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SPEAKING OF GOD TODAY

Jews and Lutherans in Conversation

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FORTRESS PRESS

Philadelphia

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Editors' Introduction

Why Jewish-Lutheran theological conversations? The answer to such a question is embedded in the theological and historical interaction of Jews and Lutherans, including the perceptions and misperceptions that many Jews and Lutherans have held about each other and about each other's faith claims across the last four and one-half centuries.

From a Jewish perspective, an effort to sort out and evaluate the meaning of its experience in the Western world compels the Jewish community to confront its relationship with Lutheranism, Lutheran people and congregations, and Lutheran theology. It is probably no hyperbole to assert that for the majority of Jews today, Lutheranism continues to be regarded as "quintessential Protestantism," the archetypical non-Roman Christianity. The person of Martin Luther seems to dominate the emergence of the Reformation as much to Jewry as to most Christians.

From a Lutheran perspective, the life of the church in its biblical, theological, liturgical, and pastoral dimensions leads to examination of the issues of Christian identity vis-à-vis Judaism, e.g., the historic Jesus as a Jew, and the grounding of the church in the context of ideas and values of first-century rabbinic Judaism. Moreover, the relationship of the contemporary church with Jews and Judaism is so important for Christian self-understanding, and the improvement of relationships so crucial, that efforts toward clarity and deepened understanding today can only be welcomed.

At the heart of both Jewish and Christian identities lies the promise of God to raise up and preserve for his purposes a unique people. Over the centuries both communities have claimed to be that people—with varying emphases on the exclusivity of that claim. Within each of these religious traditions, there have been distinctive teachings which have shaped the faith and life of each. A consideration of law (Torah), for example, is essential for understanding Judaism. Justification by grace through faith, a distinction between law and gospel, and the so-called doctrine of the "two kingdoms" become pivotal for understanding how faith and life have been shaped within the Lutheran tradition.

Would mutual exploration of faith issues be a way to create beginnings for genuinely constructive relations between these two religious communities, and to make a contribution to the broader Christian-Jewish encounter, especially in the United States? An international consultation on the church and the Jewish people, convened under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation in Løgumkloster, Denmark, in 1964, strongly encouraged this approach for its member churches as it stated: "It is a Christian responsibility to seek respectfully to understand both the Jewish people and their faith. Therefore responsible conversations between Christians and Jews are to be desired and welcomed. Such conversations presuppose the existence of common ground on which Christians and Jews may meet, as well as points of difference."¹

In the hope that such theological exchange would be worthwhile, the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.² and the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee³ convened an academic colloquium in the spring of 1969. The modest purpose of this initial conversation was to explore the possibilities for further fruitful theological talks between Lutherans and Jews. To achieve this, attention was focused on two themes central to each tradition: law and grace; election and the people of God. The four papers presented comprise Part One of the present volume. As is true of all essays in this book, they did not represent consensus attained, either between the two religious traditions or within the Lutheran or Jewish groups. They were prepared as contributions for study and discussion, and as such do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the group or of the sponsoring organizations. Without exception, however, these papers did expose areas where fruitful inquiry and discussion could be profitably pursued.

This colloquium, the first such national-level conversation involving scholars from the major bodies of American Lutheranism and all branches—Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform—of Judaism, was considered to

1. See the Appendix, "The Church and the Jewish People," p. 166. This document's condemnation of anti-Semitism and encouragement to root out its traces in religious education curricula, represent one of the earliest postwar declarations on these sensitive issues from within a world confessional family.

2. The Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. is an agency for cooperative study and service whose participating church bodies are The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The combined membership of these three churches is approximately 95 percent of the total Lutheran constituency in the United States.

3. The American Jewish Committee was founded in 1906 to protect the civil and religious rights of Jews throughout the world and to promote improved intergroup and interreligious relationships.

have been an exceptionally promising initial probe. In addition to the significant theological issues which were presented and discussed, one of the richest aspects of the consultation was the frank and mutually respectful conversation which took place in response to the papers.⁴

It became clear at the first conversation that there were a number of crucial items for the interreligious agenda which should be covered with much more thoroughness and in some kind of logical progression.⁵ The significance of "the land," for example, and the transforming force of the Holocaust had surfaced early as particularly pressing problems. The question of the Lutheran "two kingdoms" ethic⁶ together with its application (or misapplication), and the ambivalent attitudes of Martin Luther toward the Jews⁷ were problems acutely felt by the partners in conversation. In subsequent colloquia, as Part Two of this book reflects, participants examined together the issues of promise, land, people, and state in the light of biblical interpretation and historical theology, as well as current concerns. It was the view of many of the discussants that while the two heritages might view things differently at several points, the modern state of Israel and Middle Eastern relations ought to be viewed particularly in terms of justice, if not necessarily theology, and that all men of good will should unite in pressing for the settlement of critical problems with maximum feasible justice and the least injustice for all.⁸

The essays in Part Three speak directly to a fundamental theological question confronting both Judaism and Christianity: How do we speak of God today? In every age Jews and Christians have sought to articulate and communicate their understanding of God's revelation in light of the salient factors which shape and condition their respective communities' theology and life. Among the forces now affecting both synagogue and

4. For a report on the initial colloquium, held in New York City, see *Lutheran Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (November 1969): 401–59, 501.

5. Reports from the second and third colloquia were drawn up by John Reumann for the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. Material on the spring, 1970, meeting at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, appears in *JES* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 497–99. The third colloquium at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, held in November, 1971, is covered in *JES* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 448–50. The fourth and most recent consultation took place at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, in the spring of 1973.

6. Perhaps more properly considered as the two ways God works among mankind: in the church through gospel and grace; in the world through reason and justice.

7. This is dealt with by Uriel Tal in his essay in this volume, but cf. also Franklin Sherman's introduction to the essay, "On the Jews and Their Lies," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 47, *The Christian in Society IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 123–36; also Aarne Siirala, "Luther and the Jews," in *Lutheran World* 11, no. 3 (July 1964): 337–57.

8. Cf. Reumann in *JES* (Spring 1971), p. 448.

church are the societal, cultural, and theological pluralisms, and—for all Jewish-Christian encounter in particular—the haunting specter of the Nazi Holocaust.

To address spiritual and human issues theologically as responsible members of a religious community is an inescapable task of both Christian and Jew today. Have we learned to cope with evil and its brutalizing consequences? What theological and moral resources are available for making some meaningful contribution toward sensitizing consciences and the will of the human family to prevent the repetition of any holocaust against any people? On the level of common humanity, therefore, Christians and Jews should make common cause to the fullest extent in matters of civil and social concerns. On the level of religious commitment, mutual sharing of faith becomes one way for separate religious communities to begin to consider pluralism more as a resource than as simply a problem.⁹

At the time that plans were being made for the first of the four colloquia whose papers appear in this volume, a request came to the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council to study the relationships of Christians and Jews in the interest of finding a common Lutheran position. The Division decided that for this particular assignment it would develop its stance from within a living, theological-personal exchange such as could be cultivated in the colloquia, and that from within this dialogical context it would attempt to work out biblical and confessional principles applicable for Lutheran Christians. It is out of such an experience, in which suspicions and misunderstandings could be

9. "Dialogue" on matters of faith, and questions of "mission" and "witness" have long been sensitive areas both in Christian and in Jewish circles, and the understandings and approaches have varied. A consultation on "The Church and the Jewish People," convened in April, 1973, under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation in Neuendettelsau, Germany, addressed Lutherans in the following way on these issues:

"On the level of religious commitment, Christians should invite Jews to engage in a mutual sharing of faith. Christians are not in a position to tell their Jewish neighbors that they should engage in such activities nor can they prescribe the manner in which this should be done. But Christian faith is marked by the impulse to bear witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. To bear such witness is intended as a positive, not a negative act. Witness, whether it be called 'mission' or 'dialogue,' includes a desire both to know and to be known more fully. When we speak of a mutual sharing of faith we do not endorse syncretism. But we understand that when Christians and Jews speak to each other about matters of faith, there will be an exchange which calls for openness, honesty, love, and mutual respect. One cannot reveal his faith to another without recognizing the real differences that exist and being willing to take the risk of confronting these differences. We are using the words 'witness' and 'mission' and 'dialogue,' which have come to be labels for distinctive ways of sharing faith. These words have a different content for different Christians. We see problems in the use of these words and urge that Christian people give attention to exploring their meanings."

cleared up, and where Christians (and Jews) could reexamine their theologies in light of the other's faith and claims, that the appended "Guidelines" should be understood. When trust and confidence are established, it becomes possible to share openly "assumptions, prejudices, traditions, and convictions."¹⁰ Within this same setting, too, credibility is lent to the assertion: "There is no biblical or theological basis for anti-Semitism. Supposed theological or biblical bases for anti-Semitism are to be examined and repudiated. Conscious or unconscious manifestations of discrimination are to be opposed."¹¹

To speak of Jewish-Christian dialogue in any serious way today means that Christians and Jews have no alternative but to try to come to terms with a beclouded theological and historical past. Both must try to grapple with the true and ultimate religious—and human—questions of theodicy, God's hiddenness, God's promises, God's faithfulness, human arrogance and perversity, dehumanization, acceptance of personal responsibility, and, most difficult of all, contrition, repentance, and forgiveness. It is hoped that this volume will contribute to the process of clarifying and sorting out those issues which desperately need attention, and that it will be of constructive usefulness to our constituencies as well as of service to the building of that larger community of mankind which also is of God.

We are indebted to our staff colleagues, William G. Rusch of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. and A. James Rudin and Gerald Strober of the American Jewish Committee, for their assistance both in coordinating the colloquia and in preparing the volume for publication.

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10. See "Some Observations and Guidelines," p. 164.

11. See "Some Observations and Guidelines," p. 165.

Judaism, Ecumenism, and Pluralism

MARC H. TANENBAUM

In his perceptive study, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*,¹ Richard Niebuhr argued that the religious diversity in American society during the first half of the twentieth century represented not so much theological differences as the accommodation of Christianity to "the caste system" of human society. He declared that social factors played a decisive, negative role and were largely responsible for the disunity of American Christendom. Elaborating his thesis, Professor Niebuhr asserted that the religious proliferation of the denominations and sects closely followed the division of men and women into castes of national origins, race, class, and sectional groups which constitute the American society. In short, the pluralism of America undergirded and reinforced the diversity of religious behavior.

Three decades later, quite paradoxically, another Christian analyst employed the identical categories of Professor Niebuhr and arrived at opposite conclusions. Robert Lee wrote in his book, *The Social Sources of Church Unity*, that during the decade of the 1950s and thereafter, social factors made a positive contribution to the rise of ecumenism and Christian unity. He observed that church unity springs from the growing cultural unity within American society.² Dr. Lee posited the emergence of a *homo americanus*—a "consensus American."³ There was an increased awareness of a common frame of reference in which Americans tended to see things from a similar perspective. Dr. Lee cited the social changes in race, class, sectionalism, and nationalism as factors contributing to the emergent cultural unity. There was now "a common culture" based on a shared universal education, a common language, economic well-being,

1. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1929).

2. Robert Lee, *The Social Sources of Church Unity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 17.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

growing intermarriage between members of denominations and faiths, the establishment of national cultural symbols through the influence of the culture-producing mass media, and an evolving network of mutual dependence through the organizational revolution which is the basis of our urban, industrialized civilization. Cementing this social and cultural unity, Dr. Lee wrote, were the unifying influences of "common value themes," most notably, a shared belief in individualism, freedom, democracy, and success.

Whether or not social forces advance or inhibit unity between religious groups is a subject worthy of continued examination and reflection. One conclusion emerges inescapably, however, from the studies of Professors Niebuhr and Lee, and that is the basic fact that neither ecumenism, nor interreligious relations, nor pluralism can be adequately comprehended solely on "spiritual" or "doctrinal" grounds. A comprehension of "extra-theological" factors is critical for a genuine understanding of the complex reality of such vital relationships.

What are some of the extratheological realities that constitute the matrix of the current ecumenical and interreligious scene? A portrait of that matrix has been sharply sketched by Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski of Columbia University, who writes in his study, *Between Two Ages*:

The paradox of our time is that humanity is becoming simultaneously more unified and more fragmented. That is the principal thrust of contemporary change. Time and space have become so compressed that global politics manifest a tendency toward larger, more interwoven forms of cooperation, as well as toward the dissolution of established and ideological loyalties. Humanity is becoming more integral and intimate even as the differences in the condition of the separate societies are widening. Under these circumstances, proximity, instead of promoting unity, gives rise to tension prompted by a new sense of global congestion.⁴

Another preeminent feature of current extratheological reality that influences in decisive ways ecumenical and interreligious relationships is depicted by the Dutch theologian and social scientist, Dr. Anton C. Zijderveld, who writes in his book, *The Abstract Society*:

The structures of modern society have grown increasingly pluralistic and independent of man. Through an ever enlarging process of differentiation, modern society acquired a rather autonomous and abstract nature

4. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Age* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 3. Copyright © 1970 by Zbigniew Brzezinski. Reprinted by permission of The Viking Press, Inc.

confronting the individual with strong but strange forms of control. It demands the attitudes of obedient functionaries from its inhabitants who experience its control as an unfamiliar kind of authority. That means societal control is no longer characterized by a family-like authority but dominated by bureaucratic neutrality and unresponsiveness. The individual often seems to be doomed to endure this situation passively, since the structures of society vanish in abstract air if he tries to grasp their very forces of control. No wonder that many seek refuge in one or another form of retreat.⁵

He adds:

Modern society has become abstract in the experience and consciousness of man! Modern man, that is, does not "live society," he faces it as an often strange phenomenon. This society has lost more and more of its reality and meaning and seems to be hardly able to function as the holder of human freedom. As a result, many modern men are turning away from the institutions of society and are searching for *meaning, reality and freedom* elsewhere. These three coordinates of human existence have become the scarce value of a continuous existential demand.⁶

These two authors reinforce a shared conviction about what is the paradoxical and contradictory predicament in which the contemporary person finds himself and herself. The planetization of the human family through electronics, automation, instant mobility, and satellite communications has made mandatory that everybody adjust to the vast global environment as if it were a global city. At the same time, that globalization of the human consciousness has led to the undermining of dependencies on the more limited local loyalties, such as the nation-state. The effects of that are to be seen especially among our young people, many of whom feel a weakened sense of national patriotism and have little emotional fervor about national sancta and rituals, while feeling very much at home roaming Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America as if they were born as natural citizens of the world. To many of them, the global city is already a dominant fact of contemporary life.

The human situation is complicated by the fact, however, that those of us who live in the advanced Western societies based on scientific and technological foundations confront bureaucracies and vast organizations as the crucial and all-pervasive structures through which we sustain all

5. Anton C. Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1970), p. 11.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

the material conditions of our existence. And as Zijderveld indicates, the dominance of these bureaucracies in our lives has resulted in a profound identity crisis. By and large we do not dominate these structures, rather they control us. We have very limited roles in decision-making in these vast systems. Our functions are generally partial, fragmentary, frequently frustrating, leaving most of us with little sense of mastery or control or direction over this large segment of our lives. In the pursuit of personal meaning, a desire for wholeness, and for clarity about one's identity, it is no accident that there has emerged in recent years such a spontaneous growth of youth communes, encounter and human potential movements. On another level, this search for identity is also reflected in the growth of ethnic group self-assertion, and in the support of denominationalism rather than interdenominationalism, which is perceived as abstract and distant from personal and direct communal needs. The identity quest is also a factor in the movement of peoplehood among blacks, *la Raza* among Spanish-speaking groups, "red power" among American Indians, and the mystique of peoplehood and mutual interdependence among Jews throughout the diaspora and in Israel. There is evidently a vast yearning for human-size communities in which the individual can relate to another person on a face-to-face basis, in an environment of caring, shared concern, and mutual confirmation.⁷

If this analysis of our situation is reasonably accurate, albeit sketchy, what then are some of its implications for ecumenism and interreligious relations today and tomorrow? I suggest that the following issues are involved and deserve our priority attention.

The emerging transformation of the planet into a global city makes it mandatory that we establish some living connections for ourselves and for our young people between our theologies, our religious teachings, and the realities of the emerging unity of the human family as well as its pluralism. Never before in human history, in my judgment, have Judaism and Christianity had an opportunity such as the present one to translate their biblical theologies of creation—the unity of mankind under the fatherhood of God—into actual experience.

This extraordinary, indeed unprecedented, moment of potential fulfillment of biblical ideals and values has become obscured for us by the dominance of uncritical tendencies to sloganize that we live in a "post Judeo-Christian era," a "post-Western age," a "postmodern era." The

7. See "Do You Know What Hurts Me?" by this writer, *Event* 12 (February 1972): 4-8 (published by the American Lutheran Church Men).

effect of such doom-and-gloom slogans is that they tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies, contributing to the paralysis of insight and will. If we would penetrate to the reality beneath the slogans, we could justifiably conclude in fact that we are in a "pre-Judeo-Christian era." There are evidences supporting such a conclusion all around us if we will insist on careful analysis rather than allow ourselves to be seduced by faddist catchwords.

It is no accident that the most dramatic advances in science and technology have taken place in the Western world. The decisive impact of the biblical world view on Western civilization, in particular the Genesis teachings on creation, have resulted in the "disenchantment" of nature—to use Max Weber's concept—which enabled biblical man to subdue and master nature for human purposes, an absolute precondition for scientific and technological experiment. Further, the biblical theology of redemption contributed to a messianic conception of history, which conditioned biblical man to responsibility for the events of history.⁸

In nonbiblical cultures, religions, and societies, this linear view of history leading to messianic redemption does not prevail. Rather the cyclical views of history have by and large resulted in passivity and quietism, preconditions for indifference to poverty, illness, and illiteracy. If history is fated to repeat itself as an endless cycle, what reason exists for seeking to alter the course of history?

As nations in the third world have begun to come to grips with the magnitude of human suffering and deprivation in their midst, and to embark on economic development and nation-building, it is evident that they will have to appropriate science and technology as the instruments for producing the food, clothing, medicine, and shelter for meeting their basic human needs. The third world nations will be able to mediate the benefits of Western scientific-technological technics, I contend, only if they make some fundamental accommodations to the Western, hence Judeo-Christian, assumptions and categories regarding nature and history, as well as toward man, society, and God. That means that a genuine convergence must perforce take place in which the Jewish and Christian *Weltanschauung* becomes central and formative in the construction of a universal technetronic civilization.

The moral and spiritual challenge to Judaism and Christianity in that convergence process will be as acute as the culture shock for Oriental

8. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see my essay, "Some Current Mythologies and World Community," *Theology Digest* 19 (Winter 1971): 325.

religions and civilizations will inevitably be. The temptations to repeat triumphalisms, imperialisms, and monopolies of truth will have to be resisted mightily by the bearers of Western scientific cultures into the third world. The need to help preserve the integrity of non-Western cultures and religions, their rich inheritances of spirituality and inwardness, and not to allow these legacies of mankind to become obliterated by the machines of science and technology becomes all the more evident with every passing day.

Thus, a primary issue on the agenda of the human family is that of helping build a united human community that respects diversity and difference as a permanent good, quite clearly as a God-given good. We must confess, however, that based on present evidence we are far from adequately prepared either theologically or humanly to realize this delicate and essential balance of unity in the midst of diversity.

To the development of such a theology of human unity and pluralism I would hope that Judaism, in dialogue with Christianity and Islam and other world religions, would make a special and distinctive contribution. It is not widely known that there is available a substantial body of Jewish doctrine and teaching which, though composed over the past three thousand years, contains ideas, conceptual models, spiritual and human values of surpassing insight and meaning for our present situation. Let us review briefly some of the highlights of what is called "the Jewish doctrine of the nations of the world—*ummot ha olam*," which today we might well call the Jewish doctrine of pluralism—and world community.

The relationship of the people of Israel to mankind takes as its first and foremost principle the fact that, according to the Torah, all men are descended from one father. All of them, not as races or nations, but as men, are brothers in Adam, and therefore are called *bene Adam*, sons of Adam.

From the time of the occupation of the promised land of Canaan down to the present day, the treatment of every stranger living in the midst of an Israelite community has been determined by the commandments of Mount Sinai as recorded in the book of Exodus: "And a stranger shalt thou not oppress, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 23:9).

In the extensive biblical legislation dealing with the stranger, the *ger* ("sojourner") or the *nokhri* ("foreigner")—whom you are to love as yourselves (Deut. 10:19)—are equated legally and politically with the Israelite.

From the first century of the present era and thereafter, the "stranger within the gate" in the diaspora who joined in the Jewish form of worship but without observing the ceremonial laws, became known as a *yire adonay*—a God-fearer. A God-fearer was one who kept the Noachian principles, that is, the moral principles known to Noah and to pre-Israelite mankind. As described in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 56), the seven commandments of the sons of Noah are these: the prohibition of idolatry, of blasphemy, of sexual immorality, of murder, of theft, of cruelty to animals, together with the positive commandment to establish courts of justice.

The great twelfth century Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, formulated the normative Jewish conception, held to and affirmed by all periods of Judaism (in *Mishnah Torah IV, Hilkot Melakhim*, Section X, *Halachah 2*) in these words: "Whoever professes to obey the seven Noachian laws and strives to keep them is classed with the righteous among the nations and has a share in the world to come." Thus every individual who lives by the principles of morality of Noah is set on a par with the Jews. Indeed, a statement made by Rabbi Meir (ca. 150 C.E.) is recorded three times in the Talmud, "The pagan who concerns himself with the teaching of God is like unto the High Priest of Israel" (*Sanhedrin* 59a; *Baba Kamma* 38a, and *Aboda Zara* 36a).

Thus, this rabbinic doctrine about "the righteous men among the nations" who will be saved made it unnecessary, from the point of view of the synagogue, to convert them to Judaism. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that Jews pray daily in the synagogue for what appears to be the ultimate conversion of the gentiles not to the cult of Israel but rather to the God of Israel: "Let all the inhabitants of the world perceive and know that unto thee every knee must bend and every tongue give homage. Before thee, O Lord our God, let them bow down and worship, and unto thy glorious name let them give honor."

While there is no unanimity in Judaism regarding the ultimate conversion of the gentiles, there can be no doubt that, theologically speaking, Judaism does expect a redeemed mankind to be strict monotheists—in the Jewish sense. It is the duty, therefore, of every Jew to encourage both by teaching and personal example the universal acceptance of the "Seven Principles of the Sons of Noah." The ultimate conversion of the world is understood by Judaism to be one of the "messianic" events. We will know that the messianic age has come when we realize a change—a conversion—in the kind of life being lived on earth, and not just in the

inner life of the individual. Wars and persecutions must cease, and justice and peace must reign for all mankind.

Translating this religious language into contemporary terms, Judaism affirms that salvation exists outside the synagogue for all who are God-fearers, that is, all who affirm a transcendental reality as a source of meaning for human existence, and who also live by the moral code of the sons of Noah. This Jewish theological view also perceives and undergirds world pluralism as a positive good. Thus Judaism advocates a unity of mankind which encourages diversity of cult and culture as a source of enrichment, and that conception of unity in the midst of diversity makes possible the building of human community without compromise of essential differences.

The central issue of teaching about the unity of mankind raises the pedagogical problem: How do we teach commitment and loyalty on the part of our youth and adults to one's own faith, and at the same time recognize, respect, and even reverence the claims to truth and value of religious traditions outside our own?

Critical for the management of that vital task is the need to face the inadequacy of much of our current theological and philosophical understanding of the meaning of "unity" and the implications of such understandings for religious liberty and freedom of conscience in a pluralistic world. The weight of much Western ideological and religious thinking and experience is shaped by the imperial theologies and ideologies that governed Europe from the fourth until the early nineteenth century. At the request of his friend Emperor Constantine, Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea conceptualized perhaps the earliest Western version of "imperial theology" when he linked monotheism with the concept of the Roman emperor: "one God, one empire, one church." That led Walter Ullmann to observe in his *History of Political Thought*, "The ancient pagan idea of the Emperor as 'Lord of the World' reappeared in the Christian universal idea of rulership. It was not only his right but also his duty to spread Christianity and hold together the *Ekumene*, the totality of all cultured peoples, by means of the Christian faith."⁹

In the sixteenth century Reformation, the enforced unity of faith and nationalism was manifested in the imperial doctrine of *cuius regio eius religio* ("whose the region, his the religion"). By his act of uniformity and supremacy, Henry VIII brought the church and commonwealth under

9. Walter Ullmann, *A History of Political Thought: The Middle Ages* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 32-33.

his civil power, thus realizing in the English Reformation the medieval philosophy of unity. In the United States, Martin Marty has described in his book, *The Righteous Empire*, how the first half century of American national life saw the development of evangelicalism, which "set out consciously to create an empire, to attract the allegiance of all people, to develop a spiritual kingdom and to shape the nation's ethos, mores, manners, and often its laws."¹⁰

Two British churchmen, whom Marty cites, after their visit to America in 1836 declared, "Blot out Britain and America from the map of the world, and you destroy all those great institutions which almost exclusively promise the world's renovation." On the positive side, they added, "Unite Britain and America in energetic and resolute cooperation for the world's salvation, and the world is saved."¹¹

This evangelical and Anglo-Saxon tradition equated the American way of life, the defense of laissez faire capitalism, and the crusade against communism with the Christian mission to the world. "So close was the fusion between the American republic with evangelicalism," Marty writes, "that a basic attack on American institutions meant an attack on Protestant Christianity itself. Positively, the defense of America meant a defense of the evangelical empire."¹²

In the second, more recent, period of American history, the ecumenical moderates tried to extricate the Protestant churches from identification with the American way of life, from a single economic pattern, and from a crusading spirit. They tried to break way from the provincialism and chauvinism of their fathers who equated the kingdom of God with the evangelical empire. They sought to become an experiencing agent in the nation and not merely the dominant mold of symbols. They reached back to other elements in the American constitutional tradition and supported a pluralism whose ground rules were that "no religion was to have a monopoly or a privileged position and none should be a basis for second class status for others."¹³ That tradition of liberal Protestant pluralism has made possible the Christian ecumenical dialogue and the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The dialogue means that people could have exposure to each other across the lines of differing faiths without attempting to convert in every encounter, without being a threat, and

10. Martin Marty, *The Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), p. 17. Copyright © 1970 by Martin E. Marty. Reprinted by permission of The Dial Press.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

with the hope that new understanding would result. The goal would be a richer participation in the city of man, the republic, or the human family.

The presuppositions of that ecumenical approach to pluralism and to Jewish-Christian relations involved at its deepest levels a fundamental theological and philosophical reconceptualization of unity. One of the clearest formulations of that revised rethinking of unity is reflected in the words of the Protestant theologian Herbert Richardson, who wrote in his book, *Toward An American Theology*:

By direct henological analysis, we can attain to the conclusion that the unity of everything that exists is (1) the unity of any denumerable individual or individuality; or (2) the unity of any two or more individuals when taken together, or considered as one thing—i.e. relationality, or (3) the unity of any or all possible relationalities considered as complete or wholeness.

From this analysis, it seems that every unity (whether it be an individual, a relation, or a whole) is as real as any other unity. This means not only that each individual is, from the metaphysical point of view, as real as any other individual, but that any individual is as real as any relation, or any whole, including the whole which encompasses all things. Or, to say it another way, "the universe" is no more real than any individual within the universe—for the characteristic of reality is unity, and it is as real to be an individual as to be a whole. While a "whole" is "bigger" than certain individuals, it is not ontologically of a higher grade, i.e., not better. Moreover, a whole does not add to or subtract from the reality of the individuals existing within it. These have their own independent principle of being (their unity of individuality) and so they are *a se* and not from the whole. . . . Individuals have their own being within the whole, but from themselves, for individuality does not originate in, nor derive from wholeness, nor the reverse. Wholeness, individuality, and relationality are therefore three distinct hypotheses of unity. As such, each is capable of being the principle of an independent system of categories.¹⁴

That recasting of a philosophical understanding of unity is experienced in our awareness of the many languages of mankind. The many languages and varieties of humankind are not something to overcome in a quixotic pursuit to bring mankind to speak one language. That does not mean that the many languages do not influence and change each other; they do. The multiplicity of languages points to the many-sided conversation which is required. That conversation distributes the varieties of human

14. Herbert Richardson, *Toward An American Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 82.

gifts and types; and it is as we gain the capacity to listen and speak, to hear and respond even though we will be changed that our one humanity comes into existence.

The conception of the unity of the whole as not being ontologically "better" than the unity of the parts which compose it also has implications for the Jewish-Christian relationship. Rosemary Ruether, the Catholic theologian, has noted that "Christianity, as the fulfilled universalism of a particularism, could not tolerate the continued contrary particularism (i.e. the individuality) of the Jew."¹⁵ She further elaborates that:

gentile attitudes toward Jews are unalterably fixed by the totalistic universalism of a Christian fulfilled messianism. Such a Christian theological stance demands, in some form, the drawing of a mental ghetto of negation around those who reject this fundamental Christian self-affirmation.¹⁶

"A Christian assertion," Dr. Ruether adds, "that Jesus is 'the Messiah of Israel,' which contradicts the fundamental meaning of what Israel means by 'Messiah,' is and always has been fundamentally questionable."

That questionableness must now be clarified and unambiguously applied to the historic sin of its translation into the negation of the Jews. This demands a relativizing of the identification of Jesus as the Christ. Contextually, we can speak of Jesus as the "messianic experience for us," but that way of speaking doesn't make this experience self-enclosed: it points beyond itself to a liberation still to come.

Both the original roots of Christian faith and the dilemma of modern Christology will make it evident that such an affirmation of the messianic event in Jesus in a contextual and open-ended rather than a "once-for-all" and absolutistic way, is demanded by the existence of Christian theology itself. In this way the Christian experience can parallel rather than negate the liberation experiences that are the community symbols of other faiths. For the Jews, the Exodus experience is also a very actuality of liberation that is, at the same time, a hope for liberation still to come. In this way the Jew and Christian stand in parallel traditions, each having tasted grace, each looking for a fulfillment that is "beyond."¹⁷

In effect, Dr. Ruether employs the Jewish-Christian relationship as microcosmic illustration of the macrocosmic theological problematic.

15. Rosemary Ruether, "Christian Anti-Semitism and the Dilemma of Zionism," *Christianity and Crisis*, 17 April 1972, pp. 91-92.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

17. *Ibid.*

The reality and urgency of reconceptualizing inherited categories whose exclusivistic and imperial tendencies paralyze Western religious communities in an effort to respect the claims to truth and value of the non-Western world's religions is graphically illustrated in the writings by Father Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, of Colombo, who declared in "The Church and Change in Asia":

In the last eight to ten years the concept of the salvific value of these religions (of Asia and Africa) also is gaining ground. It is now admitted that Christians too can learn something regarding God and salvation from the other religions. In the last 3-4 years the concept of salvation of individuals and even nations is giving way to the idea of a world mission in which every people has to learn and can teach something to others. Salvation is being understood as more closely related to justice and the building of the fraternal community of man on earth. This is the Kingdom of God, of which institutional churches are signs and means—sacramental expressions. Though the theory of the mission has changed among the more advanced Christian groups, the old mentality still largely prevails in practice.¹⁸

In summary, there are two opposing conceptions of world community that are now being contested on the global scene. In a world in which two-thirds of the human family is neither white, nor Jewish, nor Christian, a refurbished Western evangelicalism, reinforced by Anglo-Saxon *hybris*, can be the surest way of leading to disaster on a global scale. If we have learned anything worthwhile from the American experiment, and particularly from the Jewish-Christian dialogue, it is the knowledge that Jews and Christians are learning to live together as brothers and sisters, are seeking to build community without compromise of their respective differences, and are learning to celebrate the wisdom that unity in the midst of diversity may after all be the will of God.

If Judaism and Christianity can grant the validity of each other's covenants, and seek to affirm the best in each other rather than deny it, there need be no reservation about their fruitful coexistence. Indeed the two covenants could be seen in the divine scheme of things as mutually complementary, not mutually exclusive. The very concept of the "covenant of the sons of Noah" demonstrates that Judaism did not limit God's covenanting to the Jews. The new covenant, as I understand St. Paul in Rom. 9 to 11, does not revoke the old. Both covenanted communities have after all for some two thousand years uttered the same prayer,

18. Father Tissa Balasuriya, "The Church and Change in Asia," *Commonweal*, 29 June 1973, p. 354.

"Thy kingdom come." And when the kingdom comes, when the Jew sees the fulfillment of the prophecy, "The Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord shall be one, and His name one" (Zech. 14:9), the Christian, too, will see the fulfillment of prophecy. "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father . . . the Son himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (1 Cor. 15:24, 28).

Thus, perhaps the most important export that Americans and Westerners have yet to contribute to the building of world community is the knowledge that we are called by God as children of his covenant not to build a superchurch nor a supersynagogue but to search together for the true service to God's own people gathered from all the nations on the mountain of the Lord.

