

Union Life: Another Gimmick?

by Bill Volkman

A recent episode on my favorite TV program, *The Rockford Files*, made me acutely aware of the fact that the union life message, which we so enthusiastically share, can easily degenerate into being just another religious gimmick.

Jim Rockford (a private detective — for those of you who are not familiar with the program) finds himself enmeshed in a blackmail case. A legal secretary unwittingly serves as a “bagman” for her unethical boss in the delivery of the \$30,000 blackmail money. On the same day, she decides to quit her job so that she can devote full time to seeking “*a greater consciousness of her oneness with God.*”

Part of her method for attaining a greater “awareness” was meditation in bright sunlight. This was supposed to allow the sun’s rays to realign and straighten out the distortions in her inner being. In her preoccupation with finding God more fully, the secretary forgets to deliver the package with the \$30,000 in it. Jim Rockford gets involved because the crooks are led to assume that he knows where the money is. Things get even complicated when the secretary’s guru replaces the real with newspaper and Jim delivers the worthless package to the crooks.

The whole program made me quite uncomfortable. The language used by the secretary was embarrassingly close to the language used at our union life conferences and in our magazine. She was no less sincere than we are. In fact, when her spiritual leader is exposed as a fake near the end of the program, she conscientiously continues her search for Reality. In the last scene, Jim encounters her on the street engaged in a whole new religious trip.

Conservatively dressed, with hair in a “missionary-like” bun, she is hawking a \$7.00 book that reveals the secrets of how to attain peace through a combination of “Jesus” and meditation. It reminded me of many who follow the same routine at O’Hare Airport. She could not take time to have coffee with Jim, because she was too busy “serving Jesus” in her street witnessing.

A number of letters have been written to Union Life by our constituency, in which they share their concern that union life not become another religious gimmick. What can be done to prevent truth seekers from turning the truth of awareness of oneness into a distorted effort to develop a formula for attaining an awareness of oneness? Nothing! Man’s efforts to attain a consciousness of oneness are part of the necessary outer process in many lives of bringing the individuals involved to a fixed inner consciousness of their union. The efforts are part of the growing pains which are needed to bring them to an “unconscious consciousness.”

“Unconscious consciousness” sounds like double-talk, but let me explain. Outer soul consciousness and inner spirit consciousness are not the same. The former is a mental awareness. The latter is an inner sense of “knowing” that transcends mental reasoning. Each of us have “known” things to be true even though we could not articulate the basis of that knowing. Frequently we label it intuition, or ESP (extra sensory perception — for we know it is beyond our senses). It is an apprehension or cognition without the process of conscious reasoning — it is an “unconscious consciousness” that comes by inner revelation.

However, we should not disdain the outer process used in many lives to bring the individuals involved to a greater inner consciousness. What starts as conscious recognition frequently

ends as an unconscious acceptance. Most skiers consciously have to learn various technical maneuvers such as stem Christies and parallel turns before they spontaneously make deep powder turns on a steep slope. All artists start with conscious techniques and systematic “how-to’s” -before they develop into skilled professionals. Nadia Comaneci of Rumania did not just walk up to a balance beam in her local gymnasium and perform the routines that earned her perfect tens at the Olympics. Years of conscious practice brought her to the place of unconscious spontaneity in her gymnastic routines. Do not be surprised that Christians will also frequently follow a path of “conscious being” before they are known for their natural, “unconscious being.”

The secretary in The Rockford Files TV episode seemed to need a lot of outer involvement to firm up her inner awareness of oneness. In one scene with her eastern mysticism group, she was floating in a swimming pool with blinders on her eyes, as well as ear and nose plugs. The reasoning was that if some of the outer senses were sealed off there would be a better chance to develop an inner consciousness of Reality. Though we might laugh at the ridiculousness of the form which awareness-seeking frequently takes, rest assured that your own path to inner awareness might also appear at times to be preposterous to on-lookers.

To the mature, much of the symbolism of organized Christianity is a “joke.” Even the symbolism of the cross has its humorous side. Would those who insist on wearing a cross around their neck wear a miniature electric chair if the Messiah had come in the 20th Century and had been put to death in that fashion? Would all the churches then have giant electric chairs on top of their spires? Do you suppose the Roman Catholics and Protestants would then argue whether the electric chairs should be depicted with or without Jesus in them? The cross is very precious to the Christian, because it reminds us of Christ’s tremendous sacrifice of love. But symbols can cause us to lose sight of what they represent.

Though we look forward to the day when inner spontaneity replaces all the conscious outer forms, symbols and how-to’s, be sure to recognize that immature outer manifestations are still evidence of a measure of inner awareness. So let each seeker take the path he must to come to his personal fixed inner consciousness, and let each teacher and witness use the approach he is led to use.

Even Scripture frequently seems to advocate outer doing rather than inner being, but this is solely because of the focus of the reader. For example, when Paul said, “*Pray without ceasing,*” he certainly was not suggesting around-the-clock prayer meetings. One does not need to try to keep God in his mental consciousness every waking moment of the day. No, Paul was speaking of a spontaneous inner consciousness — of an “unconscious consciousness.” In our immaturity we see Paul’s admonitions as laws and principles, and we try to fulfill them through the use of gimmicks. But in maturity, we will finally come to see that all such admonitions are automatically fulfilled as part of the stream of Living Water which naturally flows from inner knowing.

The “unconscious consciousness” does not result from long strivings and self-effort. Rather, this spontaneity is the essence of Christ’s life which He lives in and through us. Believers already possess the “unconscious consciousness.” However, most of us must go through a desert experience of outer doing, until we finally “come to the end of our rope” and see that Life does not result from our works, but by God’s grace. Then we realize that what we are seeking is already ours in Jesus Christ. We begin to live spontaneously.

The final test of maturity is unconsciousness (spontaneity), not consciousness. Did you consciously think about breathing today, or think about putting one foot ahead of the other in walking, or think about the use of your hands on the steering wheel when you drove your car? If you did, you were having a problem with your lungs, or your feet, or your hands. Life is meant to move from conscious doing to unconscious spontaneity, from conscious gimmicks to unconscious being. If you need to use the union life message as a gimmick for a time, be my guest, but rest assured that in due season shadow will become substance and symbol will become reality.