

Academic pressures – surmounted

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The front page of the university paper carried a variety of interesting articles that afternoon. In the upper left-hand column an interview with professors revealed that cheating incidents were rising over what they had been in previous years, and that these incidents pointed to a fierce competitive sense among students.

On the right a report on the activity of the university job-placement office indicated that students were putting the service to greater use than they had in previous years, but that there were fewer jobs to meet student qualifications.

A survey in the center of the page confirmed that at least for that university, first-year students tended to reflect the moral code of their peers rather than the code they maintained in their last year of high school while still living at home.

Pressure to excel at any cost, to succeed, to conform, seems vivid in academic communities. But there is also a healthier pressure at work—and the same student paper showed it—pressure to break out of outgrown forms and constricting molds.

Pressure, per se, is not the challenge in an academic context. Rather it is the assumptions behind the pressure that need careful evaluation, the negative assumptions that we lack time, lack ability, lack opportunity. If we accept these assumptions as valid, pressure can sometimes seem almost unbearable. But this pressure may also turn us to a more thoughtful evaluation of the assumptions by which we live.

The person faced with limited job prospects may be pressure by assumption that opportunity is limited. “After all,” this false assumption argues, “you’ve got to take what you can get; there are not all that many opportunities, and someone else is going to get the job if you don’t take it.”

Does opportunity really depend on something outside ourselves? Christ Jesus admonished his followers: “Take no thought saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹ Jesus did not ignore basic needs. But he did direct us to the real source of supply and opportunity—to God. And he established a priority: we are to look to God and His government of being to find what we need.

Opportunity is found in our consciousness of spiritual being. We need to understand that man manifests and expresses God’s attributes, His nature, and that we experience opportunity in proportion

1 Matt 6:31-33

to our active expression of God's being. We always have the opportunity to be loving, truthful, just. We can demand from ourselves—no matter how trivial the activity—greater originality, a more intelligent approach, a more vivacious attitude, and an increasingly perceptive outlook.

We have now the opportunity to express God, that is our reason for being. The more we utilize that God-given opportunity, the more expansive will be our experiences, including our jobs. And knowing that God expresses Himself as infinite individuality, that each of us is an individual expression of divine Spirit, we don't have to settle for less than the opportunity that is compatible with the expression of our God-derived individuality.

We may need to challenge willful thinking and planning in order to perceive our true individuality. But God-derived individuality is the fact of man—the man each one of us really is. If we're interested in having an expanded sense of opportunity, we'll be willing to do whatever we need to do to perceive what God has for us. We'll look beyond the surface of circumstance and situation and ask, "How can I take this opportunity right now to be a fuller expression of God's being?" We can always do that, no matter what the circumstance.

What about the person tempted to cheat to achieve success? He may be pressured by the assumption that life is a series of interdependent events that build on each other without any divine order. Then it's easy to see why one might fall into the trap of believing that succeeding by any means in one instance is necessary if you are to accomplish the desired end.

I can remember sitting in a tenth-grade class feeling my life was ruined because I got a C on the final. A C on the final would lower my grade point average. This would keep me from gaining entrance to the prestigious college where I would earn the degree that would get me into the law school where I would find contacts necessary to obtain the prestigious job that would indicate I was a success in life. Life dashed at tenth grade! What a scenario! Contrast it with this sense of life: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." ²

These words of Christ Jesus' exhibit no fatalism, no resignation to predestination. This sense of life is not confining but expansive, because it takes our attention away from material symbols and directs it to life's substance. Christian Science, through its textbook, *Science and Health* by Mrs. Eddy, explains this expansiveness: "The admission to one's self that man is God's own likeness sets man free to master the infinite idea."³ And again: "knowledge of the Science of being develops the latent abilities and

² John 5:19,20

³ *Science and Health* p 90

possibilities of man. It extends the atmosphere of thought, giving mortals access to broader and higher realms. It raises the thinker into his native air of insight and perspicacity.”⁴

Using this understanding, we never find ourselves at a dead end. Situation is not our master. No matter what the situation, we can turn to higher realms for the solution.

Are we seeking these higher realms? Are we taking the opportunity to master more of the infinite idea? Are we letting our sense of success and worth go beyond the symbols to the substance of being? Are we throwing off the procrastination fostered by the assumption that there is no divine order and opportunity in life? We can! And we must.

And what of the person trying to decide on his own moral code? Perhaps he feels the pressure to conform, stemming from the assumption that one is likely to get along better in life if he does what everyone else is doing. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to feel loved, provided we know that what we’re conforming to is right for us. How do we know? By checking to see whether our actions express the good, pure, intelligent divine Principle of man’s existence. This process cannot begin too soon. Why! Because our thought models, shaping our structure of thought, directly determine our everyday experience. This Bible passage from Romans is cause for much pondering: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey...”⁵

We cannot choose a materialistic thought model and hope to avoid the inevitable consequences of adopting that model. However, Christ Jesus maintained, and Christian Science elucidates, that there is only one true mode of consciousness: the divine, which knows God’s allness and wholeness. Beginning with that premise, we can make sense out of our lives; we bring infinite power to bear in our experience by keeping our thought in unity with the Divine.

We look out from the standpoint of God’s allness and ask, “What does God know about me? What is God doing? How is He expressing Himself?” We can ask ourselves these questions and rejoice in the answers, even in the face of evil suggestions. As we do, we will experience a legitimate kind of pressure: to strive to fulfill Christ Jesus’ command to seek first the kingdom of God, the spiritual consciousness of being. Then we will find “all these things” added unto us.

4 *Ibid* p 128

5 Roman 6:16