An Awareness of World and Need for Transformation

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We have been brought up to feel proud of the values promoted in a democracy. In fact, most of us would identify our culture as profoundly Christian. Aware of the heritage which we share with the Jewish people, President Eisenhower began a political trend to speak of "the Judaeo-Christian tradition." Because we rightly proclaim spiritual values and the rights of the individual against philosophies grounded in materialism and the absolute supremacy of the state, we may be complacently certain that all is secure in our own way of life. Many of us failed to notice that, in recent decades, legislation and Supreme Court decisions questioned the value of life in the womb and have fostered rights of individuals to the detriment of the family. Our culture may continue to echo biblical principles in theory but do they ring true in application?

We must not be so immersed in our culture that we fail to scrutinize it and the values it promotes. How can we accomplish this? We need to have another framework and set of norms whereby we can evaluate our personal, social and political world. A deep knowledge of the Bible and its teaching will enable us to step back from our own situation so that we can perceive where we are going. Christians must be bi-cultural, part of our own time and nation yet aware of limitations of both that need correction and transformation. People who desire sincerely to do God's will may at times hear the statement transmitted by disciples of Isaiah to their contemporaries: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the Lord" (Is 55:8).

The parable of the workers in the vineyard illustrates how our sense of justice itself may be at odds with God's generosity.

The law of Moses was concerned not only with a just wage but also that it be paid promptly, since the ordinary laborer lived a precarious hand-to-mouth existence. In his story Jesus explained that the vineyard owner guaranteed an adequate payment for work. Somehow he miscalculated the number of workers needed, so returned several times to the place where those wanting work would gather. One can see such people in Israel and many other countries today, eagerly running to the vehicle of potential employers. They are without work but are not "idlers;" nor are those who come later into the explicit service of God to be so judged. Working for God, living a life in obedience to the commandments, is our greatest privilege; the reward is far beyond what anyone has a right to expect. Thus, when the late-comer receives the same as the one who lived longer with knowledge of God's gifts, the latter should rejoice in seeing signs of divine generosity. "The last shall be first" expresses a principle showing that God's ways are elevated high above ours. Frequent prayerful reflection on the Gospel message will enable us to assess the situations in which we must adjust our focus to see things in God's light.