

The Wisdom of Jane Goodall - Contributed by Bill Grace

A Biographical Sketch

Jane Goodall spent her early formative years in the safety of a loving family yet in the midst of the London Blitz. As a child her love for God and nature were deeply intertwined. As a young adult, she had the life changing opportunity to work with Louis Leakey in his famous archeological work in Africa. Leakey spotted a passion and freshness in her and gave her an assignment that would forever frame her life. She grew into adulthood in the forests of Gombe, observing chimpanzees with great compassion and intimacy. In return, these unique creatures gave her unique perspectives into humans, stewardship and hope.

Humans: Half Sinner Half Saint

"It was obvious too, that some male chimpanzees, particularly the younger ones, found community conflict absolutely thrilling..." The biggest crowds at motor races gather at the dangerous corners; the popular jumps for the crowds at steeplechases are those known to fell the greatest number of horses. Miles-long traffic jams form when there has been a particularly bad accident -partly because everyone slows down to look. Public hangings were among the most popular of events in medieval England. Just today as I am writing this (August 1997) I read in the newspaper how ten thousand people gathered in Teheran for the execution of a convicted rapist. They watched as he was lifted by a crane, a noose around his neck high into the air above them. Gradually he kicked and jerked less vigorously as the air was choked out of him.

"Acts of self sacrifice in the hell of death camps were frequent. There was a moving incident that took place at Auschwitz when a Pole, facing a death sentence, sobbed and begged that his life might be spared so that he could stay with his two children. At this moment the great priest, Saint Maximillian Kolbe stepped forward and offered his life instead. After surviving two weeks in the starvation bunker, Kolbe was then murdered by the Nazis but the story lived on, serving as an inspiration to the starving prisoners: a beacon of hope and love had been lit in the dark confines of the concentration camp."

"So here we are, the human ape, half sinner half saint, with two opposing tendencies inherited from our ancient past pulling us now towards violence, now towards compassion and love. Are we, forever, to be torn in two different directions, cruel in one instance, kind in the next? Or do we have the ability to control these tendencies, choosing the direction we wish to go?"

"It is these undeniable qualities of human love and compassion and self-sacrifice that give me hope for the future."

Science and God

"How sad that so many people seem to think that science and religion are mutually exclusive."

"...Yet there are other windows [other than scientific observation] through which we can look out into the world around us, windows through which the mystics and the holy men of the East, and the founders of the great world religions, have gazed as they searched for meaning and purpose of our life on earth, not only in the wondrous beauty of the world, but also in its darkness and ugliness. And those Masters contemplated the truths that they saw, not with their minds only but with their hearts and souls too."

Lost in awe at the beauty around me, I must have slipped into a state of heightened awareness. It is hard - impossible, really - to put into words the moment of truth that suddenly came upon me then. Even the mystics are unable to describe their brief flashes of spiritual ecstasy. It seemed to me, as struggled afterward to recall the experience, that self was utterly absent: I and the chimpanzees, the earth and trees and air seemed to merge, to become one with the spirit power of life itself. The air was filled with a feathered symphony the evensong of birds. I heard new frequencies in their music and also in the singing insects' voices - notes so high and sweet I was amazed."

"I met Henri Landwirth... In his autobiography, *Gift of Life*, he describes those years [in a German concentration camp as a teenager] during which "he saw heard and experienced man's inhumanity to man firsthand." And somehow he survived... In his book Henri writes that whilst at the death camps he lost touch with his spiritual side, 'abandoning God, as I felt abandoned.' How did he recover his faith in God? How has he reconciled the unspeakable cruelties of the death camps and the suffering of innocent children... with the existence of a just God, a caring God of love? Henri writes: 'Where does a heart truly broken, a spirit hopelessly abandoned, find hope? What exists within a human being that allows for survival amidst such devastation? It must be God... Who else could it be'"

Hope for the Future

"We either agree with Macbeth that life is nothing more than a "tale told by an idiot' a purposeless emergence of life forms including the clever, greedy selfish and unfortunately destructive species we call *Homo sapiens* - the evolutionary goof. Or we believe that, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put it, 'There is something afoot in the universe that looks like gestation and birth. In other words a plan a purpose to it all."

"We are moving toward the ultimate destiny of our species - a state of compassion and love. Yes, I do have hope. I do believe we can look forward to a world in which our great-grandchildren and their children after them can live in peace. A world in which there still will be trees and chimpanzees swinging through them and blue sky

and birds singing. And the drum beats of indigenous peoples reminding us powerfully of our link to Mother Earth and the Great Spirit - the God we worship."

"But, as I have stated repeatedly, we don't have much time. The planet's resources are running out. And so if we truly care about the future of our planet we must stop leaving it to "them" out there to solve all the problems. It is up to us to save the planet for tomorrow: its up to you and me."