

NORMAN LEAR

December 7, 1987

Dear Mr. Kohl:

Thank you for your invitation to join the Woodland Historical Document Collection.

At 65, I'm not sure that my "spiritual journey" has yet begun. It seems to me that I have spent most of my life packing for the trip. At 650 years old, I might still think myself in the process of packing.

The big question, I suppose, is "What am I packing?" Well, the life and words of Jesus, of course. Not Jesus as he has been interpreted, but the Jesus we know from his own words and by example.

I wrap carefully and take with me, too, the memories, taste, touch, and feelings for and from that handful of individuals over the years who managed to live and love in a small C christian way, so purely and uncomplicatedly, whatever their religion.

Finally, I take with me every great piece of religious writing I have the strength to carry, but especially the words of George Bernard Shaw and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Accompanying me, too, on the eternal journey to spiritual understanding, would be my own half-baked gleanings from what I have experienced, seen and read. Summing them up, I believe, first and foremost, that nothing in our world has or will occur as an accident of nature. Everything has meaning. At the least, something has willed all that was, all that is, all that will come. If there was nothing before that will, then that will is God. And everything that exists is, at the time it exists, a sliver of that same will, that God. Shaw believed that man provides the hands and mind to implement that will. To Shaw, the hands and mind of man now work in collaboration with God (that will) to complete the task of perfection — perfection in the natural world and perfection of man.

I like that. It appeals to my sense of reason. Science tells us everything started with the big bang. If science is correct, we know that all those billion of years ago, the natural universe (or worlds of universes) was naught but chaos, all vapors, gases and planetary collisions. Today, science reports of an incredible, breathtaking order in the universe and among the universes. Quite an improvement.

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Similarly, man began as some kind of amoeba and followed the evolutionary pattern from sea creature to reptile; to land creature on four legs to land creature on two legs; from the paleolithic age to the neanderthal age (in whatever order came first, I do not know) through all the other ages my limited background in science will not allow me to detail, until we arrive at man the way he is today. Man, with the mind and the hands to assist the original and divine will in the achievement of universe perfection. Quite an improvement also.

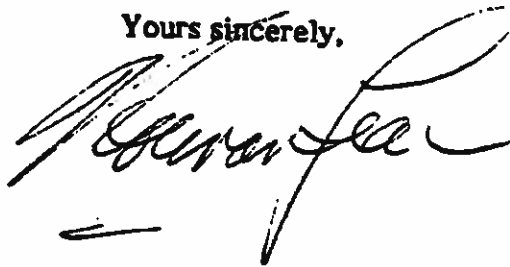
Ah, but if one accepts the above, the best is yet to come. Because granting how far man and his natural world have come along the evolutionary path — and granting that he is only what — 30%, 50%, 62% along the way? — how dare he not believe that it gets better all the time and that man and his world will not ultimately reach perfection?

It is all there for us. Someone once suggested that there are spiritual currents on which man's heart may soar just as birds fly on currents of air. The thoughts I have tried to express above cause my heart to lift whenever I care to think of them, and if I hold those thoughts long enough, I can feel my arms stretching out symbolically and my spirit begin to soar on those spiritual currents. Emerson said that we lie in the lap of an immense intelligence; that all truth, beauty and justice is in a sense part of the natural world. Man does not own it; his soul merely allows passage to its beams. I believe all of that, too. More spiritual currents on which to soar.

One more thought: Victor Hugo said that "to love another person is to see the face of God." That may be the straightest line of all to ultimate spiritual growth. But when you think of how Jesus loved, it may also be the most daunting route of all.

Lucky there wasn't a window open in my study when I began to set down these thoughts or I might have flown out of the room before telling you how much I've enjoyed answering your query.

Yours sincerely,



NL/caa

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