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162

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58

Folder  
809

Where Jew and Christian can meet, 1949.



## WHERE JEW AND CHRISTIAN CAN MEET

Sunday, December 25, 1949

When we discuss a theme such as the one which we announced for this morning, "Where Jew and Christian Can Meet", one must bear in mind that much depends upon what we mean by the word "meet". In the minds of some people such meeting can only mean merger, amalgamation, submergence of one in the other. I read yesterday the sermon preached by Pope Pius XII in Rome on the occasion of the opening of the Holy Year. In this sermon the Pope called upon all Christians, both Protestants and Orthodox, to return to the fold of Rome, the one true church. This is the Pope's conception of Christian unity, of the meeting of Protestants and Catholics. "Every Christian," he said, "can and should say 'Rome is my fatherland'."

This is the Pope's answer to the question which he propounds, When will all the forces of the spirit and of love be harmoniously united. They will be united, in other words, only when they all accept the sovereignty of the church of Rome, and they will all return to its fold.

There is a passage in his sermon of yesterday which seems to refer also to the Jews whom he invites into this union of all the forces of the spirit and of love. He states, "The venerable father of the Gospel story is waiting anxiously on the threshold of the holy door for the contrite return of the Prodigal Son who will wish to remain obstinate in the desert of this guilt. Oh, that this Holy Year could welcome all the great return to the one true church, awaited over the centuries of so many who, though believing in Jesus Christ, are for various reasons separated from her. With unspeakable groanings the spirit who is in the hearts of good people today cries out imploringly the same prayer of our Lord that they may be one. With good reason men are anxious about the effrontery with which the united front of militant atheism advances, and the old question is now voiced aloud, Why are there still separations. Why are there still schisms? When will all the forces of the spirit and of love be harmoniously united? For all those who adore Christ, not excluding those who sincerely but vainly await his coming and adore him as the one promised by



the Prophets and still to come, do we open the Holy door, and at the same time we extend a welcome from the heart of the Father, whose fatherhood in the inscrutable design of God, has come to us from Jesus, the Redeemer."

Now if this last passage refers to the Jews - "all those who adore Christ, not excluding those who sincerely but vainly await his coming and adore him as the one promised by the Prophets and still to come" - then there is some misconception here of the role which Christ, the Messiah, played in Jewish theology and in Jewish thought. The Messiah, among the Jewish people, was never adored. He was never looked upon as God incarnate. He was a human being who was to appear at the proper time to restore the Kingdom of Israel and to bring about a reign of universal justice and reconciliation in the world, but being a human being, he is not to be adored or to be worshipped. No man is perfect. Only God is perfect and only God is worthy of human adoration.

But that's quite apart. Meeting on this basis, as envisaged by the Holy Father, between Protestants and Catholics, is clearly illusory, and this kind of meeting between Jews and Christians is likewise unrealistic. Behind this conception of a meeting is the conviction, as Pope Leo XIII expressed it at the close of the last century, that the equal toleration of all religions is the same thing as atheism. What is aimed at here is not really cooperation between religions, but the conversion of all religious groups to the one true faith. And that is why I suspect that at the various meetings arranged all over the country today by the Conference of Christians and Jews one seldom comes upon a Catholic priest, although Catholic laymen are present. There seems to be an unwillingness to recognize equality of other religious groups in a common effort for meeting in cooperation.

This kind of meeting is unrealistic and undesirable - that all men in order to be brothers must accept a common ideology and submit to a common regimen and discipline is the very nub of all dictatorships and the very denial of that liberal humanistic conception which mankind has so painfully been striving to achieve in the world



and in society. In politics this sort of meeting, meaning merger, meaning amalgamation, leads to the idealization of "gleichschaltung" as it did with the Nazis. The idealization of the monolithic society, as it does with the Communists; it leads to the one-party state, it leads to the police state. In religion it leads to religious imperialism, to religious persecution, to heresy hunting, to inquisitions, to the burning at the stake of all dissenters and non-conformists.

One is very much troubled at the advocacy of this kind of unity which means uniformity. And I must confess that I am somewhat troubled, too, by this summoning of the world to unite in a crusade against Communism on the ground that it is militant atheism. I do not recall any more vicious militant atheism which plagued our world than that which was represented by Naziism and Fascism, and I do not recall that the church called mankind to unite in a crusade against Naziism or Fascism. I do recall that the church found it possible to establish a Concordat, both with Fascism and Mussolini and Naziism and Hitler.

The problem of the one and the many is one of the most fundamental problems in human thought and organization. In philosophy it is the ancient problem of how to reconcile the manifoldness of the universe with a single unifying concept. In government it is the problem of how to relate personal freedom with group responsibility. In international relationships it is the problem of the sovereignty and the self-determination of individual states with international cooperation for peace. It is a hard, difficult problem - the problem of the one and the many.

Some years ago I discussed this problem in an essay called "The One and the Many" in my book, "Religion in a Changing World" from which I should like to quote a sentence or two in this connection.

Religion, too, faces the problem of the one and the many. The doctrine of one universal religion has been in continuous conflict with the principle of religious freedom. After centuries of struggle liberty of conscience and the right of non-conformity have been generally conceded by all the enlightened peoples of the world. Still there remains in the minds of people the apparent incompatibility which,



in loyalty to their own faith and group and tolerance of other forms of religious thought and organization. How can religion be purged of bigotry? How can a motley, grudging and jealous sectarianism ever make possible the world-unifying mission of religion? In the face of this many-sided and all-important problem of the one and the many, what is the task of civilization in our day? Clearly, its task is not to superimpose an artificial uniformity upon all races and peoples and creeds. Its aims should be not to force all people into one common mold. The task of civilization is not to constrict all groups into a Procrustean bed of uniformity, but to discover their common human needs and to organize them into voluntary, cooperative efforts to meet these needs.

When Jew and Christian, Mohammedan and Bhuddist, and men of all faiths will realize that their source is one, God and their destiny one, the service of man, and when they will join in the comradeship of labor to fulfill their common destiny, then they will have met. The walls of their churches may continue to separate them, but the spirit of their faiths will unite them. Their prayer books will continue to be many, but their prayer will be one.

Frequently some enlightened and broadminded men are heard expressing the wish that there should be but one religion. The forms of institutions of religions, they maintain, are after all incidental and of secondary importance. These incidental features of religion could very well be sacrificed, they maintain, for the sake of one universal religion. But one religion for the whole of mankind is neither necessary nor desirable. Only the religious monopolist, who is convinced that there is but one true faith and one true church, will insist upon one religion for the whole of mankind. All other men who do not find in any religion, however exalted, the final and exclusive revelation of God and man, but who see in all religions the self-same quest for spiritual truth and illumination, who look upon the yearning for universality and uniformity as something quite naive and primitive. Religion is not a science, but an art - the supreme art of man. Religion has to do not with the observation of physical phenomena, but with their spiritual interpretation, with judgments, values, appraisals, intuitive inferences. In this process of interpretation individual and race variations inevitably enter and differences of temperament, culture, history, even of geography become decisive factors distinguishing one religion from another.

Art, for example - art, too, is universal. All art is the effort of man to interpret life through the medium of line, color or sound, to dramatize the love the beautiful. But how different and various are the ways by



which artists arrive at their interpretations - different not only as regards the media employed, but also as regards technique and style. The distinctiveness of a work of art is to be found not so much in the theme as in its treatment. Every original artist reads into his work himself, his life, his philosophy, his environment, his racial heritage. It would be, therefore, quite naive and pointless to declare that inasmuch as art is universal, mankind should have but one art, one style of music, one style of architecture, one school of painting, one school of sculpture, one type of literature.

And so with religion. There is but one text, to be sure, but each religion has its own commentary. God is one, to be sure, but man's views of God are not one and cannot be one. "All the prophets prophesied one truth," declared an ancient rabbi, "but their styles were altogether different."

When I speak of where Jew and Christian can meet, I am thinking in terms of meeting in terms of the comradeship of labor, in voluntary, cooperative efforts to meet their common needs without asking them to accept one dogma, one church, one ritual, one Pope. This is possible - this kind of meeting - not only possible, but feasible and highly desirable. This is how free men meet in a free society. What is called for is not conversion but cooperation - not the contrite return of the Prodigal Son, for who is there who is qualified to pass judgment on his neighbor and to say who is the Prodigal Son. Who can claim for himself really absolute truth? This kind of claim and this kind of attitude makes for controversy, not for good will, for unity of effort.

Now, if by meeting we mean cooperation, then it should not be difficult for Jew and Christian to meet, to work together. They have so much in common, especially in their spiritual and ethical traditions. Christianity stems from Judaism. The founders of Christianity were all Jews. The Master whom Christianity adores was a Jew, one who was born a Jew and who died a Jew. The whole Messianic idea underlying the Christian faith is a Jewish idea. The Sacred Scriptures of Judaism is an essential part of the Sacred Scriptures of Christendom. Many of the practices and ceremonies of Christianity have their origin in Judaism. Above all, the great ethical ideals with which both Judaism and Christianity challenge the hardness and the cor-



ruption of the ancient pagan world - these great ethical ideals of justice and love, compassion, the dignity of human life, the protection of the weak, the stranger, the poor, the orphan, the widow, the aged, the purity of family life, the rights of the laboring man, the rights of the slave, the rights due even your enemy - these were ideals shared in common by Jews and Christians. That man should not be haught, but humble, acknowledging sin and repenting; that man should not be vindictive or relentless, but forgiving; that one should not do unto others what one does not wish others to do unto him. These were part of the common moral code of Judaism and of Christianity. That all men should be brothers seeking peace and eschewing all conflict and strife; that peace and not war is the goal of human existence. This, too, Judaism and Christianity have in common.

That God is the God of all men, the Father of all. That God dwells in the inward heart of man as well as in the universe without. That His true worship is the pure and noble life - the clean hands and the pure heart; and that through service and aspiration and sacrifice and suffering, man comes close and ever closer unto God. All these great and exalted spiritual truths are the common heritage of Jew and Christian.

Now partisan theologians on both sides, monopolists and apologists, have sought in a spirit of competitive zeal and competitive loyalty to draw sharp and irreconcilable distinctions between the ethics of Judaism and the ethics of Christianity. To be sure, there are distinctions, and there are differences, and there are different emphases, but they are not so vast in the field of ethics as to make this comradeship in labor of which I am speaking impossible or even difficult. On the contrary. The things which they have in common, not so much in the field of theologic doctrine, but in the field of morals and ethics, are so vast as to make cooperation not only mandatory, but extremely facile. The good will is there. Christianity did emphasize as Judaism did not salvation by faith rather than by works. Judaism laid his great emphasis upon conduct and action, and not so much upon faith in an abstract idea.



Christianity did emphasize pacificism, non-resistance, turning the other cheek to violence and injustice. There were reasons why it did. The early Christians believed that the world was about to come to an end by the miraculous intervention of God Himself, and that a new order was about to come, and therefore, there was no point in fighting evil, resisting evil. All that men should do was to try to purify themselves and prepare themselves for the coming of the Kingdom.

Judaism, which is basically a religion of prophesy and of ethical conduct for a continuing world, preached not pacifism, but peace. Resistance to evil, with the ultimate aim being beating of swords into ploughshares and knives into pruning hooks.

Christianity did emphasize another word-iness far more than Judaism did. It laid great stress on the value of ascetism, on the ideal of celibacy. These ideals gave rise to the institutions of the monastery and the nunnery in Christendom. There were never monasteries, there were never nunneries in Judaism. The basic outlook of Judaism was never one of ascetism, and of contempt or disdain of this world. On the other hand, Christianity did not place the same emphasis on the covenant idea between the people of Israel and God, on Israel as a factor in the establishment of the Kingdom of God as the Jewish people did.

There are differences, important differences. One should not seek to ignore them or to brush them aside. But these differences do not set up an iron wall of non-cooperation, of irreconcilability between the followers of Judaism and the followers of Christianity because both religions are seeking to establish a better world. Both religions are motivated by the great ideal of improving the world after the pattern of God Almighty. And if good will is there - not bigotry, not fanaticism, not pride of opinion - then cooperation is possible. Men must realize that to be intolerant is not proof of one's sincerity, that fanaticism is no tribute to loyalty, that to love your own does not mean that you must hate your neighbors. But it's amazing and heartbreaking to realize how easily people interpret their loyalty - intensive devotion to one's own conviction, in terms of bitter, cruel intolerance of the opinions and the convictions of other men. Even within a given religion there



arise vile subdivisions, this sectarianism which becomes shot through with bitterness and rivalry. In Christendom you have it not only between Catholicism and Protestantism, but within Protestantism and its 250 odd sects. And we had it also in Judaism - Pharisees and Essenes, Rabbinites and Carriites, The Chassidim and the Miznabim, the Orthodox and the Reformists. Within a single faith sharp, bitter divisions which turn brother against brother and make cooperation, meeting, comradeship in common tasks quite impossible.

People fail to realize that the essential ties of society are not the ties of agreement, but the ties of good will. Kindly disposition to meet on the basis of our common humanity and to explore together opportunities for cooperation in tasks advantageous to all; the peace and the progress of the world are maintained not by the over-zealous or impatient, the intolerant, but by the glorious company of men of good will whose judgment, wisdom, generosity of heart are the oil which lubricates the machinery of human relationships.

When I speak of good will, I'm not thinking of a namby-pamby term. Good will is more than tolerance. Tolerance can be very annoying and patronizing. Good will is far more than amiable grueliness about brotherhood in the abstract. There's an easy-going tolerance among certain classes of people. I don't care very much about my religion, and you don't care very much about your religion, and let's be tolerant and broadminded about it. That isn't what I mean at all. I mean the hard kind, the difficult kind of tolerance which means intensity of conviction, deep loyalty to one's own, plus generosity of heart, broad toleration. When I speak of good will, I lay the emphasis on the word, will - determination to do something about it, to bring about the goodness that all religions strive for. Good will as an active, dynamic principle. There is so much in the world which needs to be set aright, so many specific tasks which call for organization on the part of all men of good will to perform those tasks in order to save civilization from chaos, from bankruptcy - tasks in our own community, in our own state, in our own nation - not merely on the



world scene. The evils of poverty, of slums, of crime - the evils of segregation and discrimination - the evils of moral laxity and the broken homes - the evils of social insecurity - the evils of the war machine and the threat of a new and an even more disastrous war. These and a hundred other ramifications of these basic problems as they crop up every day in our every-day existence call for cooperative effort, for consistent, organized planned attack in order that we might move forward to a better world of Judaism and of Christianity.

Now, it is not necessary for the Christian to become a Jew; it isn't necessary for the Jew to become a Christian to meet in the brotherliness of this moral awareness and to accept together the burden of the common task. The tragedy of our day is not that there are too many religions in the world, but that there is not enough religion altogether in the world. Many of our religions have lost their vision and still retain their dreams and nothing more. They have the past with them, they have the institution with them, they have all the external trappings with them, but the propulsive and revolutionary and dynamic spirit of shaking the world loose of its evils which first gave rise to them - that seems to have vanished from many of them.

Can Jew and Christian meet? Of course, they can meet - on the basis of the code of holiness which I read this morning, they can meet; on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount they can meet; on the basis of "love thy neighbor as thyself" they can meet; on the basis of all the spiritual idealism of the psalmist and the ethical passion of the prophet, they can meet; on the basis of a common humanity, they can meet. Only that kind of meeting has any significance and any worth. Any other kind is spurious and meaningless. Any other kind has to do with proselytism and conversion and missionary activities. Institutional sort of monopolism which has no value for civilization.

Our great teachers visioned the day "when all men will join in one cooperative effort" to do the will of their Heavenly Father. Not conversion. Our rabbis said, the righteous among the Gentiles will have the same portion in the world to come as



the best of the Jews. The Jess never put a verbotten sign on Heaven and restricted it to the members of the household of Israel. There are no priorities in the sight of God. The credential is not the religion you belong to or the race you belong to or the color you are of. The credential of admitting you through the **gates** of Heaven, to use that figure - "Who shall ascend into the mountain? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." It isn't said of ~~only~~ only the Jews. "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." On that basis meeting between members of all religions, not merely Jew and Christian - half of the world is neither Jew nor Christian - on that basis all people can meet and help bring about the Kingdom of God.

