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WHAT WE MIGHT DO TOGETHER
A Vision for Ecumenical Religious Education

An Address By

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In a recent conversation with two of my ablest students I found that they had made what was for them a surprising discovery. They had discovered that persons who start with very different theological presuppositions can agree on a major social issue I was surprised that they were surprised because common action on ethical problems has proved to be possible so often not only among Protestant churchmen who differ theologically but also among Protestants and Catholics and Jews who can be expected to have more basic theological differences. It is also our daily experience that we who belong to one of these communities of faith can cooperate with men of moral sensitivity who have no traditional religious commitment

However we should not draw either one of two possible conclusions from this common experience. We should not assume that there are no religious convictions that may be present in churches and synagogues which hinder cooperation in matters of ethical concern. Let me put the matter in this way I can name various theological positions held by some Protestants which prevent me from cooperating with them on the issues on which I can work closely with many Catholics and Jews. I am sure that Catholics and Jews here present can make an equivalent statement. Reinhold Niebuhr used to shock new students at Union Seminary by saying that he found himself most often in politics allied with Catholics and Jews against Protestants. The reason for this was the tendency for many Protestants to represent a spiritual individualism which carried over into their thinking about economic institutions and hence into their thinking about political choices This individualism has roots in theological convictions. Also there is a type of Protestantism which is so conservative in its interpretation of divine providence that it tends to advise an acceptance of the status quo as ordained by God. God is seen more as the sanction for order than the inspirer of movements which seek a transforming social justice.

I realize that there are many non-theological factors which support the opinions to which I refer, such factors as limitations in social experience, the pressure of economic interest and, growing out

of both of these, the fear of change, but in the church theological ideas have some force of their own and they give sanction to these fears. The fear of revolution can be dressed up theologically in many ways as both Protestants and Catholics know and this may make psychologically impossible sympathetic attention to the plight of people whose need for change cries to heaven. Theology does make a difference especially at the point where religious people weigh the claims of radical social change. But this is not a theological difference which separates Catholics and Protestants and Jews as such from each other. I have often felt that the Jewish experience of being a minority has enabled Jews to escape some of the temptations to give theological sanction to the status quo to which Protestants and Catholics have often succumbed

The second error to which I desire to call attention is the error of under-emphasizing the positive role in our common work of some theological convictions. It goes without saying that Catholics and Protestants and Jews, however each group may differ within itself, do differ from each other on theological issues which they regard as essential. But I do believe that they may stress an overlapping area of conviction, however differently they may move into that area I have in mind what I take to be some common Biblical elements in our understanding of God and man in the world. Do we not have in common faith in God who is both Holy and dynamic, who works within his creation but who allows freedom for his creatures to resist him, who seeks to save the people whom he has created from the lostness that follows disobedience, who seeks to bring communities into existence, communities of faithfulness and love and more inclusive political communities informed by justice, the justice demanded by the prophets of Israel which can also be seen in the context of the kind of solidarity of God with men of whom Jesus spoke when he said "Inasmuch as ye did it not to the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me " Do we not also have in common a view of the world as God's creation which is sufficiently positive that it causes us to renounce escapist doctrines that stress the ingrowing religious life of churches and synagogues at the expense of openness to the world, or responsibility for and involvement in the secular world without losing a perspective from which that world can be judged and a faith in sources of mercy and redemption for its people which the world as such cannot provide? I have put all of these things in my own way as a Protestant and not a Catholic or a Jew but my words have been intended not so much to call attention to my own formulation but to refer to a body of common convictions which are possible because we share elements of the same revelation. I know that every sentence that I have uttered will have different nuances of meaning in a Catholic or a Jewish context. And yet I wonder if when we compare these words which point to common convictions with some of the views that often divide us from members of our own communities, we may not have fresh understanding of their importance.

So, my first word about the things that we may do together is that we should give greater attention to the ways in which we may make a common witness on the theological level in these days of

fantastic theological confusion. I do not mean at all that we should develop a common-denominator package of religious propositions which we join in promoting Not that at all. Rather I mean that we should become aware of the area of overlap when each of us gives his own witness and seek to get a hearing for it. We should in our own institutions make sure that this is heard from representatives of each of the other religious communities. This is being done in many places now and it is being done here this evening. I believe that much of the current theological confusion arises from the widespread caricatures of the Biblical understanding of God, caricatures that do not allow for God's patience and respect for the freedom and dignity of men and falsely suggest that God competes with the claims of humanity for attention to its need for justice and peace. Wonder and gratitude which become worship should not be seen as an extra duty to God that can supplant our duty to our neighbors but as sources of motivation, sources of strength as we move into the world of neighbors and characteristics of that humane living which is our goal.

As I say these things I must warn at once against allowing traditional and pious words to create a barrier between us and the honest searching and noble commitments of those who reject all such words because they have heard them used far too often to excuse escape from intellectual or social issues or to sanctify various combinations of injustice and obscurantism. Full recognition of these difficulties should not cause us to neglect what we believe to be true in misunderstood traditions.

The cooperation of churches and synagogues in recent years on the issue of civil rights is a proof that common social action is possible. The willingness of representatives of our three traditions to take together what often at the time seemed to be risks and to join in action that tried the patience or affronted the prejudices of many supporters in our constituencies show what is possible Today the concrete issues are often more ambiguous and the unity that made the March on Washington so memorable has been partly dissipated. Each of our communities has proved that it has its own form of backlash The problems of our northern ghettoes do not lend themselves to solution by laws for which we can crusade. Moreover the civil rights issues are seen to be part of far larger problems of urban poverty and in many places of urban demoralization Today often wise statesmanship is more important than crusading. But let not such a statement inhibit us when times and places occur where crusades and demonstrations and civil disobedience are still in order.

White Christians and Jews will need to be careful in their responses to the frustrations of their Negro fellow citizens for whom little has changed during these recent years of civil rights crusades. Why those who have been using white power since the beginning of the republic should be so astonished to find some who are still its victims speaking of "black power" is difficult for me to understand. I do recognize that in the midst of the present vicious circles the talk of black power has been tactically a political mistake and that those who speak of "coalition power" are

correct. There are many white allies that are essential if any battles are to be won and they must not allow themselves to be scared off by this phrase. Certainly in the sphere of religious education imaginative understanding can be encouraged and careful distinctions made and we can help to prepare our constituencies for the courage and the commitment and the wisdom that will be needed in the midst of innumerable local and regional situations in which we shall have to act and take sides on political choices when we would prefer to wait until there is a clearer choice. This will be our life and it will be much more difficult and less satisfying than single issue crusades I hope that what many of us learned during those crusades concerning our religious responsibility for social structures, for political action, for justice in terms of real equal opportunity of people, of children in our schools will not be lost.

The civil rights issues lead to a radical approach to the broader problem of poverty. In the short run it is essential to c ounteract any tendencies that may stem from the recent election to undercut what is being done to overcome poverty in our cities. In the long run it will be necessary to prepare the people of churches and synagogues for more far-reaching changes It is significant that the President's commission on Technology, Automation and Economic Progress, while it was free from extreme and alarmist predictions, did break the pattern of individualistic social thinking very radically in its recommendation that "economic security be guaranteed by a floor under family income" and that "this floor should include both improvements in wage-related benefits and a broader system of income maintenance for those families unable to provide for themselves." (Technology and the American Economy, p.110). This recommendation is close to one adopted in February 1966 by the General Board of the National Council of Churches that "our burgeoning productivity makes possible, and our Judaeo-Christian ethic makes mandatory, the development of economic policies and structures under which all people, regardless of employment status, are assured an adequate livelihood." Both statements presuppose the idea that such income maintenance must be recognized as a basic right, such as the right of all children to educational opportunity. Changes in what seems right or possible are taking place in circles that are highly responsible and some of them would have shocked most of us only two decades ago. These changes go against "the Protestant ethic" which put so much stress on the economic virtues of the individual, upon his discipline as one who worked and saved and invested in order to work more and save more and invest more. Actually there has been a great difference for some time between this stereotype of "the Protestant ethic" and the ethical teachings of the Protestant churches which have strongly criticized this one-sided individualism and have come very close to the economic ethics of the encyclicals of Pope Pius XI and Pope John XXIII and of the Constitution on the Church and the Modern World of the Second Vatican Council. The converging of Roman Catholic economic ethics and the economic ethics of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, of most Protestant denominations and of most Protestant theologians forms the background of much that we can do

together. The Jews have not lacked the economic virtures but they have been less dominated by an individualistic ideology than the Protestants and their social witness has helped very often to show us the way.

I can almost hear someone quoting the words of St. Paul "If any one will not work, let him not eat." (II Thessalonians 3 10) But we should not turn Paul's condemnation of an especially obnoxious group of parasites in the first century into a universal law applicable in all centuries to all economies, at all levels of productivity. Moreover there are other verses in the New Testament including the words "for I was hungry and you gave me food."

We all know that new structures and new ways of dealing with the distribution of the means of livelihood will create their own problems. I do not look forward to a society in which work for economic reward will cease to be a discipline for most of us. But it is important that we be able to face the problems of the immediate future without sacrificing tens of millions of people to the individualistic ideology with which Protestants feel at home. There must be willingness to think new thoughts and try new ways that will require the reinterpretation of much that has been believed to be religious truth.

One of the great episodes in recent years in the experience of the Protestant and Orthodox churches was the Conference on Church and Society that met in Geneva in July 1966. I have been greatly influenced by it and I mention it here because it dramatized for those of us who were there another phase of what we can do together for the sake of social justice. The conference was an occasion on which the Christians of Asia, Africa and Latin America made themselves felt by the Christians from Europe and North America.

As a result there came to be two major emphases at the conference. One was the responsibility of the older and richer nations to find ways of sharing their abundance with the developing nations, helping them to help themselves in raising their standards of living. The other emphasis was quite different the stress upon the revolutionary impulses and movements especially in Asia and Latin America Often these revolutionary movements in Latin America have Roman Catholic support. Younger Protestants there seem to have more in common with younger Catholics than either group has with the older and more conservative representatives of its own confession. I suggest to you that here is one area in which North American Catholics and Protestants can work together. Together they may help to change American attitudes and policies, attitudes and policies which are controlled by fear of any leftist revolutions in any country in this hemisphere, and that have the effect of strengthening the conservative oligarchies in some Latin countries.

More broadly, out of Geneva and out of Roman Catholic circles inspired by Pope John's Mater et Magistra and Pacem in Terris there should come a common commitment to international economic and social justice. I am glad to observe that on the highest levels there are already the beginnings of institutional cooperation. But the people who are in our churches need to realize in their minds and hearts the

depth of the moral and spiritual problem created for us by the gap between rich and poor nations that grows wider all the time All of our religious communities have a responsibility At Geneva it was often suggested that the United States and the Soviet Union were much alike not only because of their great power but also because both are dominantly white and relatively prosperous in a world in which most people still are hungry. To narrow this gap between the rich and the poor on a world scale will be very difficult. The too rapid growth of population is an important part of the problem and differing positions on birth control remains one obstacle to cooperation Religious education can be the education of conscience and of imagination in the face of the massive facts of poverty and hunger in the world. Our religious communities should enlist in this cause, always emphasizing at the same time what we can do to narrow the gap between rich and poor nations and our openness to the social experiments, even the revolutionary experiments of other nations.

I am sure that on the minds of all of us is the question of how far we can work together for peace. The Pope as an active peacemaker has kindled hopes and set an example. Also the statement of the Vatican Council on modern war should stimulate fresh thinking a nd new resolves in this country. The Catholic Church has had in its tradition in a more explicit form than Protestantism the concept of the just war as the basis for limiting the use of violence This concept covered both the occasions of war and the means of war Now that nuclear weapons create the possibility of war without limits, of mutual annihilation and the annihilation of nations that never chose to fight, it is incumbent on us to deal with the religious and moral issues raised by this situation in religious education.

On a world scale I see a convergence of Catholic and Protestant thinking on this subject. Almost identical positions were taken by the Vatican Council in its constitution on the Church and the Modern World and the conference at Geneva Neither was able to say much that threw light on the immediate problem of deterrence, neither called for immediate nuclear disarmament beginning with unilateral disarmament if necessary, neither was able to go as far as nuclear pacifism. But both stated that the prevention of total war has a moral priority. After giving some account of the meaning of the effects of a nuclear war the Council made the following statement

> "With these truths in mind, this most holy Synod makes its own condemnation of total war already pronounced by recent Popes and issues the following declaration
>
> "Any acts of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their populations is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation."

Let me put beside that declaration the statement that was adopted by the Geneva Conference

"This new and terrible situation forces Christians to re-examine their previous thinking concerning war and the function of the state in relation to it In Amsterdam in 1948, the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches declared, 'War is contrary to the will of God," and at the same time distinguished three possible attitudes toward the participation of Christians in the evil of war Today the situation has changed Christians still differ as to whether military means can be legitimately used to achieve objectives which are necessary to justice. But nuclear war goes beyond all bounds. Mutual nuclear annihilation can never establish justice because it destroys all that justice seeks to defend or to achieve. We now say to all governments and peoples that nuclear war is against God's will and the greatest of evils. Therefore we affirm that it is the first duty of governments and their officials to prevent nuclear war."

These statements about the moral priority of preventing nuclear war need to be seen today against the background of the changes in what is at stake in the conflicts associated with the cold war. When it was natural to expect that a victory for Communism anywhere meant an addition to a monolithic Communist movement that threatened the so-called free world from both east and west and when such an extension of Communism meant that one more nation would be dondemned to permanent Stalinist slavery it may have been a mistake to say that the prevention of nuclear war was the greatest duty of states. The issue of what was imagined to be permanent slavery versus freedom was so fateful an issue that many thought it better to allow the choice between nuclear war and any serious risk of Communism anywhere to be kept at least a matter of even balance Today the change in the meaning of Communism, its obvious fragmentation as a world-wide movement and the changes which come over Communist countries within a few decades making them more humane, should go far to defuse the cold war and to prepare our government and our people to focus more on the limitation of force than has been true in the past. It will take time to absorb the full meaning of what has happened. So far, except for the strong pacifist testimony in churches and synagogues, there has been a tendency to hold back and to postpone a serious dealing with this issue. The cold war has so conditioned the responses of Americans that it is difficult to begin the fresh thinking that is now required. We are putting behind us the spirit of the holy war but a great deal of rigidity remains. The time has come to drop our absolutistic anti-Communism. There may be less agreement in this area than in regard to civil rights and world poverty but at least there should be continuous enquiry and a concerted effort to move into new territory.

On the war in Vietnam there are so many voices in our religious communities that it is difficult to speak with confidence I have referred to the Pope's leadership here. He is strongly supported in this country by very able and devout and articulate Catholic laymen, by laymen rather more than by the clergy. Indeed

the ferment among lay Roman Catholics is a great inspiration to many of us in the Protestant churches. Mr. Scharper speaks for them. I am also greatly encouraged by the many statements on this issue by representative Jewish organizations and by Jewish rabbis of whom Rabbi Heschel is one of the most eloquent The World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches have called repeatedly for de-escalation of the war and for a negotiated settlement rather than military victory.

Geneva Conference said almost unanimously

> "The Massive and growing American presence in Vietnam and the long continued bombing of villages in the South and of targets a few miles from cities in the North cannot be justified."

Recently the co-chairman of the Inter-religious Conference on Peace issued a statement calling for a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam as a first step toward carrying out the peace formula of U Thant. Those who signed this were Rabbi Eisendrath, Bishop Wright - the Roman Catholic Bishop of Pittsburgh, Archbishop Iakovos of the Orthodox Church, Bishop Lord - a Methodist, Bishop Crittenden - an Episcopalian and Dr. Dana Greely - President of the Unitarian-Universalist Association. When during a war, have churches and synagogues shown as much independence of the state as in this war? In so far as they have done this they have been true to their calling to witness to the God who has no favorites among the nations and who judges especially those that are most powerful and most inclined to self-righteousness and who loves those on both sides of this tragic conflict

Many barriers are down The conflicts of conviction which separate us are better understood and the many disorders that we all inherit from the past can be dealt with in a more therapeutic manner than before. Conflicts on Church and State issues, for example, will not be deepened by the fear of Catholic power felt so strongly as recently as 1960. Many people regard that year as the year of America's coming of age as a pluralistic society with the election of a President who was a Catholic. We are beginning to learn to work together each guided by his own tradition but with many overlapping convictions, with mutual respect and with a promise of beneficent results for our common life.

WHAT WE MIGHT DO TOGETHER

An Address By

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To National Convention of Religious Education Association

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A famous four-volume work on the history of atheism in the West, published sixty years ago, begins with the statement "God has died. The time has come to write His history." Today, no historian would regard such a project as urgent, our major anxiety today seems to be diametrically opposed. Man may be dying and there will be no one to write his history. This is the problem that shatters all complacency, "Is man obsolete?" A generation ago people maintained: technological civilization contradicts religion. Today, we are wondering does technological civilization contradict man? The striking feature of our age is not the presence of anxiety, but the inadequacy of anxiety, the insufficient awareness of what is at stake in the human situation. It is as if the nightmare of our fears surpassed our capacity for fear.

Men all over the world see the writing on the wall, but are too illiterate to understand what it says. We all have that sense of dread for what is coming, it is a fear of absolute evil, a fear of total destruction. It is more than an emotion. An apocalyptic monster has descended upon the world, and there is nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. What is the nature of that monster? Is it a demon the power of which is ultimate, in the presence of which there is only despair?

This is a time in which it is considered unreasonable to believe in the presence of the Divine, but quite reasonable to believe in the demonic. And yet, as a Jew, I recoil from the belief in the demonic. Over and against the belief in the ultimate power of the demon stands the admonition of Moses. I quote "Know, therefore, this day and believe in your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above, on the earth beneath, there is no one else." There are no demonic forces.

The great act of redemption brought about by Moses and the Prophets of Israel, was the elimination of the demons, the gods,

and demigods from the consciousness of man, the demons which populated the world of ancient man are dead in the Bible. And yet, even Moses knew that man is endowed with the power to make a god, he has an uncanny ability to create or to revive a demon. Indeed, man's worship of power has resurrected the demon of power.

It is not a coincidence that the three of us who participate in this evening's panel discussion also serve as co-chairmen of the National Committee of Clergy and laymen concerned about Vietnam.

The meeting place of this evening's discussion should be not the Palmer House in Chicago but somewhere in the jungles of Vietnam. An ecumenical nightmare, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, dying together, killing one another So soon after Auschwitz, so soon after Hitler.

The question about Auschwitz to be asked is not Where was God? but rather where was man? The God of Abraham has never promised always to hold back Cain's hand from killing his brother. To equate God and history is idolatry. God is present when man's heart is alive. When the heart turns to stone, when man is absent, God is banished, and history, disengaged, is in distress.

What should have been humanity's answer to the Nazi atrocities? Repentance, a revival of the conscience, a sense of unceasing, burning shame, a persistent effort to be worthy of the name human, to prevent the justification of a death of man theology, to control the urge to cruelty.

Is it not a desecration of our commitment to act as if that agony never happened, to go on with religion as usual at a time when a nuclear disaster is being made a serious possibility?

We should have learned at least one lesson <u>Don't hate</u>!

Today is the anniversary of the death of President Kennedy. His assassination shook the world Yet it made no impact on our laws and customs No lesson was learned, no conclusion was drawn. Guns are still available c o d Mass killing in Chicago, in Houston, Texas, in Arizona, and elsewhere, is becoming a favorite past-time of your boys.

The Pentagons of the world are Temples Within their hallowed walls the great decisions come about How many shall live, how many shall die

> The envoys of peace weep bitterly
> The highways lie waste
> Covenants are broken,
> Witnesses are despised,
> There is no regard for man.
>
> -Isaiah 33 8

Jonah is running to Tarshish, while Nineveh is tottering on the brink Are we not all guilty of Jonah's failure? We have been running to Tarshish when the call is to go to Ninevah.

"What is the use of running, when you are on the wrong road?" What are the traps and spiritual pitfalls that account for the traps and spiritual pitfalls that account for the outrage of the war in Vietnam? What is the use of social security when you have a surplus of nuclear weapons?

Religion cannot be the same after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Its teachings must be pondered not only in the halls of learning but also in the presence of inmates in extermination camps, and in the sight of the mushroom of a nuclear explosion.

The new situation in the world has plunged every one of us into unknown regions of responsibility. Unprepared, perplexed, misguided, the world is in a spiritual no man's land Men all over the world are waiting for a way out of distress, for a new certainty of the meaning of being human Will help come out of those who seek to keep alive the words of the prophets?

This is, indeed, a grave hour for those who are committed to honor the name of God

The ultimate standards of living, according to Jewish teaching, are Kiddush Ha-Shem and Hillul Ha-Shem The one means that everything within one's power should be done to glorify the name of God before the world, the other that everything should be avoided to reflect dishonor upon the religion and thereby desecrate the name of God.

According to the ancient rabbis, the Lord said to Israel· "I have brought you out of Egypt upon the condition that you sacrifice your very lives should the honor of My name require it " (Sifra, 99d)

"All sins may be atoned for by repentance, by means of the Day of Atonement, or through the chastening power of affliction, but acts which cause the desecration of the name of God will not be forgiven 'Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you die, says the Lord of hosts' (Isaiah 23 14)."

In the light of these principles, e.g. a slight act of injustice is regarded as a grave offense when committed by a person whose religious leadership is acknowledged and of whose conduct an example is expected

God had trust in us and gave us His word, His wisdom and some of His power But we have distorted His word, His wisdom, and abused His power.

Those who pray tremble when they realize how staggering are the debts of the religions of the West. We have mortgaged our souls and borrowed so much grace, patience and forgiveness. We have promised charity, love, guidance and a way of redemption, and now we are challenged to keep the promise, to honor the pledge. How shall we prevent bankruptcy in the presence of God and man?

God has moved out of the fortress of pedestrian certainties and is dwelling in perplexities He has abandoned our complacencies and has entered our spiritual agony, upsetting dogmas, discrediting articulations. Beyond all doctrines and greater than human faith stands God, God's question of man, God's waiting for

man, for every man, God in search of man Deeper than all our understanding is our bold certainty that God is with us in distress, hiding in the scandal of our ambiguities And now God may send those whom we have expected least "to do His deed -- strange is His deed, to carry out his work -- alien is His work " (Isaiah 28 21) What is the use of running to Tarshish when the call is to go to Nineveh?

We must learn how to labor in the affairs of the world with fear and trembling. While involved in public affairs, we must not cease to cultivate the secrets of religious privacy

Abraham who despised the spirit of Sodom and Gomorrah as much as Washington despises the ideology of Red China was nevertheless horrified by the Lord's design to rain napalm, brimstone and fire upon the sinful cities Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah would be a spectacular manifestation of God's power in the world! So why did Abraham oppose an action which would have been a great triumph for "religion"? "Will you destroy the innocent along with the guilty? Far be it from you to do such a thing " (Genesis 18 24f). It is said in that story "Abraham is still standing before the Lord" (18 22). To this very day Abraham is still pleading, still standing before the Lord "in fear and trembling."

It is necessary to go to Nineveh, it is also vital to learn how to stand before God. For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was both protest and prayer. Legs are not lips, and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship.

Unlike Jonah, Jeremiah did not go into the desert of loneliness He remained a solitary dissenter in the midst of his people. Defied by his contemporaries, bewildered by the ways of the Lord, he would rather be defeated with God than victorious without him.

The cardinal problem is not the survival of religion, but the survival of man. What is required is a continuous effort to overcome hardness of heart, callousness, and above all to inspire the world with the biblical image of man, not to forget that man without God is a torso, to prevent the dehumanization of man For the opposite of human is not the animal <u>The opposite of the human is the demonic</u>

Contemporary man is a being afflicted with contradictions and perplexities, living in anguish in an affluent society His anxiety makes a mockery of his boasts Passing through several revolutions simultaneously, his thinking is behind the times. High standards of living, vulgar standards of thinking, too feeble to stop the process of the spiritual liquidation of man. Man is becoming obsolete, computers are taking over

The issue we face is not secularization but total <u>mechanization, militarization. The issue is not empty churches, but empty hearts</u>

If the ultimate goal is power, then modern man has come of age However, if the ultimate goal is meaning of existence, then man has already descended into a new infancy

At times it is as if our normal consciousness were a state of partly suspended animation Our perceptivity limited, our categories onesided.

Things that matter most are of no relevance to many of us Pedestrian categories will not lead us to the summit, to attain understanding for realness of God we have to rise to a higher level of thinking and experience.

This is an age in which even our common sense is tainted with commercialism and expediency To recover sensitivity to the divine, we must develop in uncommon sense, rebel against seemingly relevant, against conventional validity, to unthink many thoughts, to abandon many habits, to sacrifice many pretensions

The temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed All that is left is a wailing wall A stone wall stands between God and man Is there a way of piercing the wall?

Is there a way of surmounting the wall?

What is the substance, of which that wall is made? is it, as the prophets maintain, man's heart of stone? Or is it, as Isaiah also claims, the hiding of God? The darkening of his presence?

Perhaps this is the chief vocation of man to scale the wall, to sense what is revealed wherever he is concealed, to realize that even a wall cannot separate man from God, that the darkness is but a challenge and a passageway

We have pulled down the shutters and locked the doors. No light should enter, no echo should disturb our complacency. Man is the master, all else is a void Religion came to be understood in commercial terms. We will pay our dues, and He will offer protection

God has not complied with our expectations So we sulk, and call it quits Who is to blame? Is God simply wicked -- has He failed to keep the deal?

The hour calls for a breakthrough through the splendid platitudes that dominate our thinking, for efforts to counteract the systematic deflation of man, for a commitment to recall the dimension of depth within which the central issues of human existence can be seen in a way compatible with the dangerous grandeur of the human condition.

Characteristic of our own religious situation is an awareness that theology is out of context, irrelevant to the emergencies engulfing us, pitifully incongruous with the energies technology has released, and unrelated to our anguish

The word heaven is a problem, and so is the living, loving God, and so is the humanity in man a grave problem There are two ways of dealing with a problem one is an effort to solve it, the other is an effort to dissolve it, to kill it...

Let us not make a virtue of spiritual obtuseness. Why canonize deficiencies? Why glorify failure?

The crisis is wider, the anguish is deeper. What is at stake is not only articles of the creeds, paragraphs of the law, what is at stake is the humanity of man, the nearness of God

What do we claim? That religious commitment is not just an ingredient of the social order, an adjunct or reinforcement of existence, but rather the heart and core of being human

We have been preoccupied with issues, some marginal, some obsolete, evading urgent problems, offering answers to questions no longer asked, adjusting to demands of intellectual comfort, cherishing solutions that disregard emergencies.

We suffer from the fact that our understanding of religion today has been reduced to ritual, doctrine, institution, symbol, theology, detached from the pretheological situation, the presymbolic depth of existence. To redirect the trend, we must lay bare what is involved in religious existence, we must recover the situations which both precede and correspond to the theological formulations, we must recall the questions which religious doctrines are trying to answer, the antecedents of religious commitment, the presuppositions of faith What are the prerequisites, conditions, qualifications for being sensitive to God? Are we always ready to talk about Him?

There are levels of thinking where God is irrelevant, categories that stifle all intimations of the holy.

We are inclined to quantify quality as we are to canonize prejudice Just as the primitive man sought to personalize the impersonal, the contemporary man seeks to depersonalize the personal, to think in average ways, yet every thought pertaining to God can only be conceived in uncommon ways

God is not a word but a name. It can only be uttered in astonishment. Astonishment is the result of openness to the true mystery, of sensing the ineffable It is through openness to the mystery that we are present to the presence of God, open to the ineffable Name

The urgent problem is not only the truth of religion, but man's capacity to sense the truth of religion, the authenticity of religious concern Religious truth does not shine in a vacuum It is certainly not comprehensible when the antecedents of religious insight and commitment are wasted away, when the mind is dazzled by ideologies which either obscure or misrepresent man's ultimate questions, when life is lived in a way which tends to abuse and to squander the gold mines, the challenging resources of human existence. The primary issue of theology is pretheological, it is the total situation of man and his attitudes toward life and the world

What is necessary is a recall to those ultimate sources of the spirit's life which commonplace thinking never touches Theology must begin in depth-theology Knowing must be preceded by listening to the call "Do not come closer Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground "

No one attains faith without first achieving the prerequisites of faith. First we praise, then we believe We begin with a sense of wonder and arrive at radical amazement. The first response is reverence and awe, openness to the mystery that surrounds, and we are led to be overwhelmed by the glory.

God is not a concept produced by deliberation God is an outcry wrung from heart and mind, God is never an explanation, it is always a challenge It can only be uttered in astonishment.

Religious existence is a pilgrimage rather than an arrival Its teaching -- a challenge rather than an intellectual establishment, an encyclopedia of ready-made answers

Perhaps the grave error in theology is the claim to finality, to absolute truth, as if all of God's wisdom were revealed to us completely and once and for all, as if God had nothing more to say

God is a problem alive when the mind is in communion with the conscience, when realizing that in depth we are receivers rather than manipulators. The word God is an assault, a thunder in the soul, not a notion to play with Prayer is the premise, moments of devotion are prerequisites of reflection. A word about God must not be born out of wedlock of heart and mind. It must not be uttered unless it has the stamp of one's own soul.

Detachment of doctrine from devotion, detachment of reason from reverence, of scrutiny from the sense of the ineffable reduces God as a challenge to a logical hypothesis, theoretically important, but not overwhelmingly urgent God is only relevant when overwhelmingly urgent.

It is a fatal mistake to think that believing in God is gained with ease or sustained without strain.

Faith is steadfastness in spite of failure. It is defiance and persistence in the face of frustration.

Many of our people still think in terms of an age in which Judaism wrapped itself in spiritual isolation In our days, however, for the majority of our people involvement has replaced isolation.

The emancipation has brought us to the very heart of the total society It has not only given us rights, but also imposed obligations It has expanded the scope of our responsibility and concern. Whether we like it or not, the words we utter and the actions in which we are engaged affect the life of the total community.

We affirm the principle of separation of church and state, we reject the separation of religion and the human situation. We abhor the equation of state and society, of power and conscience, and perceive society in the image of human beings comprising it. The human individual is beset with needs and is called upon to serve ends

To what religious ends must my fellow-men be guided?

The world we live in has become a single neighborhood, and the role of religious commitment, of reverence and compassion, in the thinking of our fellowmen is becoming a domestic issue. What goes on in the Christian world affects us deeply. Unless we learn how to help one another, we may only hurt each other.

Our society is in crisis not because we intensely disagree but because we feebly agree. "The clash of doctrines is not a disaster, it is an opportunity." (Alfred Whitehead).

The survival of mankind is in balance One wave of hatred, callousness, or contempt may bring in its wake the destruction of all mankind. Vicious deeds are but an aftermath of what is conceived in the hearts and minds of man. It is from the inner life of man and from the articulation of evil thoughts that evil actions take their rise. It is therefore of extreme importance that the sinfulness of thoughts of suspicion and hatred and particularly the sinfulness of any contemptuous utterance, however flippantly it is meant, be made clear to all mankind. This applies in particular to thoughts and utterances about individuals or groups of other religions, races and nations Speech has power and few men realize that words do not fade. What starts out as a sound ends in a deed

In an age in which the spiritual premises of our existence are both questioned and even militantly removed, the urgent problem is not the competition among some religions but the condition of all religions, the condition of man, crassness, chaos, darkness, despair.

There is much we can do together in matters of supreme concern and relevance to both Judaism and Christianity

The world is too small for anything but mutual care and deep respect, the world is too great for anything but responsibility for one another.

A full awareness and appreciation of our fellowmen's spiritual commitments becomes a moral obligation for all of us

A Jew who hears what he prays cannot be indifferent to whether God's way is known in the world, to whether the gentiles know how to praise In our liturgy we proclaim every day

> Give thanks to the Lord,
> Call upon Him,
> Make known His deeds among the peoples!
>
> - Psalms 105 1

In the Omer liturgy it is customary to recite Psalm 67

> May God be gracious to us and bless us and
> make His face to shine upon us, that Thy way
> may be known upon earth, Thy saving power
> among all nations
> Let the peoples praise Thee, O God,
> let all the peoples praise Thee'

What is our task as Jews in relation to Gentiles? I rely upon the words of an inspired Hassidic sage in expounding Deuteronomy 28 9f. "The Lord shall establish you as His holy people... if you keep the commandments... and walk in His ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord's name is proclaimed upon you," and they will acquire reverence through you "

The real bond between people of different creeds is the awe and fear of God they have in common. It is easy to speak about the different dogmas we are committed to, it is hard to communicate the fear and reverence. It is easy to communicate the learning we have inherited, it is hard to communicate the praise, contrition and the sense of the ineffable. But souls which are in accord with what is precious in the eyes of God, souls to whom God's love for them is more precious than their own lives, will always meet in the presence of Him whose glory fills the hearts and transcends the minds

What, then, is the purpose of interreligious cooperation?

It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another, to share insight and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures on the highest scholarly level, and what is even more important to search in the wilderness for well-springs of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care for man What is urgently needed are ways of helping one another in the terrible predicament of here and now by the courage to believe that the word of the Lord endures for ever as well as here and now, to work for peace in Vietnam, for racial justice in our own land, to purify the minds from contempt, suspicion and hatred, to cooperate in trying to bring about a resurrection of sensitivity, a revival of conscience, to keep alive the divine sparks in our souls, to nurture openness to the spirit of the Psalms, reverence for the words of the prophets, and faithfulness to the Living God.

A distinguished Protestant theologian suggested to me recently that there ought to be standards and rules for interreligious dialogue. An example of such a rule for Catholics and Protestants would be not to discuss the supremacy of the bishop of Rome or Papacy, an example of such a rule for Christians and Jews would be not to discuss Christology

The God of Abraham, the Creator of heaven and earth, deemed it wise to conceal His presence in the world in which we live He did not make it easy for us to have faith in Him, to remain faithful to Him.

This is our tragedy, the insecurity of faith, the unbearable burden of our commitment. The facts that deny the divine are mighty, indeed, the arguments of agnosticism are eloquent, the events that defy Him are spectacular Our Faith is too often tinged with arrogance, self-righteousness It is even capable of becoming demonic Even the creeds we proclaim are in danger of becoming idolatry Our faith is fragile, never immune to error, distortion or deception

There are no final proofs for the existence of God, Father and Creator of all. There are only witnesses. Supreme among them are the prophets of Israel.

Humanity is an unfinished task, and so is religion. The law, the creed, the teaching and the wisdom are here, yet without the outburst of prophetic demands coming upon us again and again, religion may become fossilized.

Here is the experience of a child of seven who was reading in school the chapter which tells of the sacrifice of Isaac. "Isaac was on the way to Mount Moriah with his father, then he lay on the altar, bound, waiting to be sacrificed." My heart began to beat even faster, it actually sobbed with pity for Isaac. Behold, Abraham now lifted the knife. And now my heart froze within me with fright. Suddenly, the voice of the angel was heard "Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, for now I know that thou fearest God." And here I broke out in tears and wept aloud "Why are you crying?" asked the Rabbi. "You know that Isaac was not killed " And I said to him, still weeping, "But, Rabbi, supposing the angel had come a second too late?"

The Rabbi comforted me and calmed me by telling me that an angel cannot come late

An angel *cannot* be late, but man, made of flesh and blood, may be late.

WHAT WE MIGHT DO TOGETHER A Vision
for Ecumenical Religious Education

An Address by

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To National Convention of Religious Education Association

FOURTH ASSEMBLY

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The Palmer House
Chicago, Illinois

The very subject of our discussion this evening invites us to leap forward in thought and to attempt to construct a vision of what might be in ecumenical religious education But the religious tradition of each of us is realistic, and reminds us that the dimensions of the city that might be are the dimensions of the city that is, one builds upward upon foundations, not outward upon fiction or fantasies

The vision, then, of what we might do together must be woven from the strands of the present and the past What have we done or failed to do together? what are we doing or failing to do together now?

One instance of what we are doing, not with each other but to each other, can be gathered from a recent Gallup poll which showed that ill-feeling toward Catholics by Jews had doubled from 15% to 30% since 1952. In this same period, it is true, there has been, according to the same poll, a decline in the number of Catholics harboring ill-feeling against Protestants, in the number of Protestants harboring prejudice against Catholics and in the number of Catholics nurturing animosity or suspicion against Jews.

One explanation for the regrettable statistics of increased ill-feeling towards Catholics on the part of Jews has been suggested by Philip E Hoffman of the American Jewish Committee, who was quoted in The New York Times as saying that "Christians and Jews are educated in two different universes of understanding of their respective histories and they are conditioned to an insensitivity about each other in contemporary life.'

If we are to ask, then, what we might do together in the future an obvious, almost banal answer might be that we begin in the present to repair what we have done to each other in the past. We might consider then how to repair the past, and thus strengthen the foundation for the building of the future. First, what we do within the framework of inter-Christian ecumenism, second, within the framework of Christian-Jewish ecumenism and then, lastly, we might hope legitimately to lift our eyes to a horizon farther than that of the world of Jewish-Christian relationship and consider what we might do together, Jew and Christian, in a dialogue with the world.

I. Inter-Christian Ecumenism

In our efforts to understand one another, to come closer to one another, we Christians have made much in the last decade of the term "dialogue." It might not be tangential to recall, at this point, that our theologians did not really coin this word in the sense which we have given it in our inter-faith conversations. Theologians rarely invent a word, they too often embalm a word to which they did not give life and then quickly gather to join in the fruits of its redemptive resurrection, which took place either while they slept, like the Apostles, or fished the old familiar waters.

Before we Christians, either theologians or the theologized-at, permit the term "dialogue" to become trite through our usage of it, we should at least recall what those who coined the word--contemporary philosophers and psychologists - meant by it As a consequence, we might perhaps understand the word more deeply and hence use it more effectively.

Dialogue means, at minimum, the perfect willingness of each partner in the dialogue really to listen to the other. Listening seems so simple, until we try it in terms of dialogue. Really to listen to another means hearing his voice as well as his words, for the tone of his voice so often either belies or belabors the words The voice lays bare the soul, even when the speaker hopes it will not or is perhaps unaware that it does.

This obviously means that when we speak we make every effort to be sure that our voice really means what our words say. Otherwise, we are not engaged in dialogue, the authentic interchange of two persons striving, at least, to be authentic.

When we bring to the surface of our minds this radical meaning of dialogue, we are in a position to ask precisely what we Christians have been talking about in our ecumenical conversations and to ask the further, more probing question of whether our voices have also meant what our words seemed to say.

While not attempting in the least to minimize the gains already realized by formal ecumenical dialogues between and among the major

Christian communities, might one not also ask if, while our words proclaim the quest for Christian unity, our voices - alternately frightened or queroulous - have not proclaimed even more loudly our ecclesial pre-occupations.

Have we not, for example, spent much of our ecumenical table-talk with the question of the validity of each other's baptism and, with enormous stretching of soul and bending of mind, attempted to accept the baptismal rite of other churches? Have we, however, spent nearly so much of our precious talking time with the question of each other's understanding of the Eucharist, the sign, symbol and agent of unity? Have we been willing to display so much effort of mind, so much stretching of the soul, to reconcile the other's eucharistic ritual and understanding with our own?

I realize fully that, to the theologically sophisticated, the very question may suggest the impertinence or ignorance of the questioner. But I must also say, in the complete candor which alone is worthy of those who profess fealty to the God who is Truth, that to the man in their pews the pre-occupations of theologians and preachers seem ecclesial rather than ecumenical Certainly, discussions of Communion under one or two species, effected with leavened or unleavened bread, the roiling question of bishops or no bishops must strike the person in the pew and the sympathetic eavesdropper at the church door as sometimes lacking a sense of ecumenical urgency

The world needs Christ, we Christians affirm, in order to heal the world's wounds, in order to repair the tragic discords and reconcile the ancient enmities which have smashed to shards what should be the unity in love of the family of man The world does, indeed, lie wounded by the wayside of its sojourning, yet the assorted Good Samaritans stand above it, arguing whether the oil should be poured in before the wine, the wine before the oil, or whether the stricken man should be administered a compound of both

I must again apologize for what must seem to be either my impertinence or my ignorance of the thick-rooted theological realities which have produced the separate trees that are found, either green or gnarled, in the garden of Christianity. But I must also ask if the churches, in the quest for unity, are not living by <u>chronos</u>, the time measured by clocks and calendars, and living perhaps unaware of <u>kairos</u>, the time of the Lord

If we look continually at the cosmic clock, the <u>chronos</u>, we may well be bemused into thinking that Christian unity can await what we call, in a quaint phrase, "God's good time." But does either sacred or secular history show us a point at which "God's good time" was not <u>now</u>, that each day is the acceptable day of the Lord if we, with our fearsome freedom, choose to make it so? Have we really the <u>will</u> for unity? If we have, what are the tangible signs of that will? Are we really groaning and in travail to end the anguish of our separation in order that we might more quickly, more effectively and more grace-fully move to repair the shattered unity of the human family?

One thing, then, which we Christians might do together in the framework of our formal and informal ecumenical education is to ask ourselves and each other whether or not we sincerely feel that we have, not the velleity, but an effective will toward the recovery of our lost unity. In such a dialogue we must, in the candor born of what we call charity, listen not only to the words and voices of the other but we must also, with exquisite attention, listen to our own words and our own voice.

In such a dialogue we might all be led at least to raise the question of whether or not we Christians might have succeeded in accomplishing what we accuse non-Christians of attempting, namely, minimizing or denying the full meaning of the Incarnation

For the Incarnation, in our collective Christian theology, is the most corrosive element ever known to man It is the Incarnation which dissolves any distinction between the concerns of the street and the concern of the sanctuary, it is the Incarnation which crumbles to dust the man-made walls between slave and free, between male and female, between barbarian and Greek, between rich and poor. How is it, then, that the walls of division between the Christian communities seem so impervious to the corrosive action of the Incarnation?

The question may be raised only to be dismissed, but I, for one, would suspect that if this question is not at least raised then most of the answers given in our ecumenical discussions may prove to be illusory, evasive or irrelevant For unless we Christians ask ourselves the questions which others are asking us, we may well have shown ourselves not to have known the time of our visitation For the question being asked of us is the question asked, but never answered, a century ago by Ralph Waldo Emerson "Within Stoicism, all were stoics, but in Christianity, where are the Christians?" Old, unanswered questions, like old unhouseled ghosts, rise again to haunt a younger generation. Emerson's question is being asked today in terms less gentle, and in tones less genteel, than his "Can one find Christ in the Christian churches - the compassionate Christ - or do the churches seem, rather, the empty tomb from which the risen Christ has fled?"

II. Jewish-Christian Ecumenism

In dealing with the ecumenical dialogue between the Jew and the Christian I shall not attempt, for obvious reasons, to speak of what the Jew might say to us Christians or what he might learn from us in the authentic exposure of the inmost self which is the heart of dialogue. I fear, however, that having avoided this presumption on the one hand, I shall fall into a similar presumption on the other as I attempt to speak, in general terms, of what seem to me to be rather common Christian failings in their effort ecumenically to speak to the Jewish community.

I must confess, first of all, that in my own reading and discussion of ecumenical questions, we Christians seem, almost without

exception, to have collectively but little understanding of the Jewish people into which Christ Our Lord was born. It will not do, to allay this feeling, to refer, in the Catholic context, to either the statement on the Jews in the declaration of Vatican II nor to the paragraphs on the Jews in Pope Paul's encyclical Ecclesiam Suam Nor will it do, so far as I can see, to refer to the statements which have issued, with all good will, from other major Christian communities

In these Christian statements there seems to be a muted but nonetheless significant theme the suggestion that, in the religious history of Western man, the Jew is to be found as an obdurate fact, who has either, with characteristic perverseness, refused to die to corroborate our theology of the Jew, or who perdures, indeed, but only to serve as a reminder to us of God's graciousness in inviting us into the household of the Christian faith

Nor is it enough to explain, as some sophisticated Christians are now explaining, the indebtedness of Christianity to the Old Testament, the need for the contemporary Christian to attempt to recover Hebraic thought-patterns in order to understand his own spiritual heritage, or to trace the evolution of Christian liturgy from Jewish ritual forms This type of Christian approach to Judaism is but to repeat, in more sophisticated modes, the general inadequacy of the Christian approach to Judaism, namely, the assumption that the Jewish people have no valid history after the destruction of Jerusalem It is to assume that the only theological relationship of Christianity to Judaism must be to the Judaism as the Christian understands it - a Judaism locked in the past - as though all of the spiritual energy of post-biblical Judaism had become like a river diverted, to sink its energy and beauty in the sand

But it is with a living Judaism that the Christian is summoned to have dialogue today, and the contemporary Christian must recognize that he is to speak and listen to the contemporary Jew, who is no more exclusively a product of the Old Testament than is the Christian himself

For the Jew, whether the Christian knows or cares, has a post-biblical history as long, obviously, as that of the Christian There have been developments within Judaism since the diaspora and these developments demand of the Christian that he approach the Jew not only in sociological or historical terms but that he also look upon the Jew as a theological problem.

The nature of this theological problem can perhaps be crudely stated in halting phrases such as this What is the theological reason for the continuing existence of Judaism, the Old Israel? What are we to make, here and now, of Paul's statement that "the calls and promises of God to the people of Israel are irrevocable " We Christians must take more seriously than we have the fact that the Old Israel, as well as the New, is the community of love shaped on the anvil of a divine calling, the work of the Spirit of God As a

consequence, we must attempt, at any rate, to realize what the Jew has been and done through the two thousand years of concomitant Christian history, more importantly, we must strive to discern the design of Providence in the fact that after these two thousand years of a common history, the Old Israel and the New find themselves in a situation of co-existence, confrontation and now dialogue, despite the persecution, forced conversions and garroting with a silken thread which we Christians have historically visited upon the Jew, despite our proclamation that ours is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

But we must see this theological question as a living one, drawing its life from the stubborn soil of present reality We cannot treat the theological question of the Jew as though it were an exotic one, hanging like a jungle orchid rootless in the heavy air. Part of the context in which the Christian must place the problem is the historical experience of the Jew in our century And part of that experience is the creation and existence of the State of Israel

Am I completely wrong in thinking that for most Christians the State of Israel seems to be but a political reality, one which does not lure the Christian mind, as a consequence, into theological speculation as to its origin, continuance, or ultimate purpose? I cannot, of course, speak for other Christians, nor even justify theologically my own response to what I have seen in Israel But I do think it worthy of remark that, as a Christian, I was reminded again and again in Israel of the ancient prophecy of Ezechiel when he saw the valley filled with dry bones restored to life at God's command.

> Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land then shall you know that I the Lord have spoken it and performed it.

I find it hard to comprehend how any Christian could fail to find in the fact and the fortune of the State of Israel a fulfillment of the ancient prophecy. But twenty years ago, six million Jews lay dead in Europe and the spared but scattered remnant seemed, to the eyes of human vision, helpless and, perhaps, doomed Certainly, no Christian nation of the West was inviting <u>these</u> tempest-tossed to its shores, nor lifting the torch of hope above its golden door Yet in that time the State of Israel was born and the impossible took place. The dry bones stirred and were clothed once more with flesh, the people were summoned from their graves and were brought into their own land Was it indeed that the Lord had spoken and performed it?

We Christians may not believe so, but we must, at least, try to understand why so many Jews both within and without Israel look upon this State as God's reply to a people's faith We might also at least strive to see, in the newly gathered Israel, an analogy to the Church as a sign raised up among the nations to proclaim that God is faithful to His promises and that the calls of God to the people of Israel are "irrevocable."

And what, briefly, are we Christians to make, theologically, of the yet more staggering experience of the Jew within our own lifetime - the fact that more than six million of their number met death for no other crime than that they traced their origin to Jerusalem and Sinai and the Land to which Abraham was called - all features which claim prominent place in our own topography of the Spirit It would be difficult, I submit, for the Christian to find even in his own churches of silence, the experience of a religious community more reminiscent of Isaiah's depiction of The Suffering Servant, a people acquainted with grief and sorrow, dumb before their executioners and led like lambs to the slaughter

Even if we discount all this and yet retain some vestige of belief in redemptive suffering, can we quite discount the possibility that hundreds of thousands of Jewish children may somehow have died for us, even as we traditionally honor those Jewish children of an earlier time whose death, violent and unsought, was yet seen as martyrdom by the eyes of Christian faith May it be that by their stripes we are healed, or at least have had the hope of healing proffered to us?

Ezechiel and Isaiah are, I suspect, very much on the mind and in the heart of the modern Jew as he approaches the contemporary dialogue with the Christian, we cannot, as a consequence, do him the dishonor of looking upon him, as he talks and listens to us, as less than a theological problem. We must, even minimally, try to understand why, for him, these places and moments of the twentieth century have not merely a social or political but a sacred significance

III The Ecumenism of Jew and Christian with the World

Alike, the Jew and Christian must recognize their "pre-ecumenical" solidarity with the rest of mankind - with those who have a different faith or no faith in the accepted ecclesiastical understanding of that term Before we are either Jew or Christian, we are human beings and members of the family of God the Father, shaped by His creating hand, called into being by His breath Wherever we turn in either the Old or the New Testament, we are forced to confront, not an anthropology but a religious understanding of man's origin and destiny. Since a divine origin and destiny are common to every man, his links to every other man are beyond his forging or his power to break

Regardless of whether those who do not share this Judaeo-Christian view of man recognize themselves as sons of God, we recognize them as such, and can only speak of and to them as our brother, whose dignity we have neither designed nor given, and with whose destiny we are not allowed to tamper

Alike, the Jew and the Christian believe that, in the last sifting of reality, there is only one history, the record of God's continual breaking in upon the world of man and speaking to man through event, even as he spoke to Moses through the event of a bush that burned yet was not consumed.

Neither Jew nor Christian has the right to put man-made limits to God's capacity to speak through events We can only strive to hear what God may be saying through events, even in the events of this glorious but torn and tragic century.

What, for example, is God trying to say to us - Jew and Christian - through this event that we comprise, in the white Western community, less than one-third of the world's peoples and yet consume more than sixty percent of the world's goods, and control more than seventy percent of the world's resources? What do we make of this event that the world has shrunken to the dimensions of a village, and that in this village we live in the houses set upon the hill, moated from our fellow-villagers by green and spacious lawns, scandalously conspicuous in our expenditure on luxuries and our waste of necessities? What do we make of this event that the number of villagers who are non-white, non-Jewish, non-Christian, is increasing rapidly to the point where, by the year 2000, we will be an even smaller minority than we are at the moment, for that will be a world wherein the population of China alone may number one billion seven hundred million people - four hundred million more than the present population of Europe, North and South America, the Soviet Union and Africa combined

What is God saying to us through these events? Is He not trying to say that we must learn from each other and teach our children that, in the world which they will inherit, they must be the conscious heirs of all that is most authentic in what we call, somewhat too glibly, the Judaeo-Christian tradition? We must attempt to become now, and hope that our children will be in the future, the anawim - the poor of God - open constantly to the breathing of His Spirit. This much, at least, we can hope to do together, if we make the effort to understand who we are and who the other is we can attempt to show the emerging world - brown, black, illiterate, impoverished - that we are indeed their brothers, for each of us holds dear the ancient words of Isaiah

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me,
> To bring good news to the poor he has sent me,
> to proclaim to the captives release,
> and sight to the blind,
> To set at liberty the oppressed,
> to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
> and the day of recompense

To suggest that we, who are so divided in creed, might yet be united in deed is, of course, to suggest a complete reversal of so many of our long-held and deeply cherished attitudes and convictions. But this is kairos, the acceptable time of the Lord, and even chronos tells us that there is little time left. Why can we not speak with one voice against the palpable injustices within our own society, and move with one heart toward the healing of the wounds of mankind - our family and God's - throughout the world It may well be that Church and Synagogue must strip itself of many of its own possessions, and

relinquish something of its smug righteousness in order to show in our actions the compassion of the God in whom our brother does not believe

Visionary? Perhaps But our very being here through these days would have seemed visionary less than a decade ago Impossible? Not to the anawim, the little ones of God who were yet great. an Abraham, a Moses, a Mary of Nazareth who knew that the surest sign of God's power was man's native incapacity to accomplish God's design For the anawim of our age must come to know what the anawim have always known - that only he who can see the invisible can accomplish the impossible

- Finis -

WHAT IS ECUMENICAL EDUCATION
and
WHAT IS THE PLACE OF ECUMENISM IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

An Address By

DR. H. A. HAMILTON
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World Council of Christian Education
Geneva, Switzerland

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Palmer House, Chicago, Ill.

The National Convention of The Religious Education Association

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Even before I arrived in Geneva, I had encountered the frustration which major Christian ecumenical organizations felt at their inability to define the term "ecumenical education." Frustration because, while on the one side, there was such a vivid story to tell, on the other, education was so much more than telling But how much? What forms it should take, what qualities it should possess and, most of all, what training the persons who participate in it should be given? There was not, and is not yet, any defined clarity about the answers to these questions

The search, however, is ON. Both in conference and in experiment, purposeful thinking proceeds. Traditional methods of catechetical teaching were the focus of one wide consultation, the needs of laity, exposed to each other and to the pressures of a searching secular environment are to be the setting of another. In addition, most conferences on religious education, sponsored by any one of us, in any part of the world, have this as one aspect of their theme, whatever it may be. Here, now, is this imaginatively planned programme involving so many related religious education organizations, offering the broadest based forum for the quest for a common answer to the questions, "What is Ecumenical Education and What is the place of Ecumenism in Religious Education?". Is it possible that in the days here we can discover some much more satisfying definitions of purpose and method which will speak with vision and with particularity to those who direct the educative operations of their communities? I would like to try to share with you some considerations of the "What", the "How", and the "Why" of Ecumenical Education and to suggest to you that "ecumenical" is perhaps the inescapable dimension of all religious education today.

The What

The content or the "What" of ecumenical education must obviously be a subject on our agenda. There is need to re-examine separately and to admit to each other what we are still currently saying about each other in lesson notes and other teaching materials Protestants

about Catholics and Catholics about Protestants, Christians about the Jews and the Jews about the Christians. A recent consultation compared the commitments which the leaders of the member Churches of the W.C.C. made at the Montreal Conference on Faith and Order with the statements about other Christian Churches which were being made, or implied, in denominational curricula. The result was "shocking," especially in the implications of what Churches said of themselves! If this is true of educators at work within the same fellowship, what is likely to be true of what is said and implied in our teaching about other religious communities? Perhaps what is implied is more far-reaching than any words on the page. Certainly the attitude of teachers, unconsciously conveyed in their use of such material, may be decisive in fashioning an anti-ecumenical mind. I assure you that if I am ecumenically minded today, it is despite my upbringing! This conference would perform one needed function by committing itself to an objective re-examination of the quality of the ecumenical content it is offering in its teaching of all ages.

After all, there is a story to tell of the active pressure of God's spirit as He is at work in communities which are open to Him. All too often the story which has had to be told of religious man's words and deeds has been one of human inertia, or sometimes even of human betrayal. Our costly rivalries, our bitter words, our implacable cruelties have shamed the pages of History. If today, in our recognition of the fateful consequences of disobedience and disunity, we have been more responsive to His direction and more open to each other, let us "tell it out." Surely it is the birthright of every growing person in our care to know how persuasively the Spirit is at work among us all! Yet it is a distressing fact that so many lay members of our communities simply do not know what is divinely afoot among us They "have not so much as heard that there be 'an ecumenical movement'"!

How many know that at the beginning of the life of The World Council of Churches in 1948 there was a public act of penitence by the leaders of German Churches, that in the course of the Vatican Council the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church paid mutual visits openly confessing sorrow at the tragic excommunications made by each other's predecessors in twelfth century and the continuing paralysis of Christian relations which had ensued, and as openly recognizing each other again as brother in Christ? Who, even of you, has heard the story of the recent march of Roman Catholic Clergy in London to Smithfield Market, the scene of human bonfires in the Marian persecution of the Protestants, as an act of corporate penitence. And who has begun to tell the whole story of the increasing sense in Christian Churches of grave injustice done by them to the Jewish community in word and sometimes unspeakable wrong in deed? Some humble and reconciling words have been spoken but we have not yet gone far enough.

Can we emphasize too strongly that Ecumenical Education begins in penitence and continues in a mood of humility toward each other in which the substance of History is refashioned? This is the view of the Past which is the proper approach to our teaching.

How many members of our different communities know the extent of the work we do together in response to needs of men in the world? Of the planning together to meet long-term needs, such as is taking place now among the Indian people. There we try to organize an irrigation of thirsty land which could provide the food supplies which so regularly fail them. Or of the swift emergency action we are increasingly able to take when disaster smites, as recently in earthquake areas of Turkey and Eastern Europe. What vivid stories there are to tell, both to young and old, about the obedience we are beginning to offer together to the command to love our neighbour. To these we could add the so many more which could be told of local action together, acts of corporate witness, ways of common service, and, best of all, initiatives taken spontaneously which outran the decisions of our official institution and reveal the ecumenical movement to be indeed a movement of the ubiquitous Spirit of God at work wherever men are open to Him.

All this makes a fascinating and convincing story, the source of innumerable contemporary illustrations of religious faith and practice. Nor should it exclude the continuing record of our human failures. Failures, either from fear or prejudice, to transcend and transform the past which separates us, failures to be generous enough to see what we think of as our "rights" and "principles" as masks of our pride, failures in negotiation which are no more than instances of our continuing obstinacy and resistance to the will of God. It is a total story and it must all be told. The content of ecumenical education is that God is confirming to us in our own time, that the whole world of man's life is His and that He is using all who will work together for good, to achieve His purpose. This is "the WHAT".

The "How"

But HOW shall we tell it? Let us agree that the mere telling of such a story, especially in relevant situations, may itself be a deed, or a living word. Then let us remember the insights which the study of the process of learning has given us, and, perhaps especially, these two. First, that learning is primarily a process of participation, or participation with more and more of ourselves, our functions and faculties, more and more deeply and widely in the world about us. Second, that the decisive influence in the learning process is the character of the community in which it takes place. These two insights have transformed the pattern of current education and men's thinking about it. They each have an ecumenical dimension which we need to explore.

(i) By participation

The technical devices which have made three-dimensional projection possible in the cinema have done much more than give to viewers a vivid, sometimes uncanny, even embarrassing experience in the theatre. They have illustrated for us the educational difference between the experience of spectators viewing scenes on a two-dimensional flat screen and that of spectators who find themselves existentially involved in a situation. There is no doubt that religious education needs 3D projection! Study the Old Testament and its educational

principles and you will see how prophet and teacher alike tried to immerse men in the stream of events and to interpret to them their deepest experiences They did not offer History as something to be studied but as something to be shared. The Gospels underline this clearly. The fascination of the teaching method of Jesus lies in the attempt to draw men even more deeply into experiences or experiments in living and loving from which they could not but learn to need the words he could offer them, it lies also in hearing him interpreting afresh to men the meaning of those experiences they thought they understood.

The mode of our religion in other words, and therefore, the pattern of religious education, is not verbal but existential. Educators have indeed recognized that all "subjects" are really lenses or ways of looking at part of the life about us Many of them have seen that their pupils learn by finding out how to use the lens. So they explore their Geography in the school grounds and trace their History along the roads of their State. Their Maths is a measuring of the Time and Space in which they live and their Science the training of an informed and discriminating eye. Is their religious education also the acquiring of a way of looking at life so as to see God at work there and a growing ability to know how to respond to the opportunities of serving Him there? This surely must be the focus of the content of ecumenical education.

(ii) By sharing in the life of an ecumenical community.

(a) In worship

Because ecumenical education is so closely bound up with the attitude of persons to each other, in the whole of their lives, in the whole of the world, it can only happen within the life of communities which embody this purpose is their worship. When we read the account of the celebration of the Passover by succeeding generations of Jews, we understand how all have been drawn into an understanding of what God did and is doing by their re-enactment of what took place on one night. Or, when we share in a celebration of the Mass, we know we are being invited to participate in a continuous divine action "for us men and for our salvation." Succeeding generations of worshippers have kept this Tryst and maintained this living tradition. Nothing can ever diminish in me the effect of a Christmas Eve Mass I attended in the whitewashed chapel of a nunnery in Belgium where I was billeted in 1918. For the first time, in that worshipping community, I knew the deep need to belong to a living tradition. It has continued every since.

The need is most deeply met in Protestants as they gather around the Bible and rediscover the continuing authority with which it speaks to each succeeding generation. The worshipping company may be a confessional group imprisoned in a political tyranny or it may be a group of like-minded people seeking for guidance in the predicament of their time. What is true is that, as for the other great traditions, the Word speaks through the life of the community. Are we not compelled therefore to ask ourselves how far, in our separate

ways of corporate worship, the ecumenical Word is heard, or the ecumenical Fact encountered? Do we, for example, include each other in our prayers, both of Thanksgiving and of Intercession?

(b) Its Work

The Work as well as the Worship of a religious community, moving out to its neighbours, or reaching towards the wider needs, in body and mind, of the underprivileged everywhere, is no less a persuasive influence in ecumenical education. Perhaps it is even more likely that our members will be stimulated to ask the questions which need ecumenical answers, as they are included, with people of other traditions, in corporate response to needs which have caught the imagination of their hearts and moved their wills. The educative influence of Ecumenical Work Camps can hardly be measured, nor can the stimulus of World Youth Projects. Locally, too, the relationships spontaneously made in pursuing, side by side, some planned purpose of relief or social action have brought men and women into a new readiness for mutual acceptance and made them more open to learn each of the other For if, as I certainly believe, education only happens at the place of encounter and religious education is only possible within the experience of belonging to a religious tradition, then ecumenical education is likely to happen only in a fellowship of ecumenical minds. It will proceed as people, especially young people, become aware of an attitude in their own communities of deep involvement in the life of the world and of readiness to receive what other religious traditions have to give them, all expressed in the life of worship and the life of service They will come to see the Ecumenical Movement of God's Spirit not as, first of all (and, alas, sometimes last of all) an argument about patterns of authority and order, but as our way of entering the process of God's saving operation in the world, perhaps, too, if we are obedient, of diverting the direction of the streams of our separate traditions until they find their confluence in the main-stream of His purpose

Plainly we shall need more detailed discussion about plans to increase the opportunities for those we educate to participate in the process of learning the "What" of Ecumenism and of sharing in its expression. The "How" of it is capable of much variety and susceptible of much local experiment. We shall be likely to discover that ecumenical education is the true purpose of all religious education, providing both a motive and a goal

The "Why"

So we arrive at the core of the matter, the "Why" of Ecumenical Education. In trying to educate men and women of all ages in our own tradition of faith and worship, we discover that the inclusive purpose is not teaching a Thing, but training a person. It is not teaching a creed or a catechism, a law or a liturgy, a pattern or a book, but creating the conditions under which a person may grow. How can he be more able to wonder at mystery, more ready to act on his deepest intentions, more fully to be "a man for others," this is our charge. So we shall seek to train an Ecumenical Person. We shall not underestimate the necessity of nourishing an informed

ecumenical intelligence. At all levels of education, it is more and more important that, in a questioning age, believers shall be able to give reason for their own faith and know how to appreciate the faith of others, even if it be expressed in different terms and even be viewing the world from a different standpoint. But, more than this, we need persons with an ecumenical way of looking, persons with an ecumenical attitude to others, persons capable of acting as persons. Says Martin Buber in his lecture, The Training of Character. "It is idle to cry to a mankind that has grown blind to Eternity, 'Look, the eternal values!' Everywhere we are sunk into the slavery of the collectives. They cannot be rescued from the power of this Moloch by any reference to the absolute whose kingdom Moloch has usurped. In order to enter into a personal relation with the absolute it is first necessary to be a person." He goes on to speak of the pain of being wakened as a person, and of the drugs available to dull the pain. He finishes with this charge to us all. "To keep the pain awake, to waken the desire -- this is the first task of everyone who regrets the obscuring of eternity. It is also the first task of the education in our time."

Such genuine education of personal character is education for community, it is the beginning of true ecumenical education. The educator who helps to bring man nearer to his own unity will be helping to produce the men and women who can give unity to society, and in so doing "will put them again face to face with God." Here I believe is the dynamic needed for ecumenical education its goal, the release of persons to be fully persons. This is our "Why".

(1) <u>An Awakened imagination</u>

Where shall we begin? We begin, I suggest, with the prophets and with the Rabbi-Teacher Jesus, by believing in the capacity of everyman to <u>see</u>, to see those "eternal values" in the space-time world about them, and to see from within. The greatest crime, the most damnable heresy a teacher can commit is to act or speak as though every child in front of him were not endowed, some more, some less, with this power we call imagination It is not, certainly, a "good" word today. It smacks of escape, as it indeed is when it is no more than fancy. But when it is a way of looking at things, at people, at events, so as to see within (what Gerald Manley Hopkins called not <u>e</u>scape but <u>in</u>scape) then it is of all human gifts, the most liberating.

So much in an individual's growth to personal unity depends on the awakening and exercise of this gift within him By it he sees beneath the appearance of things and, so seeing them, escapes their tyranny. He sees and hears behind the masks of what men did and say so as to see them as they are and to be unafraid. He learns to see behind the words, to read between the lines, to recognize in a symbol a language deeper than words, and to hear, more loud and clear than any voice, both the things which men are not able to say and the Word which God is constantly speaking.

I do not find anything comparably urgent for us educators than to learn again, or to learn for the first time, how to train this power

of looking at life so as to see God at work in it, and how to look at men so as to see his image there. It requires in us the willingness and ability to strip the object of vision of all preconceptions, to still the urgent power of reasoning, itching to explain things or people before it has really seen them. As educators we are not there to explain, we are there to recreate reality so that it can be seen. This seeing, which Jesus called "the single eye," is a focussed way of looking which comes only from a heart which is generous. It can be trained, exercised in life situations, in the observation of people and things It grows as our study of the vision of seers reveals to us its authority, whether of prophets who discern the timeless ways of God in the confusions of human events, or of humble saints who simply marvel every day as they see more clearly than the wise, the goodness that is in men

Imagination is not simply a way of seeing, though the other powers it brings depend on seeing It gives us the power to relate It impels us to see the likeness between things, to perceive what is common to different situations, to see what unites people who are separate in language, color or creed. You can hardly think of a mental activity more needed in the ecumenical task. What is more, the simplest of our fellows possesses it, uses it vividly in their description of scenes, in their talk about people, in their judgments about life. For the most part we ignore it, neither appealing to it nor making use of it. Yet here is a gift, unspoiled by too much argument, which often surprises us in the classroom and in the crises of life. Can we not use our educational know-how to give such active exercise to this gift that, from its use, men will come to a sense of History in which they see themselves in the midstream of it, make their observations of their fellows so as to see, with an invincible clarity, our human unity, and even will be able to relate particular situations so that, from within themselves, they become aware of the general truths about God which hold them together.

There is yet this one other power which a disciplined imagination brings, which ecumenical education must possess. It brings the power to see things <u>before</u> they are there! By this power, this creative power, men are able to see things related to one another so as to form some new thing which has not yet its being Yet this thing given shape in the mind, will be believed in until, in the fidelity of men and the unhurried goodness of God, it IS. It is not fashioned out of day dreaming or escape thinking, it is made out of the clear and fearless images of things as they are and men as they are but "transformed in another fashion." This, Ecumenicity needs for its very life, and this, every ecumenically minded educator must be able to see, to recreate and to respond to with his life. Each of us who share in this conference know how much we have owed and owe still to such a vision, of a Promised Land, of a Holy Roman Empire, of the Kingdom of God. The Ecumenical Movement needs a vision by which to live, not fashioned out of the hollow bricks of wishful thinking but of the substance of truth with each other and of the readiness to be at one, when we are brought to the place of encounter or face the clamant need of our neighbour. "If there is to be a revival of religion it will spring from a revival of imagination" said one of our English Bishops.

If there is to be any ecumenical education of any worth, it will be as we are able to release persons to see with inner eyes, to relate what they see so as to be at one within themselves, and to hold a vision they have seen of what is meant to be, so that it becomes a dominant, unifying experience in their lives. Such a quickened imagination will be a mark of "the ecumenical man."

(ii) A disciplined will

He will also be a man of ordered will. The training of the will has been one of the neglected areas of educational thought and practice "The will" is not a separate faculty as is suggested by the phrase "a strong or a weak will." It is the coordination of faculties which makes a man able to exercise responsible choice or to commit himself to a responsible course of action. This capacity may be encouraged to develop by a cooperative rather than a didactic approach in the very manner of his education. The more he is confronted by the opportunity to make real choices and has to abide by the consequences of his choice, the more discriminating his "will" can become The more he is given the chance to reflect on these experiences and to use them in making new judgments and choices, the more likely it is that this capacity will grow. It is indeed by the exercise of choice that a man comes to have a personal identity They know this very well who desire to subdue the wills of men to their own purposes. They attack first either subtly or violently, their freedom to choose. If, in our purpose of religious education, we desire to create the conditions for the emergence of a person, an ecumenical person, who can act on his deepent intentions, then our program of training must give much more room for choice and much more chance for active obedience. If we are to train him to be not a spectator, but a participator, then from the beginning his religious education must be much more than something which merely happens to him or informs him. It must involve him in necessary responses to the world he lives in.

A painting by the Lancashire artist L. S. Lowry called "The Bystanders" exposes this. Seven characters in a group are revealed by their hands. One pair hang limply, another is thrust into pockets, yet another is securely under the breast button of a uniform. Folded under arms or held behind back, so the position of hands reveals the unwillingness of theorist or snob, of official or of mere spectators, to respond to the challenge of life situations. Ecumenical education is concerned to train men and women who are not content to be "bystanders." Instead they will know that they are called to make a response to the universe which is at all times importunately calling them through what happens in their own lives through what is happening to their neighbour. They will know that all they learn about this widening world asks for a response and that all their deepest feelings demand disciplined expression. In the kind of education which provides the opportunity for this, men and women find that inner unity or wholeness from which truly ecumenical action can proceed. It is part of our responsibility to think out the possible shape of such a purpose in ecumenical education. For men are crying still,

"But Lord, the will, there lies our bitter need
Give us to build, about the deep intent,
The deed, The deed."

(iii) A generous heart

If some words are added finally about the training of the affections of the ecumenical man, it is because there, in the heart of a man, where he becomes most fully a person, there the ecumenical movement must find its springs. "Yet surely," some will say, "the affections are sacred! Their influence as well as their integrity lies in their very spontaneity." It is most deeply true, and yet....Whose affections have not grown with growing insight, learned through the wisdom of others? Or whose affections have not begun, of themselves, to include in an understanding concern more and more of their fellows, as they have been able to be exposed openly to them?

It is, of course, quite especially urgent that we should be as free as we can of that charge of "conditioning" the reactions of others. No less is it urgent that we should bring those we teach within an ever broader and deeper involvement with men and women of "all sorts and conditions of life." We can only become persons at all, with an identity and life of our own, as we grow in community. There, open to all the differences of character, of mood, of age and of interest, there we grow in awareness, in understanding and in tolerance The circle goes on widening as we grow more able to respond until we see that it has no limits and in Tchekov's magical phrase, "it would be strange not to forgive."

So personal education, education of the affections happens only in community, where we respond and are helped to reflect on the nature of our responses In ecumenical education it is only the more true that this is the creative environment we must provide. How often we have ourselves found the opportunity simply to be together with those who see, think or act differently from ourselves not simply as enriching experience but a truly educational experience. This accepting and being accepted has made it possible for us to hear each other, to be open to each other and, quite simply, to love each other. There is no other way. We must not deny the opportunity of this experience to our peoples.

We shall not achieve their ecumenical education by instruction or explanation or even by new insights into History, though all these have their proper place. We have a prior task and a continuous one. We have to expose them to their fellow-believers and to do so in the environment in which it is possible for real encounter to take place and a response be made by each to the truth the other cherishes and by all to the total hunger of the world. We shall do better than well if we give imaginative concern to how this may be done. For in such an environment, ecumenical men will grow and the "Why" of our work be fulfilled in their growing capacity in the Ecumenical task in the whole inhabited world to which we each know ourselves called.

A CALL FOR ECUMENICAL POLEMICS

An Address By

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The critical issue concerning ecumenical education is not whether it shall be but only what kind it shall be The world has anticipated our discussion Contemporary culture is busily at work forcing men in a dozen different ways to confront their neighbors of many climates and states as well as faiths If we choose not to educate our people to the reality of other religions they will not remain blissfully ignorant. Our society in its mindless mixture of exploitation and chance will teach them what we might have hoped to channel through responsible purposefulness.

Men who believe in one God should have a special interest in this new world-become-a-neighborhood. Morally we must confess that a good deal of the prejudice which separates man from man, nation from nation, race from race, has been empowered by religion even where it has not arisen in its midst For that prophetic judgment upon us we must be grateful to our secular critics who, judging us by our own standards, have called us hypocrites. We cannot hope to end such prejudice merely by giving people facts Its roots lie beyond the rational. Yet the word "Jew" will sound differently when Christians know the countless lives of sanctity created by post-Biblical Judaism, and the term "goy" will lose its repulsiveness when Jews know what the mass and the cross and the creeds represent. The very fact that one faith deems other faiths worthy of serious brotherly concern will itself make the formal educational process more than superficially effective

There is another social process which is bringing religious men together, the growing sentiment called secularity. As men continue to lose or casually give up their sense of the Transcendent, Biblical religion will increasingly find itself on the defensive, a minority view in a secular culture. Though we adopt as many of the insights of secularity as we can and adapt our concepts to secular language styles, we shall still be outsiders in a world which sees man as self sufficient Secularity unless fundamentally transvalued inevitably becomes secularism. The pagan reasserts itself In such world religions, even those which are accustomed to being minority

faiths, will benefit by having allies. To know with whom we may stand against a rising paganism, to find those with whom we can work in a mutual effort to reorient our civilization, these too are the spurs to ecumenical education.

Yet in the largest, most positive sense, the search for brothers has always been the task of those who wait for the coming of God's Kingdom. We do not stand and serve alone. God knows other men as His covenant with Noah and his sons makes clear As our religious communion sustains the individual, so our knowledge that other religious communities stand alongside us in the night of history should give us all added hope

These truths, and others, can hardly be gainsaid. What keeps us from applying them in our institutions is not their falsity but our fear. We are afraid that if we affirm that which we mutually believe we shall lose our individual faith. That dread is particularly great within the Jewish community. In the century and a half that we have been coming out of the ghetto we have seen how social integration leads to religious defection. If the rate of conversions to Christianity has not been high in recent generations it is only because religion is out of style and ethical secularism a far more attractive way out. With society so seductive, shall a minority faith educate about other faiths? It hardly has time to transmit an introductory understanding of its own view of man and God and history And after centuries of Christian persecution climaxed by the Nazi horrors (which Christianity may not have caused but for which it provided the background and against which it did not vigorously protest), how can one say it is desirable to teach Jews of the truth of Christianity?

These special Jewish fears are widespread among believing, caring Jews. They must not be repressed They must be stated. Yet the very statement itself, predicated as it is on some men's willingness to listen and on our ability to speak our heart's pain, is not the end of ecumenical education but, in fact, its beginning To know that we are welcome to acknowledge our apprehensions to men who genuinely care is already to initiate the process and transform the broken past in a slight but significant way.

The lasting threat of ecumenism is the loss of identity In the effort to see what we have in common will it still be possible for us to remain our own unique selves? In the search to discover what we share must we not forget that in which we differ? Does not the high value placed on ecumenicity necessarily demean the value of any distinctive form or belief?

Surely that would seem to be the attitude of many a common man. In teaching him about the essence of religion we have implied its superior truth. He therefore judges that what all religions have in common is superior to what any one holds alone. That is why, though God may not be dead, institutional religion is neglected

This problem of individuality amidst sameness is the central

problem facing our society as a whole today. Similarity is the key to planning and production, to organization and facilitation. How then shall we be persons?

The sinfulness of conformity lies in our surrender of our peculiar selfhood, the one thing which makes us us. Beatnik rebellion is no more successful a strategy Bare feet and dirty long hair may make us look different. They do not guarantee that we are ourselves rather than slaves of middle class conformism in transformation reaction. Maturity will not be found in total immersion in the life of mass man nor in external assertions of one's difference from others. We know ourselves only when we acknowledge both that we are one of mankind, yet in that unity with all men recognize what distinguishes us from them. As the midrash puts it when a king of flesh and blood stamps his likeness upon coins, they are identical, but when the Holy One Blessed Be He put His image on all men, each one comes out unique.

That too should be our goal in ecumenical education, that in our concern for what we share in common we do not neglect to clarify where we differ, and in learning where we are joined together we come to understand better where we must stand apart. Thus far we have emphasized but the former. It is time we moved on to the latter The most important step in ecumenical education then is the creation of ecumenical polemics

This proposal will sound strange to those for whom ecumenicity is the emotional opposite if not indeed the antidote to the attitudes implied in the practice of polemics. Polemics meant antagonism, harshness, the total negation of the antagonist's position. They breathed an attitude of total deprecation and complete disparagement They assumed the polarization of the debaters with one possessing God's own truth and the other necessarily damned in God's own eyes. Is not the general joy at the birth of the ecumenical spirit precisely the death of the old polemical style? Instead of seeing the agents of the devil we now see men of another mind, instead of the damned we begin only with the different, and we are open to the beliefs which he and we share as one.

The progress is morally unmistakeable yet it is not yet complete. We are more true to one another than we used to be when today we meet to discover what we have in common. But, in fact, we are not identical Hence, knowing each other only in our sharing we have not yet come to know each other really at all. We exist in our difference as in our similarity. To know us truly, indeed to understand in just what sense that which we share with each other is meaningful to us, we must be known in our uniqueness. To cut short our discussions and permit them only to deal with parallels is then not to have done much at all. It is easy to be friendly when we agree. It is more important to see how we are prepared to accept the other's difference from us, his rejection of our fundamental faith, his negation of what we consider to be the saving truth. Difference is the test of religious good-will, our ability to create a meaningful polemics will be the sign of our ecumenical good faith.

Obviously these should not be the old type of inter-faith warfare yet they should retain something of its ultimacy The difficulty of the old polemics is that they were founded on the premise that man could give God's judgment on other men's faith in the here and now of history, often to the point of having sword and fire enforce that decision. How easily then could the will to power, personal or social, appear to be the will of God. How quickly texts became pretexts

These procedures were justified by the belief that in Sacred Scripture both sides had a public, absolute standard of theological right and wrong. Today, with some exceptions, we do not believe religious truth is adequately dealt with in such objective fashion The Scripture does not state religious truth for us as much as point to it in a uniquely significant fashion We can still hope to find public agreement in the text but only insofar as we agree to study it in terms historians agree may disclose what it once meant.

If we seek to discuss what it means, in truth, now, then we know we do not read the same text in the same way. When we talk of the nature of our faith today, even if we use texts to found and justify our belief, we know we have reference ultimately to a subjective realm. That is why our polemics must have a new tone. We may believe we know God's own truth as best man may know it but there is no way fully to explicate it to other men. The public, open, common knowledge of that truth, the other man's full recognition of our right, cannot be required or compelled now, in finite history He may not know it because we cannot fully convey it or he may in fact know it as well but as inexpressably as we do In God's good time, the messianic time, we shall jointly see how "The Lord shall be one and His name shall be One." (Zech. 14 9) Until then we must be committed to theological pluralism, and, if we are committed to the finitude of our own under standing as compared with God's, to the possibility that the other man may have as much of truth as we do.

Our polemics then will be different by being conducted within an ecumenical context They will be a search for that which divides us and for the truth which is inherent in those differences That is what makes them polemical for we shall undoubtedly discover that there is fundamental truth in what divides us as in what unites us Christians may find a faith in the Christ brings them a unity more fundamental than their different doctrines of the church. Yet faith in the Christ divides Christian and Jew and insofar as he is understood to be a person of the Trinity that divisiveness will affect the underlying sense of unity which Jew and Christian might find in the Biblical God. Here the differences seem to be decisive for the entire structure of the faith and more fundamental than the similarities. What began then as a search for distinctiveness in unity may then well eventuate in a statement of what to each is a more adequate faith than the other has. Description may give way to evaluation and commitment With ultimate truth at stake in difference, these researches in confrontation are, in their modern, existential way, polemics.

Yet if all faith is ultimately subjective why should we undertake to probe these differences? They cannot ever be fully explained and we potentially expose ourselves to the charge of avoiding brotherhood for emotional or ethnic or other morally insubstantial reasons There is some truth in these allegations and they should serve as a warning that this undertaking may often end in frustration and even misunderstanding. Yet the opposite danger is equally great Not to try to clarify the areas of our disagreement is to imply that differences are not significant at all It is to permit a shallow relativism to dominate religious discussions. Because faith is finally personal that does not mean that it is totally incapable of rational discussion and structuring. After all, the person is rational though he is not limited to his rationality. Subjectivity itself can be discussed in rational categories as is being done here, though those categories are a poor substitute for the personal experience itself What can be said should be said, in order that we may exercise such checks and balances upon our faith as we are capable of. In that way we shall be most responsible in believing And in the process of trying to speak of our differences to one another we may better learn what it is that we have been trying to say, either as we hear it from the other or recognize in his fallacy or distortion what we did not mean.

We can likewise be enriched by the non-verbal as well. How true it is that one understands a faith better in knowing its believers than in reading its theoreticians The faithful convey to us something beyond words of its style, its feel, its effective nuance This is as critical to understanding its validity as its ideas if not more so. Hence we must stand in polemic over againstness not just to the minds of men of other faith but to their faith-full lives as well

That is where the issue of conversion arises We confront the adherent of another faith in the full human dimensions of the truth on which he stakes his existence. If he does any less, if he does not really believe, if his faith is an intellectual game, his practice and stance an unmeant routine, he is not worth speaking to on these matters. If he is fully present in his faith his authenticity makes its demands upon us. Simply by being there he challenges us to accept his saving truth for ourselves. We cannot deny him that right without asking him to sacrifice himself as self. To engage in this sort of polemic then must mean to hold oneself open to the demand made by the other's very person that we accept his truth The risk of dialogue, even polemical dialogue, is conversion. But it applies to him as to us He must be as open to us and our truth as we are required to be to him He must be as willing to risk what may happen when we talk as we are and neither of us must in all good conscience exert any influence upon the other to make a decision other than what logic permits between minds and respect permits between persons

The risk of conversion is worth taking for those who seek the truth passionately and are reasonably secure in the road that they have thus far come, for the alternate result to such conversion is a new and fundamental self-affirmation. To know in the depths of

one's being that the other's truth is not one's own is to be sent back to one's own truth with some new insight into its nature. That may, at best, be an existential variety of negative theology, yet it is also true that negation is one of the classic means of definition In knowing who we are not, in having some intellectual and personal sense of why we are not sharers in other faiths, we become more fundamentally rooted in our own. That is not an easy or a troubleless path, but compared to the slander and hatred of other faiths into which religious groups have regularly allowed themselves to be drawn, it is one far more worthy of our God.

What an extraordinary contribution religion could make to the contemporary world if it could show men how to understand one another in their difference! What vulgar sinfulness infects every level of our social relations when we must deride and defame those who differ from us in order to affirm our own worth. It is but one step from this hatred of the different to its destruction. Does not the Bible itself remind us that the first religious polemic, one over the nature of sacrifices, ended in Cain's murder of Abel? The time is ripe, as it always has been, for us to learn that lesson We are indeed all the sons of Adam though some of us still till the fields while others tend the flocks Whose sacrifice the Lord will in due course accept He alone can fully know. Until then we shall serve Him best in being ourselves, not trying to become our brothers, in accepting our brother for what he is, even where he is not like us, and thereby accepting ourselves as well in all our distinctiveness.

THE NEW VISION OF THE WORLD AND THE ECUMENICAL REVOLUTION

An Address By

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Professor Historical Theology
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To The National Convention of The Religious Education Association

November 20, 1966

Opening Assembly at 8 00 P.M.

Palmer House, Chicago, Ill.

The purpose of this address is not to tell you what are the implications of the ecumenical revolution for religious education. You are far more competent to do that than I. Rather, my role as I understand it is to try to describe the shape and the background of the present movement towards unity in such a way that you will have a common point of reference in your later discussions -- a point of reference with which you may agree or disagree, but which will, hopefully, provide some kind of focus for your own independent reflections on the nature and the implications of the contemporary ecumenical ferment

In thinking about this topic, I find myself wondering what event most vividly symbolizes the startling ecumenical advances of our times. What came to mind was not the Second Vatical Council or the Pope's meetings with the Patriarch of Constantinople or the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the entrance of the Russian Orthodox into the World Council of Churches, but rather the demonstrations at Selma with nuns, priests, rabbis, and ministers of many denominations marching shoulder to shoulder in the Negro ranks protesting against the white power structure. Never before had the country seen such a vivid visual illustration of the increasing closeness of Catholics, Protestants and Jews and of these three groups with the humanely concerned of all religions and no religion at all. This is odd because, after all, that manifestation was not directly ecumenical. For the clerics and religious who participated, it was rather an expression of a new vision and new attitude towards the world. The church, they were trying to say, must stand on the side of the poor and the oppressed, not the rich and the oppressors. It cannot confine itself to Sunday services and pious exercises, but it must participate in the struggle for a better world even when this is dangerous, and even when it involves, not leading and teaching, but playing a servant role in a movement led and directed by others.

It is, I suspect, this vision of the world and the church's place in it which is the most important factor in the contemporary ecumenical situation. It is this which makes it imperative that Christians act together, not only with each other, but also, as Pope John XXIII put it in Pacem in terris, and as the council has repeated,

with all men of good will whether Christian or non-Christian, atheists or believers. Christian unity is important for the sake of what the council sometimes calls "building the earthly city," for the sake of effective action on behalf of the victims of injustice and the alienated and suffering in all strata of society. There are of course many other motives for ecumenism, but it seems to me that it is the beginnings of this new attitude towards the world which gives hope that present strivings for Christian unity will have a passion and persistence which have often been lacking in the past.

Our topic, then, is not ecumenism per se, but rather that vision of the world which is helping to give it its revolutionary drive. We shall later say something of the ecumenical implications, but these will be, I trust, more or less self-evident.

In order to understand what is happening, we must go, first of all, to history, for what is new can be understood only in contrast to that which it is replacing. We must also draw -- even though we shall mention few names -- on the writings of both Catholic and Protestant theologians, for the new vision is being developed as a part of a group enterprise which is itself ecumenical, embracing Christians of all confessions.

One prominent Roman Catholic theologian, the Dutch Dominican, Schillebeeckx, has proposed that the present shift in the evaluation of earthly realities is part of the greatest change in Christian thinking since Constantine 1600 years ago. Each generation is, of course, inclined to exaggerate the importance of the transition through which it is living, but if one goes this far back, one might as well go 300 years farther.

It might be suggested that the first great change began as soon as Christianity moved out of the thought-world of 1st century Judaism into that of Greek classical culture, in other words, it began while the New Testament was being written. One view of the universe was replaced by another and Christian beliefs were reformulated in many different ways in the course of a thousand years in order to make them intelligible within the new framework.

Now we are involved in a comparable transition. The classical outlook is being replaced by pictures of the world derived from modern science. Once again Christian beliefs are inevitably being expressed in fundamentally new patterns.

This does not mean, to be sure, that all theologies and philosophies of the past are irrelevant and doomed to disappear. The themes of the New Testament authors lived on within a Greek framework. Greek thought, in turn, retains enormous vitality even within a modern outlook as is illustrated, for example, by the role which both Platonism and Aristotelianism play in a process philosophy such as Whitehead's. However, such perennially persistent theological and philosophical positions are radically reshaped within the context of a new world picture.

In order to establish the terms in which I would like to describe the reshaping of the Christian attitude towards earthly realities,

I shall trespass on your patience by recalling some of the familiar catch-words used by historians in describing the biblical, classical and modern world pictures

The New Testament authors, good Jews that they were, saw the world eschatologically in terms of a story with a definite beginning and end. The story starts with God's creative act and moves towards the consummation when the Messiah will return and manifestly transform this earth into God's kingdom of justice, love and peace. This transformation so the Christians believed, had already taken place in a hidden way in the first coming of the Messiah, in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Thus, according to this way of thinking, the great divide in the universe is not along the vertical spatial line between heaven above and earth beneath, but along the temporal horizontal line between the old age of sin and death, and the new age of righteousness and life. Heaven was part of that created order which needed to be changed, and so the New Testament authors spoke of looking for a new heaven just as much as for a new earth. Similarly, the great divide within human existence was not between an immaterial soul and a physical body. Spirit and flesh in New Testament usage represent quite a different distinction which makes it possible, for example, to speak of a spiritual body and a fleshly mind. As modern biblical scholars argue, whatever lived in the power of the coming age, whether body or soul, was spirit, and whatever remained fixated in the past of loveless and defensive anxiety was flesh.

Within this context, the attitude of early Christians towards the world, that is, towards the natural order of created things, was in a sense this-worldly. The Kingdom of God for which they longed was not a matter of "pie in the sky" but was rather the final and culminating phase of this world's history. Secondly, their attitude was hope-filled and future-directed. They believed that in Christ the future had already begun and that the old age of misery and injustice would pass away. Thirdly, they were communitarian, not individualistic. Individuals were of immeasurable importance, but they were thought of as persons in community, not as isolated agents. The good life, the redeemed life, was understood by them as reconciliation, as the uniting of man with man, and indeed, of all things through Christ with God. Salvation was not a matter of simply private experiences nor of the purely interior and separate possession of God's favor or grace.

The classical picture of the world was dramatically different. As is often said, it was two-storied and static. The great divide was between the upper changeless realm of immaterial being, of Platonic forms or Aristotelian unmoved movers, while beneath was the arena of becoming, of time and matter. This lower domain was one of constant flux, to be sure, but it had no history. Its duration was endless both in the past and the future, and the basic patterns of the world of motion remain eternally the same, either in the sense of Aristotle's unchanging species or in the sense of the ceaselessly repeated Stoic cycles.

The Christians who had grown up with this view were forced to modify it profoundly in order to reconcile it with the Bible. The world, they said, was not uncreated and of endless duration, but was

made by God a finite time in the past and would end a finite time in the future Occasionally, genuinely new things happened, such as the coming of Christ But they retained much of the classical outlook They continued to believe that the structures of material, biological, and even human existence remain fundamentally unchanged from the beginning to the end of the world The biblical horizontal temporal contrast between the old and the new ages was replaced by the vertical contrast between an immaterial heaven and material earth. Despite some resistance from Aristotelians like St. Thomas, the Platonic dualism between soul and body also triumphed, at least on the imaginative level of popular Christian culture and devotion. Further, -- and the beginnings of this are already apparent in the later books of the New Testament -- this world is not to be transformed into the Kingdom of God, but it is to be almost totally annihilated with the exception of a limited number of pious escapees.

In this context, the Christian attitude towards the world was radically altered. This-worldliness was metamorphasized into other-worldliness. The orientation towards the future, towards the Kingdom which had come in Jesus but was not yet fully manifest, was largely replaced by a stress on the past incarnation and the Christ of present faith Finally, communitarian emphasis gave way to individualism This was true of Catholics as well as Protestants. Except for some sectarian movements, the church was not fundamentally a community, nor was it fundamentally the Messianic people of God. It was rather an institution supplying the means of grace by which individuals could be saved, so to speak, one by one. To be sure, the Catholics thought of this institution as indispensible, and the Protestants often did not but, at least on the level of popular piety, their basic notion of the church as the institutional purveyor of the means of grace has been remarkably similar and their views of salvation equally individualistic.

However, we should not exaggerate. Christians who thought in classical patterns have often been deeply concerned about the world even in its material aspects. They could not suppress the Biblical emphasis on nature as God's good creation. They could not repudiate the world as entirely evil, as did the Gnostics, nor neglect it as somehow unreal in the fashion of some Eastern religions Supposedly unworldly Benedictine monks were the great innovators in agricultural technology in theearly middle ages. During long periods, it was the church which built the schools and hospitals. It has provided the initial impetus for innumerable movements of social reform which, to be sure, it often then opposed when they threatened the established order Nevertheless, despite Luther's doctrine of vocation and the "inner-worldly" asceticism of the Puritans, so-called secular activities have generally been regarded during most of Christian history as second best, mere adjuncts or by-products of the real business of the devout Christian which is the salvation of individual souls, whether his own or those of others.

Now, however, a third way of picturing the world is becoming pervasive. The classical outlook in both its religious and non-religious versions is disappearing. Often we are unaware of how recently this has taken place. The world views of the first period of modern science were in many respects like those of the classical period, however

different in detail. For example, Newtonian science conceived the basic structures of reality as unchanging and time as an absolute of infinite duration. It is especially in the last 100 years that the fundamental revolution has begun. Technological and scientific progress, Carnot's law of entropy, Darwinian evolutionism, Einstein's theory of relativity and speculations about expanding and oscillating universes have changed even the way the man in the street visualizes the universe. He thinks of it, not as static, certainly not as two-storied, but more and more as a unified historical-evolutionary process.

Now, strangely enough, the formal structure, though not the concrete details, of this modern world picture resembles that of the first Christian century much more than it does the classical Hellenized views of later periods.

This, at least, is what many historians of ideas and theologians are suggesting They argue that for both the first and twentieth centuries, the world is a unified whole rather than divided into two fundamentally distinct layers of the unchanging heavens and the earthly flux, or of spiritual and physical realities. For both centuries, it is at least thinkable that this universe had a definite beginning at some finite time in the past, even though first century men thought of this in terms of thousands of years and the Genesis myths, while our cosmologists, if they adhere to the theory of an expanding universe, speak of billions of years and of some unimaginable cosmic explosion For both, this unified, temporally finite cosmos is not static, but is a process with a story, a history, in which even fundamental structures can be revolutionized. This is true, once again, even though first century Jews visualized the process in anthropomorphic terms while we speak of gaseous clouds condensing into nebulae, stars and planets, of the emergence of living beings from nonliving matter and of the slow and painful push up the evolutionary ladder to cave men and now to space men. Finally, both these world views are oriented towards the future. Most contemporary men, to be sure, do not think in first-century fashion of the cosmos as rushing towards the Kingdom of God, but they are intensely aware that mankind is hurtling forward with ever-increasing speed Development succeeds development at an accelerating pace until now we find ourselves rocketing into the future in what seems to be definite direction, but towards a goal we cannot know -- towards a blankness which we fill with both terror and hope and towards which we react either by blind reactionary clutching of the familiar or an equally desperate revolt against everything which comes from the past.

We are now in a position to see why an increasing number of theologians are inclined to think that it is, so to speak, easier to baptize or Christianize this world view than the classical one. Over-simplifying drastically, one could say that the Christian is one who affirms in faith and hope, not knowledge, that the future towards which mankind and his world is heading is not a terrifying blank but is one whose shape is stamped with the lineaments of him whom the New Testament speaks of as our elder brother, as the first fruits of the New Creation, Jesus Christ. God, he says, is guiding all the processes of nature and history towards the ultimate, cosmic fulfillment in which all things and mankind as a whole will be reconciled in Christ, and through Christ with God.

This New Testament language is highly symbolic, and it is quite impossible to reduce it to a description of a rather commonplace, inner-worldly Utopia as some of the social-gospel theologians of a past generation tried to do. It is also impossible to spell out what it means in quasi-empirical, purportedly scientific terms as Teilhard de Chardin, for example, so brilliantly, but ultimately unsuccessfully attempted However, as we know, one of the characteristics of much, though by no means all, modern theology, both Catholic and Protestant, is that it takes symbols seriously, it does not try to explain them away, to reduce them to another kind of language, whether that of medieval metaphysics or of some contemporary non-symbolic mode of expression. It views symbols as the logically indispensible way for the whole to be represented to man and for man to develop total responses, total attitudes towards reality The Marxist or the humanist visions are just as symbolic as the Christian, even when they parade in literal dress. The question, then, is not whether the representational pole of one's ultimate commitments is symbolic or not, for it can't be anything else, but which set of symbols is most adequate to articulate and guide whatever fundamental human orientation it may be that is truest, that is most appropriate, to the fathomless mystery which lies at the heart of things, which encompasses the beginning and the end, the origin and the destiny, of our lives and of the world we know, and towards which we feebly point in our talk about God.

It is in some such way as this that many contemporary theologians try to take seriously within a modern context the biblical vision of the world and human history. This does not mean that they set themselves up as prophets They are agnostic about the details of the future course of events It may last a mere matter of minutes or it may continue for millions of years. Humanity may experience both unbelievable cataclysms in the form, for example, of atomic warfare as well as unimaginable triumphs here on this planet or in distant constellations and galaxies. About all this the Christian knows no more nor no less than anyone else. But what he does affirm in faith is that, whatever happens, the world and human history is moving towards, not simple cessation or abolition, as most theologies of the past have suggested, but transformation into the Kingdom of God.

Such an outlook, it must be emphasized, is not a simple reproduction of biblical eschatology. The New Testament authors and the early fathers understood only the history of Israel, Roman peace and, in some cases, Greek philosophy as preparation for the gospel, while within the contemporary perspective, this preparatory action of God is thought of on a vastly greater scale as extending through billions of years of cosmic and biological evolution and the hundreds of thousands of years of human development.

The implications of this for the Christian and the church's attitude towards and the relation to the world are, of course, tremendous. It leads to much greater emphases on what might be called "the secular mission" of the church, on its servant character, and through this to ecumenism.

The secular mission becomes important because God is seen as guiding all that happens towards the final transformation. All that is pure, honorable and of good report, whether it develops

within the explicitly Christian sphere or not, whether it is overtly religious or apparently secular in character, will enter into the consummation. Human advances of all sorts, from the technological and scientific to the social, political, cultural and moral, are part of God's preparation for the coming kingdom. These advances, of course, are radically ambiguous and can be used for evil purposes as well as good, but God wills that man actualize his potentialities to the uttermost, and whatever is good about these actualizations is eternally relevant. Thus the "building of the earthly city," as Vatican II calls it, and the worldly tasks which necessarily occupy the attention of most men most of the time are not simply a meaningless background to spiritual reality, to the New Age, but contribute to its very constitution. In promoting so-called secular advances, therefore, the church and the Christian are directly engaged in God's business, and this is true not only when they struggle for peace and justice, but also when they are concerned with these inseparably related technological, intellectual and cultural domains.

In the second place, however, this Christian concern for the world cannot take the form, which was common in the classical, two-story view, of a desire to dominate and direct society. This was natural in that context simply because the church thought of God as saving, not the world, but individual souls out of this world. Its interest in society, therefore, was simply that of providing a favorable environment for the specifically religious activities of preaching, worship, and Christian nurture. Not only Catholics, but also many Protestants, were quite willing, for example, to violate religious liberty in order to prevent simple souls from being led astray. Even when they didn't go that far, their interest was frequently the negative one of passing blue laws to remove temptation rather than the positive one of building for the future.

However, when God is seen as redemptively guiding all the processes of nature and history towards the consummation, then the church no longer has a monopoly of saving activity. The church is called upon to cooperate with what God is doing outside the explicitly Christian realm. It must do this even when its role is subsidiary, even when it does not lead to any growth of power or influence for itself, even when it does not result in an increase in membership. Its role must be that of a servant of mankind, not a master.

Indeed, one must go farther. The sole business of the Christian community is to concentrate on faithful witness in action as well as word to the Lord who was a servant of human need and who fought against evil even when, to put it mildly, it was inexpedient to do so. The Church, therefore, need not feel troubled if it fails to convert large numbers to Christianity. It can cheerfully leave the question of visible success to God, knowing that He wills to use that witness in apparent defeat as in apparent victory. Its task is not necessarily to Christianize the world, but to serve it by reminding it in all that it is and does of where it is heading, of what God's purposes are. It does this, not only by the words and individual lives of its members, but more fundamentally by being a communion of faith, love, and service, by being a concrete sign and witness, however imperfect, of the Kingdom which has begun and is to come.

The ecumenical importance of these emphases is obvious. Within the traditional two-story outlook there was no overwhelmingly evident reason why Christians should act together in order to carry out their mission. That mission was thought of, as we have said, primarily in terms of the explicitly religious task of mediating God's saving grace to individuals. The Catholic, to be sure, has conceived of the communication of this grace more in terms of right doctrinal belief, sacramental causality and institutional membership while the Protestant has spoken mostly of the Word of God, living faith or religious experience, but in both cases it was not of central importance that Christians and churches act together in order to carry out their function of saving souls one by one. This was particularly true on the Protestant side, but even Catholics admit, as has now become clear from the council's Decree on Ecumenism, that the grace of God can be mediated more or less fully to individuals through ecclesial communities and churches which are not in communion with Rome. Thus there is room for being laissez faire about the divisions among Christians. To be sure, there can be a variety of reasons even in this outlook for taking unity with the utmost seriousness, but it is not built into the very concept of the mission of the church.

Within the new perspective, in contrast, it becomes immediately evident that Christians must be reconciled among themselves and, by their communal action, reconcilers in the world if they are to be credible witnesses to God's reconciling action. Further, united action is required for effective service of human need when this is understood not only in terms of the traditional religious activities, but also as a secular mission which embraces all dimensions of human existence whether private or public, whether material, cultural or political. This makes ecumenism central to the purpose of the church. It makes clear that even preliminary steps towards unity are important. While the goal may be the full unity of the churches, it would be a serious error to wait until that is accomplished (as was often done in the past) before beginning to work together, and think together and worship together to the degree that this is possible. Everything which can be done to increase communication and cooperation among Christians is fundamental to what Vatican II affirms is the church's nature as sign and source of unity in the divided world

The concrete applications of this outlook are beginning to be seen everywhere, not only in such matters as the demonstrations at Selma, which we have already mentioned, but in common concern for the Vietnam war, in joint Catholic-Protestant parishes in inner city areas in St. Louis and here in Chicago, in the trend towards thinking about the problems of education cooperatively rather than competitively and in many similar developments in many areas. It is evident that when the churches are most deeply involved in standing on the side of the poor and oppressed, and in serving human needs of every kind, that they are forced to think, act and live together. This does not decrease, but increases concern for doctrinal and ecclesiastical divisions, because these become urgent problems only when the necessity for a life of common action and prayer is vividly apprehended.

We have said enough, perhaps, to indicate why the new picture of the world as a God-directed eschatological process enhances concern

for "building the earthly city" and therefore also for unity It is time now to pause and reflect what chances there are that this will significantly influence the attitudes and behavior of the men and women who call themselves Christians and of the institutions called churches.

It is easy to be skeptical. To be sure, the words of official ecclesiastical documents have been affected by the new outlook as is evident in the pronouncements of Vatican II, the World Council of Churches and many Protestant denominations. It is also clear that the new vision provides some inspiration and a kind of theological rationalization for a new emphasis on the secular mission of the church. However, can we really expect that more than a few words and a few actions will be changed? Isn't it totally unrealistic to suppose that the masses of the devout can be weaned from their preoccupation with their own soul's salvation or with a religiously induced peace of mind or that the church's institutional self-interest and preoccupation with numbers and finances can be substantially diminished? Can one really expect any large number of people to have their imaginations captivated, faith stirred and energies mobilized by what sometimes seems a kind of theological science-fiction fantasy? Is it really believable from the point of view of either Christianity or modernity that building the earthly city is part of God's way of preparing for the final unveiling of the Messianic Kingdom?

The empirical evidence relevant to such questions is inconclusive. Christianity and, in a different way, Judaism survived astonishingly difficult transitions in the past, and perhaps they will do it again. Or perhaps they will suffer shipwreck. The Christian, to be sure, affirms that the community of believers in God's Messiah, however large or small it may become, will have a role to play in God's plans for the world until the end of time, but that is an affirmation of faith, not knowledge

However, of two things, it seems to me, both believers and non-believers can be fairly sure If the Christian community endures as a vital force, it will do so, first of all, only because it maintains the outrageous grandeur of its original claims that the self-giving of God in Jesus Christ is central for humanity, and indeed, for the universe. Otherwise, with the increasing disappearance of sociological and cultural reasons for belonging to the church, there would be no point in being a Christian Secondly, however, it will have to learn to think, and feel and experience these claims in terms of the modern picture of the world. It will have to view the vast panorama of cosmic and human history, not as a meaningless backdrop for so-called spiritual or purely existential realities, but as part of the very substance of God's plan for the world. It will learn to affirm earthly realities and the concrete stuff of human development as a painful and everlastingly ambiguous but still essential part of God's preparation for the coming Kingdom

As I said at the beginning, the implications of this for religious education is something for you to consider. If there is any merit in the general approach to ecumenicism which we have sketched, three theses in particular would seem to deserve attention First, the ecumenical aspect of religious education cannot consist simply or primarily of supplying fair and sympathetic information

about other religious bodies Rather, it must be related to the need to work with other Christians, with Jews, and indeed all men of good will, in the service of human needs and of reconciliation in a divided world. Secondly, this ecumenism in action needs to be nourished by the search for greater unity -- which does not mean uniformity -- in prayer, worship and expressions of faith (i.e., "doctrine"). The so-called "secular" and "religious" dimensions of ecumenism cannot be separated. Thirdly, all our teaching should be informed by a sense of history and of change so that we present our respective traditions as developing and never completely adequate expressions of the fullness of the Christian reality which often do not contradict, but rather supplement each other, and which need to grow together in mutual enrichment It is only thus that deep rootage in the concreteness of Christian life, that is, loyalty and love to a particular church, can be combined with genuine openness and ecumenical passion

SECULAR ECUMENICITY AND THE TEACHING OF THE FAITH

An Address By

REV. ALBERT van den HEUVEL,
Executive Secretary, Youth Department,
World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland

To The National Convention of The Religious Education Association

November 22, 1966
Convention Luncheon, 12 15 - 2 15 P.M.

Palmer House, Chicago, Ill.

Mr Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To be here this afternoon required the crossing of an ocean, once the most forbidding thing to man, today one of the most comfortable and restful experiences one can have But speaking to you this afternoon requires an attempt at real communication and that has become most difficult That is the predicament of our time Crossing an ocean is a child's game in comparison with communication Airplanes are safer than words to bring people close to each other These are strange times in which we are more at home with complicated machines than with the simplicity of words. And men in such a time want to gain clarity about the impossible semantic code-combination of secular ecumenicity and the complexity of religious education!

However, we shall try and hope that at least the concurrence of trying to say something and the attempt to listen will produce an educational event if not for you than at least for me.

A. Secular Ecumenicity

What do we mean by secular ecumenicity?* The adjective 'secular,' which simply means 'worldly,' 'not sacred' or even 'concrete,' is not meant to add anything to the meaning of ecumenicity but to guard it against possible misinterpretations. I will, therefore, not speak this afternoon of yet another sort of ecumenicity, apart from the usage that word has in Roman Catholic circles or in the World Council of Churches, but simply about what some of us think ecumenicity must mean if it is to be biblical and theologically sound.

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*See also Albert H van den Heuvel The humiliation of the Church, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, October 1966, page 92

Ecumenicity - as we all know - comes from the Greek word oikoumene, which simply means the inhabited world, the world of man Its meaning, therefore, originally is 'openness towards the world of man.' The specialized use which the churches are making of the word hopefully does not forget the original meaning but applies it to the life of the churches. Ecumenicity in the churchly realm can be defined as study and action for the renewal of the life of the churches and the manifestation of the unity of the Church. The word stands for a perspective in thinking and a specific way of churchly behavior. Ecumenicity is the modus vivendi of the ecumenical movement.

About the movement itself I do not have to speak long. The reason why the word ecumenicity is in need of a clarifying adjective is simply that the word is already very differently understood in different circles Conservative Evangelicals hear in it that the Churches of the Reformation are on their way to submit themselves again to the bishop of Rome (submissive ecumenicity), the Roman Catholic Church hears in it the restoration of the unity of the Church - be it in a radically renewed form - around the Pope (papal ecumenicity), the World Council of Churches uses it for the road towards the manifestation of the unity of the Churches in a form which is not yet known (open ecumenicity). As you see it is the World Council of Churches which knows least, and the Conservative Evangelicals who know most, about the outcome of the ecumenical movement

But our subject is even more complicated There is not only perplexity between historic confessions about the meaning of of the word Ecumenicity shares the fate of all other theological concepts in that it is submitted to a tremendous differentiation of meaning within each of these communities I hold that to be a most important and exciting development Each community of faith today is as diversified as the One Church of Christ would be. There are Roman Catholics holding a concept of ecclesiastical authority lower than many Southern Baptists, there are evangelical Protestants today who are avowed atheists, there are episcopal Pentecostalists and high church Calvinists In the churches a German proverb has become superbly true Es gibt nicht, dass es nicht gibt' Nothing exists that does not exist. The time in which one could smell at a theological book and tell the confession of its author is gone, our communities of faith have become as differentiated as the whole world. And since our concept of authority has also changed, the Grand Inquisitor - or whatever the name is for the office which enforces uniformity in our churches - can do little about it. The inner differentiation of the Church is here to stay This development spells trouble to the ecumenical movement which is built on the principle that whole communities speak to whole communities It spells profound trouble for the discussion between, for instance, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Confessional Bodies. Who will represent the Roman Catholics? Ottaviani or Bea, Tromp or Küng, the Italian hierarchy or the Dutch, the Curia or the representatives of l'Eglise des Pauvres? And who shall represent the Lutherans? Bonhoeffer's

disciples? Bultmann's disciples, the French Lutherans or the Missouri Synod? I took the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran confession as an example because doctrine plays such a central role with them, but the same could be said about any other confession.

Those of us who use the phraseology of secular ecumenicity see to our embarrassment that the undigested differentiation of our confessional positions often results in their representation by those who show greatest affinity to their historical positions, as if historical loyalty was a guaranty for actual relevance.* In an age of differentiation, a dialogue between those who represent a whole confession becomes increasing difficult. Example the gigantic performance of Vatican II. The ecumenist may be comforted by the thought that these 3,000 minds can live in one Church and in what the documents call perfect unity, at the same time he is greatly perplexed as to how the ecumenical debate with the separate brethren of the Roman tradition shall henceforth be carried out.

The ecumenical movement then has become much more of a laboratory than of a conference hall, more a place in which the people committed to renewal meet and plan than a place where the representatives of historical communities straighten out their difficulties. The emphasis has shifted from unity to renewal, or at least from unity-in-truth to unity-through-renewal. To me that seems tremendous progress because it means that we have all seen that churches, as they are, cannot ever find unity nor can they ever find relevance for the world The ecumenical movement is a laboratory where sick churches try to discover together how to get well together.

In this laboratory the most important ingredients of the medicine have been discovered as well. These can be called Man and World.

Man

When the Christian hears the word Man he is first and instantly reminded of that Man whom, in the words of Thomas the Doubter, he confesses as "his God and his Savior, the Man from Nazareth, Jesus Christ." Not Christ in isolation of mortal man, but as the beginning of the new humanity, as the New Adam, as God's disclosure of what Man in his image really is

Recent scholarship has shown that Jesus' most beloved title for himself, the Son of Man, is not merely a singular concept but a plural one **

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*Actual relevance is not in contradiction to historical loyalty but it can not be equated either

**See, for instance, Norman Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, London, 1965.

The Son of Man is really the righteous community, as the Suffering Servant is in reality the obedient Israel. In the Hebrew mind, we are told, the concept of the person and the concept of the community are like two sides of one coin.* The Christian community sees this exemplified in the person of Jesus, who sums up in himself the obedient Israel and personifies the Suffering Servant and the Son of Man, but who also opens up the possibility for men to join Him and become part of the people as God willed man to be. In the ecumenical movement we have long since said that the closer the Churches grow to the Christ the closer they come together. Nothing new would have to be said here, were it not that earlier ecumenists often laid the emphasis on the glorified Christ, whose triumphalist features dominated his humanity, his suffering and his service, with which our generation has become so fascinated. We therefore like to say it this way the closer we come to the humanity of Jesus Christ, the closer we come to each other.

A similar thought comes to us in yet another way. The rediscovery of biblical theology, especially of the Old Testament, has opened our eyes again to the fact that God's design for the world has the humanization of man as its object. Using somewhat exaggerated language, we like to say that God does not want people to become Christians but simply men. As God himself became man, so He wants us to become man and muster the faith and the courage to leave behind the sub-humanity with which we are usually satisfied.** Both Israel and the Church live by the knowledge that they hold a promise for all nations and the content of that promise is a revealed and restored manhood, subjecting nature, establishing viable communities in which justice and peace are married and not at war, ridiculing and smashing idols and worshipping God in festive and willing obedience. The whole creation "waits with eager expectations for God's sons to be revealed" (Rom. 8 19) and our hope is that "the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the Children of God" (vs 21).

This radical turning of God towards man cannot but bring the Church to follow Him and worship Him by living a fully human life.

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* e Martin Buber Die Frage an de Einzelnen, 1936 English translation -- Between Man and Man, Fontana Library.

**In the now famous words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Christian is not a "homo religionis" but a man, pure and simple.....in whom the knowledge of death and resurrection is ever present.. ". In "Letters and Papers from Prison." Fontana books, page 127.

The ecumenical movement means that the Church in Unity brings the message of this hope to the whole inhabited world as the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches said in Rolle, 1951

Worldliness

For the same reason the ecumenical movement is the radical movement towards worldliness Radical because it requires a change in the root of our thinking (metanoia/conversion)*, it requires the death of the Old Adam, radical because it means leaving the thought-pattern of the old aeon and entering the world anew as people who have been called out of the world to be sent back into it again, as servants.

This worldliness or secularity, with all its dangers**, is at the heart of the ecumenical movement Therefore, schema 13 is regarded as the highlight of Vatican II and the World Conference on Church and Society is regarded as the most interesting recent event in the ecumenical movement of the Protestant and Orthodox churches

Yes, there is an even more important third remark to make. We must see that God led us during the last years to discover that He himself is the great secularizer *** The whole story of Israel is the story of the refusal of the sacred autocracy of the Middle East From the thundering No! to the golden calf, the hesitation about building a temple and crowning a king to the stirringly ethical preaching of the prophets, the Jewish people were led to the understanding that faith is not a stirring of the soul or a religious emotion but an obedience to humanity as God has ordained it Modern theology has wrought an impressive liberation for us by showing the profoundly secular character of God's revelation, in which all God's acts and all man's responses are directed to a life for others and a concentration on the humanization of man's structures

In the ecumenical movement these trends have been brought together, have fed and crossfertilized each other, and have taken hold of many in all confessions. Of course, we are not without

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*See Bonhoeffer again o.c. pages 120-128

**For the dangers, see what has been written about a lack of discipline disguised as "new morality" or unfaith disguised as "modern belief" in the works of Paul Lehmann, Ethics, Jacques Elul, Fausse Présence, and H. Golwitzer, The Existence of God.

***See Bonhoeffer's work in prison, the writings of Roland Gregor Smith, Albert H. van den Heuvel The Humiliation of the Church, Harvey Cox The Secular City, and especially A. Th. van Leeuwen Christianity in World History, London, 1964.

problems in all this Secularizing in God's economy is not an end in itself as some overeager modern theologians seem to say. Secularization, the new freedom for man, is preparation for choice. It procures man's freedom to recognize the source of this liberty or to reject it. Israel's and our hope is not a secularized society, but a society in which the farmers will write the name of JHWH on the bells of their horses (Zach.14 20), or, in the terms of the New Testament, a city, not merely known for the absence of temples in it, but in which God will be all in all. It is in this hope that some of us created the expression secular ecumenicity. That concept then witnesses to God's liberation and to our hope, that the members of the divided community of faith will find each other in their service to man and to God's world We must remember that only that which prevents the churches from this service divides them properly All other divisions, as the inner differentiation of our churchlife shows, we can bear within the One Church.

The secular ecumenist is greatly encouraged by the development of the ecumenical movement the erosion of the doctrinal differences between our churches, the unifying development in modern biblical exegesis, the common experimentation going on between churches in all lands and the spiritual unity between those in different communities whose allegiance is to renewal, closer to each other than to many renewal-resisting colleagues in their own tradition. We are full of hope that God gives his churches a real new road to follow and we pray that all our best theological thinking will go into this adventure, that living remembrance of our rich traditions will give it colour and depth and that together we shall have courage to take far-reaching and deep-ploughing decisions.

B Secular ecumenism and the teaching of the faith

It seems to me that the way of thinking which I have outlined above has profound consequences for the teaching of the faith I am not ready to develop these consequences here in full, but will try gladly to begin a discussion on them

I must warn you at the outset that I am not going to be very practical. My knowledge of the Christian education debate in the Anglo-Saxon churches is limited and recent I apologize, therefore, for drawing wide circles rather than painting a precise picture.

1. The teaching of the faith in ecumenical perspective can never be discharged by either informing people about the ecumenical movement and other churches or by bringing people of different communities together. All this, however necessary, is pre-ecumenical.

Serious ecumenical education only takes place when people engage together in the mission of God towards the world. Their common confession and their common worship do not come about through combining old or inventing new forms acceptable to all the faithful but is found and fulfilled through their common witness and service.

Our experience tells us that this is true Concentration on our differences usually creates hardened disagreement, or at the best, uncomfortable consensus, to which all can subscribe but no-one can live with. Concentration on what unites us usually creates the uncomfortable agreements of people who know the surprising measure of their unity but who do not know how to apply their agreement.

Only if we learn to theologize and worship as one body-in-service, will we understand the true scope of our disunity and the strength of our unity. Our common service and witness form the only reliable tools for establishing the real dimensions of our unity and division.

2. The insight that God is the secularizer of all men's religious inventions,* makes the teaching of the faith into stimulation of the process of secularization. The biblical narratives and their kerygma tell us many things about the God of Israel indirectly, by way of attacking the idols. Faith, in biblical terms, means first of all establishing silence and openness, expectation and alertness, so that God can be heard when He speaks in his strangely silent, hidden and implicit ways. That means that teaching the faith means first of all clearing the religious field of all the voices of the idols.

The destruction of all that sets itself up as god prepares the way for God himself. Therefore, salvation reaches man through judgment in the prophetic literature That is the real issue in the ministry of John the Baptist, that is the content of the teaching of Jesus The initiative, the first act, lies with God, of course, but shows itself first of all in judgment The faith of Israel and the Church must, therefore, include the relentless attack on the ever-recurring idolatry, out of which the kerygma called man back Jesus' strongest teaching about the kingdom of God significantly comes when he exorcises the demons, that is when he fights, rejects and overcomes the powers which dehumanize man Our world is full of such powers. Propaganda, the distortion of news which silences or distorts the view of the opponent and/or enemy, nationalism which operates on the principle that our allegiance to ourselves is pre-eminent over that to other peoples, political pessimism which makes people believe that no one else is ready for sacrifice and that man will only work for his own good, cabalistics which believes that one needs a majority to get things done, minimalism, holding that we have to straighten out the small problems before we can effectively tackle the big ones. All these idols are recognizable because they divide rather than unite, they focus on self rather than on others, they want to be worshipped rather than used, they sow enmity rather than

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*I am aware that the concept of religion is ambiguously used here. Anglo-Saxons seem to prefer religiosity here, although I do not think that this helps basically. I use the word "religion" in the Barthian and Bonhoefferian sense of the word (a) as a unifying concept for the religious, the philosophical and the scientific and (b) as the odious combination of soteriological egotism and metaphysical escapism. For a fuller treatment see my The Humiliation of the Church, Westminster Press, 1966, chapters I, II and III.

produce reconciliation, they bring loneliness rather than fellowship, they imprison rather than set free, they make people stand still rather than move.*

I have the feeling that current discussions on the teaching of the faith do not put sufficient emphasis on this point. Subsequently religious or Christian education tends to become too "religious" again, too much concerned with either knowledge about beliefs or integration with the religious community. The sure sign that the emphasis tends to be wrong is when the rich think we are doing alright and the poor could not care less, or even actively distrust us.

3. The kerygma of God becoming man is qualified in the New Testament by stating that he became a poor man. Of course, this is no exaltation of poverty. Poverty is in the whole biblical tradition a curse But paradoxically the cursed are blessed because God takes their side He takes their side to bring them from poverty to wellbeing.

One must be blind not to see that the whole Bible drives the rich to either side with the poor, give them justice and charity (in that order!) or perish under the wrath of God.

Secular ecumenicity means that the Church takes on this role. That is an intrinsic part of our renewal. Since all of us here are rich we had better see the choice before us The poor are abundant in our world. Two thirds of the nations' population are hungry. 15,000 people die today of starvation. We have indicated in our politics that we are standing with these people in their ideological battle. We interfere with them, we protect them, we guide them very forcibly, but, at the same time, we buy their raw materials at such fluctuating prices that they are at our mercy, we put tariffs on the products they want to sell us, we give them loans which they can not pay us back as long as trade is not organized, we invest in their countries and bring the moneyearned there to our lands, we give them aid which is ridiculously low both in proportion to what we earn by our exploitation of them and our own gross national income. Here secular ecumenicity becomes painfully concrete. The Church in the developed countries cries to God about our American and European injustice but we throw up our hands and let them die. It seems to me, ladies and gentlemen, that here we come to the heart of the matter. These things our churches will have to shout from the roofs in order that the prophetic preaching of the Old Testament may be understood at all and the people of God may be given a chance to really show, by their loss of popularity and worse, whether their God is alive or dead **

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*Albert H. van den Heuvel These Rebellious Powers, Friendship Press, New York, SCM Press, London, 1965.

**See Msgr. Ancil a.v L'église des Pauvres, Les éditions du CERF, Paris, 1965, which states that "evangelism to the poor includes the evangelism of, the call to, if possible the conversion and if that is not possible the condemnation of the rich."

In societies in which political and social education is so abominably cheap that the great majority of people can vote without knowing or facing the issues, the teaching of the faith will have to be political education and social education from the perspective of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, that is, from the perspective of a God who gives the poor and the oppressed an open future and hope (Jer.29:11). Let us learn from the fact that in South Africa, Nazi Germany and many parts of this country, religious education fortified rather than weakened political and social injustice If we do not teach with the same explicitness and toughness of the biblical teachers themselves, we do not teach at all. Today the international bodies like FAO, UNCTAD and WTC are better religious educators than the communities of faith.

The teaching of the faith in terms of secular ecumenicity must mean the preparation of people to become fully men. On the one hand this means clearing the religious field of idols, on the other the identification with the struggle for the rights of the poor, but also the representation of those whose voice is silenced in the decision-making forces. The love for the enemy, for instance, in terms of education must at least mean that we take him seriously. Allow me to take an example In South Africa the teaching of the faith, that is the education to full human living, must mean that the white churches teach their constituency what those Bantus who want apartheid to go really say. That this is not done, that the Bantus who love the white are always made the spokesmen of their people, shows the sickness of the white religious community You can make your own application for the racial problem in this country. Are we also willing to include in our education the teaching of love for the enemy in relation to the Vietnam war? Are not the American religious educators called to teach who the Vietcong really are and what they really want? Not because they take their side, nor because they are friends, but precisely because they are enemies. Are we not called, because of our faith, to represent those who are virtually silenced in the discussion and in the official statements, because we think so highly of man that we do not want him to miss any element of discernment in his decision-making?

5. Finally, some people may still ask but what about the content of the faith, what about the covenant and conversion, about prayer, the sacraments, forgiveness, what about incarnation and resurrection? To answer that very legitimate question I have to make a remark about a recurring element in the Anglo-Saxon religious education discussion. In the attempts to find the right approach to Christian education, people have used concepts like scripture-centred, child-centred, experience-centred, community-centred. All agree that each of these indications contains important elements of truth. But all share the same weakness, namely, the danger that the faith is systematized, in all these concepts the faith can be, and as we well know, often is separated from God's actual deeds in history

It seems to me that here it is helpful to refer to what Gerhard von Rad* says in his theology of the Old Testament about God's educational work. God, he says, educates by interfering into the history of the Jewish and theother nations. In other words, the teaching of the faith is event-centred. In the punctiliar concept of history which is so dominant in the Old Testament, the people live from event to event From the exodus to the possession of the Holy Land, from the splitting of Israel to the exile. And all teaching, the whole content of the faith, is related to these events and the hope for ones yet to come There are no concepts in Scripture, there are only stories and, therefore, relational insights. So, even God changes his mind (Ex. 1·22), so a sin of yesterday becomes a commandment for tomorrow (Deut.7), so a man has to do in God's name what he refused in God's name before (Acts 10). That does not make for inconsistency but for a consistent attitude of continuous listening and readiness to reconsider and change.

Conceptual education is unbiblical, scripture makes us champions of narrative education, in which all we know from revelation is brought to bear in the evaluation of the events of our actual history.

All we can teach is how, in past events, faith became effective and unfaith was revealed in doing so, the past events become contemporary and so produce elements for the discernment of the actual effectiveness of faith The contextual study of tradition, in which Scripture plays a decisive role, is absolutely necessary for an understanding of the faith today.

Both what we call biblical concepts and what we call central events of church life lose their value when separated from the obedience asked from us in the events of our day. Bonhoeffer formulated that in his time most sharply in his reminder that only he who shouts for the Jews may sing Gregorian chants. So today only those who are fully committed to the abolition of hunger may receive communion, only those who are fully committed to unity in the world may work for unity between the churches, only those who are fully committed to real communication between estranged people may pray and only those willing to die for their fellows may carry the message of the resurrection.

Of course, these words are hard, they bring us to confession, to a plea for forgiveness and to a renewed understanding of mercy and grace, that is to the center of the gospel and the content of the faith.

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*Gerhard von Rad Theologie des Alten Testaments II, Kaiser Verlag,