

A CALL FOR A NEW SOCIETY

by John G. Bennett

Sherborne House, November, 1974

Continuous Education is founded on the principle that human beings are capable of unlimited self-perfecting from birth to death and beyond. Self-perfecting is threefold: bodily, mental and spiritual. It gives meaning to our lives as individuals; but there is also a continuous education of the human race to enable us to become truly human – which we are still pretty far from being.

Progress in self-perfecting is not automatic; it requires use of the right methods and the determination to persevere against all discouragement. Very few people can achieve it alone; and, for this reason, ‘Schools of Wisdom’ have existed from time immemorial to provide instruction and to create environments in which all can contribute to the common aim. Although such schools have always been present they are little in evidence except in times of crisis and change, when they extend their activities to enable more people to prepare themselves for the task ahead.

We are now in such a period, and more and more people are looking for methods and guidance to help them with their own problems. They wish to be of service, but can see only too plainly that things have gone wrong for lack of ‘know-how’ and are afraid of doing harm where they mean to do good. Sensible people are acutely aware that something has gone wrong with humanity. Our present society, based on great institutions that control economic resources and political power, tends to strengthen the materialistic and egoistic sides of human nature. We need a new kind of society in which concern for needs of others and of Nature as a whole will predominate over self-interest and fear. One obvious need for such a society is to change our eating habits so that the whole world can be kept from starvation. We need to be more self-sufficient and less dependent upon vast inhuman organizations.

All agree that the world is facing a food crisis, though few admit its true gravity. The artificial stimulation of agriculture by mechanization and synthetic fertilizers is

A Call For A New Society

impoverishing the soil. There is another scarcely noticed effect: work on the land has lost its charm and become intolerably dull. There is in developed and undeveloped countries alike a flight from the land that cannot be reversed unless life on the land is made exciting and rewarding as it was in ancient times. It is useless to call for more effort to produce food and deny the producers a worthwhile life. It is typical of great institutions to ignore the human factor. Unfortunately, even in small societies, concern for the general welfare is paid lip service rather than readiness to make the sacrifices that are needed.

Unfortunately, concern for others can be translated into effective action only by those who are working for their own self-perfecting. Only people who sincerely wish to give rather than take, to overcome their own weaknesses rather than exploit the weaknesses of others, can create a society that will survive in the hard times ahead. The hard times are themselves a necessary factor in self-perfecting. This is one reason why schools of wisdom can become active when mankind is approaching a time of crisis. The task ahead is now very clear. We must demonstrate that communities engaged in food production can provide a really good way of life. This calls for a new kind of society. We believe it can be created from small beginnings.

THE CLAYMONT SOCIETY

The task is to create a community that will be able to maintain itself under difficult economic and social conditions. For this, it must produce the main necessities of life: food, shelter, clothing, recreation, and as the foundation of it all, a shared spiritual quest for self-perfecting. This Manifesto announces the creation of a new society, sponsored by The Institute of Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences, Ltd., of London, England. This was incorporated in 1946 to do research into the factors that make for process and retrogression in human individuals and societies. It has investigated most of the psychological, religious and spiritual movements of our time and also the traditional methods preserved in the Schools of Wisdom. It has, in the course of twenty-eight years, developed and tested a unique system for training men and woman in the way of self-perfecting. This has been applied at the International Academy for Continuous Education established four years ago at Sherborne House in England. The success of the method has led to a demand for similar facilities in the USA.

A Call For A New Society

To meet the demand, the CLAYMONT SOCIETY FOR CONTINUOUS EDUCATION is being incorporated in the State of West Virginia. It is intended to go far beyond the basic training now available to Sherborne. The task will be to create, within three to five years, a fully integrated society, the members of which will be committed to self-perfecting and to service to Nature and their fellow men. To meet the needs of the present crisis in human affairs, the Claymont Society will make itself largely self-sufficient in the provision of food, shelter, clothing and other necessities of life. It will do so partly by intensive food production and partly by the adoption of a system of diet that enables the requirements of the human organism to be satisfied with the minimum consumption of foodstuffs in short supply such as animal protein.

The chief problem in any community is to achieve unity of purpose and harmony among people of different temperament and cultural background. It is above all essential to eliminate the conflicts that come from desire for power of some and the laziness and self indulgence of others. This can be achieved only if there is a right balance between people at different stages of self-perfecting. The society will be composed of four categories of members.

The first category consists of those undergoing training prior to admission as full members. These are called 'Candidates.' The Candidates will receive an all-round training identical with that of the Sherborne Academy and contribute an important work force for the needs of the community.

The second category consists of specialists who are responsible for administration, teaching and for the direction of all operations requiring skill and specialized know-how. They have power to make executive decisions but share in all the duties that do not call for specialized know-how.

The distinguishing mark of the society is the role of the two remaining categories. These are elders whose long experience and high personal qualities enable them to act as guides and counselors to the Candidates and Specialists. They have no executive function but they exercise authority within the community by virtue of their qualities. The first category – called Counsellors – not only advise individuals but are teachers particularly as regards spiritual exercises. Their most important role derives from their own experience of spiritual realities and the resulting ability to give confidence to seekers that the path of self-perfecting is in fact open to them. The fourth category comprises those rare men and

A Call For A New Society

women who have direct spiritual insights and powers that enable them to bring the entire society into contact with the spiritual world. They are called Initiates.

At Claymont Court we can count upon the presence of members of the first three categories. Those of the fourth need not be in permanent residence as their guidance is required only for the general strategic direction of the enterprise. As the society grows, Counsellors and Initiates will appear.



CLAYMONT COURT

The property comprises 481 acres of land and buildings all of which can be used for the purposes of the society. It is situated in the fertile and picturesque Shenandoah Valley, Jefferson County, West Virginia within four miles of Charles Town and twelve miles from Harpers Ferry, one of the historical landmarks of the USA. It is readily accessible from Washington (58 miles), Baltimore (62 miles), Philadelphia, New York and Pittsburgh. Dulles International Airport is within forty minutes by car.

The mansion built in 1838 is a fine example of late colonial architecture with a very large ballroom, six reception rooms, eleven bedrooms and seven bathrooms. The house has two servants' wings capable of housing twenty to thirty people. There are also extensive outbuildings and three tenant houses in good repair.

An even more useful feature of the purposes of the society is a vast barn and auxiliary buildings 420 ft. in length and including an octagonal theatre 107 feet across that

A Call For A New Society

was erected for showing and selling cattle at auction. This is to be converted into living quarters, lecture rooms, studios and theatre for the Candidates' course.

The geological formation is a dense grey limestone that outcrops in many places. The land is partly arable and grazing and partly woodland. With ample labor available it can produce enough food for a community of 1,000 people. There are two springs on the property producing more than five hundred million gallons a year, enough to supply a town of 10,000 inhabitants. The water comes from the limestone formation and is hard, pure and suitable for all purposes. Very extensive vegetable production can be assured by irrigation. Forty-eight acres of land have been zoned and registered for fairly dense occupation to give over a hundred private dwellings.

There are, at present, no planning regulations in Jefferson County and we shall be free to undertake any kind of activity, educational, agricultural or small-scale engineering that is permitted by our own charter.

THE PROJECT

The long-term aim of the Society is to demonstrate that a viable social structure can be founded upon the principle of continuous education. Claymont Court is large enough and has sufficiently varied resources to enable a model society to be established embodying all the main activities required for self-sufficiency and a harmonious and creative life.

The term 'Fourth Way School' was used by Gurdjieff to distinguish the type of society we are creating at Claymont. It has also been called by Bennett in his *Dramatic Universe*, a 'Psychokinetic Society,' to indicate that its members believe in human perfectibility. A school of the Fourth Way exists solely to carry out an allotted task and to train people for this purpose. The task at Claymont is to demonstrate that a predominately food-producing society can enjoy fully satisfying conditions of life in all planes: physical, intellectual and spiritual.

A. Training of Candidates. All who wish to form part of the permanent community will be required to pass through a training period of not less than ten months. The school will use the methods and follow the programme of work at Sherborne House. Teacher-specialists will be available both for general instruction and for private teaching. The Candidates will learn all the basic skills required in a self-sufficient community.

A Call For A New Society

The purpose of the course is to help Candidates in their work of self-perfecting, to give them confidence in the reality of the spiritual world and to train them to become specialists able to teach others and to serve Nature.

It must be emphasized that the course demands hard work, discipline and the readiness to sacrifice comforts and prejudices. Those who apply for admission are carefully examined to test the sincerity of their commitment.

B. Specialists. Thirty to forth specialists will be required for the school and to direct the technical work of the society. They must combine special skill in their chosen line of activity with a thorough grasp of the method and the ability to use it to instruct others. Specialists include:

- i) Administrators and Accountants.
- ii) Teachers in the school. The teaching includes Gurdjieff's sacred dances, psychological and spiritual exercises, the study of man and societies, contact with Nature.
- iii) Practical skills, domestic, horticultural, agricultural, building construction and maintenance.
- iv) Art including music and drama, spinning and weaving, pottery.
- v) Health, diet, natural medicine and physiotherapy.

Specialists must not only be highly trained, but also able to set an example of self-discipline. Their membership in the community implies that they are committed to their own self-perfection.

C. Research and Development. Fourth Way Schools are geared to the needs of the time and place of their activity. They look at the present and future and are ready to put away traditional ideas and methods if they no longer fit the needs of the time.

At this time, we need new forms of society that will be infinitely more flexible than the large institutions that are trying to run the world. The society of the future is likely to be less dependent upon large organizations to produce and distribute the necessities of life and will produce for itself nearly all it consumes. This will create a demand for a new intermediate technology making use of the know-how of modern industry, but applying it to small-scale operations. Dr. Schumacher has put forward plans for intermediate technology suitable for communities of the size that is right for a complete Fourth Way

A Call For A New Society

School and we already have small teams of workers engaged in projects for alternative sources of energy. Other projects include the production of clothing and furniture efficiently without requiring large installations.

The Research and Development projects will include ecological and environmental studies.

The projects to be undertaken will be chosen with regard to their potential value to other communities and to the improvement of village life in developing countries. Candidates with scientific and engineering background will have the opportunity of specializing in a branch of Intermediate Technology that interests them.

D. Families. Claymont should be able, at an early stage, to support a hundred families engaged in food production and intermediate technology. The main line will include:

- I. FOOD PRODUCTION – the aim would be to establish a balanced diet based mainly upon vegetable proteins. There will, therefore, be a relatively small number of cows and sheep. It is hoped to apply new technologies such as Dr. Todd's 'Culture of Algae' to supply a large fish farm. The community will produce and grind its own wheat. Small-scale food production, being labor intensive, will occupy a large proportion of the population.
- II. INTERMEDIATE TECHNOLOGY - devices for using alternative sources of energy. Small-scale production of utensils, furniture, fabrics and paper will be developed partly from our own research and partly from exchange with other societies.
- III. COTTAGE INDUSTRIES - such as spinning, weaving, furniture making and also fine crafts.
- IV. PRINTING AND PUBLISHING – especially the society's own literature.

Members wishing to make their home at Claymont will be required to go through the Basic Course for Candidates and to be approved by the appropriate specialist as regards practical skill. They must be recommended by a Counsellor of the society at Sherborne, Claymont and elsewhere.

A Call For A New Society

Families will include Specialists teaching the Candidates' Course, also workers in research, health and other sections of the society.

Approved families will be allotted one-third to one-half acre sites and will be responsible for building their own houses. It should eventually be possible to take 200-300 families, including those of Specialists.

E. Education of Children. A school for children of all ages will be started as soon as enough families have been established. The aim will be to provide an all-round education and training with a strong bias towards practical skills. This will be a model school based on the principle of human perfectibility and organized to bring out the latent potential of each individual child. The teachers will be qualified specialists. The most important and sadly neglected part of education is the integration of children into the family life by way of service and the acquisition of practical skills.

Children from outside the society will be accepted providing their parents subscribe to the basic concept.

F. Health. The society has no doctrinaire views on health and diet, but the majority of its members favour the use of natural medicine. It is intended to provide specialists in natural diet, homeopathy, acupuncture, and hydrotherapy. The Academy at Sherborne has investigated and strongly supports the principles and methods advocated by Dr. Chandra Sharma, Consultant and Medical Director of the Ramana Health Centre and it is hoped that his guidance will be available to enable Natural Medicine to be developed at Claymont.

We believe that the return to the land will create an increasing demand for natural diet and natural medicine. An immense body of knowledge and experience is available, but there are few qualified practitioners. It is hoped that Claymont will attract members of the medical profession interested in gaining first-hand knowledge of the principles and practice of natural medicine.

G. Spiritual Direction. The society will be open to believers of all religions, who will be free to practice their own form of worship, but adherence to an institutional religion is not obligatory. There will be an overall spiritual direction based on the principle of human perfectibility. The highest standards of living are required for accelerated self-

A Call For A New Society

perfection and all members of the society will be expected to take part in the spiritual disciplines and exercises started in the Candidates' Course and continued throughout life.

The creed of the society is that we men have been brought into existence to serve God through Nature and our fellow men. This is the doctrine of Reciprocal Maintenance according to which everything that exists, including man, serves a cosmic purpose which is one integral whole. As Nature serves man, man must serve Nature; but he cannot see far enough into the future to know what is required of him and must therefore look for guidance to the Higher Spiritual Powers.

Divine Service and the act of worship are the means by which man can be connected with guidance and higher sources of energy. The society will have its own liturgical forms of worship that will supplement, rather than replace, those of the great world religions. It is hoped that the experience that has been gained over the years will contribute to the revitalizing of religion.

INNER AND OUTER RELATIONSHIPS

Membership in the society is open to all without restrictions of age, sex, race, creed or cultural status. The intending member must satisfy the society that he or she is sincerely committed to the task of self-perfection and is prepared to accept the discipline that this entails. Residents at Claymont, apart from the transient visitors, must possess or acquire some special skill enabling them to contribute to the material needs of the society. This skill may apply to any of the activities described in the previous section and, of course, includes manual labor as agricultural or building and domestic workers.

There will be three classes:

- I. Full Resident Members.
2. Full Non-Resident Members who accept all the obligations of membership but live and work outside Claymont.
3. Associate Members who have not been through the Candidates' Course.

Only full members vote at the Annual Meetings.

A Call For A New Society

The fundamental principle of service to Nature requires that the society and all its members should seek to understand the needs of our natural environment and be committed to its conservation.

Service to the human environment is an integral part of the wider concept of service to Nature. It is very hard to be a man, and self-perfecting is an immense undertaking. Man is still immature, yet he imagines himself competent to manage his affairs. We should not regard man as being a privileged being entitled to pollute and destroy the natural environment for his own selfish benefit. Nevertheless, the society will not engage in polemic or propaganda. It will be essentially non-political and seek good relationships with all parties and interests, especially those in the area of its activity.

It is hoped that the project at Claymont will be the forerunner of similar communities in other parts of the USA and also in Europe. It may also be possible to help in the development of a prosperous village life in the developing countries, nearly all of which are threatened by the flight from the land. If mankind is to have a future, it must be based on respect and love for our Mother Nature.

(Sherborne House, November 1974)