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*Jewish and Catholic Theology
in Dialogue* ❖ ❖



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RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM

*The Role of the Church and Synagogue in
Social Action*



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A few years ago, a Hebrew book, published by American Jews in Israel, but written in Soviet Russia, was called to my attention. This book was an exchange of correspondence between two rabbis

in Soviet Russia—one the Rabbi of Bobruisk, the other the Rabbi of Pavlograd in the south of Russia.

The topic they had been discussing for a number of years in their correspondence was "Whither Soviet Jewry?" What is the future of Russian Jews?

In one of his first letters to the older rabbi, the Rabbi of Pavlograd asked whether or not he should remain in the rabbinate. Why this question? He says, "We have a Synagogue—it's empty. We have no *Talmud Torah* [Jewish religious school]. We have no *heder* [elementary school]. We have nothing. But somehow a couple hundred of Jews living in Pavlograd are afraid of remaining without a Rabbi. But I have nothing to do. Wouldn't it be more desirable to resign and become a factory worker in Russia and at the same time remain a pious, traditional Jew as I am?"

The other rabbi advised him not to resign. The line of the argument he used and the criterion he applied to what a rabbi is or should be is very interesting. A rabbi should be in his world an almost functionless person. His only function is to study and to pray, and his house should be open to other people; that is the only function of a rabbi.

I tell you this story about the book not because I want you to adopt on the American scene that criterion for the rabbi—or, by inference, for the priest or minister—but because the Rabbi of Bobruisk referred to something else.

In his semi-rabbinical language, the rabbi referred to an idea about cycles in history. There are various cycles in human history, the rabbi writes in one of his letters. Fundamentally, there are only two—the naturalistic cycle and the metaphysical cycle. Now we are in the midst of a new naturalistic cycle, as the rabbi said, a materialistic, secularistic, and naturalistic cycle in highly industrialized countries, in countries with a technological civilization or in countries aspiring to create a technological civilization. And our duty "is to be patient and wait. This new naturalistic cycle is going to commit suicide."

"I see already the germs of death in this cycle, in this new naturalism," wrote the Rabbi of Bobruisk. "And then a new wave of the metaphysical outlook will seize Soviet Russia; not only Russia, the world as a whole; and the Jew will again find his place in the world and his language will be more understood than it is today. But in order to welcome the emergence of the new metaphysical cycle we must have you in Pavlograd and you must have me in Bobruisk, and there must be hundreds of others like us in other places. That is your task."

This Dostoievskian *midrash* might well be viewed as a parable on the situation of the Church and Synagogue in the twentieth century. Without subscribing to the conclusions of the Rabbi of Bobruisk, nor to his overly simplified and apocalyptic views on "the cycles of history," I cite this episode because it is suggestive, symbolically and metaphorically, of these three larger themes with which I should like to deal in this paper:

- 1) The existential situation of the Church and Synagogue at this moment in history, and some implications of the present condition for social action.
- 2) Some of the theological and historical factors that have formed the relations of the Church and Synagogue with the social order.
- 3) The challenges, the dilemma, and the possibilities in social action for the religious communities.

The Existential Situation

Any informed observer of the social-action arena in the United States and abroad, but especially in the United States, over the past two decades may confidently assert that a virtual revolution has taken place within the religious communities—within them as well as between them. The impressive record that Father John S. Cronin¹ documents of the accomplishments in such social-action areas as race relations, anti-poverty campaign, civil liberties, and the pursuit of peace (with some qualifications) is a

decisive testimony to this growth of collective social consciousness and witness on the part of denominations, singly and cooperatively. More than one Congressman and civil-rights leader has publicly testified that the collective action of the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish leadership was a crucial factor in passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Nevertheless, the term "revolution" should not be used unqualifiedly. In the face of the glaring moral corruptions and social injustices that pockmark our society; in the wake of the even more overwhelming problems of potential nuclear holocaust and of poverty, disease, and illiteracy that afflict most of that two-thirds of the human family so callously called "underdeveloped"; in confronting the fantastic challenges of the "triple revolution" of cybernation, weaponry, and human rights, it is evident that the Kingdom of God is far from being realized and that a posture of (cf. "The Church, The Synagogue, and the World," Father Cronin's contribution to this Colloquy) denominational or inter-religious triumphalism is unwarranted, and, worse yet, dangerous because it creates an illusion of achievement which is the greatest enemy of growth and development, the fruits of realism.

In point of fact, the social action enterprises of the churches and synagogues cannot be adequately comprehended apart from a recognition of the transcendent reality of this time; that is, the contradictory existential situation in which the West, and in particular, the Western religious communities find themselves.

The ultimate contradiction, quite obviously, is that posed for the entire human family by the nuclear age itself. The science and technology which hold out the possibility for the first time in man's recorded history of banishing the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance, are at the same time a Pandora's box of apocalyptic terror that enables modern man to "overkill" himself at least 125 times!

In the middle of the eleventh century the Catholic Church was in a position to enforce a "Truce of God" which greatly re-

stricted the time when it was permissible to carry on warfare. By means of the Truce of God, the Church prohibited warfare between contending parties from Wednesday evening to Monday morning of each week, and during the period of Church festivals. Thus, there were at least theoretically only eighty days for fighting in each year, never extending over more than three consecutive days. The difference between the unitary, feudal society of the Middle Ages in which the Church held effective political power and the relative impotence today of all the churches combined to affect, for example, the decisions for the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear bombs is too obvious to require comment. Nevertheless, this paramount "social action" question must be confronted with a new seriousness as to whether the prophetic, moral, and spiritual resources of the world's major religions cannot be asserted at this critical hour to help achieve a twentieth-century "Truce of God" before the world destroys itself in a nuclear-missile holocaust, and, almost tragi-comically, either through mechanical error or human miscalculation.

There are other decisive factors which have undergirded the renewal and reform of religious communities, and foremost among them has been the recognition on the parts of Pope John of blessed memory, Pope Paul, and other Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish leaders of the radically altered new realities which confront all Western religions, and the West itself. (There is substantial evidence that certain forms of *aggiornamento* are taking place among the major Oriental religions—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism—but this paper is confined primarily to a survey of the Church and Synagogue of the Occident.)

For the first time since the emergence of Christianity in the fourth century as an established, organized religious community, Christians—and allied with them Jews and all others who count themselves as citizens of the West—find themselves at one and the same time as a minority and a majority. Out of the 3.3 billion people who inhabit our planet today, less than one billion are

Christians and Jews. Every year 22 million non-whites, non-Christians, non-Jews are born into the world as contrasted with eight million who are born Christian or Jewish. The annual population growth rate in Asia, for example, is 2.6 per cent, as compared with 1.6 per cent in the United States, and 0.7 per cent in northern and western Europe. Roman Catholics today number some 18 per cent of the total world population, and population projections indicate that by the year 2,000, the world Catholic community will number 11 to 12 per cent of the 6 billion inhabitants of the earth. In light of such statistics, Father Karl Rahner's insistence on the "Diaspora" situation of Christians takes on concrete human meaning and is not just a charming Biblical metaphor to be taken abstractly (it takes on meaning for Jews, too, but apparently Jews are veterans of the Exile and suffer less trauma, having come to grips with the condition some time ago at Babylon).

The "diaspora" situation of Christianity (and Judaism) is profoundly shaped by other forces as well. The emergence of communism as a global, pseudo-Messianic religion with an effective missionary enterprise and a determined anti-theistic ideological program represents the most powerful and unprecedented opponent in the 1,900-year human experience of Christianity. Since the end of World War II, fourteen formerly "Catholic" countries have become Communist satellites and more than 100 million Christians are now behind the Iron Curtain. The largest Communist parties in the world, outside of the Iron Curtain, are found in predominantly "Catholic" countries, namely, France and Italy. The Communist inroads in Cuba and the considerable hold of communism in other parts of Central and Latin America are sources of profound anxiety to the West. None of the dominant nations in the world today are "Catholic" as contrasted with the pre-World War II situation when Catholicism was a major political force in France, Italy, and the Balkans, and in Europe generally—and Europe was the major force in the world.²

Another dimension of these "new realities" is the rise of nationalisms in Africa and Asia. In many of these countries, Christianity is regarded as the "white man's religion," the handmaiden of Western imperialism and colonialism. (In many ways Jews are involved in Asia and Africa through the activities of the State of Israel which has been carrying on significant programs in technical assistance. To some extent, the Israelis have also been looked upon as agents of the "Western-imperialist-colonialist" world). The tragic massacres of missionaries in the Congo and Angola reveal the depths of the hostility of the African toward peoples of the West, even if the European was at one time considered a Christian benefactor. The harassment and banishment of Christian missionaries in the Sudan is only one of the more recent of a long series of acts in many parts of Asia and Africa that have reduced Christians to tolerated minorities.

According to the Methodist publication, the *Christian Advocate*, the establishment of Islam as the official religion of Malaysia resulted in a ban on religious teaching by missionaries and on the use of the radio for evangelical purposes. In Nepal, Methodist missionaries were allowed to open a hospital on the promise that they would not evangelize and that the government could take over the equipment in five years if it so desired. In Ceylon, the government has nationalized 2,500 Catholic and Protestant schools which served 140,000 students. In the United Arab Republic, a Christian school is permitted to stay open on the condition that a Moslem teacher be allowed to come into the classroom and explain the Koran.

Accompanying the rise of nationalism is the resurgence of the Oriental religions, once regarded as moribund. Of the 242 million Africans, for example, there are 35 million Christians (Roman Catholics number 23 million; 7 million are Protestants; 5 million are Eastern Orthodox; of the remaining Africans, 160 million are classified as animists, and 89 million are Moslems). Islam, which numbers some 430 million adherents in the world, has

the most aggressive missionary outreach in Black Africa. Islam converts seven Africans for every one African converted either to Catholicism or Protestantism. Every embassy of the United Arab Republic in Africa has an "attaché" for Islamic affairs—a euphemism for a Moslem missionary. Similarly, Buddhism (153 million adherents), Hinduism (335 million), and Confucianism (300 million) have been undergoing a renaissance, are rapidly developing a political sophistication which reflects itself in effective social organization (the new Buddhist quasi-political structures in Viet-Nam are a powerful example), and have become increasingly competitive with Western Christianity.

A statement on "the Pope's Plan for Latin America" which appeared in *The Catholic World*, contained a report by CELAM, the Episcopal Conference of Latin America, which discusses frankly the situation of some 200 million souls there.³ This report says that it is not unusual to find cases where 60 or 70 per cent of the couples are without religious marriages. Some, said to be Catholics, have not even been baptized. There is one priest for every 5,000 people compared to one for every 700-800 in the United States. In a recent survey in Chile, 60 per cent of the men favored abortion. The Latin American population is increasing faster than that of any other continent in the world. There is not a single government in Latin America that is not threatened by economic upheaval and political instability—fertile grounds for the marauding of the Castroites and Communists, on the left, and for the Peronists and fascists (such as the Tacuara movement in Argentina, in alliance with the thick nest of Nazi emigrés and the Arab League), on the right.

The "contradictory" aspect of the existential situation, to which I earlier referred, grows out of the fact that at the moment when Christians and Jews are becoming collectively a "minority" living in the "diaspora," they are at the same time experiencing an unprecedented growth and strength as a "majority" in the United States. The churches and synagogues in America, and

their auxiliary bodies, today have the highest rate of growth, the highest levels of per-capita contributions, the most extensive building programs, the highest rate of attendance at religious services and of enrollment of children in religious schools, the most carefully developed social welfare programs for youth and the aged—the highest in comparison to their growth in the past and in contrast to churches and synagogues anywhere else in the world. This growth has taken place—not incidentally—in a free, voluntary, pluralistic society, and not in a confessional Church-State arrangement. But this very growth and this very strength have given many Christians and Jews—and other Americans—a "buffered" vision of the world at large. The description of the American state of mind by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen is tragically accurate: "Americans live in a sumptuous palace in the midst of a vast slum."

The problems of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, the question of proselytization or witnessing, freedom of movement, the relationship of Church to State, racial and religious discrimination—once regarded as the preoccupation of Westerners and Christians in the internal relationships between Catholics and Protestants, on the one hand, and Christians and Jews on the other—have now been catapulted onto the world scene. In an age in which there is instantaneous global communication, rapid transportation and mobility, it is no longer possible either to "keep under wraps" for long or to withhold from the judgment of a restive and interdependent human family any acts or attitudes which reflect contempt for the human person or which deny him his "natural rights."

An attack on a Negro in Birmingham today will tomorrow be condemned editorially in a Ghana newspaper. The harassment of Christian missionaries in Jerusalem will be protested at once on the front pages of Christian newspapers and the general press in various parts of the world (I write here in defense of the rights of responsible missionaries, not the "rice missionaries" who de-

ceive children and exploit the desperate poverty and confusion of newly-arrived Jewish immigrants from Arab countries). The denial of the religious rights of a Protestant or Jew in Spain or in Colombia will become the subject of a consultation within hours in New York or Geneva. The banishment of priests and nuns from Indonesia results in immediate protests from far-flung parts of the world.

From the foregoing I would here summarize three conclusions:

1. A world, teetering on the brink of nuclear destruction, can little afford the perpetuation of an atmosphere of hatred, division, and suspicion.

2. The human society, both East and West, threatened by moral decay and materialism, needs every human and spiritual resource to meet the overwhelming needs and challenges of our age. Repressive, mutually antagonistic religious, racial, and ethnic group conflicts will paralyze mankind in its effort to meet the challenges of survival. The monopolies and hegemonies of the past must give way to a global pluralism in which, in the words of Pope John's *Pacem in Terris*, "the universal common good, that is, the common good of the entire human family" is promoted.

3. Religion itself will be irrelevant if it continues to perpetuate the glaring contradiction between preaching high moral principles of love, sympathy and charity, and allowing the undisciplined practice of the opposite in the forms of race prejudice, anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Protestantism, and other ethnocentric blasphemies.

Theological and Historical Factors

"Are the churches (and synagogues) exerting even as much as 10 per cent of the influence which they could—or should—be exerting in the fields of peace and social justice? Are they tooled for such a task by intention, declaration, organization, program, finance, staff?"

E. Raymond Wilson of the Friends Committee on National Legislation posed this question in his article, "Are We Serious about Social Action?" (*Christian Century*, Feb. 10, 1965). On the basis of a sampling of Protestant denominational social action, Wilson comes to several striking and chastening conclusions (which, I would argue, are virtually applicable without much qualification to that of the Catholic and Jewish communities as well):

First, "Through the past two decades there has been considerable growth in church social action programs at national, state, and local levels, but that growth has been slight in comparison with the many opportunities available for effective action." For example, Mr. Wilson writes, "What is needed now is enlightened and continued support, backed by testimony that is competent, relevant and effectively presented, of such objectives as wider development of United Nations operations; more far-reaching steps toward disarmament: enlarged but more discriminating mutual aid and technical assistance projects to overcome world hunger, ignorance, disease and poverty; and expansion of programs for population control. Such issues get no appreciable supporting mail from churchmen, in contrast to the stream of letters inspired by the isolationists, the 'fright peddlers' and others who would have our national concern limited to the part of the human race labeled 'American' . . ." He adds that in the area of negotiations dealing with the ending of the spiraling arms race, "it is disheartening that, so far as I know, no religious organization has a full-time staff person dealing with disarmament problems."

Secondly, "There is with all of us a temptation to confuse resolutions and pronouncements with social action. Such statements do serve to register a certain degree of consensus, but they are not self-executing."

Thirdly, an appraisal committee of the National Council of Churches' Division of Christian Life and Work has reported that "of the council's 31 constituent communions only ten have

agencies with one or more full-time staff members engaged in social education and action, while six others have voluntary commissions or committees to work in the field. In other words, only one-third of the member churches have assigned full-time staff members to the specific task of supplying local congregations with pertinent information and helping them engage in social action endeavors."

Mr. Wilson adds that "a survey of the denominations (other than the historic peace churches) which are particularly active in social action indicates that the proportion of their central funds devoted to support of their departments in that field varies from 1/2 to 4 per cent, and that average expenditures per member vary from four to 15 cents. [Here he indicates that these figures do not take into account the funds expended on health, welfare, and home-missions work at home or on relief and service to refugees abroad.] How can we hope to achieve such goals as disarmament, world peace, or racial justice when the average church member's annual sacrifice to keep his denomination at work in those areas on the national level is no greater than his expenditure for one candy bar, one soft drink?"

How does one explain such relatively limited action on social issues? Mr. Wilson seeks to offer several reasons. One is financial: "yet throughout the nation expensive new buildings are being constructed by congregations whose social budgets are starved for funds or are nonexistent". Another is the fact that "conservative boards and ecclesiastical hierarchies" are frequently unwilling to approve new endeavors that compete for funds and attention with entrenched programs." A third reason which Mr. Wilson offers is the "theological," and he explains it in these words: "For far too many, Christian religion is merely a personal matter having no relation to the unsolved problems of national and international life. If a wider horizon exists, it is likely to be confined to the foreign mission enterprise; if ethical concerns intrude, they are often limited to the effect on the public of smoking, gambling

and drinking." Related to that, he adds, is the view that "the church shouldn't 'get into politics.' Lobbying is something nice people don't do . . . The church should stay out of controversy."

Schleiermacher has written that "underlying every philosophy is a conviction." I would submit that the reverse is also true: "underlying every conviction is a philosophy." At the very heart of the question of the relation of the Church and Synagogue to social action is the theological and philosophical issue of the orientation of the religious traditions to the world. A good deal of the behavior of the religious communities in response to contemporary social challenges can be understood primarily in light of theological positions whose origins stem back to the foundations of the faith communities.

In his perceptive study, *Christ and Culture* (1952), H. Richard Niebuhr set forth the five main ways in which Christians have understood the relationship between the Church and the world: Christ against culture (e.g., Tertullian); Christ of culture (e.g., Locke, Ritschl, Barton); Christ above culture (e.g., Thomas Aquinas); Christ and culture in paradox (e.g., Luther); and Christ the transformer of culture (e.g., the "conversionism" of F. D. Maurice).

Thus, four of these historic formulae involve a separation of religion from the public domain—if not a separation, then certainly a primary emphasis on personal salvation or otherworldly concerns. The views of St. Augustine are most frequently cited as the proof texts of the classic Christian view that the ideal world is always above and not at the end of human history.

"Two loves," says St. Augustine in *De Civitate Dei*, "have made two cities, love of self unto contempt of God, the Earthly City; love of God unto contempt of self, the Heavenly City," the City of God. The *Civitas Dei* is a "mystical society" of all the elect, past, present and future. The *Civitas Terrena*, the Earthly City, is identical neither with the earthly State, nor with any particular

earthly State such as the Roman Empire, nor with any merely human society; it too is a "mystical society," that of the impious, the damned.

In an essay on "Aspects of Medieval Thought on Church and State," Gerhart B. Ladner (*The Image of Man*) writes: "St. Augustine's concept of the City of God is a specifically Christian ideal of community life . . . It is only natural that notions of such perfection as that of the City of God or of the Church itself which in one of its aspects is 'the only human society engaged in building the City of God' tended to depreciate the state as conceived by pre-Christian antiquity. St. Augustine is indifferent towards the state as community and territory." Ladner adds that Augustine's views were "rather generally held in the patristic period and was an important factor in the development of early medieval political theory."

An eminent Protestant church historian, A. C. McGiffert, in his introduction to *Protestant Thought Before Kant*, traces mainstream Christian ideas about human nature and temporal society back to the teachings of St. Paul.

The theological system of the Middle Ages was in its controlling principles as old as the Apostle Paul. He was led by his own experience to draw a sharp distinction between the fleshly man, who is essentially corrupt, and the spiritual man, who is essentially holy. The one is natural, the other supernatural. The one is doomed to destruction; the other is an heir of eternal life. The spiritual man does not come from the natural by a process of development and growth, but is a new creature born directly from above. Wherever Paul may have got the suggestion which led him to interpret his experience in this way, his low estimate of man and his contrast between flesh and spirit revealed the ultimate influence of oriental dualism which was profoundly affecting the Hellenistic world of the day. A sense of moral evil, a conviction of human corruption and helplessness, and a recognition of the worthlessness of the present world were becoming more and more common, and men everywhere were looking for aid and comfort

to supernatural powers of one kind or another. The later Platonism, from which the theological thinking of the great fathers chiefly drew its sustenance, was completely under the sway of this spirit.

With the traditional view of human nature was correlated the notion of the present world as evil, sharing in the curse of man and doomed to destruction as he is. To escape from it was the one great aim of the serious-minded man. Salvation meant not the salvation of the world itself, its transformation into something better and holier, but release from it in order to enjoy the blessedness of another world altogether. The dominant spirit was that of other-worldliness. To be a Christian meant to belong to another sphere than this, to have one's interest set on higher things, to live in the future, and to eschew the pleasures and enjoyments of the present. Asceticism was the Christian ideal of life.

The practical implication of this theological world view, according to McGiffert, was that "social service on a large scale was postponed to modern times." It was not a mere accident that this was so, he explains; "rather, it was because of an altogether different ideal, and an altogether different estimate of the present world."

The emergence of Protestantism, particularly in a certain tradition of Martin Luther's teaching, it would seem, represented a radical break with this line of Pauline and Catholic teaching. Luther's conception of salvation as being wholly a matter of divine forgiveness (man is saved by faith and not by works, as developed in *The Liberty of the Christian Man*) led to the belief that the Christian is free from the necessity of earning his salvation by engaging in particular religious practices and performing works of special merit; this, in turn, also meant the sacredness of all callings, even the most secular and the most humble, and the possibility of serving God in worldly profession, business and trade as truly as in monastery and priesthood.

It looks like a great thing when a monk renounces everything and goes into a cloister, carries on a life of asceticism, fasts, watches, prays,

etc. . . . On the other hand, it looks like a small thing when a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework. But because God's command is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service of God far surpassing the holiness and asceticism of all monks and nuns. For here there is no command of God. But there God's command is fulfilled, that one should honor father and mother and help in the care of the home (*Luther's Primary Works*, V, p. 100, as quoted by McGiffert).

But Luther, a complicated man, often contradicted himself, and his views on the relation of salvation to moral and ethical responsibility were no exception. The Protestant historian, McGiffert, quotes Luther's contradiction as it appeared in his essay, *Against Latomus*: "As wrath is a greater evil than the corruption of sin, so grace is a greater good than the perfect righteousness which we have said comes from faith. For there is no one who would not prefer (if this could be) to be without perfect righteousness than without the grace of God."

McGiffert observes:

It was a religious and not an ethical motive which controlled him; not to attain moral purity, but to be on good terms with God was the supreme need of his being. To claim that the Protestant Reformation was due primarily to ethical considerations, and was the result of dissatisfaction with the moral state of the world, and of the desire to raise the moral tone of society, is nothing less than a travesty upon the facts.⁴

John Calvin, the great formulator of the Reformed theology whose *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) became "the theological textbook of all Western Protestantism," was even more rigorous than Luther in conceiving of man in terms of his "corruption and depravity" as a correlative of his doctrine of unconditional predestination and God's omnipotent will. As Calvin says in his *Institutes* (Book III. chap. ix.), "With whatever kind of tribulation we may be afflicted, we should always keep this

end in view, to habituate ourselves to a contempt of the present life that we may thereby be excited to meditation on that which is to come" (§1). "There is no medium between these two extremes, either the earth must become vile in our estimation, or it must retain our immoderate love. Wherefore if we have any concern about eternity, we must use our most diligent efforts to extricate ourselves from these fetters" (§2).

Protestant scholasticism as expressed in the *Formula of Concord* (1580), which was widely adopted as the official doctrinal standard of the Lutheran churches, served to stereotype this view of human nature and the negative relation of religion to life. As in all scholasticism, according to McGiffert, the importance of a particular doctrine came to depend upon its place in the closed system rather than upon its practical relation to life.

In response to the rigidities of scholasticism, the emphasis upon formal orthodoxy, the absorption of leading churchmen in theological controversies, and also in reaction to the depressed religious and moral life that ensued on the heels of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), there emerged in Germany under the advocacy of Philip Jacob Spener (1633-1705) the Pietist movement that became a dominant force in German religious life down to the eighteenth century, even influencing the reconstruction of theology at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Both in his organization of Bible-reading groups, commonly known as *collegia pietatis*, and in his introduction to the mystical work, *Pia Desideria*, Spener emphasized the practical nature of Christianity, which consists not in the knowledge, but in the conduct, and particularly in the exercise of mutual love and service. Spener, an orthodox Lutheran, insisted that personal piety, the bent of the heart and life, the feelings and will at the expense of the intellect, personal faith, and growth in Christian perfection were more important than doctrinal soundness.

Spener interpreted Christian conduct in other-worldly terms. His ideal was not, as with Luther, victory over the world, but es-

cape from it. Piety was to show itself in devotion to spiritual and supernal things, and in the transfer of affection and interest from this world to another. As McGiffert profiles the movement:

The pietism of Spener and his followers was essentially medieval in its estimate of man and the world. Distrust of human nature and despair of the salvability of society were both characteristic of it. Salvation meant escape from an evil world for a few elect souls who banded together for spiritual communion and mutual edification, and these elect souls were not the Christian Church but a small circle within the larger body . . .

The vitalizing of Christian piety, the breaking of scholasticism's control, the recognition of religious experience as the chief basis of theology, the emphasis of the will instead of the intellect in religion, the prominence given to the emotions, above all the individualism given to the whole movement and its hostility to ecclesiasticism, sacramentarianism, and sacerdotalism, meant much for days to come. Pietism was one of the forces which brought the modern age in the religious life of Germany.

Without succumbing to the temptation of employing history as the "imperialism of the present," one can understand the warrant which justified Franklin Littell, in his examination of the moral collapse of the Lutheran churches under Nazism, to conclude that "a sentimental and degenerate personal piety pervaded the established churches of Europe, secure in the stagnant swamp of culture-religion."

German pietism, in turn, influenced English Evangelicalism through the impact of the Moravians on John Wesley (1738), founder of British Methodism. Calvinist and Arminian evangelicalism, through Wesley communions and the preaching of Wesley's associate, George Whitefield, influenced the New England theology of America, especially through the revivalist activity of Jonathan Edwards. Like the German pietists, the Evangelicals were ascetic in their tendency. Their ideal was to

live with heart set constantly upon the future, and natural human interest in the present world was condemned as irreligious. "Friendship with the world," Wesley said, "is spiritual adultery." But, as church historian McGiffert points out (p. 168):

The Evangelicals were not as consistent and thoroughgoing as their medieval prototypes; they did not advocate retirement from the world and seclusion in a monastery. But they denounced many of the ordinary pursuits and pleasures of society, commonly looked upon as indifferent matters, and insisted that they ought to be eschewed by the Christian. Card-playing, dancing, gaming, horse-racing, theatre-going, elaborate dressing, and frivolity of all kinds came in for most vigorous condemnation. To be a Christian very commonly meant above all to turn one's back upon such employments. Thus there grew up an externality of religion and an artificiality of practice even more complete than anything witnessed in medieval Catholicism.⁵

Both in England and in the United States (in the former under the impact of the industrial revolution and in the latter under the force of pressures exerted by a frontier society) evangelicals and revivalists did not overlook responsibility for the welfare of one's fellows. Love and service were an important part of Christian virtue, and the evangelicals gave themselves to humanitarian and social labor on a large scale and with great effectiveness. It meant much for the future that not rationalists, and deists, and unbelievers alone were fired with a growing enthusiasm for humanity, but that the great representatives of a revived Christianity shared the same spirit.⁶

This survey of some of the theological factors which have helped shape the contemporary stance of religious communities toward the social order has concentrated mainly thus far on the Hellenic, that is, Platonic, dualistic element in Christian tradition. But there has been another formative influence at work, namely, the Hebraic, which requires comment.

In an essay entitled, "The Present Heritage of the Long En-

counter between Christian Faith and Western Civilization,"⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr asserts that "the civilization of Europe has been created by a culture in which the Christian faith has been a chief component." Among the "distinctive qualities" which he regards as "possible ultimate causes of unique aspects of European culture," Prof. Niebuhr cites three which have their origins in Jewish religious thought and tradition:

- 1) The hazardous affirmation that history is meaningful and the temporal process is not merely a corruption of the eternal.
- 2) The emphasis on the value and dignity of the life of the individual and the equally important affirmation that the unique freedom of the individual is the source of evil as well as of virtue. [Niebuhr cites Pascal's phrase of "the grandeur and misery of man" as affirming Augustinian realism as reflected in the emphasis that "the freedom of the self is the root of both the creative and the destructive possibilities of human action."]
- 3) The attitude toward the whole temporal process, which is not regarded as divine (as in systems of cosmic pantheism), or as evil or illusory because it is not divine (as in systems of acosmic pantheism). The Hebraic component of Western culture contributed this sober attitude toward the temporal and the natural, making it possible for Western man to regard nature, in Santayana's phrase, as "man's stamping ground and system of opportunities."

In *Moral Man and Immoral Society* Niebuhr elaborates his view:

It was the peculiar genius of Jewish religious thought that it conceived the millenium in this-worldly terms . . . Whenever religion concerns itself with the problems of society, it always give birth to some kind of millennial hope, from the perspective of which present social realities are convicted of inadequacy, and courage is maintained to continue in the effort to redeem society of injustice. The courage is needed, for the task of building a just society seems always to be a hopeless one when only realities and immediate possibilities are envisaged.

In his Harvard essay, Niebuhr observes that the Jewish idea of the Messiah, "the hope in a future fulfillment of history in which, under a Messianic king, power and virtue would be perfectly coordinated, was the most potent . . . of the various solutions to the problems of historical meaninglessness." He adds, however, that "the radical transformation by New Testament faith of Old Testament messianism was one of the two greatest revisions of the Hebraic faith (the other being the emphasis on grace, rather than law, as a saving power). The revision was expressed in viewing the Messianic fulfillment in the crucified Christ, rather than in the triumphant Messiah," and this view assumed "a perennial variance, even contradiction, between historical achievements and the divine."

But this radical revision, Niebuhr observes, did not completely suppress the original messianic or eschatological vision. The early church was dominated by the imminent Parousia of the promised triumphant Messiah, at the price, says Niebuhr, of the lack of a responsible attitude toward all the proximate solutions of the communal problems of a sinful world. He continues: "An historical religion must have the tension supplied by an eschatological vision. But the vision must not be so pure or so determined as to destroy responsibility for proximate goals—a fact which Karl Barth evidently does not understand."

From the point of view of Jewish concerns about the social order, this tendency of Christian thought toward a "neutralism" or irresponsibility for historic tasks in this world has been one of the fundamental departures from the prophetic view, and has stood in radical contrast to a mainline emphasis in Judaism. In the judgment of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, there has been a tendency on the part of Christian theologians to affirm mystery at the expense of history, but Christianity is both proclamation and event.

It may be worthwhile to recall that the characteristic Jewish experience of God is the awareness of His presence in human events. Every aspect of the Jewish tradition is pervaded by the

memory of His redemptive act in the exodus from Egypt. Almost the whole of the religious calendar is an act of recalling the past experience of the Jewish people as a record of God's relationship to it. The emphasis of Jewish faith is therefore neither on metaphysical speculation nor on dogma, but on human action. Life is the arena of moral choice, and man can choose the good. He can make himself worse than the beast or he can ascend to but little lower than the angels. Every man plays his role, for good or ill, in the redemptive history of mankind, for man is God's partner in the work of creation. In *imitatio Dei*, the Jew is obligated to seek justice and pursue it, to care for the widow and orphan, and the stranger at the gate.

This is not to say that rabbinic Judaism denies dualism altogether. The concept of the *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination) in constant tension with the *yetzer tov* (the good inclination in man's nature), of *Kodesh* (holiness) and of *chol* (this-worldliness) are intimations of a recognition of the *homo duplex*. But it is characteristic of rabbinic thought that these are experienced as "value-concepts" by the individual alone or in community, rather than "congealed in a static, hierarchical system of thought."⁸

The growth of involvement in social action on the part of the Christian community has, indeed, been a radical response to external forces of the twentieth century, such as those elaborated earlier in this chapter: population explosion, anxieties of the nuclear space age, communism, emerging new nations, resurgent Oriental religions, secularism, and pluralism. But it owes whatever deeper meaning it possesses to interior forces at work in the life of Christianity and Christendom, namely, the Biblical, liturgical and theological renewals. In its concerted effort to recover the Hebrew mode of thought by restoring the Scriptures to a more central place in study and worship (see Father Roland Murphy's chapter in this volume), the Church has moved decisively to overcome the bifurcating and "abstractifying" of life that was one of the by-products of Scholasticism.

The emphasis in Vatican Council II's schema on "*De Ecclesia*" (On the Nature of the Church) which speaks of the Catholic Church ("while on earth it journeys in a foreign land away from the Lord . . . like an exile") and its conception of itself as "the people of God" related providentially to "Israel according to the flesh" finds resonance in the non-Catholic ear.

Especially compelling have been the declarations of several Council Fathers at the Ecumenical Council during the third session as they discussed Schema 13, "The Church and the Modern World." Bishop Remi Joseph De Roo of Victoria, British Columbia, said, "Christians achieve their total vocation when they engage themselves in the structures of the world, share in its struggles and commune with the inner dynamism of humanity. A Christian must immerse himself in the world. He dare not consider himself as foreign to or above the world, belonging to a church which condescendingly imparts gifts reserved to her by God alone."

The late Cardinal Meyer of blessed memory, whom I was privileged to know both in connection with my work as program chairman of the National Conference on Religion and Race as well as in Rome during the third Council session in September, 1964, in commenting on Schema 13, said that he missed in the draft "a sound theological basis for joyful acceptance of the world and a correction of the false dualism which would separate soul and body, the Church from the world, spirit from matter." In essence, said Cardinal Meyer, all creation goes together. Men must realize that their daily work is a part of the plan of salvation. The Redemption was total. It was not a snatching of man's blithe spirit from the weight of his body, nor did it imply a hopeless break between the world of the spirit and world of flesh, matter and physical energy. In the divine economy, redemption meant much more than the salvation of souls; it meant also the resurrection of bodies and indeed the resurrection of the universe itself.

That this reorientation of the Church toward the world and its

values is profound, more than a matter of perfunctory or isolated ecclesiastical statements, is reflected in a survey of current Catholic and Protestant theological thought contained in an article by Thomas E. Clark, S.J. (*America*, May 29, 1965), whose subtitle significantly is: "Christian secularity finds positive values outside the institutional Church." Father Clark identified the two movements of modern Christian thought, *immanence* and *secularity*, as today "coming into vital confrontation in our effort to adopt a new Christian posture before the world and its values."

Citing the contributions of such Catholic thinkers as Maurice Blondel, de Lubac, Von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, Jacques Maritain, Père Chenu, E. Schillebeeckx, and John Courtney Murray, as well as of such Protestant thinkers as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Robinson, Paul Van Buren, and Harvey Cox, Father Clark stresses that "for over a half century now . . . the insistence has been on the *unity* rather than on the distinction of natural and supernatural orders, the immanence of the Christian in the human (rather than on its transcendence of the human)." In a revelatory exploration of the meaning of "secularity" for modern Christianity, Father Clark makes many assertions that will startle conventional ears, but what he affirms has a greater ring of relevance than has been heard for a very, very long time from religious quarters:

Christian secularity excludes instrumentalization. The goodness of the creature (and not merely its non-evilness), of the world, of time and temporal institutions, is a central conviction of Christian secularity. Any *purely* instrumental approach to the world—that is any attitude that would see in it merely a tool for Christian evangelization, that would neglect its innate values, its own immanent dynamisms and finalities—is incompatible with Christian secularity. The world is to be taken seriously. As Father Robert Johann has put it: "Whatever ultimate meaning life may have . . . life is a call to share in the world's making."

Why do I, and probably a great many other Jews, welcome this profound reorientation in Christianity and Christians?

First—and I must ask you to indulge me here if this smacks of Jewish triumphalism, but you will grant that two millenia of "grandeur and misery" in the diaspora is a long time to wait—the very Jewishness of Christendom's posture today seems to confirm the mission of the Jews to serve as "a light unto the nations." Perhaps all our witnessing across the millenia to the Covenant and to the mandates of the Prophets is getting through after all. More seriously, it helps make sense and give reality to the teachings of Maimonides and other Jewish sages who regarded Christians (and Moslems) as the missionary outreach of Judaism, charged by Providence to bring the idea of God and of obedience to His word to the heathen of the world.

Secondly, in light of their history, Jews have a special stake in a peaceful social order, in concretizing justice and freedom. The Catholic Church, and many Protestant bodies, have become major agencies of social reform. As citizens of the Western world, Jews see themselves increasingly as allies with their Catholic (and Protestant) neighbors in social reconstruction.

Thirdly, involvement in social action is providing Jews and Judaism with new opportunities of service beyond their own group. This is a test of our Prophetic universalism. Heretofore, Jews have been preoccupied with helping to defeat the Nazis and Fascists, rescuing refugees, building and securing the State of Israel, combatting anti-Semitism (which still preoccupies our community for we are deeply concerned about anti-Semitic discrimination in Soviet Russia and in parts of Latin America). As these problems have diminished, Jews have become increasingly free to make contributions to the resolution of problems that are not specifically Jewish—problems such as are related to race relations, the war against poverty, and international affairs. In this sense, Rabbi Louis Finkelstein has formulated this challenge: "Our ancient teachers were right in their admonition that

there is a great contribution to be made only by those without power, who are few in number, always a minority, uncertain of their ability to meet alone the challenges of the world . . . We are a pledge to remind the world of its true goal."

Religion and Society; Dilemma and Possibilities

The context in which the present shape of social action is being forged is that of a voluntaristic society within which the Federal Government is assuming ever-increasing initiatives and responsibilities in the achievement of social-welfare purposes. Prescinding from the debate over whether this is good or bad for America, it is one of the overarching facts of the life in our nation that the Government, in building the "Great Society," is calling upon voluntary agencies (conceived as large blocs of influence over substantial constituencies) in order to help advance the goals of health, education, welfare, civil and human rights. Religion, along with labor, business, farm, and education, is unblinkingly conceived of as another of the major blocs. This development has obvious advantages for "religion," for it means that religious institutions are taken into serious account in the affairs of our nation. At the same time, this development brings the Church and Synagogue face to face with acute predicaments.

The first dilemma centers on bureaucracy.⁹ In an age of bureaucracies, can a group of "amateurs," joined in small units, still be heard? If the answer is no, the trend toward bureaucratization of the Church and Synagogue would seem to be justified. But when these institutions become just one more bureaucracy, will they say anything worth hearing? Bureaucracy can threaten religion with impersonalism, and when the Church and Synagogue fall victims to impersonalism, the vitality of society and one of the chief sources of a nation's moral strength is affected.

The second dilemma involves the use of power by religious groups. The individual is guided by the higher ethics of selfless-

ness in personal relations; but social cooperation requires coercion. Social organization is structured power, for, as Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out, "only a romanticist of purest water could maintain that the national group ever arrives at a 'common mind' or 'general will' without the use of force or the threat of force." However, "power is poison," as Henry Adams has said—a poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purposes. The Church and Synagogue can foreswear all use of power in order to remain true to a Biblical and prophetic imperative. But this would render their efforts ineffectual in the social order and may contribute to anarchy or to a moral order based on naked power. (Most forms of social order are better than anarchy, and an order only partly imbued with morality is better than one of no morality at all.) Or the Church and Synagogue can seek power for the sake of the prophetic imperative which demands realization; however, they must recognize the real possibility of becoming compromised in the use of that power. Religious motivation is no protection against such compromise. Experience shows, in fact, that power, wielded in the name of God, is subject to special perversions, one of the most destructive of which is the fanaticism "occasioned by attributing ultimate validity to historically relative norms, purposes, and ends." The only palliative for either religious fanaticism or the secular fanaticism of political religions, as Niebuhr points out in his Harvard essay, "is an open society, as it has developed in the last three centuries, which grants no immunity from criticism or review to any authority proclaiming the truth, whether in the political, the religious, or the scientific realm."

This discussion raises a number of basic questions for which there are no easy answers and which have not yet been adequately examined by Church and Synagogue leaders. For example, what are the theological justifications for the involvement of the corporate Church and Synagogue in influencing the public

order? And, as indicated above, in what ways are Church and Synagogue to exercise their power? Are the limitations that we would put on Church involvement a result of theological conviction or, rather, of prudential judgment based on certain convictions concerning the nature of the democratic process?

To be specific, if Church and Synagogue leaders can lobby vigorously—literally buttonhole Congressmen—as they did with such effective strategy for the enactment of the Civil Rights bill, why should they not lobby also for a measure that would curb pornography? If Synagogue and other Jewish leaders can threaten congressmen with the loss of votes on an issue that affects the economic welfare of a Jewish Sabbath-observer or that impinges on the welfare of the State of Israel, is it wrong for a bishop to exercise the same threat on such issues as bus transportation for parochial school children or the revision of the divorce law?

What are the rightful areas and responsibilities of the State and Church, together and separately, in their effort to achieve and maintain standards of private and public morality? What is the particular role of the corporate Church and Synagogue—as against that of the individual clergyman and in contrast to that of the layman—as they seek to make religion a significant force in life? How can the Church and Synagogue wield their power and yet maintain respect for those of other faiths who differ? How, too, can they wield their power while maintaining respect for those within the faith community who differ with the Church or Synagogue on those political issues which contain spiritual or religious significance? Where do the political and moral meet? Where do they separate?

As one attempts to respond to what, to this writer, is the most crucial of these questions, namely, the exercise of corporate power by Church and Synagogue, I would submit that, on the one hand, those committed to the prophetic tradition cannot escape the responsibility of moralizing power; on the other hand, they must resist all temptations to make a bid for *direct* power. The religious groups, as I view it, should seek to make effective

use of *indirect* methods of pressure, namely, exhortation and persuasion. Of all the steady contributions which religion makes to American life, its creating of a moral atmosphere and consciousness, within which social and political decisions are made, is more significant than that of supplying the basis for these decisions. It is more a policy of the Church and Synagogue indirectly shaping a whole pattern of national thinking than of supplying precise doctrines.

Religious institutions made their most significant contributions by remaining true to their vocations as judges of society, as centers of independent criticism insisting that the nation live up to its own ideals and general standards of morality. Churches and Synagogues that fail to rebuke people when they worship themselves or fall down before nationalistic idols are, by their own standards, guilty of betrayal. By following the example of those saints and sages who cried out against injustice, complacency, and spiritual torpor, religious spokesmen exercise liberty for the benefit of all. By keeping alive before the nation a sense of the Absolute as man's highest ethical aspiration (which eliminates partial perspectives) and a sense of the Divine as Benevolent Will by condemning selfish actions and desires, so that no position of power in the community remains unchecked, the Church and Synagogue contribute to justice and to rendering responsible the exercise of every kind of political power.

Toward working out such generalized positions as these in a concrete situation, Dr. Gibson Winter (*Christianity and Crisis*, May 31, 1965) gives a valuable illustration in his article, "The Churches and Community Organization." In a perceptive analysis of "the political character of community organization" whose purpose is to help the dehumanized and impoverished masses of the ghettos to "regain dignity and independence through self-determination," Dr. Winter raises the question of what "is the method of participation appropriate to the situation and to the nature of the Church." One of the conclusions suggested by Dr. Winter is that "the churches have a servant role to fulfill—not

leading but encouraging community organization where possible. They also have a prophetic role to play—not letting community organizations settle for token reprisals but pushing on to a new political and cultural vision for metropolis.”

At the same time, the nation has a right to expect religious groups, whatever their theological claims, not to impose their special truths on others by special coercion, by use of economic pressures, political threats, boycotts, or blacklists. A religious absolutist position that attempts to translate beliefs into laws or public practices binding on all represents a genuine threat to freedom.

A third problem of critical seriousness is the lack of communication between religious and secular culture. As William Clancy has written in *Religion and American Society*, “The forces of religion and the forces of liberal culture seem increasingly to be addressing and describing different worlds.” Liberal deafness toward theology deprives them of a wealth of humane wisdom; on the other hand, religious leaders often speak in formulas that no longer have meaning for those to whom they are addressed. The absence of communication between religious and liberal culture should be taken as one of the most serious problems of our time. Contrary to the eschatological vision of our Rabbi of Bobruisk (which many religionists share either consciously or unconsciously), the secularistic cycle is not on its way to suicide and will likely be with us for the duration of our civilization.

We are in a new era in man's history, the age of urban secularization, which Harvey Cox describes with shocking power in his book on “technopolis,” called *The Secular City*. The secular city (which supersedes not only early tribal society, but also the town culture that has shaped the world since the time of the Greek *polis*) requires not only a renewed message from the Church and Synagogue, but also a renewed language. “We must not define our ‘spiritual’ resources too narrowly in traditional religious terms,” Reinhold Niebuhr asserted in the UNESCO

pamphlet, “Our Moral and Spiritual Resources for the International Order.” We cannot forget, he adds, that the very creation of our free society was the joint achievement of religious and secular forces. The American consensus has been kept alive over centuries through combined efforts of the Church, law, university, press, and the learned professions.

The secular disciplines, frequently so defective in their ultimate frames of reference, nevertheless provide the discriminating judgments which made it possible for modern man to analyze complex problems of social, economic, and political justice and to puncture the pretensions of religious people who sought to make religious faith an instrument of political power and self-aggrandizement.

In summary, the Church and Synagogue can make effective contributions to America not by putting themselves at the disposal of the nation, or by blessing whatever our society does or hopes to do, but

1. by providing a source of values;
2. by enlightening and inspiring the individual citizen to have courage and patience;
3. by helping the individual and society to become sensitive to the injustices and petty tyrannies that exist in our midst;
4. by providing the individual with motivation for responsible life in our society and with stable standards of moral judgment;
5. by calling men to self-knowledge and personal humility and bidding them to be aware of the unfathomable depths of human personality, keeping the sense of transcendence alive.

NOTES

¹ *Triple Revolution*, Information Service, Department of Research, National Council of Churches, New York, May 22, 1965.

² Cf. *The Challenge to Change*, by Abbé François Houtart (New York, Sheed

& Ward, Inc., 1964, for an excellent summary of global change from a sociological and religious perspective; also my articles, "The New Realities" in *Worldview* magazine, published by the Council on Religion and International Affairs, 170 East 64 St., New York 21, N.Y.; and "Confronting the New Realities of the Nuclear-Space Age," published in the *Sister Formation Bulletin*, X, No. 2, Winter 1963-64.

³ Cf. *CIF Reports*, studies of developmental programs in Latin America published by the Center for Intercultural Formation, Guernevaca, Mexico, under the direction of Msgr. Ivan Illich. Also, *Profile of Latin America*, a Protestant analysis by Dr. Stanley Rycroft, research specialist on Latin America for the National Council of Churches, New York, N.Y.

⁴ *Protestant Thought Before Kant* (New York, Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 24.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁶ For an insightful analysis of revivalism and its relation to nativism and American political pietism in the form of radical-right movements, see Franklin Littell's *From State Church to Pluralism*.

⁷ *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (October, 1961).

⁸ For a fuller development of the basic ideas, values, and religious life of Jews and Judaism, see *Judaism* by Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg (George Braziller, Publishers), *The Rabbinic Mind* by Rabbi Max Kadushin (Jewish Theological Seminary Press), and *The Prophets* by Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel (Harper & Row, Publishers). A fuller bibliography is available by writing to me at the American Jewish Committee, 165 E. 56 St., New York, N.Y.

⁹ Cf. *Religion and American Society* issued by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. This section of the paper is much indebted to this and related Center publications.