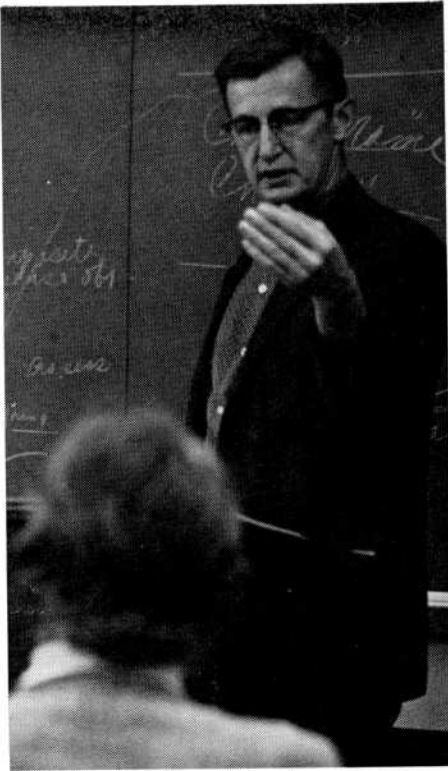


Dr. J. Clayton Feaver's



Dr. J. Clayton Feaver

When the Student Senate set up its "Last Lecture" series, a selected group of faculty members was asked, "What would you say to students if this were your last opportunity to say it?" The first to respond was the popular professor of the philosophy of religion and ethics, Dr. J. Clayton Feaver. Students packed Meacham Auditorium to hear what he had to say. Here Dr. Feaver has revised his lecture for the *Sooner*.

THIS is a rather ominous assignment. I am somewhat overwhelmed by the number of people who seem to have either sadistic or masochistic leanings; I am intending to be careful in driving home. Either this is a singular honor or a double threat. I don't know whether you consider me the most expendable among the faculty—I take some recourse, however in scripture, knowing that the first shall be last and the last first. I am exceedingly apprehensive for the chap who winds up this series.

I am honored and delighted with this assignment; it shows a rather remarkable interest and concern on the part of students—even great expectations. It shows, in a different language, that they are made of the stuff that men and women are made of. It seems to me that your Senate has undertaken a task which reflects rather striking maturity.

I am also a bit frightened by the assignment: how partial, how trite, even how downright false anything I might say may be. Omniscience is not one of my blessings. Fortunately, the task was put to me in the form of a hypothetical question: *What would you say to students if this were your last opportunity to say it?* The "if," I think, gives me a way out.

Of course, I realize that all life is risk. The only thing certain is death—for the dead, that is. Life is a risk and there are indeed, I suspect, many levels of risk. They range all the way from slipping in the bathtub to delivering lectures.

And likewise there are many levels of death. There is the death of meaninglessness, of emptiness, of hopelessness, of ordinate sense of guilt and condemnation, of escapism which takes manifold forms—even the seeking of an A.B. degree may be a form of escapism and, I submit, manifest death. And then, of course, there is the common garden variety of being six feet under the sycamore sapling's delight. But all of these, as far as I can judge, are pretty final, however much all of them may be conquered and/or transcended.

One of my favorite dead friends, Socrates, says in effect that the mature man constantly rehearses death. This I believe, not

in a morbid sense, but in the sense that death is to be reckoned with, understood, even gracefully confronted.

I am not wanting this evening, however, to dwell chiefly on death; but rather more nearly on something that I might call the maturing of human life, and this even though I believe that in all life there is some dying and in turn being reborn. To state this a bit more tersely: in all life is impending death, with the possibility of reconstruction and rebirth. I am wanting then to turn more nearly to the subject of the maturing of human life.

I kind of feel as if I am bothered by a double or triple barrier between me and the people—the pulpit, excessive height, and darkness. The pulpit is necessary—I need something on which to lean and something to hold my head. The excessive height I attribute to an architectural folly. The darkness, I presume reflects inappropriate legislative appropriations. . . .

Well, I repeat that what I want to do is to dwell more nearly on the subject of the maturing of human life; and to do so I am wanting chiefly to make a number of suggestions for your consideration. I trust that all of them call for rather sharp analysis and development. This you will have plenty of time to do after I am gone.

The first one I will put this way: man's goal and destiny is community, by which I mean the full reciprocity of persons. Community is the interdependence of persons wherein mutual hope and trust and understanding, mutual concern and faith, mutual sense of dignity and respect (with self-respect equally lauded with respect for others) each person is looking to himself and at the same time is looking beyond himself to other people. Community is this sort of inter-relatedness or inter-dependence among persons, each of whom stands on his own feet, and each of whom stands in relation to others who equally stand on their own feet, with dignity and sense of integrity.

In community it seems to me there are many expressions. There are communities within communities: the scientific community; the artistic community; the fraternal community; the

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nation; the family, and even, if you will, the community of the self wherein one stands in communication with himself and interprets himself to himself. I am wondering if this is perhaps not what the person who put the inscription over the Greek temple had in mind when he suggested, "Know Thyself"—that he had in mind the integrity of the individual and at the same time the communal standing of the individual.

Now if we make the suggestion that man's goal and destiny is community, then I am wanting to submit two or three corollary comments: one, that man must decide for community. Sometimes I have thought that this is the one *either-or* in life; that it is for this kind of inter-relationship among persons, and this alone, that we either decide for or against.

Probably no one ever makes a clean-cut, unequivocal decision. Probably at every moment of our existence our decision is only more or less for and more or less against. I presume this is part and parcel of man's limitation.

And then indeed there are many things that relegate against decision for community and/or prevent full commitment to community. There are other goals that we sometimes seek; or ill health; or hate which goes under the guise of love—inordinate self-hate confused with love; or social pressures; or fate or laziness or churches.

Now I am not sure just how "churches" got into my notes, but as long as it is here I would defend its being here. Churches sometimes reduce man to less than his true self—indeed giving the impression that the project is the full meaning of the spiritual life, thus precluding the possibility of deciding what I am calling community. But be this as it may, I am making the point that one must decide for community and that this is an *either-or* matter.

Second, as a corollary suggestion, I submit that one must grow into community; that this is more nearly an achievement than it is a gift; that we do not come catapulted into the world situation in community, but we accomplish it—and we accomplish it pretty much by acting in the light of what I shall call a law or principle of development, wherein the arrow of change is from dependence to and through independence to inter-dependence. The inter-dependence of persons is the entrance fee to community.

Now, again, many things prevent this growth: hostility; fear; anxiety, and there are several levels and ramifications of anxiety—*anxiety over fate and death, anxiety about one's meaninglessness and emptiness, anxiety about one's inordinate sense of guilt and condemnation.*

Parents sometimes prevent one from growth. Parents sometimes keep young women "tied to their apron strings," as the saying goes, (and sometimes young men as well) and so unwomanly characteristics are perpetuated. Or deans of women—I have sometimes thought that they are the major culprits at this juncture. Deans of women are immoderately against any kind of growth and development; it is part and parcel of their training, their philosophy, and their practice that no one shall

have a new idea or shall entertain a different mode of behavior. Teachers—well, teachers not so often—most of them are impeccable.

And I notice that sometimes the Independent Students Association represents a barrier; and sometimes the fraternities do; and sometimes even the Senate (that is, on the University level, not on the national level), wherein the concern is chiefly to keep the individual at the level of achievement at which he is most easy to manage. And if deans of women don't do this (and of course they don't—I jest) I shan't have to make an apology, unless your "trick" doesn't work!

By this normal arrow of change or growth I mean the movement in which, having security in the home at birth, we nonetheless break away from this, assert ourselves, become ourselves, stand on our own feet, gain our independence. We need to gain this even if it means the rejection of father and mother, sister and brother, and universities—even sorority sisters. For sometimes we transfer the strings from mother to sorority and sometimes from sorority to husband or wife, as the case may be, and so on ad infinitum, ad nauseam. So I am suggesting then that one must cut these ties if he is to be faithful to and honor this normal growth from dependence to independence.

But then, having achieved independence, sometimes people are exceedingly envious of it; and/or proud of it; and/or fearful to give it up—perhaps fearful that they will lapse back again to this state of dependence. Either the state of dependence or independence is the state of death; that of dependence, the death of sterility; that of independence, a more violent death but surely as deadly a death.

If one is to honor this arrow of growth, he moves from the state of independence wherein he stands up and, if you will, resists, into that state of being wherein he relates himself to other people and to things.

Normal people do this pretty well and on some levels they do it better than on other levels. It tends to be more easily accomplished—more nearly inevitable perhaps—on the biological level. It is sometimes difficult on the moral and the spiritual level. How easy it is to settle for *moralism* or *spiritualism* which is nothing more or less than evidence of one's concern to hold on to something that he has accomplished, namely his independence, and his refusal to pass on to a state of inter-relatedness.

And third, I would say in this connection that man may grow *in* community; that having accomplished the state of inter-dependence or inter-relation he may grow in community; that community is a continuous process, that it is a dynamic thing, that it is a life that allows for new and further opportunities for action as one participates in it.

This, then, is my overall thesis or suggestion: the human possibility and goal is to be and to act in community, and this entails accepting and being myself, and accepting and being beyond myself, thus fulfilling my own greatest potential. My ful-

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filment and your fulfilment belong and go together.

If someone says that this is too tough, I reply, of course it is—life in community is possible perhaps only for a Christ or a Socrates, or a Buddha—but it is not too tough as an approximation and directive. Many persons in the husband-wife relationship, the friend-friend relationship, and so on, have approached such stature and many are directed more or less by some such ideal as this.

My second suggestion for your consideration is that to be and to act in community does justice to the two great needs and concerns of man: (1) the concern for security and (2) the concern for adventure. So far as I can see (unless a person is inordinately sick) all men, at least men commonly, exhibit these two concerns for security and adventure. On the one hand is the concern for a firm foundation on which to stand amidst all the forces that tend to pull one down; on the other hand a concern to pass beyond anything that has at any moment of one's existence been accomplished.

Whether this concern takes the form of an interest in "better homes and gardens" or an interest, if you will, in achieving the "Kingdom of God" (or an interest in achieving community), man has these two prerogatives. They seem to go together (they may be distinctive and/or definitive features of man), and in this context I am concerned to suggest that in community they can be and they are exercised.

Third, I submit that there are two laws principally which govern man's behavior and/or performance, his conduct in community—there may be others; I am mentioning two especially. First, each individual ought to be treated as of sacred and inviolable worth; negatively, no individual may be exploited, desecrated, vitiated. In the man-woman relationship, for instance, for man to vitiate and defile the integrity of woman rules out participation in her life, either for the greatest joy in the relationship or for matters of procreation. And the same, so far as I can read the books, goes for man.

Parenthetically, I ought to add that on reading further I think I am aware that the wild fury of passion sometimes makes it hard to act in the light of this law, to keep this law. Passion raises her head, and does so whether we think in terms of Saturday evening affairs or national affairs or international affairs. Passion sometimes blinds us, if you will, to the concern—indeed to the imperative—that men and women be treated as of sacred and inviolable worth. But only so does one participate in this reciprocal relationship.

And the second law that governs man's behavior and performance in community, I suggest, is that in community objects—things—trees, poems, epistles, gospels, forests, grapes, molecules, universities, churches, footballs—things—ought to be used as a sacred trust; or negatively, no thing may be wasted, squandered, exploited—from indeed the least to the most excellent.

The most obvious forms of waste and exploitation are perhaps the least damaging. To ram one's fist through the sheet-rock wall of the dormitory, to show one's manliness, I suppose, is costly and all, but far less damaging to community than attending church for points rather than for worship or com-union; far less damaging than copying material from a book for unearned credit rather than for an education. The latter, I submit, is to profane the church, the book, the author of the book,

and worst of all to profane oneself—almost in such simple steps of progression as this.

So I submit that these two laws govern man's conduct in community: he should not violate the integrity of another or himself; he should not violate the sacred meaning of any thing or object.

Fourth, I should like to suggest for your consideration that the "good" of community is inclusive (1) of that which satisfies human appetite, desire, aspiration, and (2) of that which fulfills human potential for growth. Here I'm meaning to stress that satisfaction—that satisfaction and fulfilment are impossible in isolation; that relation is the requisite to human satisfaction and human fulfilment. And let's tie in the last two suggestions together and say that the laws of community are requisite to relation and that relation is requisite to satisfaction and fulfilment.

This is true I believe on every level of life; more obvious perhaps (and only perhaps) on the biological level, but so also on the psychological, the moral, the aesthetic, the religious levels. Wherein is satisfaction with respect to a great Gregorian chant or a great Wesleyan hymn? And wherein in the religious life is satisfaction and fulfilment except one does love the Lord his God with his whole self and his neighbor as himself, seeing in this relationship both himself and the other? No, human satisfaction and fulfilment are possible only in relation, in community; and in turn the "good" of community is just such satisfaction and fulfilment of the potential for growth.

And further, I submit to you, the result of community is What I am calling endless advance; community opens and offers inexhaustible possibilities on which man may act; it is an undrain-driable—I've just coined a word (Aristotle did it, why shouldn't I?)—it is an undrainable reservoir of possibilities.

I have sometimes thought that this is especially evident in the husband-wife relationship, wherein, as the attunement is fine between the two, and there is action in the light of fine attunement, each action opens further and (so far as I can see) interminable possibilities. Or let me put this just a bit differently and submit that in community is the *power* to be and to act. So far as I can see, power is endless; it is inexhaustible; it does not wear out . . . in this instance: when the power exercised is in the light of the meaning of the communal relation.

And it seems to me that there is a three-fold source to what I am calling this inexhaustible power: (1) the power has its source in myself, (2) the power has its source in another, and (3) the power has its source in the inter-action of self and other; in this inter-activity I gain power to be and to act. And I am suggesting that, so far as I can judge, this is inexhaustible.

Now I have been wondering at this juncture, whether the possibility could be that life in community is life in God. Could God be or mean the comprehensive ultimate in judgment on and as lure to this and every particular? And could God be and God mean the sacredness and the ultimacy of each particular in the light of the comprehending and the all-comprehensive ultimate? I am wondering if the language of religion may indeed not be appropriate at this juncture.

I think at this moment of a picture I once saw, thrown as it were on a cosmic canvas. There was a high, high mountain; and the mountain was revolving; and on top of the mountain was a woman standing naked, revolving with the mountain.

And she was looking out indefinitely far and looking in incredibly close.

And there were people on the mountain as far as the eye could see and beyond, all sorts and conditions of people: black and white, yellow and red; there were educated people and ignorant people; and there were old and there were young people, and babies; there were vicious people and kind people; and some were laughing and some were crying; some had hope—some had given up to despair; there were university teachers and university students; fraternity people and non-fraternity people.

And there was a little girl without limbs; and a babe without eyes; and an old man senile; and an old woman serene and stately; and an old man alert, relating his bountiful experience. And there was a man with eyes that had grown out of his body and into the rock, and a woman whose eyes had grown into his body.

And they were laughing, and crying; but they were all silent, and looking up to the top of the mountain—and each had just a trace of a smile, and expectation. And the woman looked out indefinitely far and incredibly near; she held them all away from her, and she took them all into the innermost recesses of her heart. She stood on the mountain, detached and she was naked, for she had nothing to hide.

I have wondered whether this picture conveys something of the meaning of community. I have also wondered if this picture conveys something of the meaning of life in God.

So a final comment, one already implied. Man is frail, weak, careless; prone to dastardly behavior; prone to profane and desecrate things and other people and himself; prone to death, with little or no power to save himself.

But man also, I submit, is strong, discerning, careful; prone to glorious behavior with great expectation and lofty visions; prone to life with great power to restore and re-create and rehabilitate himself.

So in concluding my "last lecture," I conclude it with a warning—sort of a glorious warning: man is limited and man is able; prone to death but also prone to life. And whatever the contingencies of his existence, external and internal, he can and he has achieved the courage to be and to act more or less in reciprocal relation.

At least some of you in this group know me well enough to know that I would end even my last lecture with a question. Can it be that true virtue, to take the phrase from Jonathan Edwards, is the consent, the cordial relation, of all being to all being? Can it be that to laugh is to live—and remember that laughing and crying are very close (not to be confused with bawling and guffawing)—can it be that to laugh is to live? That to see all things in perspective, in fruitful tension, and to participate therein with compassion and joy is to live?

That even with the risk and at times the utter precariousness of my existence, with the "end at hand" (as Amos uses the phrase)—and at hand at each moment of my existence—can it be that life is courageous participation in community? What power to be and to act is such a faith? And can it be that I am he who must decide to be or not to be—is this the question?

Let me forsake the pedagogical device of leaving the question and make the simple suggestion. Think through, and try the experiment. Thus, I believe, I would leave my own son and my own two daughters.

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