

Impressum

James Hilton: The Virtue of Moderation (Mk1.1)

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Source: James Hilton (1933): "Lost Horizons" (a novel)

Quotes selected by Klaus Bung, 2024

Additional notes by Klaus Bung

Editorial introduction

In 1933, James Hilton described an imaginary community of villagers in a remote country, ruled by an order of monks, who by nature did not believe in any form of excess. The rulers were moderately strict, their subjects moderately obedient, the men moderately lecherous, and the women moderately chaste. If somebody is stupid, then it is good if he is only moderately diligent or even lazy, because that way his stupidity will do less harm. Nobody thought there was any point in publicising or enforcing political correctness. Politically they were "moderately correct", and often "moderately incorrect". This seemed to them **a recipe for happiness**. The pages that follow contain nothing but verbatim quotes from Hilton's novel about the principle of moderation - and a non-Hilton modern application: "Thy will be done (in moderation, of course)."

James Hilton: The virtue of moderation

QUOTES FROM HIS NOVEL "LOST HORIZON" (1933)

1. Chang answered rather slowly and in scarcely more than a whisper: "If I were to put it into a very few words, my dear sir, I should say that our prevalent belief is in moderation. We inculcate the virtue of avoiding excess of all kinds - even including, if you will pardon the paradox, excess of virtue itself. In the valley which you have seen, and in which there are several thousand inhabitants living under the control of our order, we have found that the principle makes for a considerable degree of happiness. We rule with moderate strictness, and in return we are satisfied with moderate obedience. And I think I can claim that our people are moderately sober, moderately chaste, and moderately honest."
2. ... our community has various faiths and usages, but we are most of us moderately heretical about them.
3. There were also, it appeared, a Taoist and a Confucian temple further along the valley. "The jewel has facets," said the Chinese, "and it is possible that many religions are moderately true."

"I agree with that," said Barnard heartily. "I never did believe in sectarian jealousies. Chang, you're a philosopher, I must remember that remark of yours. 'Many religions are moderately true.' You fellows up on the mountain must be a lot of wise guys to have thought that out. You're right, too, I'm dead certain of it."

"But we," responded Chang dreamily, "are only moderately certain."
4. Chang, I believe, explained to you our principle of moderation, and one of the things in which we are always moderate is activity. I myself, for instance, have been able to learn ten languages; the ten might have been twenty had I worked immoderately. But I did not. And it is the same in other directions; you will find us neither profligate nor ascetic. Until we reach an age when care is advisable, we gladly accept the pleasures of the table, while - for the benefit of our younger colleagues - the women of the valley have happily applied the principle of moderation to their own chastity.
5. ... even the fixed rules of our community are only moderately fixed.

6. I'm strongly **opposed** to that idea of **moderation** that we hear so much about. You can call it broad-mindedness if you like, but in my opinion it leads to the worst kind of laxity. The whole trouble with the people here is their so-called broad-mindedness, and I intend to fight it with all my powers."
7. ... it is our custom at Shangri-La to be **moderately truthful**, and I can assure you that my statements about the porters were almost correct.
8. "You find it easy to separate the two? Is it possible that you are **falling in love** with Lo-Tsen?"

Conway was somewhat taken aback, though he hoped he did not show it. "What makes you ask that?"

"Because, my dear sir, it would be quite suitable if you were to do so - always, of course, **in moderation**. Lo-Tsen would not respond with any degree of passion - that is more than you could expect - but the experience would be very delightful, I assure you. And I speak with some authority, for I was in love with her myself when I was much younger."

"Were you indeed? And did she respond then?"

"Only by the most charming appreciation of the compliment I paid her, and by a friendship which has grown more precious with the years."

The following precept is **not** by James Hilton:

I pray every Sunday: "Thy will be done
(in moderation, of course)".
God is satisfied with that:
He has a sense of humour, aka "grace and mercy".

In the German chorale "Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit" (used in Bach's St Matthew Passion), we find the line "und züchtigt mit Maßen" (he punishes with moderation).

<p>Was mein Gott will, gescheh allzeit, sein Will, der ist der beste. Zu helfen dem er ist bereit, der an ihn glaubet feste. Er hilft aus Not, der treue Gott, und züchtigt mit Maßen Wer Gott vertraut, fest auf ihn baut, den will er nicht verlassen.</p>	<p>I should always do what my God wishes, what he wills is best for me. He is ready to help those who firmly believe in him. He is sure to rescue us when we are in trouble, and when he punishes, he punishes with moderation. If you trust in God, and firmly rely on him, he will not let you down.</p>
	English prose translation by Klaus Bung

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