

Transformation through the Holistically Unitary Life

The word unitary is intended to describe the life of the individual functioning as a harmonious unit within a larger universal unity. The goal is to relate the whole of the person at every moment to the whole of reality, including God as the creative center of all that exists.

We aim at a fully integrated personality creatively interacting with its total environment. The parts of a car are useless until they are properly assembled. Even then they are powerless until integrated into a much larger setting of roads, gasoline companies and oil wells.

The Bible embodies an even larger unity of all creation. The Hebrew word "*shalom*" expresses this vision of God's purpose of wholeness and harmony among all things. Shalom is an inclusive concept of well-being embodying peace along with security, freedom, justice and opportunity. It includes a fulfilling harmony in the inner life of individuals, between persons, with nature and with God. When we greet anyone with shalom we are expressing our hope for that kind of unitary blessedness.

If the total self is to be liberated, body, mind and spirit are to be integrated. Thoughts, feelings and actions are all then involved in our devotion. Emotional intensity is considered incomplete without intellectual insight and vice versa.

We also aim consistently to express dedication to God in all our opinions and actions, whether in family, politics, work, play or church. Our hope is to become loving persons joining both being and doing, character and behavior in full dedication. If we omit any aspect of life from God's empowerment, we remain to that extent handicapped.

The unitary life not only involves the entire person, it also relates us to our total environment, to reality in its most inclusive dimensions. Settling for anything less than that is to live in a partial and therefore artificial environment.

The unitary life goes beyond the unitive stage of which the classical mystics spoke. The final rung on the mystic ladder, following purgation and illumination, tended to be restricted to unity between the human individual and a transcendent God, usually experienced during periods of silent withdrawal.

Now we see possibilities for continuous, harmonious interrelatedness with all humanity and the entire world of nature. We become aware of new and transforming relationships with family and intimate friends, members of our church, workers at shop or office, and unseen citizens of foreign lands. We are eagerly open to aesthetic experiences of all forms of beauty.

In unaccustomed political and economic expressions of love, we join in a worldwide network of social relationships. We experience a great new explosion of meaning in the requirement "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

To be blind to such a range of God's empowering presence is like trying to see the grandeur of the Grand Canyon by concentrating attention only on a single pebble at one's feet.

Religious experience can also become more intensely rich as more of total personality is involved. We relate to God with our minds, emotions and actions.

The benefits of a more unitary emphasis are illustrated by recent approaches to physical health. In a more limited field, these findings demonstrate that by mutual reinforcement of several factors, better health is possible. Increasing numbers of practitioners are now interested in holistic medicine, which uses a more unified approach in treating the whole person – body, mind and spirit.

As the holistic approach contributes to physical well being, so may even more spectacular consequences be realized as we move beyond health to a still more inclusive wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

Relating every aspect of our personhood to the whole of reality becomes an even more exciting possibility today because we now have available a greater abundance of supporting resources from theology and science. We can have a much vaster view of God.

Psychological findings have revealed inner potentialities which our ancestors never knew they had.

Sociologically we know more about the nature of systems, the dynamics of groups, and the release of personal power through relationships.

Modern communication systems introduce us to the wide variety of human needs around the world, greatly expanding the implications of the biblical message.

Economic analysis suggests that honestly praying for the poor requires us also to meditate about God's judgment on entire economic systems.

The readings so far concentrate on personal devotional methods rather than on group practices. Yet it is important that the unitary life include creative group relationships. In the miracle of human interaction, we can become comrades of our better selves. We are nurtured as we become active in a forward-looking church, participate in a small growth group within the congregation, or relate to a community-improvement organization.