

CARROLL QUIGLEY: SOME ASPECTS OF HIS LAST
TWELVE YEARS
Recollections from Personal Correspondence
by
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In the last 12 years of his life, from 1965 to 1977, Carroll Quigley taught, observed the American scene, and reflected on his basic values in life. He was simultaneously pessimistic and radically optimistic.

Teaching was the core of Quigley's professional life and neither his craving to write nor his discouragement with student reaction of the early seventies diminished his commitment to the classroom. "I am sure that you will enjoy teaching increasingly, as I do," he had written in 1965:

it is the one way we can do a little good in the world. The task is so important, the challenge so great, and the possibilities for improvement and for variation as infinite that it is the most demanding and most difficult of human activities. Even a virtuoso violinist can be made to order easier than a good teacher.¹

Six years later, in his 30th year of teaching at Georgetown, he was less hopeful. "I find teaching harder every year, as the students are less and less receptive. . . ."2 The turmoil of the Vietnam years spilled into the lecture hall and, on at least one occasion, students disrupted a class. He worried about the dilution of academic standards and feared the increasing bureaucratization of education. Such problems, he lamented, "will give you a glimmering of what teaching has become in the tail end of a civilization. . . ."3

Despite these pessimistic readings of student responsiveness, the School of Foreign Service senior classes of 1973 and 1974 both honored him as the outstanding professor of the year. Quigley himself continued throughout this period to address a variety of audiences--bureaucrats, scientists, an Irish-American club, even a Catholic high school religion class. "A rather daring experiment in religious enlightenment," he concluded in describing that encounter with Catholic adolescents.⁴ "I accept. . .outside lectures (and also

. . .I give courses I never gave before in my final year of teaching) because," he explained, "it makes me clarify my own thoughts about what is really important. I often say things in my lectures that I never realized before."⁵

Quigley revised his lectures to the end of his teaching days even in classes which he had taught for over a decade. "I am never satisfied with my courses, so keep working on them."⁶ In his final weeks at Georgetown he broke off just before Thanksgiving and told his students in "The World Since 1914" class that there was little point in discussing the Third World when they knew so little about how their own society works:

So I told them about the USA--really very-hair-raising when it is all laid out in sequence:. . .1. cosmic hierarchy; 2. energy; 3. agriculture; 4. food; 5. health and medical services; 6. education; 7. income flows and the worship of GROWTH; 8. inflation. . .showing how we are violating every aspect of life by turning everything into a ripoff because we. . .have adopted the view that insatiable individualistic greed must run the world.⁷

He feared "that the students will come to feel that all is hopeless, so I must. . .show them how solutions can be found by holistic methods seeking diversity, decentralization, communities. . .etc."⁸ Pleased with the class response, he later recalled:

The students were very excited and my last lecture in which I put the whole picture together was about the best lecture I ever gave. That was 10 Dec. [1975], my last full day of teaching after 41 years.⁹

Unlike his underlying faith in the efficacy of teaching, Quigley found little basis for optimism about the future of American society. A journal asked him in 1975 to write an upbeat article on the country's prospects. "I told the editor that would be difficult, but I would try. I wrote it and they refused to publish it because it was not optimistic enough. . ."¹⁰ In 1976 he wrote congratulating my husband for his decision to give up any idea of leaving state politics

for the federal arena. "It is futile," Quigley concluded, "because it is all so corrupt and the honest ones are so incompetent. I should not say this, as students said it to me for years and I argued with them."¹¹

It was more than the institutionalization of the American political system which concerned him: "We are living in a very dangerous age in which insatiably greedy men are prepared to sacrifice anybody's health and tranquility to satisfy their own insatiable greed for money and power."¹² He feared that these values had virtually destroyed the roots of the Western outlook and had made the creation of a satisfying life in contemporary America a hazardous undertaking. "I am aghast at what. . . selfishness, and the drive for power have done to our society. . . I worry. . . as I find the world so increasingly horrible that I do not see how anything as wonderful as. . . your life can escape."¹³ Less than six months before he died he advised: "The best thing you can do is. . . to keep some enclaves of satisfying decent life."¹⁴ Yet pessimism about American society did not weaken a radical optimism rooted in his essential values: nature, people, and God.

The greatest source of pleasure for Quigley, outside of his scholarly pursuits and his personal life, came from his profound love of nature. In 1968 he bought an 82-acre farm near the small town of Glengary, West Virginia:

in the case of the permanent residents they are the same individuals (or their offspring) that we have known for years. We are chiefly impressed with their distinctive personalities, and intelligence. . . marvelous, so steady, hard-working. . . and unafraid. . . [others] were really neurotic, afraid of everything. . .¹⁵

This sounds like unremarkable country gossip until one realizes that the "permanent residents" to which he refers were several generations of bluebirds which he had been studying.

I once made the mistake of writing to him about my war of attrition with racoons who were foraging in

our trash. Quigley rushed back a reply to prevent me from making any further intrusions in the cosmic hierarchy:

If the racoons make your trash disposal a problem, why not cooperate with nature instead of resisting it? The big solution to our pollution problems is to increase the speed of biodegradation, and what is more natural than for animals to eat? Here I feed a fox every night if our local skunk does not get to it first (I buy chicken backs and necks for 19 cents a pound, but am afraid to give these too frequently for fear they may have injurious hormones injected into the live chickens). . .My fox never leaves a crumb or a mark on the concrete platform where he eats. . . .

Last summer when he had a mate and young ones, we gave him more food and he always took the best. . .away to his family. We used to time him: it took 4 minutes before he was back for something for himself. . .We have found that wild things are so wonderful.¹⁶

He concluded with a revealing description of what to him was a particularly satisfying weekend--writing, observing birds, and on Saturday night "Beethoven's birthday, we sat. . .reading near the fire, while the radio played all nine of HIS symphonies."¹⁷

Thus, discouragement about the course of American life existed simultaneously with happiness derived from those aspects of life he knew to be lasting. "I am fed up with. . .everything but God and nature. . .and human beings (whom I love and pity, as I always did)."¹⁸ His loyalty was to a religious-intellectual outlook: "I feel glad I am a Christian," he wrote, "glad I am . . .without allegiance to any bloc, party, or groups, except to our Judeo-Christian tradition (modified by science and common sense)."¹⁹ Over the years he usually closed such letters with what could serve as a characteristic valedictory: "God keep you all. . .and help you to grow."²⁰

REFERENCES--from personal correspondence between Carroll Quigley and Carmen Grayson, 1965-1976.

1. April 1, 1965. On Quigley's writing and the evolution of this manuscript see Foreword by Harry Hogan.
2. October 6, 1971.
3. Ibid.
4. January 5, 1972.
5. April 13, 1975.
6. January 2, 1975.
7. January 2, 1976; December 4, 1975.
8. December 4, 1975.
9. January 2, 1976.
10. October 8, 1975.
11. June 28, 1976.
12. May 4, 1976.
13. November 29, 1973; May 20, 1974.
14. November 8, 1973.
15. May 24, 1975.
16. January 10, 1973; December 17, 1972.
17. December 17, 1972.
18. November 8, 1973.
19. November 29, 1973.
20. November 7, 1974.