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The Reason For Belief

(Condensed for radio as WHY BELIEVE?, broadcast December 18).
Belief, and especially religious belief, requires a kind of effort, even a kind of determination. For there is almost nothing which may be proposed to you to be believed today which may not be contradicted tomorrow. Even the most solemn truth your best friend utters may be contradicted, yet you are committed to believe in your friend, to have confidence in his reliability and his word.

Today you are asked to believe in democratic principles; tomorrow you will meet someone who shows himself wholly unworthy of the confidence which belief in democratic principles must place in the unselected human being. Today you are asked to believe in the possibility of peace; tomorrow you must read the opinion of a top military strategist that since preventive war is an immoral concept for a democracy, we must use the threat of retaliatory power to deter the enemy from the first blow, although, he argues, it is the first blow that is likely to win. Today you are asked to believe in God, or in the security of moral principle; tomorrow you will see decisions taken in important places that haven't the slightest relevance to such belief.

It is not strange, therefore, to discover in many people a belief against belief, an anti-belief, such as my friend expressed one evening in the middle of a rather hectic pursuit of beliefs in general. "Why do you have to believe something?" he asked. "Why believe anything at all?—ha, ha, ha!" His explosive laughter punctured the inflated atmosphere of argument and inquiry—probably at about the right time—and his question was exactly the pertinent question. But he seemed to be proposing his laughter as the answer. It seemed to me then that he sat among us as a kind of friendly Pilate, content to ask, "What is truth?" yet without any urgency or intent to find any other answer than laughter, and it seemed to me that somewhere in the marginal shadows of the room Jesus of Nazareth stood listening, as it seems to me in fancy he has been listening ever since the walk to Golgotha for some resolution of the great dilemmas of moral consciousness and human intellect.

But so difficult is it to be without belief of some kind that to repudiate belief implies another kind of belief. My friend's question, although he followed it with laughter, implied another question. "Why believe anything at all?" he had asked; and it seemed to me he should then have asked, "Why not just take life as it comes?" This is the anti-belief implied by the repudiation of all we commonly call belief.

Let us admit at once that it has great appeal as an alternative to the effort men and women put into believing, and to the warring thought and feeling that become engaged in that effort, and to the over-concern of most of us to be right, and proven right, and acknowledged right in what we believe. There is a kind of power drive that seems to creep in and displace the genuine concern for truth in belief in persons and churches and nations, in laymen preachers, professors, scientists, and politicians. By contrast "taking life as it comes" seems peaceable, humble, relaxed, and harmless, downright pleasant, in fact. Yet I am sure that the practicability, and the wisdom, and even the happiness that seem to attach to this view of taking life as it comes are of a specious sort, and that it is passively subject to all the ills of anger and dogmatism that afflict the intense and purposeful quest for things to believe.

Consider, for instance, that no one really does—just—take life as it comes. Instead we make plans, perhaps not extensive ones, but plans of some kind. A week ago some people told me they are planning to go to Europe in the late spring. They are not content just to take life as it comes, and wait until then to see whatever vacation notion pops into their minds. My friend plans his work ahead, though he really can't be sure there will be any ahead at all, or, if there is, whether he will be there in person. I haven't asked him, but I'll bet he buys life insurance and participates in some kind of retirement plan. The combination of these two kinds of planning has always struck me as one of the funniest things in the world, for it is so revealing of two of our major fears: we're afraid of dying too soon, and equally afraid of living too long, and with reference to these two fears we aren't willing at all to take life as it comes. And think of the superior wisdom of repudiating religious or moral belief, but staking your whole unknown future on the value of a dollar. My friend might say that a dollar is, at least, a more down to earth kind of thing than God, and I can see his point, and yet that would be a tremendous assertion to make and to believe. He might say, too, that he only carries insurance and has a retirement plan because these are conventional things to do. Well, one of the dangers of just taking life as it comes is the danger of falling into conventionality as a way of life.

We don't take life as it comes. We plan, and then try to accommodate planning and the unforeseeable; we prepare, and then try to assimilate preparation and the constant need to improvise in the recurring situations for which we have no preparation. Moreover, no one CAN — just — take life as it comes. For too much comes, and it comes as a flux of unsorted, uncountable experiences of pain and pleasure and mixture. There is a severe necessity for everyone to select what he will pay attention to and "respond to." When a man leaves his house in the morning to go to his work, he has in mind a clear destination and an arrival time that rule his journey from home to work. This means that he cannot stop to watch a bug cross the sidewalk, and he cannot follow the rescue squad when it crosses the intersection ahead of him, and he cannot dawdle in front of store windows or hang around the news bulletins at the radio station. Enough kinds of possible experience can be presented to him between home and work—that if he followed a free kind of impulsive response and just took life as it came, he might not arrive at work at all, indeed, he might not even get home by nightfall. I should not want to say that would be bad, for it might not. But if one intends to go to work, then he must get there, and to do it, he must refuse to pay attention to a great many things along the way. That is to say, it is he who has the direction, and not the flux of things.

But even without a direction or a destination we have to reach — and most of us do have one — we could not just take life as it comes. Shall I simply give equal attention and concern to everything that comes my way? I would be limp as a dishrag before the day was half over and an emotional and intellectual vacuum. No tears or laughter left in me, and no ideas either, and no words to tell my emptiness, even. I should, if I tried just to take life as it comes, be utterly at the mercy of experience which, in its unsorted and unselected occurrence has no mercy for me at all. All of us have certain days when significant and demanding experience happens too fast and in too great quantity. All of us have had or will have certain years that seem to be true, when too many things of too great magnitude for the heart happen and we cannot assimilate them, indeed, cannot really experience them, as fast as they occur. There is the day full of crises large and small, full of meaning and full of absurdity, and forgotten debts to punctuality coming due at the same time, and brand new promises being made to do things we haven't the faintest notion we will have the time to do. We really can't just take life as it comes and achieve any coherence in our own lives at all. We might even lose the little we thought we had.

Mrs. Gladys Starks

Mrs. Gladys Starks, age 74 years, of 5825 South 15 St., expired Monday Jan. 2, 1956 at a local hospital.

She was an Omaha resident 42 years and a long time member of Allen Chapel A. M. E. Church.

Mrs. Starks is survived by 3 sons, Ray, Earnest of Omaha and Howard Starks of St. Paul Minn., 5 sisters, Mrs. Minnie Walker, Mrs. Gene Hodges, Mrs. Pauline Mitchell, Mrs. Myrtle Davis, Mrs. Emma Johnson; 2 brothers, Thurston and Hiram Bryant, all of Omaha; 8 grandchildren; 2 great grandchildren and a host of other relatives.

Myers Brothers Funeral Service.

The reason for belief, then, is first that it steadies the man or woman. "If you can't believe in God," says one of Edna Millay's characters, "it is a good thing to believe in Communism." Although I don't think this is a true alternative, it makes the point well enough that without one kind of major belief some other kind is necessary. There is no simple stream of events which will integrate our lives, and there is no simple stream of responses or free thoughts that will make our lives coherent.

We have got to have a certain minimum predictability of self first of all. When it is asked whether others can depend upon us, we only need to know whether we can depend upon ourselves. A certain constancy of mood, a kind of prejudiced disposition, a moral and emotional center of gravity is necessary to each of us. That is why they put those foolish signs up in business places for the employees to see: Keep Smiling and Think. Now it would be a ludicrous office and a ludicrous world if everybody just smiled all the time. What an expressionless condition it would finally become. Imagine falling through a glass partition or slipping poison in the boss' coffee and never flinching in your smile. It would be just as ludicrous and gruesome a place if everybody thought every minute. The most wonderful thoughts might be conceived and no one would ever know the wonder of them — just the thought. Yet these silly signs are an acknowledgement of our need for a kind of constancy of temper or temperament.

William Dawson

William H. Dawson, age 5 years son of Mr. and Mrs. Cleo O. Dawson of 3209 N. 27th St., expired suddenly Tuesday Jan. 3, 1956.

William was a resident of Omaha 2 years.

He is also survived by 2 sisters, Brenda Joyce and Sandra Mae; brother, Cleo Otis Dawson, Jr.; aunt, Mrs. Mary Anderson, all of Omaha, and other relatives.

Myers Brothers Funeral Service.

Jesse Guyton

Mr. Jesse Guyton, 2206 North 30th Street, passed away Wednesday night at a local hospital.

Mr. Guyton had been an employe of Cudahy Packing Plant for 32 years.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Mintha Guyton, Omaha, two sisters, Mrs. Mary Lane, Edwards, Mississippi, Mrs. Rilla Abrams, St. Louis, Missouri and other relatives. The body is at Thomas Mortuary.

Ed Martin

Ed Martin, age 88 years, of 2919 Erskine St., expired Sunday evening Jan. 1, 1956 at his home.

He was an Omaha resident ten years.

He is survived by 3 nieces, Mrs. Cora Brown, Mrs. Bobbie Carter and Mrs. Leona Herrington, all of Omaha; nephew, Fletcher Martin of Chicago, Ill.

Funeral services tentatively arranged for Wednesday at 11:00 a.m. Jan. 4, 1956 from the Myers Brothers Funeral Chapel.

Henry H. Cook

Henry H. Cook, age 82 years, of 2562 1/2 Cumming St., expired Thursday Dec. 29, 1955 at a local hospital.

He was an Omaha resident 36 years and between the years of 1920-1945 he was well known as a Barber.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Annie Cook of Omaha; daughter, Mrs. Lois Beverly of Burlington, Ia.; grandson, Vernon Windson of Ft. Madison, Ia.; two great grandchildren and other relatives.

Funeral services were held Thursday Jan. 3, 1956 at 2:00 p.m. from the Myers Brothers Funeral Chapel with Rev. J. H. Reynolds officiating assisted by Rev. F. C. Williams. Interment was at Mt. Hope Cemetery.

Palbearers Messrs Harvey McNeal, Emmett Dennis, Earnest McNeal and Glen Oldham.

Steven Johnson

Steven R. Johnson, six months, 1907 Clark Street, passed away Sunday, January 1 at a local hospital.

Steven is survived by his mother, Mrs. Delores Johnson; two brothers and a sister.

The body is at Thomas Mortuary.

Ethridge Turner

Ethridge Turner, age 47 years, of 2016 Grace St. expired suddenly Thursday morning Dec. 29, 1955 at his home.

He was an Omaha resident 8 years and was employed at Armour and Co.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Nancy Turner; 2 daughters, Mrs. Irene Gay and Mrs. Lorene Reed; son, Willie Turner, all of Omaha; 6 brothers, 4 sisters; 1 grandson, 4 grand daughters and a host of other relatives.

Funeral services tentatively arranged for Wednesday Jan. 4, 1956 at 2:00 p.m. from the Morning Star Baptist Church.

Myers Brothers Funeral Service.

Anniversary Observed At Corinth Baptist

The Corinth Baptist Church observed its First Anniversary Sunday, January 1, 1956. The highlights of the progress that the church made during the year was given at the 11 a.m. service, and the minister delivered a challenging sermon. His theme was "On being Loyal to Christ." The congregation was encouraged to be loyal to Christ regardless of the circumstances in which they found themselves. In time of victory and in time of defeat, in time of plenty and in time of want, in time of happiness and in time of sorrow and when the crowd is with you and when the crowd is against you.

One member was added to the church at the morning worship.

The 3 p.m. service was one of fellowship. The following persons brought greetings: Rev. Z. W. Williams, Rev. Wm. Pratt, Elder J. Hall Bowers, Rev. J. H. Williams, Rev. F. C. Williams, Rev. J. C. Wade, Elder McDowell, Atty. Robert Blanchard, Rev. Solomon Jacobs and Mr. George Washington. The afternoon service included a feature of the observance of the 90th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation which gave the Negroes in America their freedom. The text for the afternoon was, "Not By Power Nor By Might But By My Spirit Saith The Lord of Hosts." Geh. 4.7.

The minister admonished his hearers that force, power or might has ever been able to accomplish freedom and the realization of human rights, but man is able to gain freedom only as he exercises the Spirit of God. That was true in the time of Moses, and it was true in the time of slavery in America, and it is true today. It is true in the life of a nation and it is true in the life of an individual. He said that the Spirit of God may seem to move slower than the forces of man, but the work of the Spirit is eternal and the forces of man is temporary. Patience and Faith are virtues, but they are not only virtues they are dynamics that a Christian cannot afford to be without.

"See How They Run" Next At Playhouse

Director Kendrick Wilson of the Omaha Community Playhouse slated the British farce, "See How They Run," as the next offering by his little theatre group.

"It's a confusing but amusing show," Wilson said, "involving mistaken identity, sharp dialogue and even an intoxicated lady in a closet." The play has been successfully staged abroad and by a number of amateur groups in America. Omaha patrons will be seeing it for the first time when it begins its run on February 17th. It follows "Dial M for Murder" which opens this Friday, January 6th.

Casting for "See How They Run" will take place this Sunday, January 8th at 2:30 p.m. and on Monday, January 9th at 7:30 p.m. The show calls for seven men and three women. Most of the players are of the "veddy, veddy" British variety but there are two Americans and a cockney to round out the comic chatter.

Alberta Butler

Mrs. Alberta Butler, 68 years, 1128 North 20th Street, passed away Thursday evening, December 22nd at her home. Mrs. Butler had been a resident of Omaha ten years. She was a faithful member of Bethel A.M.E. Church where she served as Stewardess and was a former Sunday School teacher.

Mrs. Butler is survived by a daughter, Mrs. Rhoda Mae Nelson, of Omaha.

Funeral services were held Tuesday morning, December 27th from the Bethel A.M.E. Church with the Rev. W. A. Fowler officiating, assisted by Rev. Cooley, Rev. E. F. Offard, Rev. W. E. Fort.

Interment was in the family plot at Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Clarence Walker

Mr. Clarence Walker, 69 years, 2629 Patrick Avenue, passed away Sunday, December 25th at his home. Mr. Walker had been a resident of Omaha thirty-one years and was a faithful employe of Wilson Packing Plant.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Helen Walker, Omaha; stepson, Mr. Rudolph Gerren, Sr. and his wife, Mrs. Bernice Gerren, Los Angeles, California; two sisters, Mrs. Ada Gamble, Hiawatha, Kansas, Mrs. Maggie Allen, Kansas City, Missouri; two grandsons, Lindsay and Rudolph Gerren, Jr., Los Angeles, California; two nephews, Mr. Wilber Gamble, St. Joseph, Missouri, Mr. Lemuel Walker, Denver, Colorado; four nieces, Mrs. Romaine Wright, Mrs. Raydell Douglas, Miss Eloise Gamble, Denver, Colorado, Mrs. Merle Baker, Hiawatha, Kansas, and other relatives.

Funeral services were held Saturday morning, December 31 from Pilgrim Baptist Church with the Rev. Charles Favors officiating.

Honorary bearers Lewis W. Grant, George Collins, Charles Rodgers, Robert Raymond, active bearers, John Anderson, Bud Carter, Norman Gray, John Russell, Lindsay Averett, Albert Beene.

Interment was in Calvary Cemetery with arrangements by Thomas Mortuary.

Ky. Court Ruling Appealed

Frankfort, Ky., December 9.—Attorneys for Carl Braden today filed their brief in the Kentucky Court of Appeals challenging his conviction under the Kentucky sedition law. In pressing the attack on the law, Braden's attorneys said that the main issue in the case was the problem of desegregation and not sedition.

"The defendant has been indicted and convicted not because he attacked the Constitution but because he tried to give meaning to the equalitarian principles which it embodies," the brief declared.

It points out that Braden was given 15 years in prison after he and his wife helped a Negro couple, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Wade IV, to buy a home in Louisville suburb where no Negroes had lived before. The house was dynamited in June, 1954, and a grand jury indicted Braden, his wife, and five other white persons who had helped the Wades.

The brief was filed by Louis Lusky, designated by the American Civil Liberties Union to represent Braden on appeal, and Robert W. Zollinger, who was Braden's chief counsel at his trial in Criminal Court at Louisville last December. Both attorneys are of Louisville.

Commenting on the filing of the brief, Patrick Murphy Malin, the ACLU's executive director in New York City, stated that the ACLU had "asked Lusky to serve as co-counsel on appeal because of its strong belief that important questions of free speech and due process are raised in this test of the state sedition statute."

The attorneys emphasize the absence of any proof that Braden personally advocated sedition, pointing out that the trial judge withdrew this charge from the jury's consideration because there was no evidence to support it. The only questions submitted to the jury were whether Braden had contact with seditious organizations or had possessed seditious books.

The brief contends that it was unconstitutional to let the jury find Braden guilty without proof of wrongful purpose on his part. It says the state and federal constitutions "forbid the imputation of guilt by association. A man can be punished only for his own misdeeds."

Lusky and Zollinger object to the admission of evidence of the house purchase, which they said had nothing to do with sedition but probably accounted for the verdict. "The sentence in the present case can only have resulted from the jury's passionate disapproval of the defendant's lawful purchase of the Wade house," they declare.

The also object to evidence about the dynamiting of Wade's home, which they say invited the jury "to punish the defendant for a bombing he did not cause, simply because the prosecution had been unable to ascertain who did cause it." The brief contends that the Kentucky sedition statute "was not intended as a deterrent to peaceable experiment in controversial social fields." It adds:

"Integration of the Negro people into the general community and difficult problems of the present day. For a long time it was deemed permissible to

enforce segregation of the races by law. Recent decisions of the Supreme Court, however, have withdrawn constitutional sanction from officially enforced segregation in one field after another. This has given the people of local communities the opportunity, and imposed on them the responsibility, for devising their own solutions for race problems within the framework of democratic processes.

"It is right and wholesome that private persons, white as well as colored, should take an interest in this vitally important problem. It is a controversial problem for which no solution of general applicability has yet been found. The best American tradition calls for an experimental, trial and errors approach, seeking sound empirical solutions rather than rigid doctrinaire judgments. Those who think integration should come sooner, and those who think it should come more gradually or not at all, should be allowed to expound their opposing views and try them out in practice, all without official intervention except for the protection of legal rights of person and property.

"Much as we may dislike those who hold up the mirror to the community and remind us that our ideals of justice and tolerance and equality are not yet fully realized in actual practice, we must beware the danger of making the way of the critic too hazardous. If he demands a standard of performance which is presently beyond the capacity of the community, his criticism may not be effective. If he adopts illegal methods, his illegal acts should be punished. But if his methods are lawful we must not silence him because we dislike his views. And we must not punish him because lawless means are used to oppose him.

"The best, and perhaps the only, hope of a sane and wholesome solution to such problems as racial integration is to allow peaceful experimentation of the sort the Wades attempted. To help them attempt it, as the defendant did, is not a crime."

Lusky and Zollinger also see a threat to freedom of the press in the cross-examination of Braden about a news story he had written. Braden was formerly labor reporter for The Cincinnati Enquirer and The Louisville Times. At the time of his conviction he was a copy editor for The Louisville Courier-Journal and was active in labor and interracial affairs.

"The prosecution invited the jury to convict him because of lack of optimism displayed in a factual report on unemployment in the Louisville area, which he had written as a news service correspondent in 1948," the brief said. "No evidence was ever offered to show that the news story (which certainly did not advocate criminal syndicalism or sedition) was false in any respect, or that the defendant believed it to be untrue. The court, by ruling that its truth or falsity was immaterial, struck a far-reaching blow at freedom of the press."

The brief also contends that the indictment was so vague that no adequate defense could be offered; that the court's instructions to the jury failed to define the offenses in any understandable way, and that the terms of the sedition statute are so indefinite "that men of common intelligence must guess as to its meaning and differ as to its application."

The attorneys are also critical of the prosecutions use of an affidavit by Braden's 15-year-old foster daughter, Sonia, to obtain information about books in his home. "The blood runs cold at the thought that, in America, in-

Will Be
An irate landowner came in the other day to have a sign printed for posting his property:
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