

II

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND RELIGIOUS UNITY

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THE PROCESS OF SECULARIZATION has received so much theological attention within the framework of the cultural revolution which has overtaken all of us that we sometimes slight a related but separate process: the universalization of culture.

The technological and transportation revolution that has made "thy neighbor" a universal concept; the industrialization and new mobility that have led to extraordinary interchange of population; the mixing in the urban technopolis — all are multiplied a thousand fold in their impact by vicarious, but real, total encounter with others through communication media. "Nothing human is alien to me" is not a humanistic slogan in the age of the TV documentary or the breakdown of *a priori* restraints on content in literature and film. Who could imagine twenty years ago that the world of homosexual queens of *Last Exit to Brooklyn* or the world of sado-masochism of *The Story of O* would be part of the experience of middle class America, or that *The Other America* would begin to impinge strongly on the Affluent Society? Who could imagine the growing validity of the masses of colored men for the West in light of conditions fifty years ago?

I

THIS UNIVERSALIZATION of culture is not a mere product of technological forces. It is an expansion of human consciousness. In Biblical terms, it constitutes an encounter and recognition of the "image of God" found in all men. This encounter leads to the demand that the image of God be freed and restored where it has been enslaved or defaced. The appropriation and internali-

zation of the sacredness and reality of the other forces a new theological and human encounter with him. The extraordinary power in this encounter can be negatively illustrated in the concentration camp experience and positively illustrated in the current war situation. Negatively in the camps, the procedures had to systematically dehumanize and degrade the inmates for only then could the guards function. Otherwise, the charisma of the "image of God" destroyed their capacity to carry out extermination. As it was, despite the dehumanizing procedures, there were enough encounters with the underlying humanity of prisoners to cause perpetual drunkenness, continual breakdowns and forced leaves for the guards. The positive reflection lies in the fact that twenty-five years ago American wars were fought against "Japs" and such. In Korea, Chinese were "chinks" who justly died in droves as people cheered the newsreels. Today the agony of a napalm-seared Vietnamese child is part of the psychic experience of most Americans, although some succeed in repressing it. This extension of human consciousness reflects itself in the growing awareness of the uniqueness and diversity of other men and other societies. Thus, today we see the growing recognition among Americans of differences among Communists or of the common concerns we share with Russia.

The process of recognition seems fair to accelerate. It unites economic and social forces with idealism, emotion, and identity into a growing awareness of the family of man and an empathetic, existential sharing of the validity and particularity of other men. Appeals combining the practical and idealistic have always tended to be irresistible.

Love conquers all, says an old Jewish proverb, but love with noodles is even better. Yet it is this appropriation of the other and his value commitments that has shattered passive particular cultures that depended on apathy or hostility to the outside. It is this same encounter that has forced us to meet each other, not in neat doctrinal categories that evade each other's reality, but in dialogic relationship that seems to open us to each other in ways whose ultimate ends we cannot yet divine.¹ It is this new reality which impelled the ecumenical movement.

IN THIS NEW situation, there is little question that what is dead or dying is what the Jewish tradition calls the "lo lishmah" of religion — the worship of God that is rooted in ulterior motives and *quid pro quo* — the secondary gains and psychic rewards of in-group religious commitment. The permeability and interaction of contemporary cultural settings are rapidly destroying the three most powerful ancillary supports of the religious community of the previous era.

The *first* is the sense of absolute — or at least intrinsic — separateness of the faithful and the Gentile. (In this context, faithful means any in-group and Gentile means any other group which is seen as the outsider.) The sense of intrinsic apartness of the faithful served in history as an automatic validator of the way of life of the community. It now yields to new human encounter which shows that the other is fully human and makes us experience his moral and/or religious integrity.

Secondly, the caricature of Gentile thought made possible by the restriction of

information or encounter with him is shaken by contact with the multifaceted reality of the other. For Jews, the caricature of Gentile thought focused on the affirmation that Christianity denies this world. This is a partial truth — but now a dying one — that as fiercely underlies classical Reform thought despite its brotherhood orientation as much as it underlies the most reactionary of Orthodox positions. Or there is the caricature of Christianity as simple irrationalism — that is so vulnerable when exposed to the power of the Crucifixion image (which so repeatedly appears in American Jewish "secular" writers) or to the theology of incarnation which a host of Christians seeking to serve now explore and apply in daily life.

For the Christian, I suspect that the role of caricature of the Gentile (i.e. the Jew) is found in the Law-Gospel antinomy with its neat simplification of law (Halacha) as inherited convention, as routine and predetermined response contrasted with the Gospel as freedom and the Holy Spirit. Such a view, which as above has kernels of real people to base itself on, manages to miss the entire spirit and reality of the Halachic process in the hands of its sensitive practitioners. They, however, in the past never came into dialogue with the Christian and, therefore, the image persisted. Similarly, the neat dichotomies of the God of Wrath of the Old and the God of Love of the New, the legalism and petrification of the Rabbinic Judaism versus the faith and love of Paulinian Christianity, the henotheism and particularism of Judaism and the universalism of Christianity, persist although they may have been softened. Aspects of these images underlie even the profoundly secular style of a Harvey Cox, let alone theological education not yet affected by the ecumenical revolution. (Indeed, in the case of Cox it seems somewhat more unforgivable in light of his call to a cosmopolitan culture.) Yet these views are inevitably vulnerable to the reality of face-to-face encounter with the living synagogue or Jew.

¹From this point of view, meeting in formal theological dialogue means no more — and perhaps less — than meeting in secular situations. Working, going to school, social activity together, have been as vital a factor as any formal religious confrontations. The literary and social reform activity of secular Jews has been one of the most powerful causes of the revision in American Christian attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. Who can deny that Selma and Washington have brought religious men together as much as Geneva and Cambridge? The reality of the other forces me to take his religious commitments more seriously too. The meaning of witness has never been so clear and so central.

The *third* secondary support is, of course, the socially closed inner circle of one's own culture or faith. Time was when the group could enfold the individual for most of his primary relationships and many of the secondary relationships throughout his life cycle. This meant that the group had the power of social sanctions, rewards for conformity and powerful conditioning reflexes which fixed the loyalty and response of the individual. Today the openness of society — and the secular university in particular — orients the individual toward the universal group. Thus it weakens, or makes only conditionally valid, the group indoctrination of most men.

Perhaps I should add here the death of a *fourth* ancillary support: the popular orientation to God as the supplier of daily fishes and loaves. The God who supplies the rains in their season when men obey is supplanted by the rainmaker or water department for the routine believer. I am reminded of the inspired theological comment in the *New Yorker* cartoon of the 1950's when New York City had its last major drought and a rainmaker was brought in to seed the clouds. The cartoon shows a ministerial meeting sitting in a board room watching the rain fall outside. One minister turns to another and says: "Is it our rain or theirs?" One might guess that the decline in piety today reflects not a drop in the core of committed but in those who depended — perhaps unconsciously — on the undermined supports.

THE REMOVAL of the ethnocentric supports of religion can be seen as an opportunity to end idolatry. Luther's comment on the first two commandments is found in traditional Jewish commentary too: "Thou shalt have no ultimate reliance on anything else but God, for his own sake." The dying of these secondary supports poses the option and agony for religious men, to practice a religion that has no reliance other than on God and the selfless love of God itself. There is a realistic impelling force here as well. What is rapidly declining even in America is the psychic gain of assumed su-

periority of the religious person. The former apologetic stance of the secularist man is now transformed to identification with the swinging, in-group looking down upon those rooted in earlier cultures. In this context the ecumenical movement represents the response of those who whatever their inner hesitations and fears are willing to build a faith on the Archemedian point of ultimate trust in God alone rather than on the comfort of sheltered superiority and fixed definitions that ward off anxiety by defining away the reality of the other. It is perhaps too ironic a note that so radical an experiment as ultimate trust in God alone is gingerly being tried almost 2,000 years after the birth of Christianity and almost 3,200 years after the Covenant of Sinai.

II

WE NEED NEW IMAGES to express and guide our new combination of commitment and full encounter with the other. To enter this era is to enter into, to borrow a metaphor, the Einsteinian era of theology. In the Einsteinian universe, it is recognized that there is no center in the world of the Infinite. Yet the claim of centrality is paradoxically more legitimate for the earth — if we recognize that we speak from the perspective of the observer. I would suggest that the claim of central uniqueness can and should be made in our time by faith communities, but after the awareness that in the Infinite there can be no absolute center located in a fixed geographic or temporal setting. And such claims can only be made in full awareness of the actual scope and size of the universe of the other. Nor if faith is deep should this weaken the claim of faith but rather temper it with the agnosticism in which the faithful recognizes that God ultimately is bound only by His voluntary giving of Himself. As in the Einsteinian universe gravity is not some objectified force but is a track, a curvature of space in the vicinity of matter, so will religious institutions be seen not as timeless essences but as realities which curve the

track of orientation to God around their locus. In this universe every material body and every shift of position affects the curvature of space in the vicinity and presence of all the other bodies. So it becomes with religious institutions. In this universe, there is no simple up or down but only basic orientations to the plane of the observer and the object. Surely some such orientation to God is necessary if we are to avoid indifferentism on the one hand and attempts to fix God in our own image and bind His hands totally to our understanding on the other. The rewards of definitional certitude and *a priori* promises may be yielded, but the role of the servant of God — the highest accolade of the Pentateuch — the selfless servant of God may more readily be played.²

III

FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION this acceptance spells a new willingness not only to be open to the world, but systematic shunning of the easy victories of internal apologetics. It means the painful redoing of textbooks and scholarship to eliminate the caricatures of the other. It means a fixed policy of deepening love of one's own faith rather than the easy highlights of contrast with the straw man of the other. It inevitably focuses on the poles of freedom and voluntarism within the scope of the authority that is in the system; a greater focus on rationality and understanding — an agnosticism toward the use of faith or submission in pedagogy. Faith should be reserved as the ultimate instrument of the religious life. It was not meant to be a prop for the limitations of our pedagogues or their understanding of their traditions. It will mean greater complexity in presentation and a recovery of the polar tensions of religious experience. ("To be a religious man in our time," said Rabbi Israel Salanter, "one

must have every possible human quality and its opposite.") It means the incorporation of doubt into the religious experience. It involves teaching laymen who have been simply loyal that a greater loyalty is to be critical even as they are faithful. It involves continual self-criticism and justification of the world. It implies a free community — one based on mature participation rather than a crippling of one's capacity to leave the community or to relate to the other communities. It involves a kind of riding the theological bicycle with "Look, Ma! No hands" — a step impossible to fake without the profoundest faith that nothing really holds us up but the everlasting arms. Many a current human support will undoubtedly crumble in this process.

ALTHOUGH, on every side, we see heartening strides in these directions, the full impact on religious thinking has not yet been felt. This is true because the Church and other religious are only now entering into their Diaspora in the new modern culture. It is interesting that the Kabbala speaks of God going into Diaspora by his voluntary self-limitation when He makes His Infinite Presence available on earth to finite men. In this sense going into Exile is *imitatio Dei* in its highest form. Here is one moment in my paper when I will allow myself to speak typologically — to give a Jewish view, if you will. I feel that in the area of Exile, the Jew can speak as a veteran with rights of seniority. He has been in Exile for a longer time and perhaps is a bit more adjusted to it. (Although I must confess that the Jewish Diaspora started in the world in which Christianity was at home, in this new Diaspora of the modern world, devout Christians are ahead, I believe, of devout Jews in coming to grips. They have thus far proven somewhat better able to enter it without yielding the precious good news which the servants of God bring than has the Jewish community.) The key to successful Exile existence is twofold: *first*, to come to appreciate that one can never speak ethno- or religio-centrally without soon feeling the jarring en-

²Many are skeptical whether the present faithful can play or survive such a role. But our doubts should be tempered by the reality that one reason religions flourish in their infancy is that believers often can not rely on the rewards of power, status and establishment.

counter with a medium of culture that is centered around the other. This medium frequently takes on different axioms as self-evident and in so doing tests or ignores mine. In time, it generates a less self-centered style of speaking. It also generates a skepticism toward victory and power which enables one to use them without being corrupted by their persuasiveness.

The *second* dimension of Exile is to be fully in the world yet not totally of it. It is not a matter of fear of the world or hostility to it. Rather it is the recognition that there is an ultimate loneliness to the man of faith for he relates to God uniquely. Therefore, he will have a different angle of vision on the world as well. This is the concept of creative disaffiliation toward the world, if you will, which must operate side by side with the total involvement in it. This is the polar existence of the believer just as God's immanence never belies His transcendence. Otherwise, the covenantal role dissolves into the world, impoverishing the world as well as itself. That is why, with all due respect to that great instant of eternity, I think that Selma is only one moment of ecumenical insight and not necessarily the greatest. (One reason for my belief is the fact that SNCC'rs tell me that the ministers and rabbis came late, yet stood up front for the pictures.) Selma was universally supported. The identification with the world, as important as it is, should not give us quite that much of a thrill. If rabbis, priests and ministers were beaten together on the South Side of Chicago as was the Sister, I would be more convinced of the ultimate nature of the moment. In any event the man of faith should not see the world only through the eyes of secular concerns. True, he should avoid his old assumptions of automatic uniqueness and superiority of view. But neither should he surrender his unique view where it is different. He may be "radical" rather than "liberal" and at other times "conservative." This would suggest that we need a creative ecumenical dialogue with the religious conservatives as well. Obviously, the present

mood makes John Courtney Murray look better than a Cardinal Ottaviani and a Visser t'Hooft better than a McIntyre, be he Carl or Cardinal. But there is a need for distance as well as closeness to the world. And here the very rigidity and estrangement of the fundamentalist — if ecumenically heard — may save from premature overcommitment to the rules of the new game. After all, there has been a historical shift from Biblical to the classical world view and now to the modern. This may not be the last shift. From a Jewish perspective, I must say that this is my major reservation about Christian ecumenicism — that Christians, less used to the long and lonely nights of Diaspora, should not yield too much and too easily to the claims of the secularist, or of the non-Christian religions. Humility is good and perhaps penance is needed for some of the arrogance of the days of power. But honest dialogue with the secularist and the non-Christian should allow for frank criticism of his claims as a competing interest in a truly universal world in which the other is a leading but not exclusive factor. And the claims of fundamentalists of whatever faith should not embarrass believers any more than the claims of special interest groups embarrass the general community.

IV

HAVING PRESUMPTUOUSLY given advice to others to be true to themselves, let me now make an outrageous reversal. Returning to the image of a faith community built on the love of God alone, having renounced both force and psychic and secondary mechanisms of evoking loyalty, let me draw one more conclusion. It is obvious that such a religious way could well lead to the reduction of many definitions, institutions, or seemingly fixed alternatives. These might well disappear between the dissolving action of modernity and the white heat of faith. Undoubtedly too the sense of common crisis and concern lest the secularist sweep all away may lead to greater unity of all formally religious groups. As

a result institutions not justified by ultimate standards may yet wither and be overcome to the greater glory of God.

But another option must be weighed too. That after all the openness and interplay and loving dialogue, we shall find irreducible uniqueness in different faith communities. In part the excitement of ecumenical discovery and exploration and the unknown quality of the future obscures the issues raised by this possibility. But it will be hard to go back and the serious encounter with each other's faith will have been made even if unity does not follow. It may well be that Catholic-Protestant differences may be overcome although some may raise doubts on that score, in view of what we know of certain theological issues and, more crucially, of the laws of human and institutional behavior. But from the classic Jewish viewpoint — others can speak for other non-Christian religions — this irreducibility must certainly be anticipated and affirmed. Nor should the relative weakness of the general Jewish community's faith commitment lead to an underestimation of the core of holy community which survives even if less known to the secular world. When this period of the romance of the ecumenical period is outgrown — when the sheer thrill of being together in prayer or meeting in love passes, and pass it must as the movement matures — when the gargoyles and unnecessary elements have been lopped off all around, what shall we do with the encounter that will follow? Here one may speak only with the greatest of diffidence. I do not presume to prescribe to members of another unique faith community — unique even as it shares so much. Indeed, one can only speak as one values the uniqueness of the Christian covenant. The fact is that having undertaken dialogue, we may have to wrench ourselves more drastically than anticipated without necessarily achieving the victories of unity hoped for.

I BELIEVE that Christians will have to face up to the ongoing validity of the covenant of Abraham and Moses in a far more

sweeping manner than Vatican II or even the World Council of Churches has yet done.³ It is more than a matter of eliminating the unintentional asymmetry toward Christianity of some of our public conversation, or the elimination of unself-conscious Christian ground or terminology as grounds for dialogue. These corrections, highly visible in the R.E.A. convention, are deeply appreciated. But the central issue is the fundamental recognition — *de facto* and/or *de jure* — of the ongoing validity of the original covenant for Abraham's seed, i.e. Jewry. I appreciate the enormity of the point, for it seems to touch the heart of Paul's conception of the relationship of the two covenants (at least as this amateur understands it) and even touches the mediating role of Jesus for men — certainly for non-Christian men. For men of little faith such a revision is no problem. But I speak now in full deference to men of deepest faith — otherwise one could not speak at all. All one can do is point at the issue, and wait for the honesty of men and the action of the Holy Spirit in men to grapple with the problem. But the validity of the universal encounter, as well as the mixed and bloody record of our past, inexorably raise the issue to a new power. And I do not think we will get out of this dialogue with easy solutions, be it a return to tolerance born of indifference, or the conversion of the Jews.

Lest you feel that such a confrontation is a uniquely Christian problem, let it be added that the Jew who believes that his tradition incorporates the Word of God to man faces an equally wrenching problem: It is the need to recapture the vision of Genesis and come to grips with the differential status of Jew and non-Jew in Halacha (the Law) while he is yet faithful to Halacha as the address of God to him. Here,

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³(I am a member of a faith community of Orthodox Judaism whose leadership has declined to engage in theological dialogue thus far — in part because it believes there cannot be dialogue when the basic validity of one of the partners is not fully recognized.)

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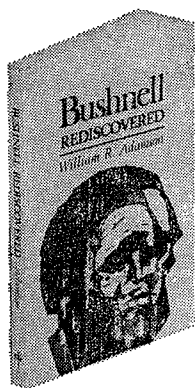
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if and when the particularist defenses thrown up by the embattled Ghetto are transcended — and this process itself has bled away much of the covenantal commitment of the Jewish community — only then

does the central issue emerge for Jews to face.⁴

These theological encounters do not presuppose any lessening of our common activity to make the world livable for man in dignity and humanity. Rather I suspect that these common tasks will deepen our mutual love and appreciation and evoke theological response. The resources and authority to do this can only come from yet untapped wells of desire to serve God alone. Perhaps the spirit that should animate both our faith communities was summed up by the late Chief Rabbi of Israel, Abraham Isaac Kook: "Every statement or law in the authentic tradition which appears to build on the secondary status or hatred of the other, should be embraced — as another jutting point which we climb over as we ascend the mountain of the Lord." Perhaps if we develop such a humility and openness, there may be a higher unity of all men in God's image, in God's own time and before God. In an age when men can do so much it is perhaps necessary to recognize that some healing can come only from Him.

⁴It is perhaps unnecessary to add that there is no intention here of suggesting a quid pro quo — which I would find offensive to the integrity of both faith communities. Rather I am pointing to the kind of fundamental wrestling with our conscience and tradition that grows from genuine contact with each other — be it in theological or non-theological encounter. The claim of the other pursues me when I am alone with myself or my God.



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