

Irrepressible Impulse to Growth¹

Earl Clement Davis

Pittsfield, MA

No Date

Scripture:

Text: "For with the heart man believeth unto
righteousness."²

Not always does it occur to us that we are constantly being forced into activity of some kind by one of the most tremendous forces of the universe, that irrepressible impulse to growth. We forget also that the direction of that impulse is the most difficult, and the most important task of our life.

Growth, growth! Everywhere the truth of the continual activity of this law is forced upon us. We go to some familiar town which for a time we have not seen. All is changed. To be sure some of the old buildings still remain, but there are many new faces on the street; babes have become children, children have become men and women. Even the trees have changed and we cannot find the town, the image of which our mind had retained. Even in the so-called decadent towns with their unoccupied houses and tumbled down sheds are a witness to growth and not to decay. The irrepressible impulse has led men to other towns to the large cities for new fields of activity, and the deserted

¹ This incomplete sermon almost certainly is an early draft of the completed sermon, "Growth and Salvation." The text for both is the same, Romans 10:10, and many of the textual passages are similar.

This manuscript also is unusual in that it is written on both sides of the paper and the last page, page 7, has on its obverse side the first page of a different sermon, "The Richness of the Religious Life." That sermon bears similarities in subject and treatment of subject with a sermon, "Obedience to the Will of God," that was almost certainly given while Earl Davis was the minister of the Unity Church in Pittsfield, MA.

² Romans 10:10

village is a monument to a former activity, the lifeless shell in which man once grew.

We feel the force of this truth more keenly as we visit old friends. They have grown and changed so that it is with difficulty that we can break down the changes of the years and find ourselves upon a common ground again. Only last year I learned of a man, who returned one day to his native town after an absence of 40 years in a foreign country. He had come home to live among his old friends, and take up again the thread of life when he had left it years before. But, alas! that was impossible. The old friends he could not find. The old town was not there. That very night he who had come to realize the dream of his youth left again for the foreign country, sad and disappointed.

These facts suggest to us that while we may forget, that we are living under the influence of a force which we can no more stay than we can stay the flow of a mighty river. We may attempt to dam the river, but no sooner have we done that then we find that the tremendous power which we have for the moment checked has found some new channel by which it may give vent to its terrible onrushing momentum.

What happens if we try to check this irrepressible impulse in man? Somehow it will find its vent. Deprive man of the light of intellectual and moral truth, and his impulse to grow will express itself in the sickly, deathly life of crime, and immorality, just as the bulb in the cellar will begin to grow its long white-ish weak shoots. Deprive him of his freedom, and he will ultimately burst the bounds of restraint with such blind fury, with such tremendous force that all the earth trembles in fear. Recall the terrible scenes of the French Revolution, and see the irrepressible impulse to growth bursting the chains of it slavery, and giving vent to its terrible power in terms of ignorant violence, which only education and training can prevent. The recent uprisings in Russia are of the same character. The most pitiable of all the sad circumstances of these bloody days that of the vodka-crazed crowds rushing wildly through the streets bent on destruction and slaughter. To think that the great proportion of the working men of a city have been so deprived of education and training that in a moment of freedom, they [know] not what to do with their freedom unless it be to turn themselves into beasts and demons. God grant that we may never pass one word of censure upon their

conduct, but that learning the sad lesson from their hopelessness, we may resolve never to be a party to any action which shall deprive men of their natural opportunities to grow, and moreover that we will devote ourselves to the enlightenment of man, so that he may satisfy his impulse to grow by turning his power into channels which may lead him to paths of noble conduct and high living.

It seems to me that here we are at the very rock bed of all our knowledge of man's nature. The impulse to growth, to expand, to express in action the thoughts which pour through his mind, is a force which is as irrepressible as the force which keeps the earth on which we live revolving about the sun, or makes the stone fall down the side of the mountain, or carries the water of a mighty river down the valley towards the sea. Some way, somehow man must grow and will grow.

But as we meet men day-by-day, and we learn by one means and another what men are doing, how they live their lives, to what depths of degradation they sometimes fall, we are almost stunned by the results which this impulse to grow has produced when through ignorance or lack of motive it has found its expression in following the blind instincts of man the animal. We meet a drunkard on the street, pass him by as a worthless wretch, little thinking that the attempt to satisfy in his ignorance those same desires of social intercourse which have been the means of leading us into the highest and most healthy social conditions, have dragged him down to the depths of degradation. When we see a social outcast, and spurn them with our supercilious contempt, we forget that the hours of our lives which have been spent in reading inspiring books, and thinking our lofty thoughts, have in the life of the outcast been groveling on the low plain of experience towards which the unfed mind must naturally turn. Every thought must in some way express itself either in bodily action or by its subtle influence on our souls. If our thoughts are high thoughts, our conduct is likely to be high. If our thoughts are low thoughts the conduct is low. The great essential for a man is that he shall have a consuming purpose.