of faith is that man is called to find his real freedom in loving and serving others. In the words of Christ, "he who loses his life for my sake will find it";³⁴ or again, "whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave".³⁵

Man's desire for autonomy is essentially a desire to be like God. Even for Fromm, a non-theist, the concept of God is a symbol of the freedom and integrity for which man strives.³⁶ But the lesson of the Incarnation is that man becomes like God through other-centredness. Christ is God's self-revelation and self-gift to man. The self-gift of the Christian to his fellow-man is his way of imitating God as self-gift

³⁴ Matthew X, 39.

³⁵ Matthew XX, 27.

³⁶ Cf. ERICH FROMM, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition*, N.Y., Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966.

which is the only way for man to be like God, for man cannot imitate God's absolute autonomy, i.e. his transcendence. Only God can be autonomous in an absolute sense because, being a Trinity of Persons within Himself, His autonomy does not tend to narcissism. God has within Himself that relatedness which man can achieve only by going outside of himself.

Thus faith, in liberating man from slavish dependence, does not do so merely to impose another form of dependence; it calls man to the only form of autonomy possible to man in his human condition — an autonomy based on love and relatedness.

4. FAITH AND SELF-IDENTITY.

The difference between Fromm's view of man and the christian view is that, while Fromm sees man as realizing this sense of his unique identity by his own resources, the christian view of man sees the sense of individual identity as coming from a source outside of man. Fromm seems to assert that the individual must find the power of self-realization and self-identity within himself and must therefore face the fact that "there is no power transcending him which can solve his problem for him".³⁷ The christian view of man recognizes the same need for a sense of individual identity but credits its realization to the experience of love and acceptance received from an outside source. So is the experience of love and acceptance from another which liberates the individual to accept himself and be himself. As we have seen, Tillich³⁸ describes this courage to assert one's individuality and identity, one's unique being, as the "courage to be" and, for the Christian, the basis and ground of this courage is the fact of God's acceptance of him in spite of his unacceptability. The Christian asserts his own being because he is accepted by the ground of being. He finds the courage to affirm his unique identity neither in himself (as Fromm does) nor in his human environment alone (as the conformist does).

But, as we have seen, the Christian's relationship with God is lived not only to the vertical level but also on the horizontal level;

³⁷ ERICH FROMM, *Man for Himself*, Greenwich, Conn., Fawcett Publications, 1965, p. 53.

³⁸ PAUL TILICH, *op. cit.*

not only in the encounter with the invisible transcendent God, but also in the encounter with one's fellow-man. Man's relationship with Christ is, existentially, his relationship with the whole Christ, i.e. with the members of Christ's Body, the Church. As Christ is the sacrament (i.e. visible reality revealing the presence of an invisible reality) of God, so the Church is the sacrament of Christ, the visible sign among men of Christ's love and acceptance of them. The Christian is intended to experience God's loving acceptance through his incorporation into this community of believers, and, more specifically, through the interpersonal life of that community. In the Body of Christ, Christians are called to live a life of mutual acceptance and self-gift.

It is within the interpersonal life of the Church — that community of believers to whom Christ's command was to "love one another as I have loved you"²⁹ — that the Christian is meant to experience in a human way the love and acceptance of God which liberates him to be a person and to love others in his turn. Thus, for the Christian, the gift of God is not something referring only to an after life; it is also the gift of self-hood here and now.

5. FAITH AS A FRAME OF ORIENTATION AND DEVOTION.

We have seen that religious faith gives man a frame of orientation, i.e. it provides him with a consistent and meaningful way of viewing reality. In the case of christian faith, we have seen that reality is made meaningful by the addition of a new dimension — a transcendent dimension which gives an ultimate meaning to reality. Interpersonal relatedness, for example, has a meaning and value in itself, but, for the christian, a new dimension is added for the presence of his fellow-man is a "sacrament" of the continuing presence of Christ, so that his response to his neighbour is his response to Christ. Thus intersubjectivity has not only a valid human meaning but also a "sacramental" meaning. Faith gives an ultimate meaning to human experience.

But the question for Fromm is: Does faith provide not only a subjectively satisfying but also an objectively valid, i.e. rational view of reality? In answer to this question, it must be insisted that the act of faith is a rational act. On this point it would seem that the insistence

²⁹ John XV, 12.

of some theologians that faith is more than the mere assent of the mind, should be balanced by the traditional catholic teaching that there is an intellectual preamble or preliminary to the act of faith. The existentialist view of faith has drawn our attention to what might be called the "psychological preamble" of faith, i.e. the anxiety and sense of human incompleteness which leads to the "leap" of faith. In such a context it is important to remember that there is also a rational preamble to faith involving what are traditionally called "matures of credibility" which makes the act of faith a reasonable "leap". On the other hand it is the "extra-rational" dimension of faith, the dimension of trust and commitment, which provides man not only with a rational frame of orientation but also an object of devotion and thus engages and involves him totally.

CONCLUSION.

40 Fromm's complaint against christian faith is that it often falls into the category of "authoritarian" faith, and thus gives a non-productive orientation to personality, by alienating man from himself and his own productive powers through object submission to an authoritarian God. Fromm sees faith as calling man off from the possibility of self-realization since what is good for man is identified not with what leads to his own self-realization but with what is in conformity to the divine will. There can be no doubt that the faith of some Christians fits the above description, but it is the present writers' opinion that Fromm, in rejecting such a view of faith, has gone to the opposite extreme. He has made man the measure of all things and completely self-sufficient. We believe that the concept of faith outlined in this study avoids both extremes.

1. In the first place, christian faith, viewed according to our existential understanding of it, does not alienate man from himself or his productive powers. We have seen that man is called by faith to achieve authentic human existence. It is an affirmation of one's unique individual existence, and a decision to use one's freedom to give meaning and direction to one's life through the commitment of faith. Fromm's concept of authoritarian faith contradicts the very nature of christian faith and grace. The Christian can never see faith as mere submission



94 **To the will of God who derives some kind of pleasure from such submission. The christian concept of God excludes any such dependence of God or man. God has no need of man and therefore his calling of man to the relationship of faith is a free gift (grace) of his love.**

2. On the other hand, man is not completely self-sufficient. It is our contention that Fromm's optimism regarding man's innate ability to realize himself through the exercise of his productive powers is unrealistic in view of the qualities of relatedness, transcendence, and self-identity which he himself identifies as elements of authentic human existence. These qualities are, to a great extent, not the result of man's unaided effort, but are a gift from a source outside man — whether that source be God or one's fellow-man. Fromm contends that the individual will not fall into isolation and narcissism because he recognizes that relatedness is necessary for his own development. But is it really that simple? We agree with Tillich that man needs courage to be himself and to relate himself to others, and that such courage is a gift from another. For the Christian, it is the gift of God who loves and accepts him in Christ.

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