

Ferdie J. Deering

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Progress Measured by Materialism

IF you were given your choice of a time to be alive, which would you select — the past, the present, or the future?

Would you like to go back to conditions as they were in the year of your birth? For many of us that would mean giving up the majority of the physical comforts and conveniences that we now enjoy. We might not like that. Make a list and see.

Awhile back a visiting lecturer at the University of Oklahoma asked a philosophy class whether they believed there has been any "net progress in human history as a whole." He excluded technical progress from consideration. The students answered "No!" That could only mean mankind is getting no better.

Later this lecturer, Huston Smith, former professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, participated in a discussion that was reported in a publication of the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities under the heading "Religion and a

Global Society." Others taking part were Tom Boyd, OU professor of philosophy, and Father David Monahan, editor of *Sooner Catholic*.

In their efforts to define religion, Smith observed that it would "include not only what have been known as the great historical religions — Christianity, Islam and the like; but you also definitely would include communism, capitalism, maybe atheism if someone really organized his life around an active belief in the non-existent God." Then he added "but by the same token you might include horse racing if that was what gave life its meaning for some creature."

If it is true that our religion is whatever we worship, the students might be correct in their conclusion that mankind isn't making much, if any, progress.

On his recent visit to Switzerland, Pope John Paul II warned of worldwide growth of materialism and said that secularization threatens to make religious faith irrelevant. Probably few leaders of other relig-

ious bodies would disagree.

Most of the standards by which we measure progress are based on material values. This includes politics since a major function of government is to collect money from the public and spend it on services or hand it out to other citizens.

In a recent issue, *U.S. News & World Report* reported a survey asking "Is America Better Off These Days?" Only 31 percent of the respondents said America is changing for the better. Economic pressures headed the list of causes of changes, followed by shifts in values. Technology, wars, and changes in the family lagged substantially behind. Religion wasn't listed.

The philosophy of materialism may be summed up in the Ecclesiastical expression: "a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink, and to be merry." It is being promoted in just about every way possible as the ideal, crowding aspirations for higher values out of our lives.