

**THOUGHTS ABOUT LIFE
GOOD NEWS, FOR SURE**

I have found a map that helps me see where I am
and the way through this stormy wilderness.

OLIVER CAMERON

A perspective that gives hope for ultimate meaning and satisfaction makes it easier to face temporary discomfort and live with more sense of direction and certainty.

We have to do our own thinking.
Ideas are the tools we think with.
Even if we don't agree with them,
they can be a valuable comparison.
I hope these ideas will be helpful.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is an attempt to share with others a perspective of life that has come to be of great value to me.

The way we are and the turmoil that so often makes us miserable have made me, like so many others; ask why and how can all this suffering be justified?

Secular philosophy, even with all the impressive recent discoveries, fails to find a reason for our existence, or to give hope and guidance for the ultimate satisfaction of our needs and desires.

Religious teachings', claiming a source with greater perspective than we have, is our only resource. But when I look in that direction my eyes want to shy away from the mess of contradictions and repulsive practice. Even so, it is the only source of information I can find that does more than frame questions about these vital concerns.

The only place I have to start from in reasoning about life is the knowledge gained from experience and the general knowledge I have of our human nature and situation. If an explanation that fits what I see is found in a religious writing, great. If not, then I am skeptical of that source.

I'm not superstitious about religious writings. My interest in and approach to these writings is philosophical. I am not affiliated with any religious organization. Because of this I read scriptures without the bias of preconceptions due to religious indoctrination.

I am not easily influenced by the arguments and criticisms of those who use an interpretation of the scriptures they have adopted as their frame of reference instead of mankind's overall experience of life. They may be sincere but that doesn't take the place of having a large enough perspective to see discrepancies in their beliefs.

It seems that under all the duff and claptrap, religious teaching is trying to help with our need for both social and intellectual satisfaction. Moral precepts help in forming satisfying social relationships. By its statements concerning our relationship to a larger sphere of life it attempts to meet our need for meaning and individual significance.

In this area of concern, there is an especially satisfying and reasonable teaching, found in our traditional scriptures (the Bible). They tell us that the Earth is a birthplace for people who can be friends of each other and of the One who gave us existence.

Because we are basically social beings who can't be satisfied without friends, any reasonable explanation of our existence has to account for this fact. Seeing that our situation here on earth is the condition needed to

make such a relationship possible, this explanation seems more than likely to be true. I have found no better explanation.

Knowing what it takes to make friendship possible is the key to understanding ourselves and our situation.

A friend asked me "What is the most important thing to know about life:" and then recorded my answer. It seems relevant so I'll stick it in.

"What is the most important thing to know about life?" In my opinion it's the fact that we are self determined but we are not self created. We have been put here by the Creator because He wants friends, and this is our birth place where we can learn to be friendly people if we will, or die by default!

We become friendly people that He can trust and appreciate by learning to live by the Golden Rule. That is something we can do because of the way we and our world are made, without any special instruction. Since it's something that everybody can do that is essential for a stable society, if we fail to do so we can justly be punished and eliminated.

Living by the Golden Rule is to live with consideration for the feelings and rights of other people. And of course a part of that is to try to live so that justice is available to everyone. The Golden Rule is to love our neighbor as our self.

Love is a common term that we use in many ways. But in reference to the Golden Rule, love is a positive outgoing attitude of respectful concern for the welfare of other people. That friendly attitude toward others is what maintains the quality of social interactions so that everyone who is worthy of life can be satisfied.

Love is something that affects just about everything we do because we are social beings. If we live a lifestyle that deprives somebody else of their fair share of necessities we are violating the Golden Rule. Seeing these less apparent aspects of what's implied by the Golden rule, it's not so easy to want to do it. It's one thing to go out of our way to be concerned for the welfare of people who are important to us, but it is another thing to be concerned with the quality of life of everyone. However, doing so is important because it demonstrates that we can be trusted with life, as the friends the Creator wants us to be. In a society where everyone can be satisfied, it is necessary that each individual is considerate of the rights and feelings of every other individual. This is why Jesus put so much emphasis on loving your neighbor as yourself.

Since friendship is a voluntary relationship, the Creator can't make friends. Unlike love, it can't be given to somebody who we don't appreciate and trust. So, He has given a special demonstration to show

that the troubles of this part of life, that are a basis for appreciation of what is good and provide us with freedom to choose, are necessary conditions and not an indication that He is an unfriendly being.

In order to show us His true nature He has sent an emissary Jesus, the Word, that is, in some way, a part of Himself, to Earth to live with us so communication can be certain without intimidating us. Because of the need for our freedom of choice to be protected He came as someone who could be ignored or defamed and rejected. Yet at the same time He has shown His power and love for us, and made it plain that if we know Him we know the nature of the Creator. This knowledge that all worthy people will see when freed of physical limitations if not before, makes it possible for us to accomplish the purpose for our existence by becoming the friends He hopes we will be!!! This way of thinking about our experiences, that seems so reasonable to me, is a concept that allows us to be dignified people. It gives us hope that we as individuals can eventually find a more than adequate satisfaction for even our deepest and most insistent cravings, by becoming people who can help satisfy His desire for friends.

The Creator is setting up a kingdom populated by friendly people. If we become people who can be trusted with life in that Kingdom we are helping build it, for friendship can't just be created; we voluntarily provide this essential part of it.

I am aware that this disagrees with Christian theology. Its salvation formula is an undignified concern for our eternal welfare without any concern for the Creator's desire for the friendship we can offer.

There would be no reason to write about my ideas if they were not somewhat different, but in this time of anarchy in the realm of thought it is not likely that they will seem controversial or be much noticed for that matter. Be that as it may, I have confidence in these concepts and in my ability to reason. Being human I may be wrong even though they seem valid. Even so I don't fear facing the Judge with what I have written in hand. If I fail to try to share them I would have reason to be fearful.

When it comes to writing, I know about as much as a chipmunk....well maybe. Chippie's trail across a piece of paper may be easier to figure out than mine. I appreciate the people who have given encouragement or generously helped make it readable.

Without having responsibility for what we do we are no better than an animal and have no dignity. This, like the fact of change, is something we can't get away from! Responsibility and consequences make life a serious business.

I must take responsibility for stating these thoughts. But at the same time I realize that I have had nothing to do with my innate ability and not much to do with providing the circumstances for its development. When one tries to write their thoughts, unforeseen relationships and new insights come. It is part of the thinking process that goes deeper than conscious work and is something none of us can take credit for, even though as far as I know some of them may be original.

It has taken many years and countless rewrites to get these thoughts formed and on paper. I keep seeing ways it could be better but the time has come when I have to let it be good enough. I hope that others who are walking under cloudy skies will see the ray of hope I find in these unorthodox perspectives.

MY PHILOSOPHY ABOUT LIFE

Dealing with unfamiliar ideas is difficult, at best. At least it is for me, I hope a simple statement of the main concepts in my philosophy of life will make it easier to understand.

Briefly stated, these concepts are:

1. Mankind was given existence because the Creator is a social being wanting friends to help Him rein. What we will be doing, I being immature, can't imagine. But something meaningful I'm sure because one I trust says so.
2. Friends can't be made by outside force. Bodies can be created and given a spirit, but a friendly personality for our spirit has to be freely self-determined.
3. To be self-determined we have to be able to choose between alternatives. Self-determination is possible because we have a built-in conflict of interest with consequent decisions to make that determine whether we live or die. Our instinct for self-preservation causes us to form the habit of being more concerned with our wants than we are with the needs of others. On the other hand, we need friendly companionship and the only way to get it is by learning to be consistently considerate of other people's welfare, so we can be trusted and appreciated. Being considerate of the rights and needs of others means restraining our habitual selfishness. It's not easy to change this habit and many people are only as considerate of most others as they have to be to get what they want.
4. This need for freedom of choice is why we have the earth as a birthplace apart from the Creator's overwhelming presence. Here we experience both good and evil so we can learn to appreciate good and try to provide it if we become willing to do so. Having appreciative feelings is what makes life worthwhile. Our memory of the bum feelings that makes appreciation possible will make a continuing experience of evil unnecessary. Because of this there will be no need for evil in the permanent life.
5. Friendship is based on mutual trust and appreciation.

6. The Creator gains our trust and appreciation by showing that He, and life, are good, but temporary suffering is necessary and justified to make it possible. He is providing a demonstration of this fact that all who need to can see in due time. Our traditional scriptures and the coming of Jesus the Word are part of that demonstration.
7. We gain His trust and appreciation by becoming willing and trying to live by the Golden Rule of loving others as we love ourselves. In this situation here on earth there is so much temptation, inclination and opportunity to be self-centered, selfish, inconsiderate people that it is a predominant characteristic. When the Creator sees someone willing and trying to become a considerate and trustworthy person in such a difficult environment He finds something to appreciate and respect them for.

It is good to know about these facts. But not everyone does. And I'm relieved that it isn't my responsibility to see that they can know about them. It would be very unsettling if someone's ultimate well-being might be jeopardized by my lack of self-discipline, skill or capability. It would certainly be unfair to them, and such a lack of justice would give a very depressing and hopeless perspective of what might be the basis of our existence. Our instincts, mental ability, and circumstances are designed so we can accomplish the purpose of our existence by learning to live by the Golden Rule and so qualify for a good, never ending life as friends of the Creator, without knowing at this time, why we exist. We each determine our own fate.

In Matthew 19:16-22: He tells about a wealthy young man who asked Jesus what good thing he could do to get eternal life. After Jesus identified Himself He told the man if he would have life to obey the commandments do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or give false witness; to honor his father and mother and to love his neighbor as himself.

The young man said he had done that and asked what more he should do.

Jesus told him if he would be perfect to sell his possessions, give to the poor and he would have treasure in Heaven then come to follow Him.

The young man's first question implied he thought he had life and he wanted a permanent extension of it. Jesus reply indicated he didn't have life. He only had existence with a possibility of gaining life by obeying those commandments. The young mans statement about obeying the commandments showed he didn't understand how he had failed so he was told in detail.

Being told to sell his possessions and give to the poor as much as said it rightfully belonged to the poor. By taking more than his share the wealthy man was being heedless of the Golden Rule and guilty of theft.

Also a culture that encourages such a thing is faulty. To be a willing part of an unfair culture is to be unfair. So he was told in effect to come out of it by following Jesus. See Rev 18:4-7. If he did it would be the perfection of the relationship with the Creator we are designed for.

We have to live in our present circumstances until we can do better. But we can be willing to see and try to avoid doing harmful and unfair things as part of living by the Golden Rule. Debt and careless spending are anchors to an irresponsible involvement and perpetuates the system.

Why is honoring father and mother an essential command? It seems to me this command is referring to a major institution. In spite of the failings of some parents the family is the basic cultural unit that children are born into. It has the primary responsibility for raising children. It goes without saying that the command means for parents to be honorable so they can be honored. If parents do not act honorably children are less likely to learn good values and self-discipline. So the culture produces fewer and fewer friendly people.

I wonder if the young man going away sad instead of defiant meant he was going to do what Jesus told him to do. If so he would be feeling grief because of the loss of what had been very important to him.

After the young man left Jesus told His disciples it is very hard for a wealthy man to enter the kingdom of heaven, even so it is possible with His help.

Peter was listening when the young man was told he could have treasure in heaven. So he asked what he and the other disciples would have. Jesus said they would help rule in the next age and have much more than they left. This didn't include marriages. In Mt, 22:30 Jesus said there would be no marriage in the resurrection. In that respect people will be like Angels. However, in the permanent life people are symbolized as being the bride of Jesus. That symbol surely represents a very satisfying relationship.

It seems to me the very large compensation the disciples were to receive could come by them having the affection of the people they govern. It could be almost like a family.

The story about the “first being last” may have been given to keep those first disciples from feeling superior to new comers. All disciples are equally appreciated as His friends. I wonder if this story was told in expectation of the young man’s return to become a disciple.

I appreciate what this story says about the Creator and His love for each of us.

It seems to me this story points out the distinction between what is required of everyone and the privilege available to those who know about Jesus. If the Creator offers to give us individual training it seems foolish to ignore it.

In becoming a disciple, I agreed to try to do what the teacher wanted me to do, if I knew about it. I could do that because he designed me to be self-determined and because I trust Him. He can’t expect anything of me that will conflict with my makeup and well-being without contradicting Himself. To be bossed by Him would be in conflict with the dignity He has given me and make me a slave instead of a friend. He wants us to become worthy companions. I want the maturity that makes that dignity possible. I’m eager to see what life will be like after that is accomplished.

Matthew 25:31-46 again tells about the same principle Jesus gave in his answer to the young man’s first question. The question of what is essential to qualify for eternal life. Before verse 31, Jesus is talking about people who knew about Him and what He expected of them. Beginning in verse 31, in contrast to the knowledgeable people, He gives the basis for the judgment of all other people. The statements of those judged, both the worthy and the unworthy, indicate they had no prior knowledge of Jesus or His teachings. They were judged on the basis of what they inherently knew to do, that again can be summed up by the Golden Rule.

This explanation is important because it gives a just basis for judgment. The Christian idea that all people are lost if someone doesn’t take the knowledge of the savior to them, if true, is holding many people responsible for information they have no access to. And leaving their fate in the hands of other fallible humans compounds the injustice.

One of the first things our traditional scriptures tell us is that we are basically like the Creator. We need friends, so it is reasonable to think that He does too. The scriptures are meaningless without this basic assumption.

But there is a problem. Suffering is a necessary part of the development of beings capable of friendship. It is a necessary basis for the appreciative feelings that make life a good experience. Without a comparison we have no choice. Without choice we lack the freedom necessary for friendship.

Unless we can see the need for suffering in making it possible for us to have a more than compensating, high quality life, we can't trust the Creator, and friendship with Him is not possible.

Our traditional scriptures tell what He is doing to show the necessity for suffering and that, in spite of what it may imply, He is a trustworthy friend. However, He can't reveal Himself and His values so plainly that we are intimidated. Friends have to be free not to be friends.

My explanation of what the scriptures teach can be easily ignored. Regardless of how reasonable my ideas may be, I'm just another imperfect human being. It isn't as if we were told in no uncertain terms in an obvious message from the Creator.

We don't need to know what the scriptures teach, while we are living in this birth place, to become friendly people that qualify for unending, high quality life.

Some people do need to have the scriptures so they can become disciples of Jesus the Word and be part of a big demonstration showing the need for suffering and, in spite of what it may imply, that the Creator is a trustworthy friend. All who need to will in due time see this demonstration so they can become friends of the Creator as well as of other friendly people. Without being able to see this demonstration, friendship with Him would not be possible, and the world would be a very painful and costly failure.

Because of the part Jesus has in showing that the Creator is a trustworthy friend, He is justifiably called the savior of the world. He makes it possible for all who qualify to have full life as friends of the Creator by showing that He is trustworthy and abides by the law of love.

Common sense tells me that since many people have had no way of knowing about a special way of salvation it must not be needed. If it is needed and they don't have it available an injustice is done them.

Our need to be self-determined and capable of enough understanding and appreciation to become friends of the Creator, explains why we have a more complex and challenging relationship to this earthly birthplace than other forms of life here. Unlike the animals, we are made so that we must do a lot of adapting of natural resources to meet our needs. This is needed to develop our superior mental abilities and provide for the development of more complex social relationships.

When we satisfy our needs by using the raw materials provided in nature, we learn to take initiative, develop ingenuity, acquire the ability to think ahead and gain many appreciations. The more we can do for ourselves, the more we are individuals in our own right, and the less we are just extensions of someone else's initiative and ingenuity. This enhances our dignity as human beings. The lack of basic skills and abilities means we have to be at the mercy of those who control what we need. If we have basic skills and equipment we have a choice and are more free.

For much of our history man has not had modern power sources and equipment. They have the same tendencies we have but are kept from being so destructive by limited technology. I wonder if we are so privileged after all.

However, freedom without choice is not possible. We are given a boundary to live within that is best for our development, but there are no fences around it. The grass often looks greener on the outside! The unauthorized use of spiritual influences and sexual relationship is as big a temptation as the wrong use of money and solid materials. There is a good reason why they were forbidden in the Israelite Theocracy. The unauthorized use of spiritualistic practices is a shortcut that interferes with the fullest development of our capabilities and lessens our dignity as responsible beings. In dealing with superhuman, spiritual powers who are we going to depend on and align our lives with, the Creator or His adversary? The adversary may help us get what we think we want.

Our Father, the Creator, will provide what is best for us. Jesus, His word said to the disciples in John 14:14, you may ask Me for anything in My Name and I will do it. If it isn't good it isn't part of what His Name represents and so He can't do it. Even so He encourages us to ask if we need to. He wants us to learn to take initiative, as any good father would do, so that we become self determined individuals.

One especially vile spiritualistic practice is the use of extra-sensory influence to intimidate (by witches and Christian "intercessors" for instance). When praying for people who choose to be His followers, Jesus was encouraging people in what they have freely chosen to do. By excluding people who have not chosen to be his disciples, He is respecting their freedom and dignity (John 17:9). These people were excluded from His prayer anyway because He said who He was praying for, so why that statement? It may be to teach us a very important principle.

The man-woman relationship is the basis for social organization and the survival of mankind on earth. Improper sexual conduct is a big

temptation. However, temptation is an essential part of our ability to choose and to be self-determined and have dignity. If the alternative isn't tempting, there is in effect no choice.

In Mathew 19:18 Jesus gave a list of essential do nots. The first two are murder and adultery. The Creator has made it apparent that we human beings are important to Him. For us to needlessly destroy human life or interfere with the propagation of it through the family is a serious offense. This doesn't mean for us to act like animals. We have means for limiting our reproductive abilities to avoid over population. The Creator is concerned that we develop our fullest potential so that we qualify to be worthy friends. We are free, but if we circumvent what the Creator has designed for our fullest development, it's a serious offense against Him. This explains the severe penalty for being destructive of the conditions provided for our development!

Without some form of capitalism and usury it is hard to imagine the development of our destructive industrial culture that interferes with the fullest development and dignity of many people, not only now but also for future generations.

This does not preclude all specialization and cooperative enterprise. Some specialization is natural and necessary because of the different capabilities of aptitude, age, and sex. There is a way each can make a valuable contribution and develop their own potential. It gives each one a role that enables others to appreciate them for their contributions and so enhances social relationships.

This sort of specialization doesn't take any member of the group so far away from the source of their needs that they lose the benefits of being dependent more or less directly on the natural source. Of course, this is a simplistic statement. However, it points out the basic conditions provided for our development. It provides a comparison for the way our industrial culture has changed away from the way our life was designed to be lived.

In our industrial culture, most people are far removed from their roots in natural conditions. It is hard for them to relate careless extravagance to the destruction of what we need. Many do not have to take enough initiative and responsibility to adequately develop their abilities. This unnatural situation is a cause of a lot of boredom, meaninglessness, social dissatisfaction and much more plus the obvious trend toward the destruction of our culture.

If we see what is happening to us there are ways we can get closer to the lifestyle designed for our best development. We have to live in the

circumstance we find ourselves in, but if we want to change we can be looking for, and preparing to take advantage of, ways to do so.

Many of the environmental, health, social, and economic problems of our time are due to this inferior lifestyle that has made it possible for some to spoil themselves at great expense to others. If we see what is happening then fail to do what we can to change, we are as responsible as anyone else for the harm being done. (My laziness makes it hard for me to write that last sentence, but I can't dodge the issue).

If we see the reason for it, a more natural way of life is meaningful and challenging. There is always something more to learn, appreciate, and share in.

It is a responsible way to live, as we are not circumventing the experiences designed for our fullest development for one thing. Another is that we can sometimes make better use of resources and we can reduce the marketplace competition that raises prices and makes life more difficult for many who have no choice but to buy what they need. Also such a lifestyle provides the handicapped more opportunity to make a contribution that is meaningful and allows them to be appreciated.

If all the world's resources were divided up evenly, what would my share be? I don't know, but we are here with an instinctive command to live. So I feel free to use what I need for maintaining life. This does not mean using material possession to enhance my sense of being. It is not what we have but what we are that qualifies us for life.

If we try to live responsibly in our present circumstances and are willing to see and take advantage of ways to live more responsibly, we are on the trail to a bright future.

Life should be a continuation of the childhood adventure of exploration and learning. I'm 84, and can see now that I'm not going to get around to all I want to learn and experience before I run out of time. I hope to continue the process on the other side of the great divide!

MY MAP AND MY COMPASS

This poem, sent long ago by an older friend, has been changed in a clumsy attempt to say, or at least hint at, the values I try to live by. It is not perfect, but it is a reminder I like.

I've traveled about a bit in my time,
Of troubles I've known a few.
Have found it better every time in every clime,
To Paddle my own canoe.

Needn't carry this out to the letter,
There can be room for two.
It would be better if neither's a fretter
To Paddle a shared canoe.

"White water ahead: we may soon be dead".
This may sure enough be true.
But I'll not live in dread: I'll look ahead
And Paddle a portage canoe.

My wants are few and I fret not at all
For I've no debts coming due.
I can stand tall, free of another man's call
When I Paddle my own canoe.

Freedom means decisions and even the little ones lead
Or fail to lead to life anew.
Wisdom is to let everyone's needs guide our deeds
When paddling a contrary canoe.

So living by the Golden Rule is the key,
To the gate I'd go through.
If that I'll see, honest I must be.
And Paddle a friendly canoe.

To keep friendship alive, forgiveness we sure need
When ignorance and bias guide what we do.
One who knows our breed says learn from a wrong deed

To Paddle a trim canoe.

Even so, since I'm responsible none can say
 I shan't suffer for what I rue.
 It's better to pay while here I stay
 And Paddle a hopeful canoe.

Also there's something I can take through the gate.
 Appreciations learned from life's ado.
 So I'll accept my fate without any hate
 When paddling a cranky canoe.

Wind and current don't ask what'll please,
 And wild storms plague me and you.
 This life's not for ease so I'll face the breeze
 And Paddle a battered canoe.

There'll be no pain or sorrow in yonder life.
 The memory of them will do
 To Keep appreciation rife. Hence no need for strife
 When we'll Paddle a perfect canoe.

To please the Good Friend is my will
 He knows what's best to do.
 Stormy or pleasant, and still, I'll paddle till
 I'm freed of this old canoe.

"Till then He'll see I can find what I need
 And from within wells up a thank you.
 But everyone must feed, so I'll take heed
 To Paddle a frugal canoe.

Becoming considerate and trustworthy here
 Will show that we are true.
 And He's made His goodness clear though it cost dear
 So we can go with His canoe.

To be a friend of the very best Friend
Is the plan we're called to.
There's no better end for the time we spend
At Paddling a frail canoe.

Yah! For Sure! - Oliver Cameron

*NOTHING IS FREE;
NOT FOR US, AND NOT EVEN FOR THE CREATOR.*

Our ability to be aware, to think, to make the choices that enable us to be self determined and to have the ability to enjoy life are possible because we have the ability to compare.

In choosing to give us existence, the Creator is responsible for both the good and the bad that provide us with necessary comparisons. Being responsible for the existence of suffering, to be just the Creator has to provide compensation for it. He does so, and does it graciously; not because He has to, but because He wants to. It is an expression of His love for potential friends and an act of friendship for worthy friends. It is an essential part of His plan for making friends.

By providing the ability to choose, He makes it possible for us to become friends. It also makes us responsible for our conduct and fate. We have to pay for the deliberate wrong we do; but if we are learning to do better, we will rightfully be accepted as His friends and trusted with permanent life with Him and other friendly people. If we are unwilling to live responsibly as we become able to, the consequence is compensating suffering and death. This also is good because it is better than the continuation of suffering caused by wrong doing. Because He acts responsibly, we can trust and appreciate Him.

But what about me? I, for sure, don't always want to do what I think I should do. I sure enough rue past failures as the chickens come home to roost! Learning is often by failing, sometimes painfully, and trying again. The right way has to be difficult enough to make character that can be trusted.

If the right way was easy and immediately satisfying, who would do otherwise? Then there would be no choice and no us! Without choice, we can't become individuals in our own right who can be friends.

Concerning the subject of becoming individuals in our own right who are capable of friendship, there is a consideration that needs to be emphasized. The Creator's provision for us is not something to be taken for granted. In a sense, it is a gift. We didn't ask for it and no payment is expected, except that we use it to produce something that is of equal value to both of us. To be a friend, we need to be able to stand with the Creator as a dignified person in our own right. To do that, the least we have to do is repay Him for what He invested in us to make it possible. We have been provided with existence and what we need to qualify for life. No small investment!

Things don't just happen without cause or cost as far as I can see. We can ignore this fact and act as if these things and opportunities are actually ours to do as we please with. We can also ignore the obvious fact of the temporary and uncertain use of them. They are not really ours if we can be deprived of the use of them at any time. It is no small responsibility to use these resources for the intended purpose of developing a friendly personality. A friendly personality is something we do own because we have paid for the resources used and we have developed it by our own will and initiative and because being worthy of eternal life, it will always be ours.

But how do we pay for the use of the materials and opportunities made available to us? The Creator wants our friendship enough to make it worthwhile for Him to invest what is needed to make it possible. So we can more than repay Him by becoming trustworthy people He can appreciate as friends.

His investment is wasted unless we do our part of making possible a mutually satisfying friendship. When we add our part so His investment pays off, we become free of the servitude of debt and can stand with Him as friends. It seems to me this is an implication of what is said in John 15:15.

He will be more than repaid in the same sense that we will be more than compensated for the trouble of this life by the duration of eternity. Something of temporal value in exchange for something of eternal value.

Nothing is free. Responsibility and consequences make life a serious business.

MAKING FRIENDSHIP POSSIBLE

In the Bible we are told about the conditions necessary for having life as friendly companions of each other and the Creator.

We are not told much about the Creator. Not having experience with eternity we can't imagine how He exists or how He works with matter, such as this earth and our bodies. We know He does exist because He has given us a partial revelation of Himself in a way we can see and understand. This revelation has three main parts: His revelations to and dealings with the Israelites; the coming of Jesus the Word; and ourselves.

One of the first things we are told in the scriptures is that we are like Him! The implications of this statement were like my campfire. As the little flame grew it cast light on a lot of details. Yah, sure! Yah, yah, for sure! Makes sense of a lot of things.

We are intelligent, feeling, social beings capable of making responsible choices and taking meaningful, creative action to meet our needs and satisfy our desires. If we are like the One who gave us existence this is the least that can be said about Him. This assumption so permeates our traditional scriptures that with out it they are meaningless.

Because we are social beings, the statement that we are like Him indicates that the Creator is a social being wanting friendly companionship, as we do. If we learn to relate well to each other, He can trust us to be His companions also. This is why learning to live by the Golden Rule is so important. Then if He shows us that He too is a friend that can be trusted, the desired relationship is possible.

The way the Creator is showing us that He is a trustworthy friend indicates He is as subject to the principles that make life possible as we are.

For sure there is a lot we immature beings are not able to comprehend about the Creator, about existence, and about life. Even so we can see what we need to know at this stage of our existence. How the Creator can be in control of all existence and at the same time be among us as one of us subject to the experiences and feelings of our life, I don't know!

What I do know is that Jesus, the Word, and the historical happenings accompanying His coming indicate that for the Creator it is possible and it did happen.

The Creator or some vital part of Him has humbled himself to become a human being. He lived a humble life among us sharing in our experiences, even the painful ones. Doing this made it possible for Him

to communicate with us in an un-mistakable way without being intimidating. By word and deed He revealed His nature, personality, values, and love for us in a way that is unique. No other religious philosophy has such a clearly given revelation of the Creator and our relationship to Him.

In our experience friendly companionship requires something to be doing together that is meaningful to both. What this may be in eternity we can't imagine. There is some indication that we will be helping with the government of something. What ever it may be, we are assured it will be good. I expect it will be more meaningful and satisfying than the best we have in this temporary birthplace.

Friends have to be freely self-determined. A doll, pet or slave is not the same as a friend. The Creator couldn't just make something like Him self and tell it to be a friend and it was! But He can create beings that are capable of friendship, put them in a situation where a friendly personality can develop, and show that He also is a friendly, trustworthy being. This being done He has done all He can to make friendship possible. The rest is up to us.

REVELATION WITHOUT INTIMIDATION

Friendly companionship can only develop where there is mutual respect and appreciation so people want to be together. To be a friend we have to be free to not be a friend. It is a matter of choice.

Seeing this need for freedom of choice and self determination is a key to understanding many conditions here on earth. Not only that, it also explains the existence of the earth.

This earth is a temporary place for us to start our development in where we are not intimidated by the direct presence of the Creator. It is a place we can mess up in the process of learning or refusing to learn without spoiling the permanent home of those who become trustworthy.

The necessary obscurity of the Creators' presence has led to many religious and philosophical beliefs. This is evidence of our freedom and provides us with alternatives to consider.

The principle of freedom from intimidation also applies to our scriptures because they are used to help reveal the existence and nature of the Creator.

There is a sense in which the Bible is the word of God. However it must be kept in mind that He can't reveal Himself to us so clearly that we are deprived of freedom of choice. So information about the Creator comes wrapped in a cloak of confusion, so to speak. Because of this the scriptures can be divided into two intermingled parts. One part tells about the facts of life. The other part offers confusing alternatives. This explains the presence of the sly, deceiving Serpent in the Garden of Eden story and the existence of what it represents all through history. One prominent example of this is the subtle contradiction of the plain teaching of Jesus, the Word, by Paul and his associates in the New Testament. The fact that Jesus, the Word, came as one of us and lived in humble circumstances made such attempts to discredit Him possible.

This obscurity is also maintained by the use of symbols and symbolic stories that have been interpreted to mean various things. They are intended to be read and I assumed they have a message of value to us so I have tried to understand them. It has been a rewarding endeavor with some explanations that seem to fit well and make sense being seen.

The scriptures that deal with the facts of life can conveniently be divide into four parts. This makes it easier for me to get an overall perspective of what the scriptures teach.

THE FIRST PART

The first part is an introduction given in symbolic story form. There is a good description of our nature, circumstances, and experiences in it that makes further study worthwhile.

This introduction is found in the first part of the first book of the scriptures. In it we can see the great ability and something of the nature of the Creator. It doesn't give us details of how things were done. The important thing is to see why and what is expected of us.

It tells us that at least one reason we exist is because the Creator is a social being wanting friendly companionship the same as we do. Then in the story of Adam and Eve it tells about the conditions that make friendly companionship possible.

The story of Adam and Eve is a story about us. This story is bracketed by, God said; Let us make man in our image... (Genesis 1:26) and... God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil... (Genesis 3:22).

The knowledge of good and evil gives us the ability and need to choose between alternatives and stands us on our own two feet. It gives us the dignity of being responsible people who can be trusted friends.

Before he could become a friend, Adam had to become an individual in his own right. So he was put in an educational garden where he wasn't intimidated by the direct presence of the Creator. He was free to eat from any of the trees. However, he was told not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest he die. He was being set up for a necessary but painful experience!

In this story Adam, to begin with, had no experience with good and evil. He and Eve were not able to be responsible for making a choice based on experience and knowledge any more than a small child under the age of accountability. They could only act on the basic human instincts they were born with. The Creator of their instinctive drives was the one responsible for what they did before they had experience and knowledge with which to make a responsible choice.

Human nature being what it is this command was bound to awaken Adam's curiosity. Even so, being immature and still tied to the Creator's apron strings, so to speak, it was hard for him to disobey. So he was given a lady friend that hadn't known the Creator and a sneaky adversary to fan the spark of independence in his nature. With their encouragement, Adam took the bit in his teeth, broke the apron string reins and did what he was told not to do. We have the same choice Adam had. We can be influenced by associates and culture or by the Creator. This is a very important and difficult choice, but consider the consequences!

By this rebellion, Adam and Eve established the independence they were designed for and became well aware of the consequences of evil. Having this knowledge and the ability to choose, they, like all of us were the same as dead if they failed to become friendly people who could be trusted with permanent life.

Putting ourselves in their shoes, it is easy to imagine the guilt, the fear of the Creator, and the lack of trust in each other they must have felt. For the first time, they felt pangs of loneliness and insecurity and realized they needed each other. So they patched up their relationship by doing something together to make their life better. Doing something that was meaningful to each with an appreciated companion brought a great feeling of friendship. Friendship being the goal, so far so good, but there still remained the need for lasting meaning and satisfaction.

However, there was someone else that wanted their friendship, the Creator, who furthermore could provide the needed lasting meaning and satisfaction. They had failed to heed a warning He gave, learned He was right but even so were on the outs with Him. They could reasonably claim He had made them the way they were and had set them up for the painful experience. Can He be friendly? Maybe the serpent was right.

The Creator could claim that in the long run their pain could lead to something very good that justified it. Even so, this would be just the say so of one they had scant reason to trust.

Being the One with understanding and in control, it was up to the Creator to take the initiative. What could He do to gain their trust and affection? He could do what love, justice, and friendship required; He could share in the necessary suffering, and seeing their effort to do right. He could be forgiving!

Carrying His share of the burden of making life possible and His forgiving acceptance of them is symbolized by the fur coats made for Adam and Eve, and given to them so they had concrete evidence and knew full well that the Creator was in the same boat with them on the stormy seas of life and His oars were pulling as much as theirs.

Animals haven't been given responsibility for themselves the way we have. In some sense they are still a part of their Creator. (Their Creator is an appropriate term to use with animals. It isn't true of us. We are self-determined and so partly self-created. However, that possibility is something we are created with. So I feel comfortable with the term "the Creator").

Because they were still part of their Creator, the sacrifice of the animals to provide skins for the coats is a fit symbol of the Creator

experiencing the feeling of death and suffering necessary to make friendly companionship possible.

Knowing that the Creator wasn't asking them to do something difficult that He wasn't willing to share in, and that He was fully aware of the cost, Adam and Eve could see there must be no easier or better way to gain fullness of life. This gave them confidence in the Creator's integrity and made friendly companionship possible. So the project we and our world are part of is able to do what it was intended to accomplish.

The Creator's suffering is not just vicarious identification with the hurts of mankind. It was an actual experience that happened historically in the life and death of Jesus the Word who was also Jesus, the man. By that experience happening here on Earth in familiar circumstances we can see and appreciate it. People who don't learn about it here will learn when they are freed of present limitations. Forgiveness is meaningless if we don't know about it or don't trust the forgiver.

Jesus suffered and died physically as one of us not for our sins but for the remission of them if we do our part. It was right for Him to do this because of His share of responsibility for sin and its consequences, as Creator.

Overcoming the harmful results of sin is accomplished by the efforts of both ourselves and the Creator. Our part is: to use our freedom to be willing to learn the lesson that only experience with sin can teach; to do what we can to compensate for the harm we cause; and by becoming friendly, trustworthy people. His part is; to not cause unnecessary suffering; to provide a quality of life that will compensate for suffering; to forgive the worthy, which He can rightfully do by making up for the harm we are responsible for but can't make amends for (we pay for this by providing the friendship He wants); to justly eliminate those who refuse to learn to be friendly so those who do can live in peace; and to demonstrate His fairness, love and forgiveness in a way that people can see and come to trust Him. Jesus and His suffering as the result of sin, the same as we do, is the climax of this demonstration. (Without seeing this there would always be the thought that He had gained His satisfaction at our expense to hinder trust and friendship).

After gaining a bigger perspective of what had happened, Adam accepted the woman as his wife and named her Eve because she was the mother of all living. She became the mother of their children which includes all of us. She was also their own mother to the extent that it was only with her help that Adam and she became individuals in their own right. Then she provided the companionship that turns existence into life.

Also, it seems reasonable to think that those of her children who become reliably friendly people add some measure of "life" to the Creator's existence. Furthermore, one of her "daughters" was the mother of Jesus, the Word and what He did makes life possible for all who become worthy people. So Adam was fully justified in giving Eve such a distinguished name.

For sure, there is a lot of food for thought in this symbolic story.

This introduction is important to our understanding of the scriptures, to say nothing about the light it sheds on the significance of life in itself!

The next two of the four parts tell about a historical demonstration of what the introductory story tells us.

THE FIRST HISTORICAL DEMONSTRATION (THE SECOND PART)

The first of these historical happenings, recorded in the Old Testament, is the Creator's dealings with the Israelites. Three things about the Creator and our nature stand out prominently in this part.

1. It shows the existence, capability, authority, and moral values of the Creator that are indicated in the introduction.
2. It shows the nature of mankind that also was indicated in the introduction. The freedom and inclination of people to ignore the Creator's precepts is obvious. It is also obvious that they were responsible for what they did. They had been warned and they had to experience the consequences they were warned would result if they went the wrong way. If they then learned to do what they should do, a good relationship was re-established between them and their theocratic ruler.
3. It illustrates what has happened over and over in history. A lasting, just and peaceful political system can not be set up by the use of laws enforced by threats and punishments to gain co-operation. Even the Theocracy of Israel with all of its incentives failed to do so. Seeing this we can appreciate a way that does work enough to be willing to maintain it. Only those who learn to be self-governed for the good of all can be allowed to have continued life.

Here the trend toward wrong-doing has to be predominant. If doing good was predominant, and the full results of wrong-doing was immediately obvious, no one would do wrong and there wouldn't be any

choice, self-determination or dignity for us. We need this condition to deliberately change away from, so we can be self-created personalities that can be trusted and respected. This, of course, is necessary for the development of friendships.

*THE SECOND HISTORICAL DEMONSTRATION
(THE THIRD PART)*

The second of these historical demonstrations is the life, teaching, and death of Jesus, the Word, who was also Jesus, the man.

The Creator used a representative segment of mankind, the Israelites, to give a historical demonstration of His existence, power; authority and values; and of human nature. He showed them how they should live, but they were often unwilling to see and rebellious.

They climaxed their very human unwillingness to see and live by His precepts by torturing and killing Him when He came to them, as a man, so communication could be certain. But that does not end the confrontation. Those who murdered Him and those unwilling to live by His values will see him very much alive when He judges them.

His physical death and resurrection brought that demonstration to a close. The curtain in the temple was providently torn and the Israelites scattered.

But before that happened, He laid the foundation for this time when His immaterial presence is at work. He taught disciples who would record His teachings and tell the kind of person He is. Having this information makes possible a well defined relationship with His immaterial presence. Knowing about Him and His values gives a definite meaning to His "name". It helps us know what He would approve of and be willing to help with.

The writings of Matthew and John are the most reliable source of information about Jesus. They were disciples who had spent a lot of time with Him. Being able to talk with Him man to man, His teachings were made plain to them and there was no doubt about where they came from. It seems likely that one reason Matthew and John were chosen for an especially close relationship with Jesus was because of their ability to write a good account of what He did and taught. Mark and Luke had second hand accounts to go by. Their addition is useful but has to be taken with a grain of salt. Some of what they say seems unlikely to be right, to say the least. They were companions of Paul!

In this part we see the Creator relating to mankind in an entirely different way than He dealt with Israel. In our time there is no super

human authority dealing with mankind in the way there was for the Israelites. Jesus is the Word of the Creator in our time. He demonstrated the way of love rather than the way of law.

As I studied our traditional scriptures two related conflicts became apparent. One is represented by evil in the guise of the serpent defaming the Creator in the Garden of Eden Creation story.

The other one is similar. It is the conflict between the writings of Paul the founder of Christianity and the writings of Matthew and John, who got their information from Jesus the Word of the Creator who came to live as one of us so communication could be certain.

The nearest thing to the Old Testament system of relationship, that Jesus made obsolete, is Paul's influence in Christianity. He unnecessarily chose to get his teaching by spiritualistic means and so was open to the wrong influence. He could have learned from the men taught by Jesus but he chose not to. His teachings are the biggest fraud in the World!

This is not surprising because the coming of Jesus to reveal the friendly nature of the Creator in an unmistakable way is the most significant event in history! It would take a very great and subtle alternative to protect our freedom of choice.

Paul was chosen to take over the office of Judas and it was his business to neutralize the influence of Jesus and protect our freedom of choice, just as the serpent did in the Garden of Eden story. With his background, it isn't surprising that one way he did it was by setting up a religious system that, in disguised form, continues the old Israelite system Jesus replaced. This religious system presumptuously assumes the authority to speak in a domineering manner for the Creator in this time when Jesus is the Word. It has built a huge empire of activity that is based on nonsense and injustice instead of carrying on the work of Jesus in the way He commissioned His real disciples to do. Why would Jesus personally train and commission His real disciples to carry on His work if He was going to turn a big part of that responsibility over to Paul, a contemporary trained by his enemies?

Paul taught in Romans 1:18-20 that the nature of God is plainly revealed in the things that are made, and that the Wrath of God is on people because they have ignored this revelation. This is obvious nonsense. Jesus revealed the nature of the Creator. He taught that the Golden Rule is the basis of judgment.

If there is a being responsible for everything, the good things are more than offset by their unequal distribution and by their often and arbitrary withdrawal. And the cruel suffering caused by predation, hunger, disease, accident and natural catastrophes, to say nothing of the

inhuman acts of people, certainly do not indicate a good Creator that we should worship as such. The only antidote for this is the Good News about the Creator, Jesus, demonstrated and proclaimed, and an understanding of our need for choices and appreciations.

Paul gives another distorted idea in his explanation of sin, responsibility, and the work of Jesus, in Romans 5:12-19. Placing the blame for people being prone to sin and causing suffering, on Adam, is a flimsy way of trying to protect the goodness of the Creator and explain the eventual coming of Jesus as Savior. Actually, it is blasphemy because it discredits the goodness and trustworthiness of the Creator. This nonsense is the rationale for the religious system Paul started.

If the Creator entrusted the fate of all mankind to one fallible man, and obviously that man was fallible or he wouldn't have done what he did, such a Creator is not a responsible and trustworthy being. If He eventually sent a Savior who again entrusted the fate of others to fallible men it would reinforce the indication of a lack of responsibility and just treatment. This blasphemous idea is the motivation for Christian Evangelism and missionary work. This work contradicts what Jesus taught about living by the Golden Rule being the way to qualify for eternal life.

Jesus rejected and separated Himself from the old religious system given to the Israelites. It had been given to demonstrate a way that didn't work as a background for His demonstration of the way that does work to make friendly relationships possible.

In place of the old system of law, and punishment to enforce it, He reaffirmed the basic system all people have had that is called the Golden Rule. It is obvious that the people from all nations, being judged in Matthew 25:31-46, did not know about Jesus and His teachings. Their human nature enabled them to know to do well and try to live by the Golden Rule. They were judged by what they did, not by what they believed.

Jesus gave us one of His most significant teachings through a woman He met at a well in Samaria, a county the Jews looked down on. He told her it wasn't a matter of worshipping in any particular place, "...the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." (John 4:23). In other words, by the way we live.

When Jesus the Word, came to be a man, he obviously could only be in one place at a time. Israel, at the crossroads between continents had been prepared as the setting for His appearance as a human being. However, He didn't come just to them. The place He came to was a

central location from which His message could go out to the rest of the world.

In line with His mission to the whole world, Jesus chose men with various secular occupations to teach His message to, and sent them out to all nations to win more disciples. This is the true basis for missionary enterprises. This privilege is still available to us. (Matthew 28: 19-20, John 17: 20)

The friendly concern of Jesus for the welfare of the people around Him, the way He taught instead of commanding, and His ordinary, non-intimidating way of living and relating to people, show His respect for our dignity and freedom of self-determination. His miracles back up His claim to be Jesus, the Word, as well as Jesus, the man. His suffering and death show the willingness of the Creator to bear His share of the cost of providing a satisfaction we both want. It also assures us that He is fully aware of that cost. Seeing these things about the Creator makes it possible for us to trust and appreciate Him. Include His teachings about the Golden Rule and we have a brief statement of the good news the disciples of Jesus can share with others.

This demonstration by Jesus is part of a much larger demonstration designed to show the integrity and trustworthiness of the Creator and save the project of providing for friendly companionship from failure.

Those of us who know about Jesus can see this now. Others will be able to see it when they need to. I and many others have had brief experiences of seeing behind the veil of here and now. Also in Revelations 7:9-10, people who hadn't known about Him while in this part of life are seen expressing their appreciation for Him when they did come into His presence. So I expect all who need to will be able to see this demonstration in full historical perspective in due time. Given the importance of us seeing the integrity of the Creator it is no wonder that such a demonstration has been prepared for us. The final part of this demonstration will be mentioned in the next section. All this was introduced by a simple little story about two skin coats, a simple little story with a tremendous implication of vital concern for us!

THE FOURTH PART

The fourth part is the Revelation given to John. Just as the first part is an introduction using symbolic stories, this final part is a review of historic conditions and a preview of the concluding events of life on earth, much of it given by use of symbols and symbolic stories.

The outstanding feature plainly shown in this book is that the Creator knows full well what is going on and is in control of the situation.

Of equal importance to us is the assurance that the outcome will be good, far beyond the cost of attaining it, for all worthy people and that any of us can qualify for it if we will.

There is a common conception in our time that the environment people grow up in determines the kind of people they will become. If people become troublemakers it is because they had unsuitable conditions to grow up in. This implies that if there is a Creator who is responsible for our situation He has given them a bum deal. Add this to all the other troubles of life on earth and it is hard to see how He can be good and trusted with our welfare from an ordinary point of view.

Of course this is barking up the wrong tree. If there were no evil influences and experiences there would be no "us" either. Having the choice between good and bad enables us to rise above the level of the animals and become self-determined with the dignity of being responsible people who may become trustworthy friends. Some people do so, even with a bum start in life, and others born with a silver spoon in their mouth fail to do so.

Of equal importance is the development of the appreciations that can only come from experience with evil as well as good. It is these feelings of appreciation that make life worthwhile.

After this age has run its course there will be one more age in the history of the earth. In that time this slander of the Creator will be shown to be unjustified. (Revelations 20:1-10)

This age will end with the most destructive cataclysm the world has ever experienced. (Revelations 16:18) It will prepare the world for a new system. Just before that happens, some worthy people will be taken out of harm's way to repopulate the world in the next age. (Matthew 24:31;40-41). To be meaningful, the demonstration provided in that age will need to be made by a continuation of humanity as we know it now. Those taken out of harm's way were chosen from a class of people with basic survival skills. After the earth has recovered from the great catastrophe, it seems likely those first settlers will need those pioneering skills.

The people of that time will have a seemingly ideal world to live in. Jesus will rule the world with the help of resurrected people of proven integrity from all nations who have been His disciples in this age. It will of necessity be an iron-fisted rule when it comes to seeing that would-be troublemakers behave themselves. The Tempter, the ringleader of

troublemakers, will be restrained until people have had time enough to grow up with good influences.

Then the Tempter will be allowed to ply his trade again. People will again have experience with evil and have a choice to make. The predominant choice will be to try to destroy the good situation that had been restraining their instinctive yen for freedom to do as they pleased as much as possible regardless of long range consequences or harm to others.

This final demonstration will show clearly that it isn't bad influences or circumstances that cause people to be troublemakers. It will show that experience with evil is a temporary necessity that a good Creator is justified in allowing so we can have a life that is good, far surpassing the cost of gaining it.

THE LAW OF LOVE

One of the most essential laws we are all bound by is the law of love (The Golden Rule). The importance of unselfish love is why Jesus put so much emphasis on it. It is the quality that makes possible our kind of social being. We have been given existence because of the relationships and feelings it makes possible. So no love, no life!

Because of this mankind has been given a built in guide, the Golden Rule, to go by if we become willing to use it. If we don't... the grim reaper gets us!

Those who know about Jesus have His example to go by also. It is the highest possible standard.

Being willing and trying to live by these standards, influences much of what we do, use, say, and even think. It molds our personalities and determines our worthiness for full life! But it sure enough isn't easy, at least not for me.

Having a considerate attitude toward other people and what has been provided for us all to use is one way we show our appreciation for the Creator.

In its most significant sense, love is something we give because we are willing and self-disciplined enough to do so, regardless of whether it is merited or not. We love our children even before they do anything to be appreciated for. We may love someone even when there is no hope for friendship or appreciation. But love is a vital part of friendship because it is something to be appreciated for. It says something about the kind of people we are. To love someone is to be concerned for their welfare and willing to do what we can to make it possible. This explains the love of the Creator for mankind.

Some of our experiences seem to indicate He is not fair with everyone. I can see how this seeming unfairness may be part of the confusion needed to keep the Creator's influence from being overwhelming, but that is unacceptable if it is unjust!

There are situations in which it is not clear to me how justice is done. But having substantial evidence that the One responsible for our existence has un-handicapped capability, is far wiser than I, and is well aware that justice is as vital to His well-being as it is to ours, and also having no conclusive evidence that justice is not worked out for everyone in the long run, I have confidence that He is doing what is right.

Some Christians, disciples of Paul, believe Jesus died for their sins and they can be forgiven without experiencing all the consequences of their harmfulness.

The idea that since we are all sinners we all deserve to die is nonsense. We are immature children needing experience with wrong-doing as part of our maturing process. We deserve to die only if we fail to become willing to do what is right as we become able to. There is no forgiveness for unwillingness to do what is right, there can't be, because it would be unfair for those who do become friendly people to suffer on and on by the mistreatment of the basically unfriendly. This would be a breach of the Creator's love for the worthy as well as the unworthy. Since the unworthy can never be satisfied with their attitude, death is best for them.

If Jesus, the man, was made to suffer and die for our sins, the innocent for the guilty, how can the Creator be just? I wouldn't be just if I expected the Creator or anyone else to suffer for what I'm responsible for.

If we don't have responsibility for the harm we cause when we know, or should know, better but won't see, we are deprived of our dignity as humans. This would also deprive us of incentive to be self-disciplined. Self-discipline is a necessary quality of those who are worthy of full life as trusted companions.

Furthermore, it would deprive us of experience needed to develop a full range of appreciations. I don't see how this could be an act of love and fairness. It is right that the Creator should share in the suffering necessary to create a good situation for both of us, and that we are able to see that He does, so we can trust and appreciate Him. It is also right and necessary, given the circumstance of our birth and the Creator's ultimate responsibility for it, that He be forgiving if we try to make things right and are becoming friendly people. He is able to compensate others for what we can't make up for and so can rightfully be forgiving. We repay Him for this by giving the friendship He wants.

If I see that in the long run all are treated fairly, even though some of the compensation comes after physical death in each case, and that each one has equal opportunity to gain life, I can have confidence in the integrity and love of the One who gave us existence, and friendship is possible. I'm confident we will see this in due time.

This is important, for without it we have no hopeful considerations to think about. Our traditional scriptures, the history of Israel, and the coming of Jesus are designed to help with this problem.

I know how I feel about those who are physically, mentally, or emotionally disabled. Seeing them hurts! But at the same time it gives me greater appreciation for the degree of wholeness I have, and caring for them may develop our self-discipline and compassion. I know what I feel, but what are we to think about them? Is there a hopeful way to see the outcome of their life, and account for their existence?

Here is an explanation that seems to be more than likely.

Suffering is unavoidably necessary, but part of it may be vicarious. When the Word appeared, He showed us that our Father suffers along with us in this time of birth. But it seems to me it is also shown in nature. Other living things on Earth have not been given responsibility for themselves in the way we have. They, in some sense, are an extension of their Creator and their suffering represents His suffering.

Those who can't make responsible choices may be in this class, as well as animals or plants, each in their own way. Not having separate individuality, their spirit, like the animal and plant spirits, would return to the One responsible for them and their suffering be compensated for in His total feeling experience.

I find no better or more fitting explanation for the suffering we see in nature, than that it is our Father, incognito, suffering in ways we can vicariously identify with and learn from, so it lessens what we have to experience firsthand. It is an evidence of His love for us. There are others who do not have such severe handicaps, but even so are less capable or less privileged than some.

In Matthew 20:1-16, we are reassured by the Teacher concerning inequality of opportunity. Those who, through no fault of their own, didn't have the opportunities some have are not harmed by their lack in the long run. They were compensated for their willingness.

And in Matthew 25:14-23, we find reassurance about inequality of capability. Even though one could not do as well as another they were equally appreciated, if they had done what they could do.

There is one more group to think about.

We are here to learn to be consistently friendly and trustworthy of our own accord. These characteristics are essential to a social situation where everyone has a just opportunity for satisfaction. This rules out the possibility of anyone being there who is carelessly inconsiderate of the well-being of others. The selfishly biased majority would be overwhelming in a situation where they were free to continue these bad habits, and no one could be satisfied. They will be better off if they become oblivious as soon as possible and so will everyone else.

But before that can happen, justice has to be taken care of.

Failure to develop our ability to become a friendly personality is the basic wrong, for we each have a unique contribution to make; also becoming a friendly person is the only way we can pay for what the Creator has invested in us. If we fail to do so others are harmed as well as ourselves. Freedom of choice being essential, we can use what is not our own as if it were for our temporary gratification without due consideration for others and without paying for it at this time. It seems to me the consideration pointed out in Matthew 5:25-26, and Luke 12:57-58, applies to this. Either we square up here or it is necessary to do so later.

Vindictiveness is not a part of the nature of the one responsible for our existence. There is no way that I can see justice in the concept of unlimited suffering. That seems like an unnecessary and unjust compensation that would be a breach of love.

The statements in Matthew 5:26 and in Luke 12:47-48, 57-58, indicate it is not a limitless punishment. After the debt is paid and justice satisfied there is an end in complete "destruction". That there is no other "out" available to those people is indicated by Abraham's statement that there is no way for anyone in "Hades" to cross over to the other side and vice versa (Luke 16:26). It is also indicated by the concept of death we learn from our experience here. When something dies it eventually loses its individual characteristics. It seems to me we are justified in thinking the same sort of thing happens to a personality that fails to qualify for life. It eventually reverts back to undifferentiated spirit.

The Creator has done and is doing all He can for us without interfering with our freedom and dignity. When we realize the provision He has made for us and why He can't do more now, we gain respect and appreciation for Him. But His love for us is no feather in our cap. "Does He love me?", "Of course He does! And you too!" It is His nature to do so. But the real question is, "What does He see in me to appreciate?!" "How often do I extend to others the love He has shown to me?"

We are created to become gods, if we will. However, we have a lot to learn before that potential can become a reality, and it isn't easy. While here, we can waste our time playing God at every opportunity or we can be learning the attitude needed to be one. This means being willing to live by the values associated with His name.

A name represents distinguishing traits. The primary trait that identifies us as part of the Creator's family is becoming willing to do what we can to make life good for others as well as for ourselves. This birthplace for us is set up so we can come into full life as part of His family by learning this trait, if we will. I suspect that this trait is an

essential part of our qualification for helping Him rule in the millennium and perhaps even in the permanent life.

We are made like the One who gave us existence in that we have enough freedom, initiative and ingenuity to be self-determined individuals. We are also like Him in needing friendly companionship. However, we are not born with His ability to abide by the Law of Love that makes friendship possible.

The ability to love is left for us to develop so we can be self-determined and independent enough to be capable of friendly companionship.

Self-determination is possible because we have a built-in conflict of interest with consequent decisions to make that determine whether we live or die.

Our instinct for self-preservation causes us to form the habit of being more concerned with our wants than we are about the needs of other people.

On the other hand, we need friendly companionship and the only way to get it is by learning to be consistently considerate of other people's welfare, so we can be trusted and appreciated.

Being considerate of the rights and need of others means restraining our habitual selfishness. It isn't easy to change this habit and many people are only as considerate of most others as they have to be to get what they want.

As long as we are just learning to maintain easy relationships with other people a means is needed to smooth out the inevitable hurts. The ability to forgive provides that means.

Forgiveness doesn't mean we can avoid the consequences of wrong-doing. It does mean that if we are willing to take responsibility for known offenses so we make up for them as best we can and are trying to do better, we can still be accepted as friends.

Being willing to forgive is a big part of love. It pours oil on the troubled waters of relationship between immature people. However it isn't always easy for either the offender or the offended. We tend to be defensive or vindictive. (How do you suppose I'm aware of that fact?).

In spite of the difficulty, life here is set up so we can be learning to live by the Law of Love. If we are learning to be friendly we are becoming like the Creator in this way also and gain full life as part of His family. Or we can fail to do so and die by default. An awesome responsibility, for sure! It has taken a long time for the implications of

the Creator's love to become part of my value system. But now it makes life a better experience and gives me a hopeful outlook for this time when I am getting close to the end of my stay here on Earth. Yah, for sure!

FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY AND CONSEQUENCE
WHY SHOULD I LIVE RESPONSIBLY?

We are born in a world where we experience both good and bad. The choice this makes possible gives us the freedom to be self-determined and able to be responsible for what we do.

Freedom of choice is an essential characteristic of friends. We are responsible to the Creator. Our commission from Him is to learn to be as concerned for the welfare of others as we are for ourselves. However, we have to be free to ignore His commission!

The ultimate consequence of failing to do so is self destruction. A harmful way of life is such a serious breach of our commission that it warrants punishment to satisfy the demands of justice and then death. If we don't learn to live responsibly we can't be trusted with full life with other people.

To give us a valid choice evil has to be predominant and some consequences of it delayed. If good was the predominant influence and the consequences of wrong doing felt immediately, who would practice wrong doing?

If it was easy and natural to go the right way we wouldn't have bad experiences to compare good with and be able to feel the appreciations that make life good. Also to be trusted and appreciated as a friend, we have to show that we will be considerate of the feelings and welfare of other people. If we are learning to do this when it is a temptation and easier to do otherwise, we can be trusted and friendship is possible. The need for evil explains why there is so much conflict, trouble, and misery. It also helps me understand and deal with my tendencies and pains.

I've done my share of harmful, inconsiderate things. I have lived in real poverty, have been in wartime combat, have starved with starving people, have been without enough food, clothes and shelter, and being exhausted, fell asleep only to soon wake up shivering, move around and doze off again through the long night, have known unrelenting pain, sickness, physical handicaps, devastating loss, grief, loneliness, and times of mental sluggishness and depression. When times get better, these experiences fade into the background of awareness, but we don't forget and triggering events bring them in focus again. These are common experiences in life and I now see their value. Even so, I sure enough try to avoid them and appreciate even small comforts. It is hard to feel secure in such a world. The troubles go on and on and we may get caught up in them again. This makes the possibility of having life

without this misery a very valuable prospect worth qualifying for! The way to qualify is simple enough, but for sure, it isn't always easy.

I'm tempted to envy people who seem not to have much concern for what is happening outside their local, daily life. However, that is not possible for some of us.

We hear about loss of soil fertility, and poor quality food, water, and air because of modern ways of doing. Rivers are contaminated. Subsurface water is being depleted. Some forests are dying or being burnt and others are being cut faster than they grow. There is no let up in news about strife, famine, deadly diseases and natural as well as man made catastrophes. In our scriptures, we see that these things are not something new. Fortunately, in them we also see a basis for understanding why they happen and how we can gain life without them.

Because of the necessary bias to go wrong, societies produce fewer and fewer worthy people. When the purpose for their existence is not being accomplished, their elimination is justified. This is made clear in the stories about the flood in Noah's time, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the prophecy given to Abraham, (Gen. 15:16) saying it would be four generations before his descendants would get the promised land because the sin of the present occupants had not yet reached it's full measure. Leviticus 18, 19, and 20, has a lot to say about those sins.

Some of the practices that caused those destructions are becoming increasingly prevalent in our time.

Also we have a destructive industrial economy that thrives because of extravagantly wasteful consumption of resources. We individual consumers are as responsible for this as the business men who provide and encourage the use of these luxuries. What we do is largely determined by our instincts and circumstances. When we grow up in a culture where a luxurious life is taken for granted, it is hard not to see it as being good. It is even harder to see or be willing to see the ultimate consequences of what we are doing, and the available alternatives. However some people do see and we are at least responsible for being willing to see.

It seems like we may be bringing on ourselves the destruction told about in the 18th chapter of the Book of Revelations. In V.4, we are given a warning not to take part in that destructiveness that is also a note of hope. Society is not likely to change for the better but individuals can be trying to live responsibly. We don't need the scriptures to tell us we are headed for serious trouble if we don't change some of our ways. We do need the scriptures to tell us that, in spite of this gloomy prospect, the outcome for people who live responsibly will be good.

Our perception of consequences influences what we do. If we see the consequences of what we are doing as the attainment of the life style embodied in the "American Dream" we will work toward that short sighted "good" and end up in a living nightmare.

If we see that the consequence of living the luxurious life style implied in the "American Dream" is the destruction of the conditions we need for life we are more apt to try to live an environmentally friendly life style that doesn't waste resources.

Before the development of our industrial economy and in some cases co-existing with it, peoples lived without being a threat to the ability of our planet to support human life. What use is our "progress" if it is progress to our destruction?

Someone asked me how I would change things. My offhand, simplistic reply was to go back to using muscle power.

I have a comfortable and efficient home built with hand tools using very little imported materials, and also local resources provide for many other needs.

I wish I could live more off the land than I am able to. Native people made all their living that way not too long ago and did it with crude tools. Not everyone can do the same, but we can be willing and trying to live in a way that isn't destructive and so add to our dignity and our hope for a very good future life.

Understanding one of the most harmful practices of our time has been a big help to me as I try to live responsibly. It is our interference with the carbon cycle. This is what it seems to me is happening to it.

As plants take carbon dioxide from the air they use carbon in their structure and release the oxygen back into the air. If the plants are allowed to decay, the carbon stays in the soil for more plant growth. If the plants are burned the carbon joins with oxygen again and goes back into the air. Normally, if there is an excess of carbon dioxide it encourages more plant growth to keep it in check. Now, due to man's interference, that safeguard is being so overwhelmed that nature can't adapt.

One way we interfere is by having too many luxuries and children. More people means the use of more food, fuel, shelter and luxuries. To supply these things we deplete the forests that are a big part of the world's plant life. Another big way we interfere is by the use of coal and oil. At the same time that we are eliminating a lot of plant life we are burning a lot of this abnormal source of carbon to further disrupt the normal carbon cycle!

Too much carbon dioxide in the air is a cause of the greenhouse effect and harmful changes in the weather. I suspect one effect of this is the increasingly destructive wild fires. Each year they add more carbon dioxide to make the situation worse.

On my home site I let brush that is too small for fire wood decay instead of burning it and adding to the greenhouse effect. Also I built a small, well insulated house, using mostly local materials that requires the use of only a small amount of fire wood. By building this way I also minimize the use of materials that require coal and oil for their manufacture and transport.

After all the Creator has done to give me existence with the possibility of gaining fullness of life, I would sure enough feel foolish if I don't try to do what I can to be helpful and not harmful. The little I can do may seem insignificant, but for me it is sure enough significant. It gives meaning, purpose, and dignity to what I do. It gives hope for sharing in a high quality condition after I leave this birth place! Aside from these main concerns, doing as much as I can with natural resources to provide for my needs gives me a good feeling about myself and enhances my dignity as an individual in my own right.

Before leaving this topic there are some words of wisdom heard from my father about 70 years ago that are well worth sharing. They have been an important influence in my life. He was not a talkative man and there were very few things he deliberately taught me, but I learned a lot from him.

When as a youngster I asked him why he didn't drink beer and whisky like many of our neighbors did, I think he was pleased that I asked, as he took the time to give a good answer. I don't remember the exact words he used but, have never forgotten the jist of what he said.

It is foolish to deliberately do something to impair our ability to think and act. We may need our best effort at any time.

Only a spineless person will waste money on something harmful just to be like other people who thoughtlessly strut around like a rooster.

Only an irresponsible simpleton will squander money that should be used to take care of himself and his family and provide for emergencies.

My father only had three short terms of schooling and was completely on his own when he was 14, but he was a learner in the school of life. In hard times, well educated people came to him for advice or help. Most of his working days he was just a sawmill worker, but he was a man among men. Coming from him this advice was not just words.

None of us know how long we will be here. I for sure will soon be leaving my patched up old canoe. I try to live so as to have an easy portage to where my new canoe is waiting.

A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT RELIGION

We have two interdependent fields of relationships. One is physical; the other is spiritual. Religion is one activity of man in relating to the spiritual part of life. Apart from a special revelation, the spirit realm with its various manifestations is not well defined. Because of this, religious beliefs and practices have taken many forms, some good, some bad. This is a part of our freedom. It provides us with alternatives to consider.

We are a spirit put in a physical body and environment to have experiences that form a personality for our spirit. This is accomplished by our every day experiences in this birth place. If we become willing to do this with the golden rule for our guide, we show our love and respect for our creator and become worthy of our Creator's love and respect. This makes friendship with him possible. This is true worship and spirituality. Religion may be a part of this but it is often just a side track and distraction.

In the introduction I asked why we are the way we are and how can all this suffering be justified. Also I said my only hope for finding an answer is in religious writing claiming a source with greater perspective than we have. This book tells about the answer I have found. It is in only one of the many religious philosophies I looked at. So this summary may also show why I disagree with people who are enchanted by and advocate other religious philosophies if this one is available to them.

No other philosophy fits our nature and circumstances, including our need for friendship and meaning, as well as this does. It reveals the Creator as a father who respects our individuality and dignity. It tells us He wants our friendship and fellowship in a meaningful enterprise, if we become willing to live in a way that makes it possible. It tells about a simple guide for that way of life that requires no special teaching or religious discipline. It also tells us there will be none of the suffering experienced here in the future life with the Creator.

Because of our immaturity we can't be told all the details of the future life, but the Creator has revealed Himself enough so we can have a good relationship to look forward to. This revelation, that is told about in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (the Bible), is good news for sure!

The most important part of this revelation is the coming of Jesus from the Creator. He came in the form of a being like ourselves so communication could be certain, but not overwhelming. He wants friends, not slaves! Being given in this way makes this superior to other religious philosophies.

In response to a question about eternal life, He said friendship with Himself is the perfection of our existence. He also gave a brief statement of requirements for such a relationship. He said: Do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or give false witness, to honor father and mother and love neighbors as oneself (Matthew 19:16-22). Obviously, not all parents are worthy of honor. Even so, in most cultures accumulated wisdom is passed on from generation to generation through parents and elders.

It seems to me that this means of maintaining culture is what is being referred to here. The maintenance of culture depends on the morality of individuals. We social beings can choose to live by the innate rules of well-being for all, or we can be selfishly inconsiderate of others, suffer the consequences and die. There is only one viable way of life. It is to live by the law of love summed up in the Golden Rule. This is the key to being a friend of the Creator.

In this brief statement, the core of traditional wisdom is summed up and approved by the Creator with the added information about the relationship we may have with Him.

The great significance of this statement becomes more apparent when compared with the various results of man's striving for ultimate meaning.

However, some confusion is necessary, if all the facts of our existence were to be unavoidably obvious, we would not have the freedom of choice needed for self-determination and friendship. In spite of the confusion, we have adequate guidance for our conduct if we are willing to see it. We have knowledge of good and bad and the Golden Rule to go by. If we become willing to live by the Golden Rule, we qualify for full life with the Creator.

But who could feel affection for and want to live with the Creator of so much confusion, cruelty and misery? To counter this, the Creator is providing a demonstration to show:

1. The need for our situation to be as it is.
2. That there is no easier way, and
3. His friendly, trustworthy nature.

It also shows that He is not asking us to carry all the painful burden of making possible the friendship He wants as much as we do.

The need for suffering and the Creator's awareness of the painful feel of it is shown by the fact that Jesus experienced it the same as we do. That awareness led to the request for relief from suffering made in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39). His human nature was asking, isn't there an easier way? The denial of that request shows there is no easier

way for people to learn to appreciate good, and become the kind of people that can be trusted with it. The way Jesus came to us and shared in the terrible cost of gaining friends, plus the loyalty and affection of His disciples show His friendly, trustworthy nature.

Seeing that the Creator is not causing unnecessary harm and is sharing in necessary suffering, we can trust Him and have the good life with Him that we are told about.

Anyone can be a disciple of Jesus if they know the writings of Matthew and John in the New Testament. They were disciples who lived and traveled with Him while He lived on earth as a man. They were well qualified to write about Him by previous professional experience. We may share our opinions, but His recorded teaching is the only reliable guide to what is expected of us and the relationship we may have with His immaterial presence.

I am grateful for the all-knowing, patient teacher we can have to help us mature! Not everyone has had the privilege of relating to Him so obviously.

The demonstration showing the Creator is trustworthy is not available to all during their life on earth and it is not necessary for it to be. It is given in the environment we are familiar with so it can be appreciated when seen in full perspective after we are freed of physical limitations. Seeing it, worthy people will be able to trust and appreciate the Creator when they go to be with Him.

In part of this demonstration, the Creator has shown some of His awesome power and authority. To safeguard our freedom of choice, subtle influences that tend to neutralize it are provided (the serpent in Eden again).

This need to protect our freedom explains the contrary influences in the Christian, Islamic, and some other religions. It is supposed that the commission of Paul, the founder of Christianity, was to set up an institution for the interpretation and propagation of the work of Jesus. Likewise, the Muslims say Jesus was just a prophet whose teaching was vague. So one last prophet, Mohammed, was sent to make explicit the way man should live. The founders of these religions imply that Jesus is not a reliable and adequate guide.

These religions oppose what Jesus is doing, by distorting or denying His teaching and the teaching about Him, and by setting up organizations similar to the Old Testament system He replaced. They substitute nonsense for His practical teachings. Their primary appeal is to man's selfish interest.

The Old Testament tells about a special demonstration superimposed on the background of usual life on earth. A representative segment of mankind was used to show the failure of law, backed up by punishment as a way for people to live together satisfactorily.

When Jesus came, He ended that and showed the only viable way is the way of love. His institution in which man can learn, and some will learn to live by that principle is the world as it is, and human society made up of man and woman and family, and tribe socializing and making their living in it. He gave some simple guidelines.

Besides the Golden Rule, He said to call no man Teacher or Father in-as-much as He is this and we are all equally learners (Matthew 23:8-10). Also, He said, to the Samaritan woman at the well, there is no special place for worship. The Father wants us to worship by a good attitude and by the way we live our everyday lives here (John 4:23-25).

It is easy to see why conventional religions are popular. We want the rewards, security, forgiveness, love and sense of meaning that a good relationship with the Creator provides. We also want an easy and prestigious way to get it. It is easier to fit into an established organization with a ready-made creed and procedure and other people to lean on and just go along than it is to think for oneself and be a direct disciple of Jesus in the rough and tumble of life on earth.

We do not all have the same abilities. I do not know what other people can or should be able to see. At least we are responsible for being willing to see and for trying to live by the Golden Rule. It is a learning process in this birthplace made for that purpose by our Father, the Creator.

It is a great privilege to be able to call the Creator, our Father, as Jesus taught us to do. His full being is beyond our comprehension now, but He has the amazing ability to relate to each of us personally for our good. Even more amazing is the indication that it is also for His good! We are made with the possibility of satisfying His desire for friends, an amazing possibility for sure. As far as we know, the only occasions that caused Jesus to give way to His feelings and weep was when friends accused Him of letting them down (John 11:32-37) and when He wept over Jerusalem and I think also over all people who are unwilling to see available truth. (Luke 19:41).

It is difficult for me to realize that the Creator and manager of all I know about, and more, wants my friendship; however, He has done all

that can be done to make it possible! I am far from being mature and am near the end of my stay on earth. Having provided so much, I am sure He has provided for my full development as a friendly person, if I keep trying to learn.

THE BIG PICTURE

This essay is something of a log book of my journey into the field of basic philosophy about life. It is undertaken at a time when my ability to write is becoming increasingly difficult. . I wonder if I really am getting old.

After my already thin shelled cultural cocoon was shattered by World War Two, I tried to find a no nonsense understanding of what life (with its conflicts, cruelty, and pain) is all about.

I found new ideas (those tools for thinking) in philosophical and historical writings. What I did not find in them was why we exist and why we are such troubled and troublesome beings. So I turned to religious philosophy even though there is a lot of sentimental and mystical nonsense connected with it.

Of all those I looked at, our traditional scriptures, the Bible, seemed most likely to be helpful. The idea of a Creator who relates to us as a father and friend fits well with our social nature and family based society. At least that was a satisfying idea I could readily relate to.

However, life is complicated and the Bible a big book. There are many conflicting opinions about both. It took a lot of time and study before I got an overall perspective of it. When I did, I saw a reasonable account of our life unfolding that cut through the many complications. What I saw is Good News if we are trying to live responsibly.

Obviously we don't all have the same abilities. Since I have been enabled to see this perspective, the responsible thing for me to do is try to share it.

I have been doing that but it seems to me I need to do a better job of giving a background perspective, uncluttered by a lot of already mentioned detail, against which its significance is more apparent.

The process of writing about this subject started when my children were young and I wanted to have some basic ideas about life, simply stated, to tell them. I had no idea it would be such a major life time project.

It started with some basic Christian concepts. But then, as my knowledge of the scriptures increased, I began to suspect that some of those concepts could not be right. After more study it became apparent that there are two conflicting accounts of what Jesus came to do and teach. Why?

This brought into focus our need for comparisons and choices. When we think about it, it is obvious that our ability to: be aware, think, make

reasoned choices, become friends, appreciate what is good, and to determine whether we will gain full life or die are not possible without the ability to compare.

Because of this it is not surprising that the Creator provided for this need in revealing His nature to us. We couldn't appreciate it without something to compare it with. This need for comparisons accounts for the existence of good and evil.

Genesis 1:26-29 tells us we are like the Creator. Our need for friends is a basic characteristic so He must also need friends. Friendship being a voluntary relationship the Creator couldn't just make some friends. However, He could create beings capable of becoming friends.

We are those beings! He put us in this birth nest where we can learn to appreciate friendship and may become His friends by learning to guide our conduct by the Golden Rule. (Matthew 19: 16-22, 25: 31-46 and John 15:12) Since this is something anyone can do without any special instruction there is no excuse for failure and if we fail our punishment and death are justified. There is no reason for us to continue to live if we are not becoming the friendly people the Creator wants and a permanent society must have.

On His part the Creator has demonstrated that He is a being we can trust as a friend in spite of the inevitable pains of our birth process. The demonstration of his character has to be made so it can be easily seen without intimidating us. This was accomplished by the coming of Jesus the Word to live and teach among us as a humble man, who experienced pain and suffering the same as we do. It is obvious that having our friendship is very important to the Creator.

The Garden of Eden story in the introduction to our traditional scriptures indicates what had to happen when Jesus the Word came to show the friendliness of the Creator. In that story the integrity of the Creator was challenged by a subtle adversary, Satan, disguised as an apparently harmless creature. The adversary was needed to provide Adam and Eve, (ie. mankind) with a comparison, choice, and a basis for appreciation.

Having comparisons, challenges and making deliberate choices are a necessary part of our birth process. Because of this, both the Creator and His adversary influence our lives. As we develop in this matrix of influences our will guided by the Golden Rule can determine that the final outcome is a personality that can be trusted with permanent life. It is up to us! The challenge is for sure, a real test.

Against this background, when Jesus the Word came to be a man His adversary, Satan, was also there but this time Paul, a man open to his

intrigues, was his front. The teachings of Paul were obtained by spiritualistic means (Galatians 1:11, 12, 15-17) that could be manipulated by Satan. In other words, he went outside the nest of what we can know by the use of the ordinary cognitive abilities we have been given for this part of our existence.

When compared with what Jesus the Word, coming in from outside the nest, taught Matthew and John by our usual means of communicating, Paul's teachings are obviously wrong and misleading. If they were true the Creator would be unjust and Jesus the Word a liar.

This is a brief picture of what is happening. It shows the significance of our existence. It also indicates our necessary freedom to become either friendly people or unfriendly troublemakers. The fact that we have the abilities needed to be a friend of the Creator means that we also have the ability to be very adept at making trouble and being destructive.

The creator is God, we are his children. But the God nature in each of us wants to be god. So we tend to ignore the Creator. We did not give ourselves existence, however, we are self determined. That we are not yet able to be gods is obvious. Even so there is a part of our nature that doesn't want anybody telling us what to do, or putting limits on us. But at the same time we want to be dominant and of course this is a cause of conflict. In its extreme form we end up butchering each other and disqualify our selves for having life. A big part of what we are here to learn is our proper relationship to the Creator and to other people, or in other words to be friendly instead of domineering.

In order for us to have a valid choice the influence to do wrong has to be predominant so that we have to voluntarily try to be friendly. Jesus the Word pointed out to Nicodemus (in John 3) that we don't know how the birth of a friendly attitude happens in any individual. We just see it happening by the way they live. The necessary predominance of the influence to go wrong indicates why Paul's influence has been so strong.

However, a closer look shows Paul's "conversion and commission" were not typical of the way Jesus chose, trained and commissioned his disciples.

Jesus' way was consistent with a typical way the Creator has used in communicating with human beings by use of our ordinary cognitive abilities. A limited segment of the electro-magnetic spectrum has been allotted to our birth process. It matches our physical make-up and ordinary cognitive abilities. Everything we need for our birth process is found in this nest of frequencies. We can go outside this nest through

prayer as taught by the scriptures. There is no need for us to go outside this nest otherwise. If we do we will contact the harmful spiritual powers.

The use of this method is shown by the way the Creator proved His existence and authority to the Israelites by using concrete happenings in the material world to back up the more subjective revelations given their leaders. The unique character of Judaism is that its faith is based on historical happenings in the material world that were obviously providential.

In the same way when it was time for the Creator to give a further revelation of Himself it came by Jesus the Word becoming a man here with us. This again provided reliable communications with us through our usual cognitive abilities.

Using this reliable means His message was taught to trustworthy men called to be His disciples by face to face communication. They in turn have made a record of what He taught and did in the concrete form of the written word so it is protected from distortion when passed from person to person.

By ignoring the teachings of Jesus the Word given in this reliable way that were available to him, Paul in effect denied that the Creator had sent a message through the coming of Jesus the Word "in the flesh". By doing so, Paul became an anti-Christ by John's criteria given in his first letter. It seems to me that letter is a good antidote to the poisonous ideas of Paul.

Also, why would Jesus the Word choose disciples with secular occupations spend several years teaching and training them and commission them to carry on His work then turn around and entrust a lot of it to a man like Paul who was trained by His enemies in the religious system He came to replace? Paul's antagonism to Jesus is shown by his establishment of an organization that in effect continued the old system of law enforced by ritual and threats mediated through a professional priesthood.

Jesus the Word came to replace that unworkable system for our social development by a personal relationship with Himself as disciples and friends. Having an adequate record of His life and teaching facilitates the personal relationship in our time. Now His immaterial presence is carrying on His work unrestricted by a localized material body. He is now able to relate simultaneously to many people world wide. Disciples pass on His teachings. But He is the only one that knows us intimately and can relate to us providently, as father, teacher and friend. (Matthew 23: 8-10) That this relationship is an informal part of

life is indicated by the way He related to His disciples and many of His teachings.

I have been writing about what the Creator is doing in our age to show that He is a friendly, trustworthy being and to show He is doing His part of making friendship possible. But now our civilization is in decline and on its way out like all past civilizations, and the end of the age is near.

We have been given a lot of elbow room to explore and develop our knowledge and ability to do things. Maybe it has gone to our head and we have gotten too big for our breeches. We have nearly elbowed the Creator out of our considerations and abandoned many of His natural provisions. We have depleted our soils and the quality of our food, water, and air. We have deprived many people of experiences needed for their best development and many others of the necessities of life.

Matthew 24 tells us what to expect. One evidence of this destruction is the fact that I am writing this while being confined to my house day after day by too much smoke and heat outside. Well over six million acres of Alaska have been burned by more than 600 fires. It is now mid September and the fire season continues. It usually ends much sooner, but not this year. This is the worst year on record here.

Science knows the harmful effects of burning fossil fuels yet we go right on doing it. Not to do so would hinder the continuing expansion needed to maintain the economy that supports our wastefully luxurious lifestyle. A major recession could lead to a lot more social unrest, hardship, and mayhem. By getting too big for our breeches we may well be locked on to a collision course with our destruction and the near end of this age.

Sometimes I wish I had never learned to read and write. But ignorance doesn't change facts. Actually I am privileged to see that these gloomy happenings are only a temporarily necessary part of making a very good yonder life possible for those who show they can be trusted with it.

The end of this age will not be the end of the world. Revelations Chapter 20: 1-10 tells about yet another age. It will be another part of the demonstration of the Creator's character and our nature. Some of what is being done in this age is a preparation for the next age.

In the next age Jesus the Word will come again, but not as before. He will be the world ruler. His helpers will be disciples chosen from all nations in this age. (Matthew 19: 27-28 and Matthew 28: 18-20) During most of that age His adversary will not be free.

In our age we tend to blame our bad habits on circumstances and indirectly on the Creator. We don't want to admit we are responsible so we pass the buck. In the next age under the rule of Jesus and His disciples there won't be any bad circumstances to blame. If they turn out to be bad people when tempted by Satan's release, to carry on his usual work, it will obviously be their own fault and their punishment and death just.

This will show for sure that the Creator is just and our experience of both good and evil necessary.

We who know about our traditional scriptures have available knowledge of the values the Creator wants us to live by and the consequences of failing to do so. This information reinforces our innate awareness of the Golden Rule and our own sense of justice. Yet as a whole our culture ignores this knowledge.

Even so, we are capable of considering what we do and are responsible to the Creator. If we contribute to the wanton destruction of something He made to accomplish a project of great importance to Him and to us, what do we deserve?

Paul's insidious influence that side tracks the real issue and our inner bias to be more concerned with our wants than we are with everyone's welfare dominates our culture.

Our culture is well described in Revelations 17 and 18. In 18: 4-7 the extra severe punishment it will receive is mentioned and we are warned not to be included.

This should cause us to live responsibly, for sure! We can try to use only what we need and do what we can to be independent of the destructive practices of our culture. Or we can live as easily and conveniently as we are able to and try to maintain our sense of being by living the lifestyle encouraged by the majority.

I know how hard it is to not be influenced by harmful cultural values and practices. But it has to be that way so we can make a deliberate choice to live responsibly and because untested people can't be trusted with never ending life with other people and the Creator.

We all have to do our own thinking and deciding. I hope these carefully considered conclusions of an old man may be helpful.

One thing is for sure! We have a choice! We have to choose! Our choice is shown by what we do!

If we ignore a clear message from the Creator what do we deserve?

I hope your sometimes difficult journey through life ends in a happy landing. (and mine, too)

ONE LAST THOUGHT

I have one last thought I want to share before the cover goes on this book.

During the more than fifty years the thoughts in this book have been evolving, there has also been, almost unnoticed, a development of sentimental appreciation for the main personality written about.

This feeling of appreciation for Him as Father and Friend has brought about a desire to be learning to live in a way that I won't be a disappointment to Him!

It is appropriate to talk about a friendly Creator who gave us existence so He would have friends. But that is only part of the story. Being a good friend, He is not only hurt by our hurts but is also the kind of being that, like any good Father, wants us to feel good and enjoy life. By making possible a good and satisfying life for us also, He is amply justified in giving us existence.

It is terrifying to even consider existing with the powerful being who gives us existence in a place of suffering, unless it is necessary to make a good life possible so it is an act of love! That the Creator abides by the law of love is good news for sure!!!

I'm grateful that Jesus, the Word, came to show us this fact. There is no greater news for us! I'm awestruck when I consider the import and cost of that message.

This is certainly cause for a lot of appreciation of Him, and we need not be bashful about feeling it!!

OUR SOPHISTICATED INDUSTRIAL AGE

Human nature hasn't changed. Circumstances do change and open up new avenues for human endeavor. The story of Cain and Abel illustrates how mankind takes advantage of these opportunities.

Abel had respect for the Creator and what He has provided. His physical life was cut short but he has gained fullness of life with the Creator!

Cain was full of his own importance and accomplishments. He ignored the fact that there was a reason for his existence and that he was responsible to the Creator. History is littered with the wrecks of the accomplishments of such heedlessness.

Man was put with plants and animals to be free.
 As is sure enough easy to see.
 Cain, Rebel, murderer, cast off the land,
 A city built with men of like brand.
 Man without land a dependant is he,
 Without direct access to needs this must be.
 This is not the way it's supposed to be.
 As is sure enough, easy to see
 If by choice, we live in a city.
 We're part of a destructive system and guilty.
 Let's do our best to get free,
 For that's not where we should be!

Without workers and consumers, industry can't be.
 Take them from the country, the land of the free!
 Steal their land; herd them to the factory.
 Working for a skimpy fee, isn't satisfactory.
 To head off rebellion, wash their brain with TV,
 And with a few luxuries, disguise the slavery.
 To feed their greed, steal resources far and near.
 This destruction is going to cost dear.
 By poison and theft, spoil their ease,
 Give them a band-aid, and charge what you please.
 Build yourself up by, putting others down,
 A good way to gain, a temporary crown.

Blind workers say, just give us some luxury to waste,
As through time to our fate we haste.
Then we'll let them, lead us by the nose.
So what if we don't, smell like a rose
we go to the grave, if that's our end.
It matters not, how our life we spend.
What makes us think, such foolishness is true?
A closer look says, heed what we do.
Meaning and purpose, hidden in chaos must be.
It is the only way we can be free.
Knowing good and bad, and the Golden Rule,
For guiding our way, is an effective tool.

The Creator says destroyers, get punished double.
Come away from them, lest you share their trouble!
Such a severe penalty is well deserved
If we ignore a warning so clearly served.
Jesus, the Word, was sent to give
A definite teaching on how to live.
Being one of us and teaching with patience
We have no excuse for ignorance.
We are here, to become a friend.
Opportunity wasted, brings a bad end.
The Creator, our friend wants to be
If we a friend will be. It is up to you and me!

WHAT I SEE CHANGES ME

An old man with a dog
Leaning back against a log

Watchin' murky waves roll in
Made by bias, folly, and sin.

Man on a senseless rampage
Wasting the privileges of this age,

Thinking of what I have and haven't done
For sure, that's not much fun,

Feeling gloomy and full of dread.
Much afraid of what's ahead.

Then I remember
I'm a family member

Father is looking on without a frown
I don't want to let him down,

So I'll hang in there
He'll see it all ends up fair.

An old man with a dog
Sitting' up on the log,

An old man not quite beat,
Sure enough He's on his feet.

Tho' walking with halting pace
There's a peaceful look on his face.

Yah! For sure! — Oliver Cameron

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE REVELATION GIVEN TO JOHN

At first I didn't intend to include this more detailed account of my speculations about the Revelation to John. Besides being speculative, some of it isn't pleasant to deal with. It points the finger in directions I would rather not look. But that is the way things are. Certainty and pleasantness are luxuries we don't always have. Anyway, I've already stuck my neck out.

The meanings I find in the various symbols seem to fit well into a whole that is in line with other scriptures and the understanding I have of our history and circumstances. These thoughts may at least provide one more perspective to work with.

In everyday life our relationship to many of these conditions is so ordinary it is difficult to realize what is happening, our responsibility in dealing with them, and the long range implications they have for us. Having them so dramatically symbolized may help us see their significance more clearly.

But the main reason for including them is the importance of this information in understanding what is being done to assure us our Creator is good in spite of the suffering experienced here on Earth that seems to indicate He is not. The vindication indicated in The Revelation to John is the only resolution of the problem I see. Without confidence in the integrity of the One responsible for our existence and in these scriptures, the hope they hold out is unavailable to me. And I see no other hope.

There is an overlapping progression, like shingles on a roof, in the sequence of the primary symbols used. The seals represent conditions basic to the human situation throughout history. The trumpets refer to the more limited time of our present age. And the vials refer to a comparatively brief time at the end of our age. Each of these basic outlines are filled in with more detail that requires a lot of the doubling back that is unavoidable when describing something with words.

The first chapter introduces the One who gave this revelation to John and the man he gave it to.

I have confidence in the One who gave this information and am aware of the limits placed on His communication with us by our need for freedom. This makes the effort to understand this message well worthwhile, even if it is obscure.

Chapters 2 and 3 have some straightforward advice, warnings and encouragement that are as applicable now as they were when first given. Our nature hasn't changed.

Chapters 4 to 7 give an overview of the major circumstances of our lives and their eventual significance.

The first seal represents all that is good in our experience. It is the quality that will ultimately prevail. Its main characteristic is friendliness.

The second seal represents trouble, strife and war. To be free we have to be able to be harmful as well as friendly. We need the experience of unfriendliness so we can truly appreciate friendliness and the value of trying to be a friendly person.

The third seal represents the conditions that develop our ability to think and take initiative. If food and other desirables were readily available and easy to get, and the wolf never at the door, we could eat like a cow in alfalfa, chew our cud, switch our tail, and be nothing more. We wouldn't be appreciative and there would be no intrinsic value in us to be appreciated.

The fourth seal represents the threats that keep us from taking life for granted. I have seen a dramatic change come in overly self-confident or cocky people when they were faced with a potent reminder of their vulnerability. An experience of the down side of life tends to make us more considerate and appreciative of others and of the good we have. It has for me.

For some of us, in our time, famine and contagious diseases are not the serious consideration they have usually been. But it seems to me and other concerned people that these two witnesses may be coming over the horizon again for us as they always have for so many.

The fifth seal represents a unique product of the Christian era. The disciples of the Word live by a different set of values than those of the majority. Consequently they tend to be separated by a lack of common interest and sometimes are ostracized. Scorn and even inadvertent ostracism can be a form of martyrdom. In some cases death may be preferable.

This group is mentioned as one of the seals because of its vital role in providing a demonstration of importance to people from all generations. They will be mentioned several times in more detail.

The sixth seal indicates the end of our age. This age began with a worldwide natural catastrophe in the time of Moses. When it is time for another major change, the institutions of our time will be destroyed by another cataclysm. This will pave the way for a more equitable system to demonstrate that a better start in life isn't a determining factor in the development of worthwhile characteristics in people. Those mentioned under the fifth seal are being trained for a part in that demonstration.

Chapter 7 is a parenthesis emphasizing what is being done and has to be finished before the end of the age. Two groups are mentioned, the disciples of the Word and those who become willing to be friendly people through natural circumstances.

The disciples with their special discipline are needed in the next age. They are symbolized by the 144,000 (12,000 from each of twelve tribes of Israel).

It seems to me this doesn't mean they are just Israelites. The early disciples were told to make disciples of all nations. The number twelve and its multiples are used to represent completeness in a limited group of people. Naming each tribe indicates that these are specially designated people who will have a particular relationship to their Leader and Teacher, as the Israelites had before them.

Also, the list of tribes is not the traditional one and they are not listed in the traditional order: Dan is left out, perhaps because he was compared to a serpent by his father (Genesis 49:16-18). There is no Judas in this group.

Such considerations incline me to think this is a more detailed description of those mentioned under the fifth seal. The only criteria mentioned there was their relationship to the Word.

Being sealed on the forehead indicates the special values they are being trained to live by.

The other group is the product the Earth was designed to produce. They are those who used the seals to good advantage. This great multitude, expressing their appreciation for the one who gave them existence, are those from all generations who had learned in natural circumstances to appreciate true values and become people of intrinsic value. I notice that they are standing, only the angels prostrate themselves.

Even a casual awareness of prevailing conditions would justify terming life on Earth a great tribulation.

As explained in comments about the coats of skins made for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21) in chapter three, the blood of the Lamb represents the willingness of the One who gave us existence to forgive the wrongdoing of immature people. But it is conditional. The washing of their robes represents their willingness to recognize their imperfection and try to do better.

The seventh seal is indicative of the Word's change of headquarters from Heaven to Earth for the period of the Millennium. Hence, the temporary silence in Heaven.

Removal of the seventh seal paves the way for us to have what will make all we experience here more than worthwhile.

The following chapters provide more details to fill in the basic outline.

Chapter 8: What basic concern would be the prayer of all who are becoming worthy of life? It seems to me we want integrity and justice to be reliable tenets of our existence. Otherwise we have no hope. Many of our present experiences, experiences that are represented by some of the seals, seem to cast doubt on this being the case. Is our sense of justice based on a reality that actually provides it? Are we made with felt needs only to have them frustrated? Does any good come to us from the confusion and discomfort we experience? It boils down to a question of the goodness and reliability of the One who is responsible for our existence.

The desire and need for reassurance concerning this question may well be the prayer so dramatically portrayed as being answered by the following demonstrations.

It seems to me this is the key to understanding this Revelation to John, our other scriptures, and the experiences they tell about.

The answer has two parts. First, wouldn't we do better if we had more knowledge and an easier life? Is the curse of the ground really for the sake of man's betterment? This is answered by giving a representative cross section of people more knowledge and an easier life and seeing what happens. It seems to me the United States is the apex of this demonstration. We have many nationalities having unprecedented educational opportunities, widespread wealth, and a generally easier time than most people have known. But the demonstration also includes the other advanced nations.

The second part has to do with good influences. Since more knowledge and an easier life don't seem to help, it may be because of the continuing effect of harmful influences. In the Millennium an equitable government, administered by high quality people, and the absence of the Deceiver and Tempter will get people off to a seemingly better start. Then they are given a chance to demonstrate its effect.

This large scale Garden of Eden didn't help. They and we need the route Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel traveled. At the end of the Millennium the Tempter is again allowed to do his work. And, in spite of their good start, the majority grow the same seed Cain sprouted.

These demonstrations will indicate that there just is no easier or better way than what we have for the development of the characteristics that make possible a high quality existence for us. Seeing this, in due

time, will answer our prayer. It will reassure us concerning the human question that goes with our quest and make appreciation of the One responsible for our existence a spontaneous feeling.

When we are freed of the limitations of time we will see these demonstrations in full historical perspective. This will give rise to the praise and appreciation expressed by the multitude in Chapter 7.

The trumpets deal mainly with the development of the industrial age with the machine fueled by a new type of energy taking the load off the muscle of man and beast. It makes possible an exceptionally high standard of living for an unprecedented number of people. But it also makes it possible for some to take unprecedented advantage of others, and they do. In some cases this advantage is gained by a subtle way, but in others by increasingly more destructive and terrible tools of war and oppression.

The woman with child, the Beast, the False Prophet and Babylon the Great have mainly to do with the development of scientific technology and materialistic explanations and values, from a beginning of Hebrew and Christian values and educational incentives. The new materialistic beliefs and values developed simultaneously with the means of wealth. The two go hand in hand to reinforce the beastly side of human nature and discredit religious beliefs and values.

The resultant wealth, power and abusiveness of some, and the poverty and abuse of others demonstrate what we do with our great opportunity. Reducing the impact of the curse of the ground that is for man's sake and making things easier for them doesn't seem to help. The male child, the Christ who is to rule with a rod of iron, is another development of this age. He not only laid the foundation for educational development and representative government, but also is preparing disciples to work with Him in the second part of the vindication demonstration.

The first part of the vindication demonstration began with the worldwide catastrophe of Moses time. The groundwork for both the industrial and intellectual developments that make it possible was laid at that time.

The Israelite and Christian values that have so influenced the development of our civilization began with the code given to Moses in those days. Also much of the coal and oil that fuel our industry was provided at that time. That catastrophe is briefly mentioned in chapter 8:5, and amplified in the first four trumpets.

These descriptions sound familiar after reading *Worlds in Collision and Earth in Upeaval*, by Immanuel Velikovsky. These books present

a broader perspective than the more subjective account given in Exodus 7-14. According to the evidence analyzed by Velikovsky the Earth acquired a big part of its coal and oil during the catastrophe of that time.

It seems to me the fifth trumpet describes the modern industrial development so dependent on coal, oil and minerals brought up out of the pit. We are beginning to realize some of the unhappy side effects of both the modern manufacturing processes and the use of the manufactured products. Perhaps the symbolism of the fifth trumpet is not uncalled for. Just the engine powered vehicles take a big toll of maimed and snuffed out lives. Add on the high incidence of insanity, psychosomatic illness, suicide, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, and the use of mood altering uppers and downers, that are all linked to modern stress, and one sees a picture that may well be described as a subconscious despair that seeks death but doesn't find it. Someone not accustomed to seeing our modern vehicles might well think they were grotesque bugs or animals.

In line with this interpretation of the fifth trumpet, the sixth trumpet would be modern warfare made possible by the new industrial development.

According to Genesis 2:14 the Euphrates area is where man first appeared on Earth. The angels representing modern warfare being held in latent readiness at the Euphrates area is appropriate. Modern warfare is the result of the freedom given to man originally at that place.

In this revision, I have an opportunity to add a comment about something that has happened since I first wrote about this.

The sixth "trumpet" told about something to happen at a particular time in a specific place. It was to mark a time of increased trouble in the world.

The Persian Gulf War was certainly a definite demonstration of modern technological warfare. If it was the time the sixth trumpet referred to, it gives us an idea of what to expect.

The description indicates that this was not just a local happening but the deadly plagues and wounding tails were to affect the whole world. This is indicated by the range of people affected and by four angels representing the four quarters of the world (similar to the use of four to indicate the whole world in Matthew 24:31). Of course, the three major plagues that decimate mankind, social strife, famine and disease are not confined to any one area. The color of the breast plate and the fire, smoke and brimstone or red, dark blue and pale yellow give us a clue to the identity of the plagues.

The symbols used at the opening of the second, third and fourth seals in Revelations 6:3-8 correspond well to these symbols and there they are well defined. In that situation red equals war, black stands for famine, and the pale color, death from deadly diseases.

These seals indicated conditions that have generally afflicted mankind. There the extent of the destruction caused by the plagues is a symbolic one-fourth which just means a considerable part of mankind. The sixth trumpet heralds a significant increase in the harmfulness of these plagues by using the symbolic figure one-third. This is a larger part of the population but still not the majority.

Historically both modern industry and warfare have developed quite suddenly and dramatically in a way that would satisfy the descriptions of the fifth and sixth trumpets. But also they have developed slowly enough during the span of any one generation to be accepted as a matter of course by most people of the time.

Matthew 24:35-44 and Luke 17:22-30 record Jesus answers to the disciples question about the end time. In those comments He made it clear that nothing is to happen that seems so unusual that it will threaten or warn most people of the near approach of the end of the age. Remembering this is a help in looking for the meaning of these dramatic symbols.

It would seem this modern capability, much of it done in the name of the religion of love, could be used for the benefit of all people. Instead, this power has been used by those who have acquired it to ruthlessly strip the world of human and material resources for the (supposed) benefit of a comparative few. United Nations organizations statistics on the resulting world conditions make gruesome reading.

Appropriately, it is to be a short lived development, five months symbolically speaking. Perhaps the figure five refers to man's remarkable hand. The hand that represents his capability also implies his limitations. He is not a creator in his own right, he is just a manipulator. When his manipulations are directed by his base tendencies they are self-defeating and limited.

Many voices of caution concerning what we are doing are clamoring to be heard even now. But to little avail. How does something like this change? The people who feel they benefit cling tenaciously to the way they have been living. If you want to, it is easier to believe the voices that say science (the False Prophet) will come up with new solutions than to give up inappropriate attitudes and practices. So we go on until a calamity stops us.

Individuals can change, but few are willing to do so and society as a whole only bows to overwhelming circumstances. There is no credit for doing what can't be avoided.

Chapter 10-11:13 is another parenthesis further explaining our time: the time of the trumpets.

The mighty angel quite obviously represents the overriding power in actual charge of the world's affairs. He sets his right foot on the sea that represents the restless tide of humanity from which the Beast arises. He sets his left foot on the land from which rises the False Prophet that represents scientific materialism. He calls out and the seven thunders sound, perhaps expressing the wrath of God. But what they say is sealed up and the rainbow above the angel's head, representing the patience of the Creator, prevails for yet a while.

But not for long. Soon, at the seventh trumpet the mystery foretold to the prophets, the Creators direct rule on Earth, will begin. The seventh trumpet represents the same time in history as the seventh seal.

But first the conditions represented by the small scroll must run their course. It seems to me the sweet taste represents our modern luxurious lifestyle; conditions so many others are envious of. But after eating, it turns out to be bitter. Right now it seems good but I wonder if it will seem that way when we are judged by our actions. Even now there are side effects that are plenty bitter for many.

Chapter 11: In spite of the tide of materialism, the One who gave us existence still has a realm of influence staked out on Earth. There are still people coming to have intrinsic value. This is symbolized by measuring the temple and its worshippers.

In contrast to this, the outer court, the holy city is allowed to be desecrated by the trampling and waste of self-biased, inconsiderate people. When we realize the purpose of the Earth and the significance of our use of It, It is sacred ground and we feel a lot of respect for It and Its Designer.

Where people are directly dependent on the land for their livelihood, they have more consideration for it. But when people are harvesting its resources for the use of others or separated from a direct dependence on it, callous carelessness is apt to prevail. In our age, this is the case to a greater degree than ever before. People are considerate of their own immediate interests, but if there isn't also a consideration of the needs of others, present or future, they are being irresponsible in their use of the land. Our industrial culture has made it possible to waste and destroy as never before.

But this is a temporary situation. Forty-two months; 1,260 days; 3 ½ years; and a time, times and ½ a time; all represent a part of the complete time of our age. These numbers are one-half of seven, which represents a complete time or cycle. This half time is identified in chapter 12 as the Christian era. It is only part of our age that started in the days of Moses. It is to be soon ended by another cataclysm that clears the deck for the second part of the vindication demonstration.

Famine and plagues of contagious disease have been two dreaded threats down through the centuries. It seems to me these fit the description of the two witnesses. In recent time we have to a large extent eliminated them in the more technologically advanced areas and brought some hope to other areas. Such successes of our science, the False Prophet, tend to increase our confidence in it. It has, in the opinion of many, freed us from a superstitious dependence on divine providence. We tend to ignore the fact that we will die sooner or later, one way or another, regardless.

We seem to have killed the two witnesses but there are still reminders of them around. In our awareness of what they are like we rightly rejoice at our relative freedom from them.

But here again is the number 3 ½. Only this time it is 3 ½ days, representing a comparatively short part of our age. We may be seeing the approaching end of our short time of relative freedom from famine and plague.

When I was young there was a lot of optimism about a better future. But now our confidence is shaken. Our solutions often lead to more difficult problems. We see disease becoming treatment resistant. There is a lot of concern about the deteriorating quality of our soil, a dwindling oil supply, and deterioration of the favorable weather we have had. Are the two witnesses showing signs of life again? It seems possible.

Famine and disease would earmark a breakdown in our delicately poised technological system. We are told that those who harm the two witnesses will eventually be destroyed by them. It seems like it could happen.

There is a certain satisfaction in seeing the pieces of a puzzle fall in place. But there is no pleasure in writing or thinking about these things. I'm getting on in years and have been through the mill enough to know what tragedy means. Even though I see its necessity I don't want my children and others to suffer. I wish it didn't have to be and it may not for much longer.

The One responsible for our existence will recall the two witnesses shortly after they stand on their feet again. They won't be needed during

the Millennium. The purpose of that demonstration rules out their presence.

The seventh trumpet represents the coming of the Millennium, and after that, the end of the world. It is indicated by the great voices in Heaven announcing that the kingdoms of the world are becoming the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. After this brief mention of the Millennium, the Elders announce the judgment and the reward in store for those who qualify.

It would be hard to take such a steady diet of doom if it weren't for the interspersed flashes of light indicating the possibility of a hopeful outcome.

The seals represent general conditions important to all ages of human history. The trumpets represent conditions developing in the Hebrew and Christian era.

The following figures represent related conditions developing in the Christian era. They give a more detailed and graphic picture of what is happening in our time.

Chapter 12:1-2: The pregnant Woman with a crown of twelve stars represents Israel. The sun and moon are light givers. This light is the increased knowledge about ourselves and the One who gave us existence that comes through the Israelites and the Christ that is the pregnant Woman's child.

Chapter 12:3: The great red Dragon is identified in verse 9 as the Devil or Satan; the Deceiver. He tries to destroy the male Child, Jesus, the Christ, who is to rule with a rod of iron during the Millennium. It is the old story of good versus evil. Sometimes I have to stop and remind myself what would happen to our freedom to be self-determined if evil didn't seem to be predominant for the time being.

It may seem that the Deceiver had gotten the upper hand. But in actuality, Jesus accomplished His purpose and returned to Heaven from where He is preparing for His return at the end of this age. We will then see who has the upper hand as He confines His adversary while He rules the world for the final demonstration.

Jesus being gone, the Dragon turned on the Woman. Even though dispersed and harassed in the wilderness, the Jewish people have maintained their identity and have their own land again now. She was to be in the wilderness for 1,260 days, the same period that the outer court is turned over to secular abuse in chapter 11:2. Israel being reestablished as a nation may be another indication of the near approach of the end of our era of time.

Chapter 12:17: After the Woman fled, the Dragon turned on the disciples of Jesus. The next chapter gives details of his plan of attack.

Chapter 13: In the process of making war on the disciples, the Dragon takes on the form of the Beast rising out of the sea. The Dragon, Satan the Deceiver and Tempter, is the alternative influence designed to give man a choice. The sea represents basic humanity (Revelations 17:15). The Beast represents the beastly side of humanity that falls for the Dragon's deceptions and the consequent institutions and conditions. These range through political, economic, social, educational and religious forms. Since many people haven't learned respect for others, political and military institutions are prominent among these many forms. All cultural institutions, even the most humanitarian, find themselves compromised to some extent by the selfish bias in our human nature, but some institutions are flagrantly biased.

It is in this guise of the Beast that Satan tries to sidetrack the disciples, either by persecution or by the subtle attraction to what is presented as harmless or even good. These good institutions and conditions are most prevalent in the so-called Christian nations.

Any disciple that makes it through this gauntlet is bound to develop some backbone and savvy about human nature.

The Beast rising out of the sea of restless humanity demonstrates the results that take place when basic unchanged human nature is given a chance to really show its stuff. This is further amplified by the story of the Harlot, Babylon the Great. We have great potential but it has to be creatively self-directed to have permanent value.

In the Millennium a contrasting demonstration will show how things go when human nature that has developed its higher values is in charge. This isn't the major demonstration, but is interesting nonetheless.

The Beast has crowns on its horns instead of on its heads as the Dragon had. According to Revelations 17:10, one thing the Dragons heads represent is major political and military powers. Five had fallen, one existed at the time the Book of Revelations was written, and the other was to gain power along with the horns, who were to have power as kings.

Rome was in power when this revelation was given. If the Roman Empire was the sixth head, the fact that it was the last major world power that had dictatorial control is significant. There was no major world power to compare with it until the United Kingdom and its allies, including the United States, came on the scene. But there was a difference and that difference explains the crowns being on the horns.

The allies came to be representative type governments with elected officials. These governments had the responsibility to govern but without dictatorial power. Hence the term, “as Kings.” In the democracies, the elected governments (the horns) are responsible to the people and have to consider their concerns. Since the Beast represents the basic desires of the people, it rules along with the horns and the horns being the visible governments wear the crowns.

The head that seemed to have a deadly wound but was healed is this last one, the seventh. The wounding sword is the same one that is mentioned in Revelations 2:16. The wound was caused by the Christian values that reinforced the rights and dignity of individuals. Our form of government, system of justice, and other remnants of that influence, is the scar left by that wound. The wound healed as scientific explanations brought materialistic values. Modern science is the False Prophet that has supplanted and emasculated scriptural concepts to a large degree. Now, the evolutionary theory of origin and agnostic humanism are prevailing beliefs, along with the skeletal remains of Christianity. These are not effective deterrents to the Beast having Its say. Materialistic values prevail to the extent that it would seem it had overcome the saints.

The religious remains are hard for me to identify with the basic teaching of Jesus. His teaching dealt primarily with workable interpersonal relationships. Perhaps the religious superstructure is needed to make His teachings available. In spite of the distortions of the vehicle it does make the Word available for those who want to consider it independently.

The hierarchy of church leaders, the tithes and offerings, the special places and days of worship, the altars, the codes of conduct, the traditions and formalities, and the covert and overt act of being intermediary, seem not too different from the Hebrew practices.

It is difficult for me to reconcile these things with the teachings of the One who said new wine has to have new wine skin. Who also said to the woman at the well that it's not a matter of worshipping here or there. The Father seeks those who will worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). And the One who told His disciples they were not to call any man Teacher, Father or Master (Matthew 23:8-12) in the sense that He is these, and we are all equally learners.

The Beast has authority over all who dwell on Earth. People with materialistic values dwell on Earth. They have no other place to call home. But for those who are developing intrinsic value this is just a place to clean the mud off before entering their real home.

One of the remarkable conditions of our time is the way modern communications have made our conditions and values known world wide. So much so that many local cultural ways have been displaced by our materialistic values and trappings.

Chapter 13:11: In chapter 19:2, this Beast that rises out of the ground is referred to as the False Prophet. In some ways it seems like a savior. It seems to me this False Prophet is modern scientific concepts and technology. Much of what it works with comes out of the ground and makes its wonders possible.

Modern medicine, the green revolution, the theory of evolution that implies further advantageous advances, increased knowledge about basic material, on and on, have given us confidence in it. We have even been led to hope that it might find the keys to life. These have made it seem like salvation from the world's troubles might be just around the corner. Much of this seems good, but when it leads to wrong conclusions, that makes it the more dangerous.

The Dragon that is behind these two critters is a wily Deceiver. He has a card up his sleeve that reinforces the effectiveness of the False Prophet.

We aren't designed to be subservient. Part of the Tempters insinuation to Eve was a claim that the One who gave them existence didn't want them to become as Gods. He wanted to keep them under His thumb.

As a whole this attitude has also been propagated by our cultures major religion. It tries to get us to grovel before an angry God of Hell fire damnation. If we do enough weeping and work up enough feeling of shame, worthlessness and sorrow for our black, black sins, then repent on our knees and subscribe to a variety of formulas for conduct, depending on what branch of religious ideology is speaking, we can be saved so we can stand around and sing adoring praises of the Savior while He looks down on us from His glorious throne. Yuk!

I realize this isn't the whole story, but we have been given enough of this impression for it to be a common conception.

When the False Prophet, modern science, comes up with another system of ideas that doesn't demand our abject surrender of all dignity, and that makes some of our less admirable ways seem more legitimate (to come out on top in a survival of the fittest evolution is in the best interests of the race) we are quick to adopt it.

When religious backing for moral relationships is eliminated it makes it easier to put pleasure seeking, in any way we can get away with, on the throne. This amounts to worship of the Beast.

The False Prophet, (modern scientific technology), has worked many signs, some already mentioned, in the process of explaining, solving and alleviating some of our problems and in giving some of us a higher standard of living. The development of atomic energy and the atom bomb is, in fact, bringing fire down from heaven. The same chemical reaction that heats the sun is now here on Earth.

When an object of worship is obviously present, an image of it isn't called for. When the seven heads are considered as major political and military powers, the head in power now isn't as obvious as a single unit as the Roman Empire and others were.

In the democracies the power of the Beast is derived from the people so It rules indirectly and shares that function with the elected horns who rule as kings. Not being so obvious, an image to represent It is called for.

The United States, made up of people from many countries and with a representative government that developed from democratic tendencies that had their start in other nations, is perhaps most representative of this seventh head of the Beast. It has certainly been built up by scientific technology, the False Prophet. It would seem to qualify for being the image of the Beast.

Here again it is good to remind ourselves that nothing so obvious is going to happen that it will alert most people to the soon coming of the end of this age. These symbols dramatize what is actually happening. But the actual working out of them is subtle enough so people can easily fail or refuse, to see what they are doing and what they are having a part in. How many of us are willing to minimize our dependence on, and part in our destructive materialistic culture?

The mark of the Beast is our failure to develop self-determined intrinsic value.

In the first chapter of Genesis, six days were devoted to providing mankind with existence in a situation where they could be responsible for their own development. If their development was only a strengthening of basically selfish tendencies, they would fail to be creative of intrinsic value as friendly, trustworthy individuals in their own right. This would mean that they had failed to carry their development beyond what they were given in the six days. They are fittingly symbolized by the figure six emphasized by repetition. Perhaps once each for body, mind and personality, a total condition.

Those who use their self-determination capability to develop a personality capable of appreciating and being appreciated by the One

who gave them existence, come to the completion symbolized by the seventh day.

The Beast, as a front for the Tempter, represents the condition necessary to give us freedom of choice. If we opt for what seems more immediately and easily gratifying rather than for what is best in the long run, we will brand ourselves with his mark.

Being pictured as a mark on the forehead and hand is appropriate. The way we think and what we do indicate the way we are developing.

The disciples of the Word are also symbolically marked on the forehead, but with a symbol that indicates a different direction of development. They aren't marked on the hand because they aren't intentionally harmful even though they aren't perfect.

In our time it is nearly impossible to buy and sell without the mark of the Beast. In our modern culture to buy or sell is to almost certainly deal with a system that has greed and injustice built into it. The freedom to profit for personal gain, under present conditions, is a necessary motivation in our economy. In spite of the widespread wealth it has produced there are many who are harmed by its built-in injustices. And those who share in its wealth are being harmed by it in ways they may be temporarily unaware of. Nothing is free.

Our industrial economy puts people in jobs that remove them from natural relationships and deprive them of valuable experiences needed for their best development. It has crowded out most of the small independent farmers and craftsmen and contributed to the breakdown of the extended family to such an extent that nearly everyone is dependent on the system. It is almost impossible not to get caught up in the values it propagates in many subtle ways, and to cooperate with and depend on it for our welfare from the cradle to the grave. Many people know nothing else.

This dependence is another card up the Dragon's sleeve. When people don't have to take much initiative and responsibility for themselves, they don't learn to think and be self-disciplined as much as they would otherwise. This makes it more difficult for them to develop their best potential and resist the ways of the Beast.

Among human institutions, we have a very remarkable system and it has some very good aspects. In spite of its beastly and false prophet characteristics, its vast influence isn't all powerful. One of its good points is the amount of individual freedom we have in it.

But what alternative is there to its values! Jesus, the Word, has given some principles for dealing with the material world and with each

other. If we try to understand and live by them we won't go wrong. It depends on our attitude.

In dealing with this situation, the fact that the disciples of the Word weren't marked on the hand seems significant. We have to live and to live in the circumstances we find ourselves in. If we live as responsibly as we can and take advantage of opportunities to live more responsibly, nothing more is expected of us. If we could grow a garden but don't because we would rather spend more time by the TV or at the beach, well... The same goes for extending the useful life of clothes, equipment, etc. and so on.

It seems obvious that doing what we can for ourselves, working with basic materials when possible, will help develop our ability to figure things out, see and plan ahead, and be appreciative of what we have.

The more we do in making our own equipment and providing our own supplies from natural sources, the more we are individuals in our own right and the less we are an extension of someone else's ingenuity. The more we do for ourselves, the less we have to be at someone else's beck and call, and the less we are dependent on the system.

When we do for ourselves we can deal more responsibly with natural resources and lessen the marketplace competition that is the backbone of the unjust inflation of prices.

Doing for ourselves is an important part of our development that our culture tends to deprive us of. It does too much for us, practically making robots out of all too many. No wonder life is so meaningless for many.

In spite of the temptation of many conveniences, the attraction of distracting pastimes, and the pressure of conventional attitudes, we have a lot of freedom to do for ourselves and develop our own lifestyle.

We don't have to be taken in by the Beast and the False Prophet. The next section, chapter 14:1-5, is about some who weren't.

Chapters 14-19 are about the end of this age with brief allusions to past conditions and the final era.

Chapter 14:1-5: The disciple; the 144,000 are ready. Pictured here with their Teacher they are without blame because of their willingness to try to do what was best. They weren't seduced by temporary wealth and prestige (the Harlot, Babylon the Great).

Verses 6-7: An angel in mid-Heaven tells the people on Earth to recognize and respect the One who is responsible for their existence for judgment is near. The use of modern worldwide communications to quickly proclaim such a message would seem to fit this symbol as well. This may be the same thing Jesus referred to in Matthew 24:14 when He

said the good news of the Kingdom has to be proclaimed as a witness to all nations; then the end of the age will come. The hidden implication in the Christian message is not good news, so we have yet to see this happen.

Verse 8: Most people being heedless of a last call to act responsibly, their destructive economic and social system will be destroyed.

Verses 9-11: A warning about the individual consequences of irresponsibility.

Verses 12-13: In light of these consequences people of goodwill are encouraged to patiently continue the effort to live responsibly and the reward for doing so.

Verses 14-20: The end of the age comes. The result for those who chose the narrow road is contrasted with the result of taking the irresponsible broad and easy way.

I have found it valuable to read Matthew 24:1-44 when thinking about these revelations. Jesus said nothing so unusual will happen that it will warn about the sudden coming of the end of the age.

Chapters 15 and 16 give more details of the events associated with the reappings just mentioned.

After identifying the nature and time of the portent mentioned in chapter 15:1, as being the final acts in our age, verses 2-4 show the readiness of the especially trained disciples. Their readiness is a prerequisite of the end of this age, in preparation for the next one. They are identified by the song they sing. Being pictured as standing by a calm sea mingled with fire represents the condition they are to deal with in the next age. At first it will be a time of peace. The restless, ruthless sea of humanity will be stilled, but it is an enforced peace. The fires of greed and selfishness still smolder. When given a chance, in the latter part of the age, they burst into flame in spite of the seemingly good conditions the people had to start off with.

The Tent of Witness in verse 5 represents the activities of the One who gave us existence as He oversees our affairs in this time of the vindication demonstration. After bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, and starting them on the road to nationhood, His presence was associated with the portable, tent like temple He had them build. With it was associated the legal system and cultural values He set up for them, that have had such a big influence in our age.

In spite of their value and undercurrent of influence we have to a large extent distorted or ignored these values in favor of our natural, self-biased ways. By the time of the advent of Christ, what the Temple represented had become just a corrupted form and was discarded as a

visible symbol. In its place we were given the principles of life in the teachings of Jesus, the Word.

To a large extent, we have ignored the effort to guide us in the right direction, in spite of it being made known in a more definite way than it has been to the people of other ages. Even though it has to be this way in general, we as individuals are responsible for our attitude toward the responsible way of life we are encouraged to take. Our rejection of it is also a rejection of the One responsible for our existence and His values.

Now in this end-time of the age, our scorn of His values that are based on the necessary principles of life, is requiring a different kind of activity from the One trying to teach us true values. Justice has to be done. Now His attitude is the same as it was toward the Israelites when they failed to respect His efforts to get them to live by workable principles. It is still appropriately symbolized as coming through the Tent of witness. We have been cautioned and if we are heedless we bring the inevitable result on ourselves.

In chapter 15:5–16:21, His activity in bringing the present age to a close is portrayed by the seven vials of the Wrath of God at our unjust and unworkable ways.

It seems that man's abuse and contamination of the air, land and water could lead to the conditions indicated by the first four vials.

Here again, what Jesus is quoted as saying in Matthew 24:36-39 applies. Nothing is to happen that will be so overwhelmingly obvious that most people will be frightened into changing their ways. Our freedom to choose is respected right up to the end of the age.

Even so, these dramatic symbols portray conditions of momentous importance to the welfare of mankind. Our destruction of forests that clean and balance the air; the impoverishing of the soil so farming is increasingly dependent on chemicals to produce food that doesn't have the health-giving quality it should; processing that further lowers the quality of food; and the packaging and other manufacturing processes that contaminate the environment are all contributing factors to many health problems.

The seas are a catchall for the contamination draining from the land. These toxins are even now harming the life in the seas. I am reminded of the destruction of life caused by oil spilled when the tanker-ship, Exxon Valdez, ran aground in Alaska. Wasteful and excessive harvesting is also depleting the sea life.

Our rivers are so contaminated that water supplies taken from them have to be purified before it is fit to use.

Our contaminating ways have even harmed the atmosphere. There is a lot of concern about it resulting in adverse changes in weather and climate. There is so much concern about the adverse health effects of less filtered sunlight that we are warned to use sunscreen and sunglasses when exposed to much sunlight. There is some indication that even the widespread use of electricity is harmful to the atmosphere, and of course some means of generating electricity adds to the contamination of the Earth and air.

Toxic ash from increased volcanic activity could contaminate water and adversely affect all animate life.

These may all be contributing factors. At least they are part of the justification for the “wrath of God.” However, would they cause an unprecedented earthquake that could level mountains and eliminate islands in the whole of the earth?

It seems like these conditions can be better explained by events similar to what happened in the time of Moses and Joshua. Since such major catastrophes have happened periodically in the past it isn’t unreasonable to think it can happen again.

Immanuel Velikovsky has given a good explanation of these events and the worldwide catastrophe they were part of in “Worlds in Collision” and “Earth in Upheaval.”

The fifth vial represents the result of this deteriorating condition in nature. If the economies of the nations became depressed or disrupted, and famine and disease more prevalent, it would lead to a lot of distress. This would be especially true of the industrial nations with their more concentrated populations who are not accustomed to hardship. These people are a major part of the Beast.

The sixth vial seems to indicate the beginning of war in the Mid-East between Eastern and Western nations each seeking to control the resources there. A war would take desperate people’s minds off other troubles that could lead to political uprisings.

The influences that lead to such a confrontation are well symbolized as three foul spirits coming from: the Dragon, Satan, the Deceiver and Tempter; the Beast, man’s selfish desires and consequent institutions; and the False Prophet, modern scientific technology that is so dependent on oil.

The foregoing explanations based on the trend in current conditions may miss the mark, but they seem likely enough to be worth mentioning.

According to the seventh vial this war in the Mid-East isn’t to be resolved by the clash of human armies.

Given greater opportunity basic man only devises more potent ways to be destructive. So a tremendous cataclysm ends the age and sets the stage for the world's final era, the second part of the vindication demonstration.

The seventh vial, the sixth seal, and the sixth trumpet, are all about the same event. It is interesting to think about mountains and islands as boundaries and barriers between peoples. The sixth seal and the seventh vial both mention their removal. It will take a very great cataclysm to make such a great change in the earth's surfaces. It seems appropriate that they are done away with for the final age in which there is to be one worldwide government.

But before we are told about that age, more details about the end of our present time are given in chapters 17-19. In 17 and 18, what is destroyed is further identified and its destruction emphasized. In chapter 19, the hopeful side of the picture is again presented and the outcome of the struggle between good and evil portrayed.

Chapter 17: John, taken to the wilderness where the Woman (Israel) had fled to escape the Dragon, is amazed at what he sees. No wonder he marveled, for now She is riding high on the Beast that is a front for the Dragon as It makes war on Her child. In this case neither the heads nor horns of the Beast are crowned. The Woman is in the driver's seat wearing royal robes and the kings of the Earth come to Her. She is labeled Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and abominations of Earth. She represents the materialistic values, the accumulated wealth, luxury, pomp and show, and accompanying ruthless injustice of people who lose sight of higher values and seek their sense of being in immediate satisfactions. Large financial institutions and enterprises determine a lot of what is happening in our time.

She is also seated on many waters. The waters represent the self-centered majority of people. In spite of her royal robes and place in the saddle, she is dependent on the Beast and the waters he rises out of. Her existence is possible because of our freedom to indulge the base side of our human nature. We put her in the saddle.

The people of Israel were and are just as human as the rest of us. Time after time when the Israelites felt secure and well off, they pushed respect for their deliverer and His higher values into the background and took to unjust and self-defeating ways. This prostitution of His values and affection caused them to be likened to a harlot. So it is appropriate that the Woman (Israel) who fled to the wilderness, should represent the result of our tendency to find our sense of being in materialistic values, wealth, and pleasures, even at the expense of others.

As the Christian nations developed there was a gradual change in the status of common people. Scriptures that emphasized the dignity of the individual made widely available by translation and the printing press, influenced this gradual revolution that weakened the position of monarchies and the wealthy. Now we have socialistic democracies in which wealth is widely distributed. Many in these countries are sated with material goods. They are drunk with the wine of her fornication, and feel this wealth is their due if they can get it. Scientific materialism has superseded the values that gave it its start.

The Harlot is also identified as being seated on seven hills and drunk with the blood of the martyrs. Rome is traditionally built on seven hills. So it seems likely this links the Harlot with both the secular and religious powers that have fanned out from there, and the values they represent. Both are typically identified with wealth, luxury and show, at the expense of people who can ill afford to give it. And both have tried to stamp out religious influences that might undermine their position.

The modern Beast has changed somewhat. The horns have authority for a short time as kings along with the Beast. In socialistic democracies the people, who produce the Beast, have self-governing power delegated to a representative government. These governments are the horns. Hence, the horns rule along with the Beast that is enthroned in the people.

The seven heads are identified as also being major political and military powers. At the time of this revelation the sixth head, the Roman Empire, was in power. Since then there has been a big shuffle and it would seem the British Empire with its allies would be the most likely candidate for being the seventh head. In two major wars it has come out on top. It with the United States has had a lot of influence in the Beast in which the horns govern as kings.

The horns and Beast are to hate and despoil the Harlot. We see this happening. Socialistic governments tend to redistribute wealth through taxation and social programs. There are still wealthy people but there isn't the former gap between poor and rich classes. The majority are in between. Besides this, irresponsible government fiscal practices seem likely to disrupt the world economy. If this happens, many well off people will find themselves in poverty.

Also, the materialistic appetite of people seems insatiable. As long as irresponsible governments make excess money and credit available, and as long as there is a buck to be made, profit-seeking organizations will try to satisfy people's desires. In the process we are beginning to see the bottom of the barrel of some resources and are suffering from the

psychological, material, financial and social side effects of this unwonted luxury and waste. It seems as if our opulent way of life is crumbling.

The description of the Harlot and the Beast is given as if it were the time of their judgment and destruction. So it is given in terms of a past condition except for one detail of the Beast.

At the time of their judgment, the Beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless Pit, and go into perdition. This aspect of the Beast is identified as an eighth head but is of the same nature as the seven. In the Millennium the Dragon is chained up until near the end of that era. Then it is loosed briefly to tempt and make a choice available. He finds ready acceptance again, and again takes the guise of the Beast to become the eighth head and to make war on the saints again. It's his last chance.

Chapter 18 and 19:1-4: Once Babylon the Great, the great Harlot, is identified, the meaning of this chapter seems apparent.

Judging from this description and by earlier statements the indicated economic collapse (Babylon the great is fallen) came on rather rapidly. Some knowledgeable people can see no way for us to continue the irresponsible way we have been going for much longer. We may have put ourselves in a situation where it is too late to avoid a drastic economic collapse.

Chapter 19:5-16 again pictures the Christ and His disciples ready to take over world rule.

Chapter 19:17-21 indicates the final war of our age. It may seem to be a war over resources and power but is actually the result of a blatant disregard for basic principles of justice and friendship. In spite of the golden opportunity we were given, all we could see was gold. It indicates a rejection of the One who gave us existence and of His values. This completes another demonstration of a way that doesn't work. It was ended by the great catastrophe mentioned under the sixth seal and the seventh vial. Here it is just pictured as a battle that is won.

The Beast and False Prophet are destroyed and their followers slain.

Chapter 20: Satan, the Deceiver, is bound while Jesus and His disciples set up a just government under which people can live with good influences. After sufficient time for people to benefit by these good influences, Satan is loosed again. Then the eighth head of the Beast develops as the latent self-bias of basic human nature responds to the arguments of the Tempter, even as Adam and Eve did, and as we all do. In this situation people would again have a chance to make choices based on an experience of both good and evil. In spite of the good start they had in this large-scale Garden of Eden, the majority rebel and try to

destroy the source of good influences. Good qualities can't be developed in any other way than by the free will of experienced people.

This demonstration not only shows the necessity for the suffering of our present experience but also shows what would happen if uncreative, self-biased people were allowed in Heaven. It wouldn't be Heaven for them. They wouldn't be appreciative, satisfied or happy so the best thing for them is to eventually cease to exist as conscious beings.

In our age we tend to blame our failures on circumstances. The final age gives conclusive evidence that it is the will of the individual, not circumstances, that determine the way we develop. It shows that there is no better or easier way for us to have the possibility of life in a highly gratifying situation. It establishes the integrity of the One who gave us existence and Whom we will soon meet as Friend or as Judge.

The last part of chapter 20 speaks of the final separation. The emphasis is placed on what people do, as the basis for judgment. It is the most reliable indication of what we are.

The symbolism of chapters 21 and 22 seems apparent. There is no way the actual situation can be described for us. We have no experience to help us imagine it. But it is obvious that the situation is designed to more than satisfy our needs and desires.

In chapter 21:7-8, it is worthy of note that it is the overcomers who inherit full life, and that the first listed trait that disqualifies is fearfulness, or as another translation says, cowardice.

Failing to resist our selfish tendencies and the temptation to gratify them at the expense of others is not as easy for us as it may seem. Giving in to our selfishness or our fearfulness of ostracism can cause a loss of self-respect and force us to try to compensate in ways that lead to any of a number of serious problems. And if persisted in as a regular habit it can disqualify us from full life so that all the discomfort we've experienced is of no avail in helping us to a more than compensating situation.

Having the perspectives I've been writing about has been a big help to me. Nevertheless, human nature has its ways and I can't look at my record without an inner blush at some of my impulses. I'm thankful for a Teacher who understands our human nature and is well aware of the necessary stability of our personalities that makes change difficult, but not impossible.

In chapter 21:24-27 the nations outside the city are mentioned and in chapter 22:2 the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations is mentioned.

In Matthew 25, beginning with verse 31, having told about the future of His disciples, Jesus spoke of the judgment of all other people. The righteous were told they would inherit a kingdom prepared for them.

None of us mature completely here on Earth, we only show our willingness to do so. It seems to me the outside nations of Revelations 21 may be the place spoken of in Matthew 25:34 as the Kingdom prepared for the righteous. The leaves of the tree of life represent our opportunity to overcome wrong habits and finish our development in those nations where there will only be people of good will. After we overcome our inferior traits, we will qualify to enter the City and be with the One who gave us existence.

I note the many times great appreciation is expressed in this book by people from Earth for the One who wants our friendship. Appreciation and affection can't be forced. Their expressions represent a genuine perception of merit and worth in the One appreciated. It also implies the quality of existence prepared for us if we qualify for it.

I have just touched the high spots with these thoughts.

I hope they are neither too brief nor too cluttered and that you can figure out what I'm trying to say.

Within the framework of my perception of historical and present day conditions, it has seemed to me that the pieces of this puzzle have gone together without distorting either the symbols or the facts. There are enough matching details to make identity fairly certain, and they fit nicely into the whole picture as they should, to give confidence in them. When all put together it gives meaning to an otherwise obscure part of our situation so that the whole makes sense to me. This gives me hope for the possibility of ultimately finding full satisfaction of our needs and legitimate desires.

It seems to me this interpretation is about right. If it is, such an accurate portrayal of present conditions made available so long before they become apparent, is one more reason to have confidence in the One who gave it to us through John.