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A Letter to the Associate Editor, Dr. Cavanagh

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A Letter To The Associate Editor,

Dr. Cavanagh:

The times were never more propitious for a close relationship between clergymen, psychiatrists, and psychologists, for in this period of maximal change there is need for the cooperation of all of them.

There is so much to be done, so many things for consideration, and so many people in need of help. It is only by cooperation that we will be able to accomplish what we are dedicated and trained to do. Serious problems face everyone. They have to do with experimentation on humans, euthanasia, contraception, abortion, and establishing the time of death. Now new problems are facing us. The geneticists are becoming more proficient and there is talk of being able to control genetic development. Also the possibilities arise of pre-determining and perhaps influencing the sex of infants. The world is not ready for either of these two "advances." Who would make the decisions?

All of this brings up the fact that there is need for constant communication in depth among these various disciplines. Everyone has to forget their own little, narrow, protected enclave and band together for the good of people in general. There are two expressions which I would like to pass on to you. I do think they are quite meaningful. A statement by the Rev. Charles P. Price, the University Preacher at Harvard:

"When we look at morality from the outside we may decide that a new systematic code is needed. But looked at from the inside the questions of morals entails a question of morale, of authority, and of the true freedom of man in which authority is rooted. For want of freedom, authority will be lost. For want of authority morale will be lost. For want of morale morals will be lost. For want of morals humanity will be lost."

Dr. Dana L. Farnsworth, also of Harvard, the Director of University Health Services, bewails the fact that psychiatrists have contributed to a low estimate of religion and states that frequently psychiatrists who attempt to aid in the development of better cooperation between psychiatrists and religion are said to be "merely advocates of a shallow humanism" — as if being interested in humanity must necessarily make one less interested in religion. He said:

"Psychiatry is concerned with natural phenomena, with unconscious motives and conflicts, and with all that encourages man to make the most of his capabilities. It is vitally interested in character formation, integrity, the dilution of destructive impulses and their transformation into drives which are beneficial to the human race. Religion is concerned with all these matters too, but in a different way."

I think these statements point our directions for the future.

Sincerely,

Francis J. Braceland, M.D.

Dr. Braceland is a past President of the American Psychiatric Association and is now editor of its journal, The American Journal of Psychiatry.