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CHRIST AND CONVERSION: H.RICHARD NIEBUHR'S THOUGHT BETWEEN 1933 AND 1937

HELMUT Richard Niebuhr is generally regarded as one of the most influential contemporary Protestant theologian in America. Partly because he wrote relatively little and partly because he shunned publicity, he did not succeed in attaining the stature of people like Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann, Emil Brunner in Europe and his brother, Reinhold Niebuhr, in America. Nevertheless, in his published writings and, especially, in his lectures at Yale Divinity School, where he taught from 1931 until his death in 1962, he showed that he could criticize in a strong yet pertinent way the thought of his contemporaries. Besides, he managed to develop original insights from which the present generation of American theologians are drawing fruitful inspiration.

One of the concepts which is central in Niebuhr's moral theology and which is gaining wide currency today is that of conversion. Protestant and Catholic moral theologians are beginning to see more and more the crucial rôle of this concept in the understanding of Christian life. Perhaps, Niebuhr may be useful for those who wish to explore the dimensions of conversion as seen in the light of Christian faith.[1] To present Niebuhr's view of conversion in a comprehensive way requires a full-scale study and this obviously falls outside the scope of the present essay.[2] I shall here concentrate on a more limited topic: the emergence of the concept of conversion in the

[1] Cf. Paul Ramsey, 'The Transformation of Ethics,' in *Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr*, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New York, 1957; Harper Torchbooks, 1965), pp. 140-172. Charles E. Curran, *A New Look at Christian Morality* (London and Sydney, 1969), p. 233.

[2] The present writer dealt with Niebuhr's concept of conversion in a doctoral dissertation entitled 'Conversion and Responsibility: The Evolution of H. Richard Niebuhr's View of Christian Ethics,' presented at the Katholieke Universiteit Te Leuven, June 1975.

thought of Niebuhr. I submit that this concept made its appearance for the first time in his thought sometime between 1933 and 1937. During this period he was trying to restore the pre-liberal American theological tradition to its rightful place.[3] His encounter with eighteenth century theology in America, of which Jonathan Edwards is the chief exponent, helped him to understand that Christian life consists first and foremost in a process of permanent conversion.

I shall devote a substantial part of this essay to an analysis of Niebuhr's writings between 1933 and 1937 with the purpose of showing the immediate context in which the concept of conversion in Niebuhr took shape for the first time. I shall start by giving a very brief survey of the main phases of his intellectual evolution until 1932 so that the reader may follow the present discussion with less difficulty. Towards the end of this essay I shall indicate in what direction Niebuhr wanted to develop the ideas gained from his study of the American theological tradition.

1. The Evolution of Niebuhr's Thought

In this section I shall describe briefly the evolution of Niebuhr's thought between 1920 and 1932. Over those twelve years he kept rethinking and reformulating his position as he came in contact with new experiences and ideas. The big change occurred in the thirties under the impact particularly of dialectical theology. In the immediately preceding decade Niebuhr was under the influence of liberalism which, as it is well known, assumed that the relationship between man and God presents no particular problem, since the highest aspirations of man, even on the natural level, coincide with the divine will. This assumption governed Niebuhr's thought until 1929 but, afterwards, it was subjected to a critical analysis.

The moral problem for the early Niebuhr was that of reconstructing the universal human community.[4] Like the Social Gospel theologians, he realized that the greatest obstacle in the way of build-

[3] Niebuhr published the conclusions of his research on the history of American theology in his book, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Chicago, New York, 1937; Harper Torchbooks, 1959). Other works which tried to interpret the American theological tradition from a non-liberal perspective were: J. Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology* (New York, 1932); P. Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachussetts, 1630-1650* (Cambridge, 1933).

[4] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, 'The Alliance Between Labor and Religion,' *Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America*, XLIX (1921), 197-203; 'Christianity and the Social Problem,' *Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America*, (1922), 278-91.

ing this community is individual and collective egoism. The divisions, antagonisms and conflicts in society are coming from the tendency of men to live and work not for the promotion of the universal human community but for their own individual and group interests.

Niebuhr interpreted sin as selfishness and salvation as life in community. In so far as selfishness is the root cause of divisions within society, sin has a social dimension. Salvation, cannot, therefore, concern merely the individual in isolation but man as a social being; it indicates a quality of life in which human relations are governed by mutual respect and not by exploitation of the weak by the strong.

Social divisions could be overcome, Niebuhr maintained, through repentance. In other words, society has to become aware of the disruptive influence of egoism before it can make an effective effort to realize the ideal of universal brotherhood. According to Niebuhr, the Christian community should be the first to make repentance for the divisions among men. The Church, however, can fulfil this mission properly, if it breaks once for all its alliance with the privileged classes and associates itself with the poor and the weak. In this way, the Church would show to the world that it really believes in the truth and power of the Cross.

Between 1925 and 1929 Niebuhr focused even more than before on the need of the Church to live a life of repentance and suffering, as it tries strenuously to deny its natural tendency toward self-preservation and self-interest. For Niebuhr the divisions within Christendom were a clear sign of the Christian capitulation to the mentality and faith of the world. If the Church wants to be effectively present in the world, it needs first of all to put an end to its internal divisions. It is only after the Church is unified that it can function as a powerful force in the reconstruction of society. A sincere self-examination on the part of the Church would reveal, according to Niebuhr, the adjustment of Christianity to the interests of economic, racial, national, regional and political groups.[5]

Niebuhr owed his new insight into the problem involved in the Church's relations to the world to the sociologist Max Weber and to the philosopher-theologian Ernst Troeltsch. A thorough study of Niebuhr's writings from 1925 until his death would prove the continuing influence of Troeltsch upon his thought. He came in contact with Troeltsch in a serious way during his studies at the Divinity School of Yale University between 1922 and 1924. During that

[5] This is the thesis of Niebuhr in *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York, 1929; Meridian Books, 1967).

period he studied Troeltsch very closely and wrote a doctoral dissertation on his philosophy of religion.[6] From Troeltsch he took the concept of compromise. Troeltsch used this concept to show that every ethical ideal loses its radical character when it is put into practice. He argued that one could see this phenomenon happening throughout the history of Christianity: the movement of Christianity toward the world (represented by the Church-type) was always accompanied by an opposite movement of Christianity out of the world (represented by the sect-type). The Church-type Christianity brought about a certain weakening of the radicality of the Gospel ethic, because it recognized the relative validity of terrestrial values. The sect-type Christianity, represented originally by monasticism, tried to deny the claims of wordly values in order to be able to follow the radical demands of the Gospel. But Troelsch observed that even in the case of sects the tendency toward compromise usually reasserted itself progressively after the third generation.[7]

Troeltsch taught Niebuhr to be more realistic in his evaluation of man's moral possibilities. Strangely enough, Niebuhr's new consciousness of the radical weakness of human nature did not shatter, at least for the time being, his faith in the Church's power to realize in practice the Gospel ideal of universal brotherhood. In fact, he insisted, first of all, that the Church should recognize (hence repentance in the sense of 'turning away from') the worldly sources of the existing divisions; secondly, that it should make a strenuous effort to realize (hence repentance in the sense of 'turning toward') the ideal of unity.

The optimistic note, a heritage of the liberal mentality, is certainly pronounced in Niebuhr in the twenties; he believed that men

[6] H.R. Niebuhr, 'Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion', (Ph.D., Yale University, 1924; Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1973). In the twenties Yale Divinity School was a centre of the so-called 'Empirical Theology' of which the greatest exponent there was Douglas Clyde Macintosh. Niebuhr was indeed influenced by this theology as can be seen from his essay, 'Theology and Psychology: .... A Sterile Union,' *The Christian Century,* XLIV (1927), 47-48. The empirical movement in theology tried to work out a 'scientific' method for theology; it was a reaction against the *subjective* method of nineteenth century Protestant theology. Although Niebuhr in the thirties criticized empirical theology for not being radical enough in its criticism of nineteenth century theological starting-point, he could have probably taken from it his initial interest in the theocentric and objective foundation of the Christian faith.

[7] Cf. E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* trans. by Olive Wyon (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1960); also, Benjamin Reist, *Toward a Theology of Involvement: The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch* (Philadelphia, 1966).

possessed enough good will to overcome the stubborn resistance of human nature against the Gospel ideal of universal community. Nevertheless, as it has already been pointed out, Niebuhr was becoming increasingly aware of the moral limitations of man and the pervading presence of sin in the world.[8] This awareness brought him close to the classical Protestant tradition and, therefore, to the fundamental Christian insight that man could not be justified by his works but by faith in God. But this current of thought remained marginal in the early Niebuhr, although it must have prepared the ground for the revolution which his basic theological convictions underwent in the thirties.

Dialectical theology began to exercise a strong influence on American theologians in the late twenties, that is, a decade after it had started in Switzerland and Germany. In the meantime significant differences emerged between representatives of the dialectical movement. Paul Tillich had already expressed some basic reservations concerning Barth's method; he criticized the latter for not taking into account that the divine 'No' pronounced on all human ideals is accompanied by the divine 'Yes' or the promise of salvation as an event which is active here and now, making it possible for human life to renew itself.[9] According to Tillich, such a renewal under the influence of grace could actually take place, if modern man were to set aside the bourgeois mentality of self-sufficiency and recognize the reference of all finite reality to the Unconditioned i.e. God.[10]

Niebuhr at first found Tillich's position more congenial,[11] because it offered him the possibility of understanding the positive relation of faith to social life, a problem with which he was deeply concern-

[8] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, 'Back to Benedict?', *The Christian Century* XLII (1926), 860-1; 'Jesus Christ, Intercessor', *The International Journal of Religious Education,* 111 (1927), 6-8, p. 7.

[9] Cf. Paul Tillich, 'Critical and Positive Paradox', in James Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology* (Richmond, Virginia, 1968), 133-141. This essay was originally published in *Theologische Blätter,* 11 (1923), 263-9.

[10] Cf. P. Tillich, *The Religious Situation,* trans. by H.R. Niebuhr (New York, 1932); originally published as *Die religiöse Lage der Gegenwart* (1926).

[11] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, 'Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?', *The Christian Century,* XLVII (1930), 914-16; 'Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century', *Religious Realism,* ed. by D.C. Macintosh (New York, 1931), 413-28, pp. 414-9, 421; P. Tillich, *The Religious Situation,* trans. by H.R. Niebuhr (Meridian Books; Cleveland and New York, 1967), pp. 9-24.

ed from the very beginning of his theological career. Experience and study led Niebuhr to become more sceptical about the moral possibilities of man and to appropriate the meaning of faith in the active presence of God in the world. Such faith has social implications, since it is faith in a God who is judging and redeeming man in all his dimensions. A crisis like the economic depression or the invasion of China by Japan is a call by God to repentance, that is, to a rigorous self-examination especially on the social level. Such national and international crises, when interpreted in the light of faith in the judging activity of God, should lead each nation and each society to see how much their lack of responsibility in the past has contributed to the present state of affairs.[12] Niebuhr in 1932 went even so far as to deny that it is part of the Christian strategy to use force to defend China against Japan, because he feared that such an intervention on the part of America would be somehow motivated by self-interest. Hence, the proper stance of the Christian in times of crisis is: (i) faith in the judging and redeeming activity of God in nature and in history; (ii) repentance or internal reformation; (iii) hope in the incoahative presence of the Kingdom of God in the world.

We observe that Niebuhr continued to consider repentance in the early thirties as something indispensable for the Christian. But he began to understand it in a new theological context. The conviction that God is active in nature and in history as Judge and Redeemer led him to rethink and reformulate the notion of Christian life. Repentance was still counted as a necessary element but it was now to be accompanied not by a self-conscious effort to actualize the ideal of universal brotherhood but by faith in God's grace in the world and by hope in the coming Kingdom.

Like Tillich, Niebuhr stressed that God is active in history as Redeemer and not merely as Judge. The redeeming activity of God in history is described by Niebuhr in 1932 as 'a different kind of *world* with lasting peace,' as 'a *revolutionary change* which will involve considerable destruction'.[13] Such a conception of salvation

[12] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, 'Faith, Works, and Social Salvation', *Religion in Life*, I (1932), 426-30; 'The Grace of Doing Nothing', *The Christian Century*, XLIX (1932), 378-80; H.R. Niebuhr, 'A Communication: The Only Way into the Kingdom of God', *The Christian Century*, XLIX (1932), 447 These last two articles were reprinted as 'The Grace of Doing Nothing' and 'The Only Way into the Kingdom of God, A Communication by H.R. Niebuhr,' in *The Christian Century Reader*, ed. by H.E. Fey and Margaret Frakes (New York, 1962), 216-21 and 228-231 respectively. References will be to the reprinted articles.

is very similar to Tillich's idea of *Gestalt* or structure of grace. It points to a radical change in the objective socio-historical world but it does not explain how it is connected with the life of persons in relation to God, neighbour and world. Redemption in time or grace appears to suggest to Niebuhr at this stage of his intellectual evolution the idea of a radical change or revolution that is taking place primarily outside the subject in the world in which he lives.

It seems to me that there are grounds to state that in the early thirties Niebuhr was interpreting grace as a radical change in the socio-historical sphere chiefly in the light of the Marxist model of revolution.[14] But I would hesitate to associate completely Niebuhr's idea of redemption or grace with the Marxist theory of revolution. Niebuhr himself cautioned against a too easy association between the two.[15] In fact, his emphasis on rigid self-analysis (repentance) is intended to 'create the conditions under which a real reconstruction of habits is possible'.[16] In his view, the revolution taking place in the objective socio-historical world should be accompanied by an internal reformation in order that God's presence may manifest itself to the eyes of faith. Yet this subjective reformation is conceived to be the fruit of repentance. As I hope to show presently, Niebuhr developed his thought on grace in a radical fashion between 1933 and 1937. He began to understand and interpret grace as the reconciliation of the self with God and its environment. We can say that he moved to a more personal concept of 'revolution'. From the notion of revolution as a change occurring in the socio-historical world through the agency of God he moved to an idea of revolution as a change of mind and heart or as conversion or regeneration. Niebuhr, of course, did not abandon his conviction that God is active in nature and in history; he kept this conviction but added another, namely, that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ made it possible for man to enter into a new relationship with God, neighbour and world. The concept of Christian life as a change of mind and heart or permanent conversion was linked with Niebuhr's discovery of the meaning of Christ in the writings of eighteenth century American theologians.

[13] Niebuhr, 'The Grace of Doing Nothing', pp. 219-220.
[14] Cf. James W. Fowler, *To See the Kingdom: The Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Nashvilee, New York, 1974), pp. 72-3. I believe that Fowler has overstated the similarity between Niebuhr's idea of the Christian revolutionary strategy and that of the Marxists. The differences between the two in my opinion are also important.
[15] Cf. Niebuhr, 'The Grace of Doing Nothing', p. 220.
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

In the following section I shall discuss (a) Niebuhr's portraits of Christ prior to his contact with the eighteenth century American theological tradition, (b) the Christological perspective in American theology.

2. Christ and Conversion: Niebuhr's Thought between 1933 and 1937

(a) *Antecedent Portraits of Christ*

The Christ which we find in Niebuhr's writings of the late twenties is prophet and priest. The prophetic view of Christ is dominant; it represents Christ as the interpreter of God's will to man. As priest, Christ is mediator and intercessor between man and God.[17] Implied in the prophetic view is the liberal idea that Christ proclaims to men a moral ideal which coincides with the highest aspirations of mankind. As Niebuhr became more conscious of the radical moral weakness of mankind, he began to indicate, without, however, developing consistently, the notion of Christ as the priest who represents man before God and who makes intercession for sin.[18]

In 1930 when Niebuhr was preoccupied with the search for a theology which mediates between a transcendental (Barthian) and an immanentistic (American) theology, he suggested that the mediator might be Christ. Why?

> Christians may be practically convinced that the mediator, in this case also, is Jesus Christ. In him they find the living union of theocentric and anthropocentric faith, of religion and ethics.[19]

Niebuhr compared the relation of religion and ethics to the relation between the two natures in Christ:

> Religion and ethics seem to be related somewhat as are the two natures of Christ according to the ancient formula: they are inseparable and indivisible, but are not to be confused or identified with each other.[20]

[17] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, 'Jesus Christ, Intercessor'.

[18] 'The reconciliation of men to God is for Jesus no problem for theological speculation or psychological analysis, but a pressing practical need. He is constrained by His love for men, by His more than common awareness of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of the peril of the soul threatened by degradation, to offer Himself in intercession for His brothers.' *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[19] Niebuhr, 'Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?' p. 915.

[20] Niebuhr, 'Religion and Ethics', *The World Tomorrow,* XIII (1930), 443-6, p. 445.

Unfortunately, Niebuhr did not develop this basic insight into the doctrine of Christ as the one who can help us understand the relation between religion and ethics in any of his published writings of the early thirties. He simply tried to explain the relation between religion and ethics without any reference to Christ:

> The field of ethics is time, but the condition of its effectiveness in time is its co-conscious awareness of eternity. The field of religion is eternity, but the condition of its realization of eternity is a co-consciousness of time.[21]

I believe that the only clue which we have in Niebuhr's published writings to indicate how he began to understand Christ in the early thirties is the phrase which describes Christ as 'the living union of theocentric and anthropocentric faith'. But what exactly is the meaning of this key phrase?

Niebuhr focused his attention specifically on the meaning of Christ within the new theological framework he was establishing in the early thirties in an unpublished paper entitled, 'The Social Gospel and the Mind of Christ.'[22] Recently, a summary of and extensive quotations from this paper appeared in print. We know now that by 1933 Niebuhr had already repudiated the liberal notion of Christ as a moral idealist whose main concern was the preservation and realization of an anthropocentric value system. According to Niebuhr, an objective reading of the Gospel should reveal Jesus as 'a God-centered, apocalyptic revolutionary strategist'. Jesus, in fact, was able to see the activity of God in the events of his time and to interpret this divine activity in history as the judgment and salvation of the world. Far from proclaiming an automatic and painless progress toward the family of God, as the liberals maintain, Jesus directed men to respond to the manifestation of God in history first of all with fear and repentance. The God of Jesus is indeed man's deliverer but he is also the judge who brings the egoism of man to a tragic end.

So Niebuhr in the early thirties tried to give an interpretation of Jesus which was more in line with his newly acquired conviction about the sovereignty of God and the sinfulness of man. But Niebuhr's Christ of 1933 is not, I believe, exactly identical with the Christ he found in the writings of eighteenth century American theologians. The Christ of 1933 represents the incarnation of a ra-

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 445-6.

[22] H.R. Niebuhr, 'The Social Gospel and the Mind of Christ', read at a meeting of the American Theological Society in New York, April 21, 1933, 23pp. For a summary and a discussion of this paper, see Fowler, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-93.

dical faith in God and a life of consistent response to God's judging and redeeming activity in nature and in socio-historical processes. Christ is, as Niebuhr noted two years earlier, 'a living union of theocentric and anthropocentric faith'. In this sense, Christ functions as a model for the Christian. As we shall see, American theology in the eighteenth century understood Christ as the one who made it possible for man to enter a new relationship with his fellows, nature and God.

(b) *The Christological Perspective in the American Theological Tradition*

One of the decisive and lasting contributions of Niebuhr is his work on the history of American theology. The results of his historical research were published in his first two major books: *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929) and *The Kingdom of God in America* (1937). The latter is particularly important for our purposes, because it shows a significant development on his earlier ideas and provides the theological context in which the author viewed the concept of conversion for the first time. This book grew out of the classes and seminars which he gave at Yale on 'The Ethical Ideal of American Christianity.'[23]

The author mentioned two principal reasons for resuming the study of Christianity in America. Both are connected with his earlier book, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism.* In this work Niebuhr studied the problem of Church disunity with the help of sociology and assumed that another effort by Christians of good-will would suffice to solve the problem. Now he discovered that sociology could explain the social sources of Church division and was quite relevant to the institutionalized churches but it was inapplicable to the movement which expressed itself in a number of churches. In other words, a realistic view of Christianity has to look beyond the different denominations and take account of the dynamic and constructive element of the Christian faith.[24] Behind or alongside the picture of a static, fragmented religion Niebuhr was now able to see the picture of a dynamic, unifying faith. He found that Protestantism, in spite of its disunity, was able to play a very constructive rôle in American society; in fact, in this country one could witness 'an experiment in constructive Protestantism'.[25] When he resumed the study of American Christianity, he intended to discover the principles of constructive Protestantism in America.[26]

[23] Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, 1959), p. xvii.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. ix-x.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[26] This shift from the static to the dynamic element in Christianity was

Niebuhr mentioned also that his earlier solution to the problem of Church disunity no longer satisfied him. In the course of his book he made it clear that the will of man is perverted. Hence, before any appeal to the will can be made, man should know that his will is in bondage to itself and that, as long as he lives, the struggle for his liberation is never complete.

Niebuhr stated, without further elaboration, that his interest in the history of American Christianity was stimulated by other related reasons as well. What these related reasons were we cannot say exactly. But a hypothesis may be advanced on the basis of what we find in the book itself and other writings of the same period. The hypothesis is this: Niebuhr discovered especially in American theology of the eighteenth century a new way of dealing with the basic problem which confronted Christianity in his own day. I have two reasons in support of this opinion:

The first reason is based on Niebuhr's observation that it is not possible for Christians in America to ignore the religious and theological development that occurred in the eighteenth century. His discussion of this period concludes in this way:

> In other lands of Christendom it may be possible to ignore the Christian revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and to seek the re-establishment of Christianity as it was in or before the Reformation. So the Neo-Protestants of Germany and the Anglo-Catholics of England believe. For America, however, – the land of Edwards, Whitefield, the Tennents, Backus, Hopkins, Asbury, Alexander, Woolman, Finney and all their company – such an attempt is impossible... It was no wholly new beginning, for the Christianity expressed in it was a more venerable thing than the American nation. Yet for America it was a new beginning; it was our national conversion.[27]

The second reason is based on a remark he made in his article, 'The Attack upon the Social Gospel', written obviously with the history of American Christianity in mind.[28] In this article Niebuhr

suggested to Niebuhr partly by Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York, 1935). Cf. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, pp. xii, 6, n. 1, 11. Niebuhr, however, objected against Bergson's mystical and individualistic conception of religion: 'prophetism more than mysticism represents the dynamic element in Christianity, and... the molten fluid id poured into the social life rather than into individual souls'. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[27] *Ibid.*, 125-6; Edwards, Whitefield, the Tennents, etc. were representatives of eighteenth century American theology.

[28] *Religion in Life*, V (1936), 176-181.

drew a comparison between the situation of his own time and that of the eighteenth century. The problem of eighteenth century Christianity, he argued, was how to deal with the mass of individuals who experienced an altogether new sense of freedom from external restraints. The problem of Christianity in the twentieth century was how to deal with emancipated societies, 'the races and classes which have made themselves laws to themselves'.[29] The situation in both cases was how to supply inner discipline in place of vanished external restraints. Niebuhr summed up his view on the matter in the following way:

> The present situation may be compared to that which existed at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The rationalist effort to deal with the problem of emancipated individual life in terms of moral self-salvation and by means of indirect and melioristic action through education and reason failed. Then came the direct, revolutionary Evangelical approach based upon a theory of salvation in which – whatever the differences between Calvinists and Arminians – the adjustment of human ways to the way of God as revealed in Jesus Christ was demanded. The new movements in Christianity, it seems to the present writer, must not be interpreted as reactions to Evangelical individualism, but as efforts to discover in our own day the social equivalent of the Evangelical strategy.[30]

As the meaning of the Evangelical strategy emerges in the context of the history of American theology, I shall now examine briefly Niebuhr's argument in *The Kingdom of God in America*.

Niebuhr was able to confirm the general view that the concept of the 'Kingdom of God' dominated American Protestantism but he found that different aspects of this concept were developed since the seventeenth century. The first was that of God's sovereignty, the second that of the reign of Christ and the third that of the coming Kingdom. These three aspects were developed in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth-twentieth century respectively. Following is a brief survey of these three aspects of the notion of the Kingdom of God in American Protestantism.

The characteristic element of Protestant faith in the seventeenth century was that God was *Sovereign*.[31] The guiding principle of early American Protestantism was faith in 'the living reality of God's present rule, not only in human spirits but also in the world

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 178.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[31] Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, ch. 11.

of nature and of human history.'[32] The corresponding conception of Christian life was obedience to God's present will. The priority of God's reality and freedom over human reason and will did not imply an external imposition on nature but only 'the presence of power and purpose behind or beyond as well as within natural events.'[33]

From its primary conviction that God is sovereign American Protestantism in the seventeenth century drew three corollary principles. The first was *Christian constitutionalism* which laid down that knowledge of God's will had to come from God himself rather than from human nature. Hence, divine revelation was made the only criterion of true knowledge of God's will. This principle, however, did not mean that the Bible should be taken as the source of all ideas about God and all moral norms for the Christian. The conviction that God is absolutely sovereign in all periods of history did not permit such an interpretation. The Scriptures were normative in that they served as a criterion whereby new ideas and measures were to be tested.[34]

The second principle was that of the *independence of the Church.* This principle implied that the gathering of the Church should take precedence over other tasks, whether these tasks be political, economic or of any other nature. Since faith in the living God had been set as the foundation of the whole of life, the building of the community which acknowledged that faith explicitly and attacked every attempt at the usurpation of the authority of God by any created power had to take first preference. Niebuhr described the notion of the Church which he found in seventeenth century American theology in this beautiful passage: 'It is the *ecclesia* which has been called out of the pluralism and the temporalism of the world to loyalty to the supreme reality and only good, on which the goodness of all finite things depends.'[35] The Church thus reflects the dialectic of Christianity, that is, 'retreat' from the world to express its loyalty to the supreme reality and only good and 'return' to the world to attack its false faith and promote an authentic faith in God.

The third corollary of faith in divine sovereignty was *the limitation of all human power.* The restriction of human power in all

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[34] Niebuhr carefully distinguished between the use of scripture as 'source' of all knowledge about God and all moral norms for the Christian life and the use of scripture as 'criterion' whereby new ideas and measures are to be tested. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

spheres of life – political ecclesiastical, individual and (to a certain extent) economic – was a generally accepted means of preventing any finite power from becoming absolute. The problem of Christianity in America, however, took a different form in the following century when it became obvious that one could no longer deal with the new situation on the basis of the principle of the limitation of power.

Restriction of human power by means of external restraints became obsolete in the eighteenth century, because people gained a strong sense of freedom as a result of several factors: the rationalistic movement proclaimed the autonomy of reason and individual freedom; availability of free or cheap land made the masses in America economically independent. The dominant accent in American society then was on the freedom of the individual. It is Niebuhr's contention that Protestant thought in America during the eighteenth century was not simply a represtination of earlier ideas:

> Though it was definitely continuous with the earlier movement, it faced a new society with new problems and represented a new emphasis. It arose in the new world of emancipated individuals who had become their own political masters to an uncommon degree... Not only was the situation different from that of the seventeenth century but the religious response to it was primarily in terms of the kingdom of Christ rather than in those of the sovereignty of God... The traditionally minded continued to deal with the new situation by means of restraint and the limitation of power, but 'the new lights' and 'the new schools' which made the idea of *regeneration* primary represented the constructive religious movement of the period from Great Awakening to Civil War.[36]

The foregoing text introduces the concept of 'regeneration'. The concept of regeneration which eventually dominated Niebuhr's thought on Christian ethics needs to be distinguished from that of 'repentance'. As we have seen, repentance had been a constant and basic concept in Niebuhr from the very beginning. But the idea of regeneration or conversion emerged for the first time in the context of his research in American theology of the eighteenth century.

The basic elements of the concept of 'regeneration' are the following. In the first place, the notion is essentially connected with the idea of Christ and hence it introduces within the general theological framework the Christological perspective. In the second

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101. Italics mine. Niebuhr discussed the eighteenth century American Protestant tradition in chapter III under the title, 'The Kingdom of Christ.'

place, the idea of regeneration is a substitute for the idea of external restraint and limitation of power. Thirdly, regeneration is the Christian counterpart of the humanist idea of freedom.

Before going further, it may be useful to mention some of the words and phrases which Niebuhr employed in the context of his discussion of eighteenth century theology to describe the idea of regeneration. Here are some examples: 'the cleansing of the inward parts;' 'the restoration to man of inner harmony'; 'the actuality of the new order of grace'; 'rebirth of the whole man'; 'revolution in the will to power'; 'redirection of the will'; the transfer of loyalty'; 'conversion of minds and hearts'; 'ultimate and permanent revolution'; 'the Christian enlightenment'.[37] This terminology indicates that regeneration or conversion here implies a reconstruction of the person or the self. Let me analyse briefly Niebuhr's own interpretation of this fundamental principle as he found it expressed in eighteenth century American Protestant theologians, particularly, in Jonathan Edwards whom he considered to be the greatest American theologian.[38]

First of all, the new theology incorporated the earlier fundamental conviction in God's sovereignty. In Edwards it is clear, Niebuhr argued, that the human will cannot love God for His own sake, unless God Himself reveals His goodness. Thus the initiative lies with God. This revelation occurred in Jesus Christ. In this sense, Christ points beyond himself to the Father. Finally, the reconciliation which takes place in the believer is with God Himself.[39]

The new theology took also into account the great problem of the day. The emphasis on freedom led theologians to develop a Christian theory of freedom. Unlike their contemporaries, however, they started with the Christian conviction that the will is in bondage to itself: 'They knew that the problem of human life was not the discovery of an adequate ideal nor the generation of will power whereby ideals might be realized, but rather the redirection of the will to live and the liberation of the drive in human life from the inhibitions of fear, conflict and the sense of futility.[40] This is an eminently

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 98, 99, 102, 113, 124.

[38] Cf. Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, eds., *Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition* (New York, 1955), p. 380. Jonathan Edwards was a voluminous writer. Cf. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards,* 10 Vols. (New York, 1829). Edwards was born in Connecticut in 1703, died at Princeton in 1756, studied Locke, Newton, and the Cambridge Platonists and at Yale was a prominent leader of the Great Awakening which took place between 1725 and 1750.

[39] Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America,* p. 103.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

existential problem and its solution is found in Jesus Christ. Fear, conflict and the feeling of futility are symptoms of a negative relation of man to his creator. It is Christ who made possible our reconciliation with God: '... the nature of that event Jesus Christ with its repetition in the lives of believers is *reconciliation to Being*, to the divine reality, which man cannot but consider to be his enemy so long as he is intent upon promoting his own will and life.'[41] The Kingdom of Christ, a central notion in American theology during the eighteenth century, meant fundamentally a quality of life based on the conviction that in and through Jesus Christ we are being reconciled to God and hence to our neighbours and to the world. Three main ideas are included in the general notion of the Kingdom of Christ.

The first idea is a new way of understanding the earlier emphasis on self-restraint and discipline. Now theologians tried to interpret the principle of the limitation of power in the light of the life and especially the death of Jesus Christ. Self-restraint was necessary not only because it is a form of obedience to the Sovereign Will of God but also, and especially, because the Son of God is continually being crucified as a result of the perennial tendency of the human will to assert itself. The will to power should, therefore, be checked by continuous repentance.[42]

The second idea in the notion of the Kingdom of Christ is that of 'enlightenment.' The revelation of God in Christ illuminates the mind; it does not reject reason but gives reason a new set of presuppositions. The distinction was drawn between reason and the presuppositions which are prior to all logical processes; in this way, a radical opposition between reason and revelation was avoided. For instance, acceptance of the teaching of revelation about the bondage of the will still entitled one to argue rationally that freedom is a goal to be achieved through the persistent commitment of the will to the universal good.[43]

In his discussion of the Kingdom of Christ in terms of 'enlightenment' Niebuhr remarked that eighteenth century American theologians adopted primarily an empirical conception of knowledge. Thus they focused on the experiential side of the knowledge of God. Yet they recognized also the objective criterion of the word of God in Scripture. 'Wesley, Edwards and their colleagues,' Niebuhr observed, 'maintained the principle of divine initiative in revelation and of the objective criterion by which all personal experience needed to be judged, while holding at the same time that the objective

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 103-4. Italics mine.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8, 118.

needed to become subjective, the historical contemporary.'[44]

The empirical view of knowledge also permitted American theologians during the eighteenth century to recognize the positive rôle which the emotions might play in the personal appropriation of the truth of revelation. The emotional factor in religious knowledge, of course, moved to the foreground because of the religious revivals taking place at the time. The ambiguity of the emotional response was recognized so that the authenticity of religious conversion needed to be tested on grounds other than those of the emotions. Yet it was also clear that the truth of the Gospel required the response of the whole man – the activity of the intellect and will, mind and heart – to be apprehended and expressed. According to Niebuhr, the Evangelical evaluation of the emotional factor in religious knowledge 'made effective and explicit the Protestant principle that God and faith belong together, or that a knowledge of God which is conceptual only and not axiological... a knowledge which is that of the head and not of the heart is of little importance in religion.'[45]

Thirdly, the Kingdom of Christ was conceived as 'the kingdom of love'. When the Evangelicals (i.e. eighteenth century American theologians) understood the Christian ethic in terms of love, they did not define love of neighbour as the essence of Christianity after the fashion of liberalism. Love of neighbour was an element within a theological framework comprising faith in divine sovereignty and the revolutionary change from natural to supernatural affection. Edwards, for instance, admitted that there is considerable altruism and love in the world, but as long as there is no revolutionaty change from natural to divine affection, natural love remains selfish, because it is committed to a part of the universe of being. Niebuhr summarized Edwards' theory of Christian love in these words:

> The extension of self-love... from the narrow self to the wider self, from individual to the family, to the nation, to humanity, to life still leaves it attached to its root and so makes it exclusive at the same time that it seeks to be inclusive. How can human love be delivered from its partiality and exclusiveness and from the consequent tendency to conflict with the excluded reality or from its exploitation? ... There is only one way out of the dilemma of human love. What if men could see that the universal, the eternal, the fountain and center of all being is their true good? What if they could learn to love their neighbors not in so far as these are persons, lives, minds, but because they are creatures of God and sacred by their relation to

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 109.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

> the ultimate Being who is also man's true good? That is precisely the possibility that has been opened in Jesus Christ.[46]

According to this theory, revelation does not cancel human love but redirects, transforms or converts it. The evil does not lie in natural love as such but in the fact that it is a love of the finite and the partial. The revelation which we have received in Jesus Christ is that the fountain and centre of all being is good. Two conclusions were drawn from this theory.

The first conclusion was that all existence has a sacramental significance. Nature is a work of God and as such it is good. It inspires in us praise for the Creator and reverence for all creation. The second conclusion was that among God's creatures man deserves special reverence in view of God's loyalty to man as declared in the life of Jesus Christ. And love of man should be comprehensive: 'Not only good men but bad were to be loved; not only their souls but also their bodies were to be cherished; not only free men but slaves were to be liberated.'[47]

Before going further, I should like to recapitulate the main points of American theology in the eighteenth century. The new strategy was proposed to meet a new challenge to Christianity: the emancipation of individuals rendered obsolete the previous principle of the limitation of power by means of external restraint. The notion of regeneration, transformation or conversion developed with the purpose of providing an inner discipline to direct man's new freedom. The idea of conversion was complex because it involved the whole of man's personality. Man is a complex being. He can easily forget his limitations and so he needs to control and analyse his motivations. Conversion implied, therefore, self-denial and repentance but it discovered a new depth in these activities, because it tried to see them in the light of the crucifixion of Christ. Man is also a rational being. Conversion meant the illumination of the mind. The mind could understand the ultimate problems of life, if it reasoned on the presuppositions of revelation. Besides, man is a loving being. Natural love should be regenerated in order to include the whole universe of being.

Niebuhr did not show how American theologians of the eighteenth century interpreted the relationship between the various levels of conversion. But he made it clear that according to them conversion is not complete in the individual until it is operative on the practical and affective level. Conversion is specious, they said, unless it issues in works of charity.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 114-5.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Niebuhr was aware that the Christian strategy of the eighteenth century had to be developed in order to respond adequately to the new situation which arose in the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth century. He found that the dominant idea in this period was that of the coming Kingdom.[48] The first and second phase of Protestantism in America emphasized faith and love respectively, without ignoring hope; but hope became actually the leading idea in the nineteenth century with the rise of the Social Gospel. The social interpretation of sin and salvation and the application of the Gospel to social problems was definitely a significant evolution over previous ideas. It was important to extend the meaning of 'crisis' to include not only the death of the individual but also social catastrophes; it was also significant to regard salvation not exclusively in terms of the union of the individual soul with God but also in terms of the liberation of man as a social and a historical being.

According to Niebuhr, the Social Gospel was right when it drew out the social implications of the Christian faith but it should not have dissociated itself from the earlier theological context of faith in the sovereignty of God and grace in and through Christ. It become increasingly secular in outlook, losing sight of the dialectical element included in the notion of the coming Kingdom. Niebuhr summed up the final outcome of the liberal movement in American theology – of which the Social Gospel formed an important part – very forcefully in these words: 'A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.'[49]

Yet Niebuhr showed a measure of sympathy with the failure of the Social Gospel to maintain continuity with the earlier theological views. The previous theology was based on the presupposition that the human unit is the individual and so it could not deal effectively with social crisis:

> Yet the evangelical doctrine of the kingdom was not adequate for the new situation in which these men found themselves. It could not emancipate itself from the conviction – more true in its time than in ours – that the human unit is the individual. It was unable therefore to deal with social crisis, with national disease and the misery of human groups. It continued to think of crisis in terms of death while it had begun to think of promise in social terms... So reaction against the evangelical

[48] *Ibid.*, ch. IV.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

> doctrine of the kingdom needed to arise among its own children.[50]

It is thus clear that the Social Gospel could not simply take over the previous theological ideas and principles. It should have reworked them in a way that corresponded to the demands of the new situation.

How did the study of the history of American Christianity affect Niebuhr's thought on Christian ethics? I shall try to give an answer to this question in the following section.

3. Conversion and Niebuhr's New Task

The main theological principles implicit in the history of American theology, as Niebuhr saw it, can be presented schematically as follows:

I. FAITH: The Sovereignty of God: God's *present rule* in man, nature and history.
Corollary principles:
17th. century.
(i) Christian constitutionalism.
(ii) The independence of the Church.
(iii) The limitation of power.

II. CHARITY: The Reign of Christ: God's revelation in Christ *regenerating* man.
18th. century.
The principle of conversion replaces that of the limitation of power.
The Evangelical Strategy implies:
(i) The use of the principle of restraint in the light of the crucifixion of Christ: so accompanied by repentance, humility and sincerity.
(ii) The illumination of the mind.
(iii) The redirection of the will.

III. HOPE: The Coming Kingdom: Sin and Salvation concern man as a *socio-historical* being.
19th. 20th. century.
The detachment of American theology from its earlier theological background.

Niebuhr maintained that the foregoing theological principles were an explicitation of a master idea, namely, that of the Kingdom of God. Besides, he held that faith, charity and hope were present in both the seventeenth and eighteenth century theology, even though faith was dominant in the former and charity in the latter. The dissociation came in the third period where hope became central but

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

isolated from faith in the sovereignty of God and the grace of Jesus Christ. The critical evaluation which Niebuhr made of the American theological tradition in *The Kingdom of God in America* contains in my opinion the programme of his own theology after 1937. Before I specify the main points of that programme, I should like to review briefly (a) his doctrine of sin and his criticism of (b) the Social Gospel and (c) empirical theology.

(a) *Doctrine of Sin*

The essay, 'Man the Sinner', published by Niebuhr in 1935, is indicative of the author's emerging new theological position.[51] His new approach is, I believe, the result largely of his encounter with eighteenth century American theology. Niebuhr affirmed the radical sinfulness of man. As we have said, he had recognized from the beginning the presence of sin in the world but it was only in the thirties that he became convinced of the inability of man to overcome his sinful condition. In the present essay he expressed basically the same idea. The Christian doctrine of sin means:

> ... that in our dealing with ourselves and with our neighbors, with our societies and with neighbor societies, we deal not with morally and rationally healthy beings who may be called upon to develop ideal personalities and to build ideal commonwealths, but rather with diseased beings, who can do little or nothing that is worth while until they have recovered health and who, if they persist in acting as though they were healthy, succeed only in spreading abroad the infection of their own lives.[52]

The image which Niebuhr used in this text, and which he continued to use for the rest of his life, to describe the condition of sinful man is very instructive: the sinner is *like* a sick man. The sick man is evidently not healthy but he is on the way of regaining health. Niebuhr found this image helpful in order to distinguish clearly between the fall and creation. 'The doctrine of creation,' he wrote, 'is the presupposition of the doctrine of sin.'[53] Though obscured and corrupted, man's nature is perfect. 'His perfection as a creature, or his health, is not a far-off achievement, a more or less remote possibility which future generations may realize after infinite effort; it is the underlying datum of life.'[54] So the doctrines

[51] H.R. Niebuhr, 'Man the Sinner,' *The Journal of Religion* XV (1935), 272-280.
[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 272-3.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 273.
[54] *Ibid.*

of sin and of the goodness of creation do not contradict one another. It seems to me that Niebuhr tried to reconcile these two points of the Christian faith by means of the theory of conversion which, as we have seen, governed the thought of American theologians in the eighteenth century. Let me try to substantiate this statement.

According to Niebuhr, sin, as a religious concept, always involves the notion of *disloyalty* to the true God. This means that when man is not loyal to God, he is not simply taking a neutral position toward God. It is the nature of man to be loyal to something; if the object of human loyalty is not God, then it is some other god like the self, the class, the nation, sex, or mankind. When man is not organizing his life around God, he is organizing it around some other centre. Disloyalty to God, therefore, means rebellion against God.

If man is by nature loyal to something, disloyalty to God implies first conflict within the individual and society – to leave the One is to be scattered among the many; secondly, death interpreted more in the 'cultural' and 'spiritual' sense – the death of cultures is the consequence of conflicting social wholes like nationalism, capitalism and communism, while the death of self is the result of internal or spiritual disintegration; thirdly, vice, like man's inhumanity to man, cruelty to beasts, exploitation of nature, abuse of sex, commercial profanization of creation.

We recall that according to Edwards' the fundamental problem of man was how to transfer his love from what is partial to what is inclusive of all being. Since God affirms the goodness of the whole of creation, a relationship of love with God changes one's attitude toward neighbour and world. Sin implies a hostile relationship with God and consequently conflict of the self with others and nature. Niebuhr used the notion of loyalty[55] but his argument is identical. There is also a striking similarity in the strategy which Niebuhr and eighteenth century American theology thought Christianity should adopt to deal effectively with the fundamental problem of life. Edwards and his contemporaries saw that the times did not call for a simple reassertion of the principle of limitation of power. They did not reject this principle completely but they used it within a new strategy, that is, the strategy of regeneration or conversion. They emphasized that Christ made it possible for man to reconcile himself with God and the rest of creation. Niebuhr affirmed

[55] Niebuhr took the notion of loyalty from the American philosopher, Josiah Royce. Royce studied this concept in his later works especially, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York, 1908) and *The Problem of Christianity* (New York, 1912).

clearly the primacy of the strategy of reconciliation over that of the limitation of power: '... the Christian strategy of the restraint of evil must be wholly subordinated to the strategy of the reconciliation.'[56] The doctrine of reconciliation implies that man is unable to rescue himself out of his conflict with God, neighbour and world: 'Redemption from sin is possible only by a reconciliation to God, which cannot be initiated by the disloyal creature. Man the sinner is incapable of overcoming his sin.'[57]

Niebuhr recognized also the need for the restraint of evil by means of disciplinary action:

> Since man is bad, the restraint of evil – particularly of the moral evil which is the result of sin – is a necessary element in every plan for the conduct of life. 'Thou shalt nots' take their place in the moral code, self-discipline and social discipline take the place of self-expression and social freedom.[58]

Niebuhr, however, insisted that those who are restraining the power of evil men should always remember that they themselves are sinners and that they are using force as a medicinal measure or as a prevention of some external consequence of sin. On this point he was, it seems, also following theologians like Edwards who tried to see the principle of the limitation of power in the light of Christ's death for the sin of all men – the just and the unjust.

(b) *Criticism of the Social Gospel*

Niebuhr's article, 'The Attack upon the Social Gospel,' published in 1936, shows clearly that he came under the influence especially of eighteenth century American theology. Let us examine the main points of this article to determine exactly the extent of this influence.

The author first of all affirmed the significance of the Social Gospel's attempt to develop a social interpretation of sin and salvation. He had expressed this opinion already in the twenties. As we have seen, he had criticized the Social Gosepl in *The Kingdom of God in America* only for dissociating itself from the earlier theological tradition. In the article we are considering here he indicated more precisely the corrections required in the theology of the Social Gospel.

In his opinion, the Social Gospel should attack the social situation by means of a direct strategy, that is, 'not via governments

[56] Niebuhr, 'Man the Sinner,' p. 280.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 279.
[58] *Ibid.*

and economic units, but via the Church or the word of God.'[59] The reason is that social injustice and misery are fundamentally rooted in a false faith. Capitalism and nationalism are the source of the present social evil because they place their confidence in a this-worldly security. Consequently, no radically new life in society can be expected, unless the falsity of capitalist and nationalist faith is exposed and attacked. 'But an attack upon faith,' Niebuhr argued, 'requires the direct action of the Church'.[60]

This notion of the Church as the community of faith or as the locus where the Word of God is heard and proclaimed started to emerge in Niebuhr's thought in the early thirties[61] and become somewhat evident in a book which Niebuhr published jointly with Wilhelm Pauck and Francis Miller in 1935.[62] It carries two contributions from Niebuhr of which one is entitled, 'Toward the Independence of the Church.' In this essay the author called upon the Church to reject its false loyalties: its loyalties to capitalism, nationalism and anthropocentric civilization. But the rejection of false loyalties is made in order that the Church may be able to commit itself to God wholeheartedly. 'The Church's declaration of independence can begin only with the self-evident truth that it and all life are dependent upon God, that loyalty to him is the condition of life and that to him belong the kingdom and the power and the glory.'[63]

We recall that Niebuhr discovered the principle of the independence of the Church in American theology of the seventeenth century. He interpreted this principle as a corollary to the then fundamental conviction in the sovereignty of God. The similarity between such a view of the Church and that which he expressed two years previously is striking. How far was Niebuhr dependent on the American theological tradition with respect to his ecclesiology? That is a question which is very difficult to answer. As I have pointed out earlier, Niebuhr had been concentrating on the Church from the beginning, even though his understanding of the Church

[59] Niebuhr, 'The Attack upon the Social Gospel,' p. 180.

[60] *Ibid.* .

[61] In 1932 Niebuhr described the Christian community in terms the 'cells of those within each nation who, divorcing themselves from the program of nationalism and of captialism, unite in a higher loyalty which transcends national and class lines of division and prepare for the future.' Niebuhr, 'The Grace of Doing Nothing,' p. 220.

[62] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, W. Pauck and F.P. Miller, *The Church Against the World* (Chicago, 1935). 'The Question of the Church,' 1-13; 'Toward the Independence of the Church,' 123-56.

[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

and its mission varied with differences in theological perspective. Besides, I have the impression, although I am not in a position to document it exactly, that he might have been influenced by the Barth of the *Church Dogmatics*. If there had been no such influence, there was certainly a close affinity between them.[64] It may also be the case that he owed his ecclesiology directly to American theology of the seventeenth century. But again there is no evidence to prove or disprove that hypothesis.

According to Niebuhr, the strategy of the Social Gospel should also be based on 'the priority of God – not as a human ideal, or the object of worship, but as the moving force in history – who alone brings in His Kingdom and to whose ways the party of the Kingdom of God must adjust itself.'[65] This theological conviction had dominated American theology in the seventeenth century. Niebuhr had already expressed it in the early thirties and so we should not presume that he took it from seventeenth century American theologians.

I could find only one instance in the essay under consideration where it is evident that Niebuhr was trying to develop his own theology in the direction of eighteenth century American theology. In fact, at one stage he argued that the strategy of the Social Gospel should be 'a revolutionary strategy, which regards the death of the old life as inevitable and as necessary before a new beginning can be made.'[66] Unfortunately, he did not specify what he meant by this revolutionary strategy perhaps because he was aware that such a strategy was still in its preparatory phase at the time he was writing. Nevertheless, he indicated the direction of his thought when he compared the situation of his day with that of the eighteenth century and said that efforts were being made 'to discover in our own day the social equivalent of the Evangelical strategy.'[67] As we have said, the Evangelical strategy implied a regeneration or conversion of the whole man. So the social equivalent of the

[64] Niebuhr acknowledged his debt to Karl Barth for his own insights into the historical evolution of American theology. Cf. Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, p. xii. Unfortunately he did not mention whether he was referring to the Barth of *Epistle to the Romans* or the Barth of *Church Dogmatics*. Anyway it should be assumed that Niebuhr noticed the positive and constructive step which Berth made in the early thirties as soon as volume one of the first part of *Church Dogmatics* was published. For a study of Barth's ecclesiology see, Colm O'Grady, *The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Vol. 1 (London, 1970).
[65] Niebuhr, 'The Attack upon the Social Gospel', p. 181.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[67] *Ibid.*

Evangelical strategy would mean the development of the principle of conversion in the light of a social theory of man.

(c) *Criticism of Empirical Theology*

In the year in which *The Kingdom of God in America* was published Niebuhr wrote a very important essay, 'Value-Theory and Theology,' on the limitations of empirical theology.[68] Empirical theology represented a major current in American religious thought in the twenties and thirties. Niebuhr had already voiced disagreement with the empirical method in 1931 but he had done so under the influence of Tillich.[69] This time his criticism seems to have been inspired by theologians like Edwards. I am not drawing this conclusion on the basis of specific references to Edwards in this essay but on the basis of the similarity between Edwards' theological method and that which Niebuhr was proposing.

In the first part of the essay the author criticized empirical theology for not carrying through its original intention. It started as a movement to restore an objective and theocentric method in theology but failed to emancipate itself completely from subjectivism and anthropocentrism. It judged the divine by means of the human, when it regarded those values to which men had been devoted always and everywhere as the fundamental criterion of the divine will. Niebuhr argued that such a method subordinated God and his will to man and his ideals.

In the second part Niebuhr gave an outline of what he thought was an adequate theological method. Such a method should avoid the two extremes, that is, the identification of the human with the divine (liberal-empirical theology) as well as their radical separation (Barthian theology). Hence, a theology which banished value presuppositions completely, as we found in the case of Barth was as inadequate as liberal theology:

> ... the new tendencies which have arisen in reaction to value-theology appear to be incomplete and unsatisfactory ... They make revelation their starting-point, but by dealing with it as though it were a bolt out of the blue and by refusing to relate it to the value cognitions of men, they fail to give an understanding of the process whereby revelation is received... They make ethics dependent on faith, but, failing to make use

[68] Niebuhr, 'Value-Theory and Theology,' *The Nature of Religious Experience, Essays in Honour of D.C. Macintosh,* ed. by Julius Seelye Bixler *et. al.,* (New York, 1937), 93-116.

[69] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, 'Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century,' *Religious Realism,* ed. by Douglas Clyde Macintosh (New York, 1931), 413-28.

> of the principle of value, they tend to substitute the commandment for the love of God, and so run into the danger of legalism and formalism.[70]

What is the right way between the two extremes?

Niebuhr affirmed that it is possible and necessary 'to interpret religion as an affair of *valuation* without assuming that such valuation must or can be made on the basis of a previously established standard of values.'[71] This is a crucial but difficult point to grasp. Niebuhr tried to explain it in this way:

> The valuation of which man becomes aware in religious experience is not first of all his valuation of a being but that being's evaluation of him... Religious experience includes an evaluation on the part of man, but primarily it expresses itself in the judgment, 'This is the being which values me or judges me, by relation to which I have worth or possibility of worth.'[72]

Niebuhr was thus trying to escape the dilemma in which his position seemingly involved him by means of a distinction between two senses of the word, 'valuation.' There is the evaluation of a being by man and there is the evaluation of a man by some being. He identified the latter with religious experience. In Christianity it is God who values man. For the Christian religious experience means one's experience of being judged and loved by God. According to Niebuhr, such a value-experience is primitive and original: 'It deals with that absolute source of all value by relation to which all other things have their value.'[73] What is the consequence of this religious experience for ethics?

> The experience of the ground and source of all value leads to the *criticism and reconstruction* of the ethical system rather than to the support of one which has been accepted as absolute prior to the experience. In this case as in others the statement that all other things shall be added to those who seek first the kingdom of God is profoundly true.[74]

Implicit in the theory he was propounding was the fundamental principle of conversion. Although he made no explicit reference to eighteenth century American theology, he was certainly aware that

[70] Niebuhr, 'Value-Theory and Theology,' pp. 110-111.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 111. Italics in the original.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*, pp. 115-6. Italics mine.

the concept of conversion played a central rôle in this theology. He referred, however, to Augustine in order to explain his point that the human constitution is such that man does need God: 'The situation may be stated in terms of Augustine, that God has created us toward himself and that our souls are restless until they find rest in God.'[75]

The allusion to Augustine is significant, because it shows that Niebuhr in 1937 knew that the basic insight developed by theologians in America during the eighteenth century was in line with an older tradition in the Church. One of his major concerns after 1937 was precisely to define more clearly the theological tradition which made use of the principle of conversion.[76] He also tried to elaborate a theology based on the concept of conversion and a social theory of man. It is not the task of this essay to substantiate this latter point. We can only state somewhat more specifically the kind of programme Niebuhr was proposing for his work on Christian ethics after 1937.

I. The central idea in that programme is that of conversion. Essentially, this term implies the transition from suspicion and fear to trust in and love of God. It is a change in one's personal relationship with God. It refers also to the consequent enlightenment of the mind.

II. Conversion implies on the theological level:

(i) the conviction that God is the Redeemer: in and through Jesus Christ man has the possibility of beginning to trust and love God.

(ii) the conviction that God is the Creator: in and through Jesus Christ man is able to see that the Creator does not mean to destroy but to affirm whatever is.

(iii) the conviction that God is the present Ruler: God, as the moving force in history (the dominant notion of God in seventeenth century American theology), is exercising his present rule through the Cross of Jesus Christ.

III. Conversion implies on the ethical level:

(i) response to God's redeeming activity: the beginning, though not the perfection, of man's trust in and love of God.

(ii) response to God's creative activity: appreciation of the goodness of creation.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[76] Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, 1951; Harper Torchbooks, 1956).

(iii) response to God's ruling activity: restraint of one's own power and that of others in the light of the crucifixion of Christ.

IV. Sin and salvation concern man as a being in time and society.

V. The Christian community should try to live the life of faith in order to be strong enough to attack the false faith of the world. Niebuhr considered this element of the Christian strategy as one which needed to be particularly emphasized in the thirties, because of the Church's captivity to the false faith of the world.

In drawing up this programme I have in mind also the later evolution of Niebuhr's thought. He continued until the end to regard the relationship with God as the basic problem in human life. He also made use of the notion of enlightenment and recognized the central rôle of Christ in Christian life. Besides, he affirmed clearly the creative, governing and redeeming activity of God in history and the corresponding human response to these three modes of divine activity. I have tried to show in this essay that these fundamental ideas were substantially present especially in American theology of the eighteenth century as Niebuhr interpreted it.

GEORGE GRIMA

THE NECESSARY BILINGUALISM OF CHRISTIANS*

NOTES ON THE POLITICAL EDUCATION OF CATHOLIC YOUTH

Although philosophers and other intellectuals have always reflected on politics, by which I mean the power-relations existing in all human societies, the need for explicit mass political education was only felt in special circumstances. The major examples of these special circumstances that come to mind are two. In the first place, the need to impart a general political education, which was called 'civics', was felt in countries which received a large number of emigrants from other countries with different political system, e.g. in the United States of America, with its system of liberal capitalism, the political education of new comers from the authoritarian agrarian societies of Czarist Russia or Bourbon Sicily, was felt to be a necessity. In the second place, newly-established regimes which placed themselves in radical opposition to previously established systems, like the Nazi regime or the Communist regime in Germany felt a similar need. But, in other circumstances, where there was a basically uncontested power-structure, explicit political education was not given, especially when there was also an established religion of the State. However, in these circumstances also, a political education was given; only it was not very visible, through its being implicit. The fact that political education is always going on in any society should perhaps be stressed for it to be clear that the choice concerning any education whatever is not whether it should be political or not, but whether it should be explicitly or implicitly political. It is not difficult to see why all education is political. In the first place, the study of any subject be it mathematics, administration, or poetry involves learning a language, in the wide sense of the word. Any learning is never just of brute facts, or of mere skills in doing or making things. It always involves learning a certain mode of communication a special kind of language, a particular system of using signs. The acquisition of any kind of knowledge implies two things: an attitude towards the

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world and a sharing of this attitude with others. A mathematician, an administrator, or a poet is a man who has learned a language which enables him to see the world and act in or upon it in a particular way, and also to communicate in a closer way with a particular group of his fellowmen who use the same or a fairly similar language: mathematicians, administrators, poets. To learn a language is both to adopt an attitude towards the world and to enter into a community of interests; to understand a language, as Wittgenstein said, is to share a form of life.

It is through sharing a language, in this wide sense, that an individual acquires an identity. As Erik Erikson has shown, it is through a sharing process, through relations of both giving and taking, that an identity is established by the child within the family and the adolescent within society. And similarly a group establishes its identity as a group through establishing a system of communication with other groups, through a common frame of reference being constituted by their sharing in the interpretation of things as signs; they can talk together, act together, work together, because they acknowledge the same meaning in what they say, do or make. In other words, they establish a special way of being together, of living together, of constituting a community, because they share the same language, they communicate with similar signs.

However, the sharing of a language has hitherto in human history always been too fragile by itself to hold together a human society. It has always had to be complemented by a power-structure. Through its shared language, or system of communication by signs, a human society establishes its identity; but it is only through a power-structure that it can preserve its integrity in the face of external dangers which often threaten its unity despite the internal conflicts of interest which always arise. Of course, it could be argued that there are cases where it may be better for integrity and unity to be sacrificed; for instance, a society may wish to merge its separate identity within a larger whole; but it can also be argued that in no case should an individual identity be lost through its participation in a larger whole. However, this controversy need not detain us here. The point being made is only that the form of life which is expressed in the language, or system of communication by signs, of any society has always required to be supported by a power-structure, by a system of authority and obedience. These relations of power in human society, which are essential complements of its shared language are the stuff of politics.

The kind of power-structure or political system of a human society is, in fact, best expressed by its patterns of communication, by the language or languages which its members share and use. If

a society is satisfied, whether rationally or irrationally with its political system, its language will be relatively stable. The legitmacy of the existing power-structure is acknowledged as corresponding to the accepted world-picture and to the desired form of life by the consensus to the existing system of signs in use for communication between the members of that society. In such a society, political education can remain implicit, since its purpose is essentially conservative. It is received simply through learning the shared language.

If, however, there is a felt need by the members of a society for changes of a basic kind in the power-structure or political system, this need will be expressed through attempts at modifying the shared language; the established system of signs for communication will be subjected to pulls and pressures. In such a situation, political education is likely to become explicit, both as a defence-mechanism by the powers that be and as an offensive-operation by those who wish to challenge them, in order to advocate or impose another distribution of power. Their success or failure will depend on the extent to which they succeed or fail in maintaining or modifying the shared language. Since education is the primary way in which the maintenance or modification of languages is obtained, it follows that, in the first place, both those who wish to preserve the existing power-structure and those who wish to alter it, will seek to control the media of education; in the second place, that education will always be biassed in the direction of either conservation or change. Education is, therefore, always political by implication. But there need not be any explicit political education if a society is quite happy and fairly unanimous in its happiness with its political system. Explicit political education will be necessary, however, either to demand and to respond to a demand for its overhauling, or to counteract the dangers of the loss of identity which arise out of a pluralism of languages and foreign influxes. There is hardly any need to argue that these circumstances which have hitherto been special in history have become today almost universal, and that explicit political education has become a felt need almost everywhere.

It is worth noting here that there is a paradox in the relation of education to politics. On the one hand, the main media of education, from schools to television networks, tend to be most often under the control of governments or established power groups, as is almost inevitable; hence they tend to be used with the purpose of conserving the existing power structure. On the other hand, because of the nature of education itself, this purpose tends to be frustrated and to yield the opposite result. The development of

linguistic skills of its very nature tends to induce people to look at the world in novel ways and to seek new and more comprehensive ways of living together. Education is, thus, most often a weapon in the hands of the powerful who wish to conserve their power, but it has an inbuilt tendency to turn against them in its results. In fact, it often happens that, as happened in the late 1960's, the attempts to challenge the existing power structures do not come from those who are most oppressed by them, but rather from some of those who may be quite well-off within them, but who will have acquired new linguistic skills, and hence new perceptions of the world and new concepts of alternative forms of life. The nature of education is such that it tends to make the young in general and students in particular the most likely group to challenge the established power-structures and demand changes of the political system.

This political bias inherent in all education will appear in a simple form, if the education is, in the primitive sense of the word, religious and in a more complex form if it is Christian.

Primitive religions, as is well-known, divide experience into the sacred and the profane. This distinction is roughly equivalent to that between language and noise. The only way in which primitive man appears to have been able to make sense of at least part of the world around him was by conceiving it as a system of communication between superior beings, such as gods, and inferior beings, such as men, through the constitution of certain objects and events and persons into signs. Parts of nature and segments of human existence became comprehensible to him if seen, or acted upon, as though they constituted a language which gods and men shared. But other parts could not be comprehended by him that way; and hence at all, since there was no other way. Most objects, events and persons could not be related together in a world-picture which could make sense to him. These large areas of experience remained unstructured, chaptic, absurd. The parts which were meaningful were deemed 'sacred', the others 'profane'. For primitive man, there was no knowledge but this vision of parts of the world as media of communication with a higher form of life; no language but that which he shared with the gods. Anything which couldnot be seen as significant in terms of the relationship between the inferior and the superior beings was senseless. Primitive man knew only one language; he was a monolinguist. Even for him, however, the common language, although a much stronger bond than it is for contemporary man, was vulnerable. It had to be supported by a power-structure for defence against external or internal violation. But no explicit political education was necessary; it was part and

parcel of education in the one shared language: the sacred language. Being the only language, it was untouchable and generally respected as such.

With the Christian fulfilment of the Jewish religion, a radical change occurs. For Jews and Christians, as also for Moslems, God not only speaks through the world, in a succession of *mirabilia*, wonderful happenings, each novel and unique; He also speaks through His prophets who interpret these events. God does not only perform speech-acts; He also informs about their meaning. He thus enables us to see the happenings in the world as a sequence with a direction. Through this new prophetic language, man can discern a little better than the pagans did the meaning of God's doings. Through the new prophetic language, a great deal, although not all, of the obscure and irrational-looking happenings in the world, especially the darkest and most absurd-looking of all, viz. death, become significant. Orthodox Jews believe even today that they have a complete guide in the Thora. Christians believe that the prophetic religion provided an education in God's language for men to be able to accept His Word when it was embodied, finally, in a Man; and that with His life, culminating in His death and resurrection, the prophetic language reached its end. Henceforth, it was Christ's Life in His Risen Body which became the means of communication between God and man. A new system of special signs (called by Christians 'sacraments') was constituted by him to help all men enter into sharing more fully the language and, hence, the very form of life of God Himself.

The institution of this new language has very important consequences for the concept of the role of the power structure. Before the Christian language became available to mankind, the power-structure was the bulwark of social unity expressed in a unique language. This unique language was, at the same time, both religious and political. But for the Christian, his special religious language cannot be the same as the political. The Christian has to become a bilinguist. Without confusing the two languages, he has yet to relate one to the other hierarchically. In order to see the complexity which the political education of the Christian has to assume, it is necessary to consider why bilingualism is a necessity for the Christian.

The Christian's religious language cannot be the same as the political because of its very peculiar nature as a language. A language is generally the perfect expression of the world-picture and form of life of a society; it has to be, since the world-picture and form of life come into being with the language. They fit perfectly because they are made together. The Christian (sacramental) lan-

guage is, on the contrary, the expression of the life of God which he makes available to man for sharing from this life, but the fulness of which can only be experienced in the future. A big gap necessarily exists between the Christian language on the one hand and the world-picture and form of life which Christians have in this world. The Christian can only tend to make the world picture and the form of life which he shares with other members of his society tend and approximate towards an asymptote which cannot be reached in this world.

A corollary of this difference is that a language of the usual kind can be imposed up to a point by a power-structure, but the Christian language cannot. A political group can use the media of education and other forceful instruments in such a way that the language of a society is established in definite ways, inasmuch as departures from the established system can only be due either to an inconsistency which carried to extremes would be described as folly or to voluntary acts directed towards altering the world-picture or form of life. The use of power to cut off the recalcitrant individuals through seclusion in hospitals or prisons is always conceivable and sometimes practised. But no power on earth can impose the total use of the Christian language, in the first place because its total use is unattainable on earth, and in the second place because even its partial use has to be freely accepted for it to succeed in creating the special form communication which is its raison d'etre.

It is true that attempts have been made in the past to impose the Christian language in certain societies through a power-structure. But such attempts at what has been called 'Christian Theocracy' have always proved to be the most dismal failures. They cannot succeed because a divine language cannot be perfectly spoken under present conditions on earth, and the best which even the best-willed human beings can do is stutter and stammer at it, to the maximal degree granted by God. They cannot succeed because even so to stutter and stammer will only be in the language as long as it is done with at least a good will. The Christian language cannot be imposed by force; but neither can it be used to perfection with the best good will.

It simply cannot therefore, fulfil the role of an ordinary language. An ordinary language is necessarily the expression of an actual world picture and form of life. For the ordinary purpose of participating in a society with an identity constituted by the nexus of a shared system of signs, another language than the Christian has to be used. No Christian is dispensed on earth from sharing his life with a group or groups of his fellowmen, including the implied po-

wer-structure which remains a necessary complement for the group having an identity as a group. He has to share their language, although he may and indeed ought to seek to modify it constantly in the direction of the Christian language, but always in the knowledge that it can change only slowly and will never coincide perfectly with the Christian. At the same time, he must use the Christian language to the extent that has been made available to him. On the one hand He must be a bilinguist. On the other hand he must not be a schizophrenic. In other words, although he has to use two languages, he cannot keep them completely cut off from each other. His problem is how to relate them in the best way.

In order to clarify this problem, it is necessary to take, however briefly, a look at the nature of the Christian (sacramental) language. The heart of this language is the Eucharist. The Eucharist is, in the first place, a meal taken in common, but the ordinary meanings which taking a meal in common has, nourishment and the manifestation of solidarity between the participants, is not its essential meaning in the Christian language. In Christian language, its essential meaning is sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. How participating in the Eucharist can mean sharing in the divine life of God remains a mystery, and this mystery constitutes the irremovable difference between the ways in which the Christian language on the one hand and other languages on the other function. However, the Christian language is deemed also to have implications for its user in terms of ordinary language. He is committed to a willing acceptance of those limits on self-expansion, of which the ultimate is death and which Christ willingly accepted; such acceptance is the condition for transcending them, as Christ did. Now, this commitment has political implications, i.e. consequences which will affect his attitude and behaviour towards the power-structure existing in his society. For instance, the Christian will find that the power-structure leaves certain groups of men unorganised, oppressed and exploited. His commitment to sharing in Christ's death and resurrection implies that he has to accept self-sacrifice in order that these groups be integrated into organised social life. Such an integration will imply some, perhaps major, alterations of the power-structure; and, it will imply the correlative modifications of the ordinary language which expressed the world-picture and form of life supported by that power-structure.

The example of the Eucharistic illustrates the need of 'bilingualism'. On the one hand, the Christian language is irreducible to a language usable in politics, for, the Eucharist is essentially expresses a form of life in which death is transcended; but such a

form of life is not perfectly expressible in any man-made language. In fact, the Christian language can only be accepted by a rational man not on the grounds of his being able to understand it, but because it is God-given. On the other hand, the Christian language is related to the language of politics, for the Eucharist implies a commitment to some alteration of the political system and its corresponding language.

The Christian language is only one – that given by Christ. Although there are differences in the ways in which Christians accept it, this only means that some or all of them are more or less mistaken in their mode of acceptance of the divine gift. But the languages used in the different human societies are various, because their world-pictures and forms of life are various. It follows that Christians should in principle share one and the same Christian language, but that their second language, which may now be called, for brevity, their 'political' language, will not be one and the same. The 'political' language of each Christian group or individual is like a function of which one element is a constant, (the Christian 'functor' of change) and the other a variable, (the language expressive of the world-picture and form of life existing in the actual society in which the Christian happens to be living). It is, therefore, inevitable that at different times and places the 'political' languages of Christians will differ without this necessarily implying that there is any inconsistency between any of them and their common 'Christian' language.

Moreover, even in the same historical situation and in the same circumstances of time and place, it is possible for Christians to have differences in their political language without contradiction with their Christian language. This possibility exists because the relation between the two languages has to be worked out and may be worked out differently. Even if it is granted that there is complete agreement about the term of the relation which should be common and unique, i.e. the Christian language, there may well not be agreement about either the world-picture and form of life expressed in the secular language or about the modifications which it is both desirable and feasible to bring out. The differences, in the political language of Christians who find themselves in the same historical context can only, without inconsistency with the Christian language, fall within a certain range. For certain world-pictures and forms of life are clearly incompatible with the Christian language; anti-semitism, for example. But even in these cases, although there should be complete unanimity about the evaluation of the world-picture or form of life, there still can be differences about the modifications to be pressed for. To give two concrete

examples. There should be unanimity among Catholics that divorce is not a good feature of a form of life for any society. But it may be the case that if it is not allowed by law, there would be a very large incidence of illicit unions. Such a situation may not be preferable to not having a law allowing divorce. Since the jüdgement to be made in cases like this is hypothetical, it is certainly not clear that one line of action rather than another imposes itself. There should also be unanimity among Catholics that justice requires that the rich countries should help the poor countries. But there was a controversy between two well-known English Catholic politicians in which one argued that priority should be given to those countries where the least help would do the greatest good, while the other argued that it should be given to those countries where the conditions were worst, even though the benefit would be less. It does not seem that either side was manifestly wrong in Christian terms. It appears that, even in identical historical circumstances, it is possible to have differences of political languages without there being a contradiction between any of them and the Christian language.

On the other hand, there may well be political issues on which it should be possible for Christians, or at least Catholics, to achieve consensus. On such issues, they may make use of their institutional structures which exist for the proper exercise of the Christian language, which is essentially constituted by the sacramental liturgy, for action seeking to modify those aspects of the world-picture and form of life which can be expressed in political language. Some of these issues could be sufficiently clearly determined. To quote an example. It should be indisputable enough that the strengthening of international organisations to prevent war, protect the environment and redistribute resources more equitably is a presentday implication contained within the Christian language. There is also little room for error in judging that the proposals to declare the oceanbed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction to be the common heritage of mankind are a way of partially moving towards the objective. It may therefore be surprising that, except for the voice of Barbara Ward in a publication by the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, no very vocal Catholic chorus to back this proposal before the United Nations was raised.

This particular example has been chosen in order to illustrate two different points. In the first place it draws attention to the fact that while it is true, on the one hand, that the world today presents such a diversity of situations and political languages, that it is impossible for all Christians or even Catholics to have only

one political language, it is also true on the other hand, that for the first time, from a number of points of view, the world has become a single unit. McLuhan, who says that we are all now living in a 'global village', because of the communication revolution, has also said, in a striking phrase, that the idea of mankind as one mystical body has become technologically realisable today. At any rate, it is clear that a historical situation has been reached in which the major political problems of mankind no longer occur on the national level, but on the global level. Because of the continuing Babel of political languages, which express the noise which still predominates over structured communication at the international level, these are problems which seem particularly to call for Christian action to draw out the clearly universalist implications of the Christian language. The ecological crisis and the demands for a new economic order have, in particular shown the need for major modifications of all the dominant political languages in order to express and re-structure changing world-pictures and forms of life in accord with the realisation that we are all living on a small planet with limited resources and that with our increasing numbers we are increasingly converging upon each other. The proposals on the Law of the Sea appear to be a most striking instance of a possible, positive and concrete Christian response to the situation.

In the second place, the example draws attention to the relative failure to produce similar responses. There are certainly many factors which appear to discourage Christians and Catholics from speaking as such in political language. But the major factor is probably the awareness of the harm done by confusions in the past between the Christian and the political languages. The reaction against this has taken the particular form of liberal secularism. On this subject, Charles Taylor has written:

> 'This concept of the desacralization of politics fits perfectly, of course, into the liberal, consensus image of politics. Along with democratization, it seems to point to the evolution of a society the culmination of which comes when men will sit down, free of religious or ideogical *partis pris*, to the business of bargaining over the advantages that really matter to them. In this open, bargaining society, they will at last be able to see clearly that they have an overwhelming common interest in keeping the system in operation, and thus in settling for what they are allocated by the consensus. A secular, pragmatic, political culture will thus dovetail perfectly with institutions whose main function is to bring an acceptable consensus out of a large bundle of demands. The political process is

> a flow from demand-inputs to allocation-outputs – which are 'allocations' of valued things between people – and this process works best when its operation is unhampered by ideological rigidity.
> But this vision of history is extremely dubious, and is more in the nature of a dream of what history should be. This dream was inspired by the Enlightenment, and persists largely because the alternatives appear too morally objectionable to be given credence. For on examination, this phenomenon of the desacralization of politics turns out to be much more ambiguous and uncertain than it first appeared to be. The sacred, in a recognized traditional form, plays a decreasing role in the world; but when one looks at modern nationalism, at the more powerful revolutionary ideologies, at the attitude of many Americans to their constitution and way of life, one is forced to ask the question whether something very like the sacred is not filling the gap it left.
> Liberals who sense the quasi-religious basis of nationalism usually change from optimists to pessimists without altering their view of man and society. They sigh regretfully at the incorrigible irrationality of man, but retain the pragmatic bargaining, consensus society as their vision of the acme of human social development. But can one ever understand modern history or society if one sticks to these eighteenth-century guns?'

The still dominant political language in the Western World, of which our countries are a part, appears to be that which Taylor has summed up, although it is, of course, being increasingly challenged especially by the young. Can Christians arrive at least, at formulating a political language which takes account of the fact that on the one hand liberal secularisation has resulted in the frustration of the universal human desire to live in contact with larger, significant realities, in really meaningful communities, but that, on the other hand, our world today is pluralist, with only a minority still accepting the Christian language, and that all forms of totalitarianism are incompatible with it? Taylor argues the concept of the 'dialogue society'.

> 'This society would start from the fact of pluralism, from the fact that we are of many different faiths, beliefs, and moralities; but it would also start from the fact that we are all less satisfied and dogmatic in our possession of the truth; that we are all therefore in some way searchers; and that the fact of pluralism has entered into the very content of our varied beliefs so that we are already in dialogue within ourselves with

the ideas of others.

A dialogue society is one that would put the fact of dialogue itself in the central position occupied in earlier societies by an established religion, and in totalitarian societies by the official ideology. In what way? Well, let us suppose that the centres of our major cities, instead of being unliveable canyons of polluted air, were reconstructed and made into a genuine living centres of our civilization, like the cities of earlier ages. Only instead of the temple or cathedral, we would establish an environment in which, through the media of architecture, art, music, and film, the most important ideas, preoccupations, and realizations of our civilization could be presented. These buildings, films, exhibits, and the like would be brought into being and constantly renewed and changed by different groups in our society and would thus reflect our diversity. These groups would have the possibility of communicating what they believe, want, and value to society at large in a way without any parallel today. The dialogue, which is now largely a private affair, whose public expression is almost exclusively intellectual, would be given a central place by being woven into our public environment.

The possibilities of the dialogue society are almost completely unexplored. It would mean using our technology and our knowledge of communications to extend greatly our capacity for collective expression, our ability to explain ourselves to ourselves, and to feel what we are as a society. In this way it would be part of the answer to one of our most intractable problems, the design of a new and humanly acceptable form of urban life. For it would restore to our cities what those of previous ages have always had – a living core – so that the geographic centre of our living space would again correspond to the centre of meaning. To get closer to the heart of a major metropolis would be to get closer to the heart of the matter – the paradigmatic expression of our collective hopes and concerns.

At the same time, it would restore in a new and more conscious way a half-forgotten art-form – that of the whole environment as communication. To recover this is of vital importance for us, for it is the only art-form in which a new classicism is possible – that is, an ordered expression of the whole. Poetry, music, painting, and drama are necessarily given over in our time to the jagged intrusion of the partial symbol.

The dialogue society would thus put behind us the paradox mentioned earlier whereby an immensely creative, technologi-

cal civilization generates a collective environment so scant in significance. And it would involve a change in our fundamental idea of what a technological society is all about. Instead of being simply an engine to increase the Gross National Product or to destroy potential enemies with increasing efficiency, it could be seen as an unprecedented way of exploring the questions that matter most to us and of coming to grips with what gives meaning to our lives. We would finally tackle one of the endemic maladies of our civilization – the fetishism of the machine.

The building of a dialogue society would be a positive response to the widely frustrated aspiration to meaningful participation. It would take us beyond our present condition of stagnation, in which apocalyptic attempts to express the ultimate in one great transformation vie with the magic illusion of participation through a modern Rain King. It would involve real participation in the search for common meanings, since it would draw on the contribution of all the varied groups whose ideas and ideals would be given public expression. And it would accept and celebrate diversity. Unlike the dream cults, it would not act as a screen to hide the need for democratization. The dialogue society would, on the contray, increase people's grasp of their real predicament. The participation in the search for meaning would reinforce and be greater participation in the decisions that affect people's lives.'

To conclude. What should the political education of Catholic Youth consist of, in practice, today? In the first place, it should ensure that the negative political implications of the Christian language should be clearly seen, so that there should be no contradiction between it and any political language that the Christian may choose to speak. It should also be ensured that the positive implications of the language, at the level of general directions to be pursued, should also be clearly seen and accepted.

In the second place, education is needed to generate awareness of the planetary dimension of human existence today, as this is a crucial aspect of the relation between the Christian language and political languages, while always keeping it in mind that even if mankind had a unique political language, instead of the many it has today, there would still be a distinction between the two languages.

In the third place, education is needed for the appreciation of the diversity of situations and the corresponding diversity of appropriate political commitments. From this point of view, no general line of conduct of universal applicability can be deduced from

the Christian language by itself. However, it is possible in given situations that Catholic groups identify desirable changes that could be worked towards in their historical and social context and commit themselves to action about them, while always keeping in mind that no solution in the political field will ever be definite, until the New Jerusalem will be reached. There, as St. John tells us, there will be no temple, no sacraments, and therefore no education, political or otherwise, either. But until then we must be, in St. James's phrase 'doers of the Word' – both in the liturgy and in politics.

PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT

'HE CAME TO DWELL AMONG US' (Jn 1:14)

THERE was a time when the most popular exegesis of Jn 1:14 placed considerable emphasis upon the etymology of the verb *skenoun*, 'to dwell in a tent'. The allusion to nomadic life contained in the term made it a natural and effective symbol of the temporary presence of the enfleshed Word among His own. Many of the older commentaries explicated the verse in this way. So, too, do some of the more recent commentaries, as well as the dictionary of Arndt-Gingrich.[1]

Most of the recent commentaries, however, view this interpretation as somewhat inadequate. This type of exegesis ascribes to the verb *skenoun* a connotation which it has in both classical Greek and the Greek of the Septuagint, but which it does not have in New Testament usage. Thus the preponderance of modern commentators on Jn 1:14, instead of drawing our attention to the etymology of the terms, point to the sacral character of the language of the text. To the Jewish mind, and the Christian reader of the Fourth Gospel, the use of the term *skenoun* recalls the presence of God with His people throughout the long history of his dealings with them.

Far from being a banal reference to the short-lived presence of the Word among His own, the expression 'He came to dwell among us' is pregnant with theological significance. It situates the presence of the enfleshed Word in the world within the broad context of salvation history by means of sacerdotal-liturgical imagery. Its implications can be elaborated upon by means of the priestly traditions embodied in the Old Testament. Nonetheless, while Jn 1:14 is full of meaning in itself, it ought not to be separated from the body of the Gospel since it serves as a programmatic statement of one of the major themes of the Fourth Gospel.

'DWELLING' IN SALVATION HISTORY

The coupling of the verb 'to dwell' with the notion of 'glory',

[1] Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1955, p. 138; E.C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 1947, p. 147; W. Arndt-F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lectionary of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 762.

a favorite Johannine theme, indicates the direction in which the theological significance of Jn 1:14 can be sought. At the time of the Exodus, Moses was ordered to make a tent, the Tabernacle, which would serve as the dwelling place of Yahweh among his people: 'Make me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them' (Ex 25:8). When the tabernacle had been constructed, duly erected and properly appointed, the ark of the covenant was carried into it (Ex 40:21). Then, on the day of its inauguration, the glory of Yahweh filled the Tabernacle so that not even Moses could enter into it: 'The cloud covered the Tent of the Presence, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle' (Ex 40:34-39). By this manifestation of His glory, Yahweh wishes to show that He was taking possession of His Tabernacle. He had come to dwell among His own people in a tent, not totally dissimilar to those in which they dwelled. Thus Yahweh's glory in the Tabernacle was a sign of his divine presence among the nomadic Israelites during the period of their deliverance.

Once the Israelites had conquered Canaan, Yahweh gave a new command to the appointed leader of his people. As a tent had been his dwelling place among a nomadic people, a permanent structure was to be his dwelling place in a nation established on its own territory, his own land. Thus Yahweh spoke to David through the prophet Nathan: 'I have never dwelt in a house since I brought Israel up from Egypt; I made my journey in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I journeyed with Israel, did I ever ask any of the judges whom I appointed shepherds of my people Israel why they had not built me a house of Cedar? (2 Sm 7:6-7). In fulfillment of Yahweh's promise (2 Sm 7:13), Solomon built the Temple as the new dwelling place of Yahweh among his people (1 Kg 6:13). When the Temple was completed and properly furnished, the glory of Yahweh filled the Temple so that the priests could no longer fulfill their duties within it: 'Then the priests came out of the Holy Place, since the cloud was filling the house of the Lord, and they could not continue to minister because of it, for the glory of the Lord filled his house' (1 Kg 8:10-11). The motif is similar to that associated with Yahweh's presence in the Tabernacle.

Against this Old Testament background, Jn 1:14 implies that the Word made flesh is the new localization of God's presence among men. It is no longer a house made of human hands, neither Tabernacle nor Temple, that is the localized presence of God on

earth. Rather the enfleshed Word has succeeded and replaced both Tabernacle and Temple as the glorified sign of the divine presence among men.

Beyond this, Jn 1:14 has an eschatological connotation. According to Old Testament tradition, Yahweh's dwelling among his people was a sign of his covenant love. Were Israel to become unfaithful to the covenant, this gracious benefaction would be withdrawn. Thus Ezekiel who had a vision of Yahweh's glory filling the Temple (Ez 8:4; 9:3; 10:3-4) also saw the glory of Yahweh leave the Temple defiled by Israel's sins (Ez 10:18-19). For the era of the new covenant, there was promised a new Temple which would be the place of Yahweh's throne where he would dwell forever among his people: 'The glory of the Lord came up to the temple towards the gate which faced eastwards. A spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple' (Ez 43:4-5).

The notion of this mode of the divine presence was central to the eschatology of the Old Testament and later Judaism. In the post-exilic period the prophets encouraged the rebuilding of the Temple, for it was necessary that Yahweh dwell again among his people. 'Go up into the hills, fetch timber, and build a house acceptable to me, where I can show my glory, says the Lord. You look for much and get little ... Why? says the Lord of Hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while each of you has a house that can run to ... Then the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest and the rest of the people; they came and began work on the house of the Lord of Hosts their God' (Hag 1:8-9, 14).

Indeed, the expectation of the renewed tented presence of Yahweh among his people became a keynote of the eschatological hope of Israel. Thus Joel writes of the future restoration of Jerusalem: 'Thus you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling (*ho kat askenon*) in Zion mu holy mountain' (Jl 3:17). In much the same vein the prophet Zechariah proclaimed: 'Shout aloud and rejoice, daughter of Zion; I am coming, I will make my dwelling (*kataskenoso*) among you, says the Lord' (Zech 2:10).[2] In brief, the renewed tenting of Yahweh among his people is a characteristic feature of the eschatological era. Thus when John writes that 'He came to dwell among us, and we saw his glory,'

[2] Cf. Zech 8:3.

he has equivalently stated that the eschatological era has dawned with the enfleshment of the Word.

These themes which form the Old Testament background of Jn 1:14 were developed in different manners within Judaism. On the one hand, apocalyptic thought looked to the establishment of a new Temple in which God would dwell with his people in the eternal age to come.[3] This train of thought was adapted by the Johannine church, in which the Book of Revelation was composed shortly before the Fourth Gospel. In his Christian apocalypse, the visionary uses the verb *skenoun*, 'to dwell', to describe God's presence among his redeemed people: 'He who sits on the throne will dwell (*skenosei*) with them (Rv 7:15). Having seen the new Jerusalem, the prophet 'heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: "Now at last God has his dwelling (*skene*) among men! He will dwell (*skenosei*) among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them"' (Rv 21:3).

On the other hand, the rabbinic strain of Judaic orthodoxy developed a theology of the *shekinah* after the destruction of the Temple. In an era when the temple, now destroyed, could no longer function as a sign of Yahweh's presence among his own, the *shekinah* was construed as God's presence among his people. The *shekinah* represented the reality of the divine presence among those who had come together to study the Torah or to pray. As such, the *shekinah* was a rabbinic equivalent of the divine name, almost a periphrasis for Yahweh himself.

Thus, in a fashion similar to that of his contemporaries still within Judaism, the author of the Fourth Gospel drew from the biblical theme of Yahweh's 'dwelling' among men to articulate dimensions of his faith. In Jn 1:14 he presents the enfleshed presence of the Word as the new mode of the divine presence among God's people. Even in its newness, it implies God's fidelity to his sworn covenant whose lasting validity is attested by his tented presence among men. For the author of the Fourth Gospel, however, there is more than mere fidelity to the covenant of old which is implied in his affirmation of the Word's presence among men. In John's perspective, Yahweh's Old Testament presence in Tabernacle and Temple is less a reality in itself than it is a sign of the reality to come. Yahweh's tented presence in the Old Testament is a waiting which will be fully realized in the Word's

[3] Cf. *Apoc. Moses* 29:4-10 (Lat.); D. Barthelemy-J.T. Milik, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, I, 1955, pp. 134-135.

tenting among his own people. Even though John does not explicitly describe Jesus as the *alethine skene*, the 'true tent', his thought is that the Word is indeed the true Tabernacle. His tented presence is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies which foretold the tented dwelling of God among his people in messianic times. The affirmation of the tented presence of the divine Word in Jn 1:14 is a proclamation of that divine presence among men which is characteristic of the final days. The Word's presence among men is an anticipation of the eschatological presence of God among his people who perceive his glory and dwell in eternal life. In a word, Jn 1:14 is a first statement of the realized eschatology of the Fourth Gospel.

God's 'Dwelling in the Priestly Tradition

If its Old Testament background and the eschatological expectations of the Jewish people shed considerable light upon Jn 1:14, the context of the verse is not without significance. For some time scholars have recognized the points of contact between the prologue of the Fourth Gospel and the Old Testament's Wisdom literature.[4] Some commentators have even drawn our attention to a sapiential tradition that Wisdom sought to pitch its tent in Israel.[5] Yet, while most commentaries note that the opening verse of the prologue hearkens back to Gn 1:1, they fail to note that all of the prologue's allusions to the Genesis story of creation are to the priestly version of the narrative (Gn 1:1-2:4a). Thus they fail to draw our attention to the specifically priestly dimensions of the Old Testament tradition as a key to the understanding of the prologue's biblical allusions.

On the other hand, not a few authors have pointed to the priestly and liturgical influences on the body of the Fourth Gospel. Its chronological setting within the liturgical calendar, its description of the Beloved Disciple's access to high priestly circles (Jn 18:15-18), and Papias' enigmatic reference to 'John the Presbyter' all point to some sacerdotal influence on the composition of the Gospel. Interest in the priestly provenance of the Gospel has been whetted further still in recent years because of the manifold points of similarity between the Fourth Gospel and the 'priestly circles' of sectarian Judaism.

[4] Cf. J. Rendel Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue to St. John's Gospel*, 1917; C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 1963, pp. 274-275; etc.
[5] Cf. Sir 24:8.

Whence, it seems to me, we can draw from the Old Testament's Priestly tradition on the 'tented' presence of Yahweh among his people to elucidate further the meaning of Jn 1:14. These traditions point to the tent as the place of revelation, as the resolution of the problem of the presence of the Transcendent, as covenant-related, as centre of unity, and as place of worship.

As a matter of fact, 'tenting' expressed by means of the Hebrew verb *sakan*, usually rendered by the verb *kataskenoun* in the LXX, has become almost a technical term within the priestly tradition to describe Yahweh's presence among his people. The Priestly tradition always uses *sakan* in this sense, and never uses the verb in any other sense. Conversely, the priestly tradition uses the verb *yasab* to speak of men 'dwelling' and never uses this term in reference to any manifestation of Yahweh's presence among his people on earth. The Priestly tradition, moreover, uses the theme of the tent to describe Yahweh's abiding presence within Israel, whereas the earlier Elohist tradition draws upon this theme to indicate that Yahweh has paid a visit to his people.

The oldest tradition had stressed the role of the Tabernacle in oracles. The tent of meeting, the *'ohel mo'ed*, is the place where Yahweh meets with Moses and speaks with him. Anyone who wanted to consult with Yahweh went to the Tent, but only Moses entered. Still today the tradition of a portable tent which can be set up and serve as a tent of oracles in a camp of nomads is preserved by some Bedouin tribes. The Old Testament's priestly tradition also looked to the Tabernacle as the tent of revelation. 'You shall make the offering at the entrance to the Tent of the Presence before the Lord, where I meet you and speak to you. I shall meet the Israelites there, and the place will be hallowed by my glory' (Ex 29:42).[6] For the priestly author, the *'ohel mo'ed* is the place of Yahweh's revelation to his people. The Tabernacle is the locus of Yahweh's self-revelation. There God speaks; there his word is conveyed to his people.[7]

In the Fourth Gospel, the enfleshed Word is likewise the locus of God's self-revelation to man. Indeed, the Word is called the *Logos* because he is the one who reveals the Father. He is the bearer of the Word of God and is himself the Word of God. That Jesus is the Revealer is most forcefully expressed in the

[6] Cf. Ex 25:22; 30:36.
[7] Cf. Ex 25-26; 36-40.

Fourth Gospel's celebrated 'I am' formula. This revelation formula characterizes Jesus as the Self-revealer, as the one who reveals and who is at the same time the object of his own revelation. This notion is foreshadowed in the prologue which calls Jesus the *Logos*, the Word of God.

Since the notion that Jesus is the Revealer is most significant in Johannine thought, it may well be the notion that the Tabernacle is the locus of God's self-revelation which led to the introduction of the Word's 'tenting' into the prologue. It has already been noted that the function of the Tabernacle was eventually taken over by the Temple. This is no less true of the oracular function. The Temple is the place where oracles are given and God's word conveyed. Thus it is not altogether surprising that in the Fourth Gospel the temple (*hieron*) is the place where Jesus teaches.[8] John's temple is the place where the Word of God is given to men. Jn 1:14 adumbrates the notion by pointing to the Word himself as the tabernacled presence of God. It is in him that the revelatory Word of God for man is personally present. Jesus is himself the locus of divine revelation, the tent of meeting – the tent of testimony. He is, in a word, the true Tabernacle, the real Temple. This concept concurs with the basic perspective of the prologue which presents Jesus under the formal aspect of the one who reveals.

There is yet another aspect of the Old Testament's priestly understanding of the tented presence of Yahweh which throws light upon Jn 1:14. In the history of Israel there always existed a tension between the absolute otherness and supreme freedom of Yahweh and his presence among his people. Israel's totally other, free and all-powerful God could not be confined to any earthly sanctuary. Yet the very existence of the covenant which Yahweh had made with Israel required his presence among his people. The priestly authors also struggled with the problems of Yahweh's immanence and transcendence. For them the ideas of Tabernacle and Temple in which Yahweh dwelled and which He filled with his glory both assured Israel of his active presence within the nation and avoided too crude a notion of the presence of Yahweh. First, for the nomads in the desert, and then for the inhabitants of Jerusalem a happy solution to the problem of the divine transcendence and the divine immanence had been found.

The paradox of the divine transcendence and the divine pre-

[8] Jn 7:14; 8:2, 20; 10:23; 18:20.

sence is also a problem for which the author of the prologue had to find a solution. The prologue is run through with the tension between the verb 'to be' (*en*) and the verb 'to become' (*egeneto*), the one used of the divine, the other of the creaturely. The author's first mention of the Word affirmed his presence in the divine sphere (Jn 1:1); his second mention of the Word pointed to his participation in weak and mortal humanity (Jn 1:14). For the Johannine author, the notion of the divine tenting among us, already rich with pertinent Old Testament resonance, was a happy solution to the paradox of the divine Word present among men. The very construction of Jn 1:14, in which the verb *skenoun* unites two contrasting notions, the enfleshment of the Word and the glory of the only God, indicates how well the divine tenting was a convenient idiom for expressing the presence of the Transcendent in the world of creation.

Moreover, the tenting idiom could also serve to allude to the relationship between the Word and the covenant. While the Tabernacle is sometimes called the *'ohel* or the *miskan* by the authors of the priestly tradition, they seem to be more comfortable with the designation *'ohel mo'ed*, an epithet which means 'the tent of meeting'. This designation hearkens back to the amphictyony,[9] when Yahweh was considered to be the head of the covenant assembly. The expression thus implicitly recalls the history of the covenant which Yahweh had established with his people, Israel. What is implicit in the expression is sometimes explicitated by the association of covenant themes with the Tabernacle.[10] This Old Testament, and priestly, tradition is continued by the author of the Fourth Gospel. Mention of the tented presence of the Word is followed by the proclamation that he is 'full of grace and truth' (*pleres charitos kai aletheias*). The binomial, slightly adapted by John, is a typical Old Testament expression of covenant-minded disposition, of Yahweh's fidelity to the covenant oath which he had sworn. Thus the enfleshment of the Word as the new mode of the divine presence among men is construed not only as an indication of God's eternal fidelity to the covenant, but also as the fulfillment of the covenant itself. The covenant itself is brought to its consummation in the new Tabernacled presence of God among his people.

[9] Cf. F. Cross, 'The Priestly Tabernacle', p. 224, in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader* (G.E. Wright and D.N. Freedman, eds.), 1961, pp. 201-228.
[10] Cf. Lv 26:12, 1 Kg 8:8-9, etc.

This mention of the covenant and the ancient amphyctiony draws our attention to the unity of the people as a covenant motif. The members of the amphyctiony were formed into one people by the covenant which was established. In the priestly tradition, however, the unity of the people is no less a motif in the description of the Tabernacle and Temple. The sanctuary is viewed as the central and unifying factor of Israelite life. The architectural symmetry of the Tabernacle,[11] centred about the holy of holies, was a symbol of the unity of the people. So, too, was the fact that the tribes were stationed on all four sides of the Tabernacle.[12] According to the latter prophets and some documents of Jewish Apocalyptic,[13] the eschatological Temple was also expected to function as the center of unity of the new people of God. As the center of the people of God, there can only be one Temple. Little wonder, then, that the prologue is quick to proclaim that the new Tabernacle is 'the Father's only Son'.[14] The notion that Jesus is the unifying center of the new people of God will be further developed in the body of the Gospel, particularly in Jn 12:32.

Mention of the covenant also recalls that the covenant is the bond by which God has linked himself to his people in faithful loyalty and according to which He has addressed his commandments to his people as covenant prescriptions. It is particularly within the Deuteronomic tradition that these covenant stipulations are described as 'commandments' (*entolai*). Nonetheless any idea that the covenant is consummated should entail as a correlative the notion that the commandments themselves have also been superseded. Within the context of Johannine theology, when the time has come for the old Temple to be replaced, Jesus

[11] Cf. Ex 25-27; 37-38. The meaning of the priestly author's symmetrical plan was essentially the same as that of *Ex* 40-48 with this difference that Ezechiel projected his plan into the future whereas the priestly author thought of a past execution of the plan.

[12] Cf. Nm 2.

[13] Is 56:6-8; 60:4-7; 66:18-21; Zech 14:16-19; 1 En 90:33; Syb. Or. 3:702-718; 773-776; 808; 5:426-433; etc.

[14] The translation given is that of the *New English Bible*. It must, however, be noted that there is a dual problem affecting the expression: (i) the state of the Greek textual tradition and (ii) the interpretation of *monogenes*. The matter is treated in the standard commentaries and by D. Moody, in 'God's only Son', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 72, 1953, pp. 213-219.

announces a new commandment: 'I give you a new commandment: love one another, as I have loved you, so you are to love one another' (Jn 13:34).[15]

Finally, it ought to be noted that the Priestly tradition connects the Tabernacle with worship in the desert, just as the Temple itself would later be considered the privileged place for the worship of Yahweh. Indeed, the term *mo'ed*, originally meaning 'meeting', came to designate an assembly that had come together to celebrate a feast. Some Old Testament texts even use the term as a metonym for feasts, especially for the great feasts of the Israelite nation. In this sense, *mo'ed* is used alongside the 'new moons', 'sabbaths' and the 'great feasts' of Israel. Thus, as the *'ohel mo'ed*, the tent of meeting, the Old Testament was the locus for festal celebration. The Tabernacle was the tent for feasts.

The Johannine tradition, which proclaims Jesus as the tabernacled presence of God, also shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament cultus. Successively John writes that the feast of Tabernacles, the Dedication, and the Passover are consummated in Jesus. In him the great feasts of the Israelite nation find a new meaning and are fulfilled. As he is the new Tabernacle and the replacement of the Temple, Jesus must necessarily be the locus of the new worship of the Father. This theme will be developed in the body of the Fourth Gospel, but it is already geminally present in Jn 1:14, whose full significance can only be appreciated in the light of the Old Testament's priestly tradition and the theology of the Fourth Gospel.

A Keynote of Johannine Thought

That Jesus is the replacement of the Temple is, in fact, one of the principal themes of the Fourth Gospel. Hence our attention should dwell briefly upon the principal passages (viz., 1:51; 2:13-25; 4:21-24; 10:7-9; 11:48-50; and 12:41)[16] which explicate the theme keynoted in Jn 1:14.

Since the time of Augustine, exegetes have recognized the connection between Jesus' enigmatic statement to Nathanael (Jn 1:51) and Jacob's vision at Bethel (Gn 28:12). At Bethel, Abraham had built an altar to Yahweh (Gn 12:8; 13:3-4). There Jacob had his vision (Gn 18:10-22). There the Israelites had con-

[15] Cf. Jn 15:12.
[16] Cf. Also Jn 7:37-38; 19:34.

sulted the Lord (Jgs 20:18, 26; 21:2-5; 1 Sm 10:3). In short, Bethel was, according to ancient tradition, the place of Israel's primitive sanctuary, the locus of an ancient theophany, and the place of divine revelation.

According to the Fourth Gospel, however, it is in Jesus that true worship of the Father takes place (Jn 4:21-24). In Jesus man is enabled to see the Father (Jn 14:9) and perceive his glory (Jn 1:14; 2:11; 5:41; etc.). In Jesus the Word of God is conveyed to man (Jn 1:1; etc.). The functions which had primitively accrued to Bethel have finally been fulfilled in Jesus. Thus Jesus has taken the place of Bethel of old. Not only has Jesus replaced the Tabernacle (Jn 1:14); he has also superseded Israel's most ancient sanctuary. As Jesus is the true tabernacle, so he is the real Bethel, the authentic 'dwelling place of God'. In a word, Bethel was the prototype, Jesus the reality.

Jn 2:13-25 contains the Johannine description of the cleansing of the temple and Jesus' prophetic statement: 'Destroy this temple (*naon*),[17] and in three days I will raise it again' (Jn 2:19). The Synoptic traditions allude to both the incident and the saying, but John has departed from the traditional order so that he can highlight the theological significance of the incident as a dramatic statement of one of the major themes of his gospel: the replacement of Jewish institutions.

The prophetic logion itself is best understood against the background of a notion that was already current in Judaism before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.[18] No matter how magnificent the Temple was, it was only a material reality and so could not serve as the definitive dwelling place of God on earth. During the general renovation of all things, the Temple must disappear in order that it be replaced by the perfect sanctuary – the one not made by human hands, the one which does

[17] In the New Testament *naos* is not generally distinguished from *hieron*. If a distinction is to be made, *naos* must refer to the central sanctuary, *hieron* to the Temple and its precincts. In Jn 2:13-25, the Temple cleansed by Jesus is cited as *hieron* or 'my Father's house'. The designation *naos* is first introduced into the narrative in Jesus' logion (v. 19). Subsequently it appears in the context of the commentary of the Jews (v. 20) and John's own commentary (v. 21). These three verses contain the only use of *naos* in the Fourth Gospel.

[18] Cf. M. Simon, 'Retour du Christ et reconstruction du Temple dans la pensée chrétienne primitive,' in *Aux Sources de la tradition chrétienne* (Mélanges Goguel), 1950, pp. 251-252.

not properly belong to the created order. The actual destruction of the Temple by the Roman armies served to reinforce this tradition and strengthened the eschatological-apocalyptic expectations that were current in first century Palestine. Thus, in itself, Jesus' proclamation of the disappearance of the Temple was a prophetic utterance, consistent with the expectations of the times. What was striking in his proclamation was the suggestion[19] that the Jews themselves would destroy the Temple, God's dwelling place among his people. Not even Jeremiah who had foretold the destruction of the sanctuary of God as a punishment for Israel's sins (Jer 7:11-15) had dared to make such a statement.

Even more striking was Jesus' claim that he would raise up the sanctuary in three days. This aspect of his prophetic utterance took on new meaning in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. The essentially Christological import of the prophetic utterance is understood by the author's explanatory addition in Jn 2:21. Already, however, the prophetic logion itself implied that the new locus of the divine presence would be an improvement over the old. To 'raise again' is not merely to replace. It is to do something different, to change the floor plan, to make improvements, etc. Yet the significance of the utterance goes beyond this to a Jewish tradition that the restoration of the Temple is one of the chief offices of the Messiah.[20] As Messiah, Jesus will raise up the new Temple. Thus Jn 2:19 is one of the clearest affirmations of messianic claims by the Johannine Jesus.

According to John's explanation, the new Temple to be raised by the Messiah Jesus was the temple of his body. Already some Old Testament texts had suggested that Yahweh himself had become the Temple.[21] The resurrected Lord would take the place of Yahweh himself as the Temple. There is little wonder, then, that the Johannine tradition proclaims that there will be no Temple in the new Jerusalem since 'its temple was the sovereign Lord God and the Lamb' (Rv 21:22).[22] This passage, along with Jn 2:19,

[19] Of the various versions of the logion preserved in the New Testament, Jn 2:19 is the only one which attributes the responsibility for the destruction of the Temple to the Jews. I would consider John's version as the most authentic rendering of the saying.
[20] Cf. Ps. Sol. 17:32-34; Sib. Or. 5:424-425.
[21] Ez 10:18; 11:15-16; cf Jer 17:12-13; Is 8:14.
[22] Passages such as Rv 7:15-17; 11:19 and 16:17 do, however, speak of a heavenly temple. This discrepancy is not entirely unexpected in a book

21, is the clearest Johannine reference to the idea that the resurrected Jesus is himself the new Temple.

Implicit in Jn 2:19-21 is, therefore, an affirmation of Jesus' divinity[23] as well as an affirmation of his messianic claims. These and other implications of the passage are not spelled out by John, but they are apparent to those who insert Jn 2:19-21 into the mainstream of Old and New Testament tradition. What the passage further implies is that Jesus is the new place in which occurs the encounter between God and man. In him God and human nature are joined in one. In him the cult at Jerusalem has been fulfilled and superseded. With him and in him the time of the worship of God in spirit and in truth has dawned. In him the Church[24] is the new assembly of God in which Jew and Gentile are but one people before the Lord. Jesus is the house of God; he is the place where God is to be adored.

Thus the implications of Jn 2:13-25 go far beyond the purification of the cultus at Jerusalem. The author of the Fourth Gospel generally avoids an explication of these implications, but does develop one of them within the context of the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:20-24). From the Johannine dialogue it appears that it is the manner in which men are to worship the Father rather than the place where worship is to be offered which is the focal point of interest. Those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth (v. 24). Here the 'spirit' can only mean the Spirit of God which Jesus is to give as living water. The 'truth' is the revelation which Jesus has given. It is the Spirit which Jesus gives and the truth which is Jesus himself which makes possible true worship of the Father. Not only has Jesus replaced the Temple; he also animates the worship which replaces the Temple cultus.

Although the emphasis of the dialogue lies on the manner in which true worship is offered to the Father, there underlies the notion that neither Mount Gerizim nor Jerusalem will subsist as places for authentic worship of the Father. The Samaritan temple on Gerizim had been destroyed under John Hyrcanus. Jesus had reiterated the prophetic utterance that the Temple at Jerusalem

of apocalyptic writing, yet in this instance it may be due to the author's use of sources in the composition of Rv.

[23] That the Tabernacle-Temple theme points to the divinity of Jesus is already apparent from the first introduction of the theme at Jn 1:14.

[24] This Pauline concept is not found in the Fourth Gospel. Nonetheless John's association of the Temple theme and the resurrected body of Jesus attests to traditional material out of which the Pauline notion developed.

would be destroyed. Divisive worship in competing sanctuaries would come to an end. Worshipping communities comprised of 'you' and 'us' would be no more. The hour was coming when there would be but one true cult, the worship that takes place in and through Jesus himself.

The perspective of the conversation is that of eschatological promise. The Jews hoped that in the days to come all would worship on Zion. The Samaritans believed that all would worship on the mountain that was sacred to them.[25] Their respective beliefs were but different articulations of a common eschatological hope characterized by a vision of a single worshipping community comprising all the righteous. Jesus reiterated the promise, but announced that it would be realized neither on Zion nor on Gerizim. It was to be realized in himself who would enable all men to worship in Spirit and in truth.

The theme of Jesus as the new Temple is even more subtly developed in the second part of the Book of Signs (Jn 1:19-12:50). According to Jn 10:7,[26] Jesus proclaimed 'I am the door of the sheepfold.' The Greek text does not read 'the door of the sheepfold', but *thura ton probaton,* the 'door of the sheep,' i.e. the gate for the sheep. The image is not so much that of a gate which gives a third party access to the sheep, but the gate through which the sheep themselves pass. Commentators who appreciate this meaning of the text have usually identified the gate to which Jesus makes reference in this solemn proclamation with the gate of heaven.[27] Even this would seem to be inadequate since it is hardly likely that the sheep go in and out through the gate of heaven (vv. 3, 9). Entrance into heaven ought to be one-way.

Thus I am inclined to look to the little parable (Jn 10:1-6) which precedes the double reference to Jesus as the 'door' as providing the key to its meaning. There the sheepfold appears as a means of protection in the night. The door has the function of assuring this protection. The door also is the means by which the sheep come in and out. The door is the way to the pasture as well as the means of protection. In other words, the gate is the means by which salvation is assured. In the Old Testament this notion is associated with Jerusalem or the Temple, as well as with the gate of the Temple used metonymously of the Temple itself. Ps 118:20 refers to

[25] Cf. J. Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans,* 1964, pp. 385-386.
[26] Cf. Jn 10:9.
[27] Cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John,* pp. 307-308; J. Marsh, *The Gospel of St. John,* 1968, p. 400, etc.

the gate of the Lord, through which victors shall make their entry. The psalm refers to the gate of the Temple as a *pule*. John has preferred the use of the term *thura*. This more generic term is better adapted to the pastoral imagery of the Johannine parable. It is, nonetheless, a term used in the Old Testament in reference to the entrance to the Tabernacle (Ex 29:4; 33:9).

Thus Jn 10:7, 9 is a double affirmation that Jesus has taken over the function of the gate of the Temple. He is the means by which the sheep find protection and pasture. He is the source of their salvation. Thus Jn 10:7, 9 might well be translated 'I am the place of salvation for the sheep.'[28] By the use of metonymy, Jesus has proclaimed that he is the new Temple. Comparison of these verses with the preceding parable and the subsequent expatiation reveals that Jesus is the only gate for the sheep. There is only one flock which belongs to him. The point is clear. Jesus, as the gate, is the means by which the sheep are gathered into one. Jesus is the new collection point for salvation. The theme of the Temple as a unifying center has recurred.

In the perspective of the Fourth Gospel neither the theme of unity nor that of Jesus as the new Temple can be dissociated from the thought of Jesus' death and resurrection. Thus even the metonymous reference to Jesus as the new Temple calls for mention of his laying down his life and receiving it back (vv. 11, 15, 17, 18). In fact, it is the risen Jesus who is the door for the sheep. No longer is the Temple the source of salvation. It is Jesus himself who is the true door, that is, the gate of the true Temple, the locus of salvation. With the death and resurrection of Jesus the Old Temple will have become useless.

Ironically it is the Pharisees who introduce the thought of the irrelevancy of the Temple by reflecting about its destruction: 'If we leave him alone like this the whole populace will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and sweep away our temple *(ton topon)* and our nation' (Jn 11:48). Both Old and New Testament tradition indicate that it is the temple which is 'the place' *(ho topos) par excellence.*[29] The Pharisees and the high priests were ready to sacrifice one man in order to preserve their hegemony over the Temple and their privileged status as the people of Yahweh. In fact, the death of Jesus was decreed. Then, by way of supreme irony, what the Jews had sought to avoid actually befell them. The

[28] Cf. A.J. Simonis, *Die Hirtenrede im Johannes-Evangelium* (*Analecta Biblica*, 29), 1967, p. 206.

[29] Cf. 2 Mc 5:19; Jer 7:14: Neh 4:7; Mt 24:15; Acts 6:13, 14; 7:8; 21:28.

Temple was destroyed by the Romans. The effective universalization of Jesus' mission was brought about by his death-exaltation (Jn 12:24, 32). With his death came the end of the privileged position of the Jews. The exalted Lord would draw all men to himself. By his death the scattered children of Israel were gathered into the unity of the true Israel. The irony of it all is that it was the Pharisees and priests who linked the death of Jesus with the destruction of their beloved Temple.

With Jn 12:41, the Johannine Tabernacle-Temple theme is brought to a close.[30] Isaiah's vision of the heavenly Temple allows him to perceive the glory of the Lord, which John explicates as the glory of Jesus. According to this piece of Johannine theology, Isaiah had no more difficulty in appreciating the divinity of Jesus than did Abraham (Jn 8:56). His vision of the heavenly Temple is a vision of the glory of the Lord which dwells within it – the glory of Jesus himself. To see the Heavenly Temple is to perceive the glory of Jesus.

With this affirmation, John's thought has come full-cycle. He had begun by accouncing that Jesus was the true Tabernacle, come to dwell among us (Jn 1:14), and endowed with the glory as of the only Son of the Father. In the history of salvation, the Tabernacle had given way to the Temple as the locus of God's presence among men. According to John's theology, not even the Temple could be the definitive locus of God's presence among men. At most it was a prototype and foreshadowing of the true Tabernacle, the true Temple, Jesus himself. He is the eschatological mode of God's presence among men, the locus of revelation and the place of salvation. In him all men can contemplate the glory of the Lord.

RAYMOND F. COLLINS

[30] i.e. apart from the problematic reference in Jn 19:34.

BOOK REVIEWS

SWANSON, R.J.: *The Horizontal Line Synopsis of the Gospels*, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 1975, pp. xx + 597.

Dr. Reuben J. Swanson, of Western Carolina University, has devoted ten years to developing a better approach for comparative study of the Gospels. The result is a 620 page volume entitled *The Horizontal Line Synopsis of the Gospels*.

Gospel synopses currently in print arrange the material in parallel columns forcing the reader to search out similarities by considering entire passages of the four versions and mentally comparing what each gospel is saying.

The format of the *Horizontal Line Synopsis* allows a far more precise comparison of gospel parallels. Because the material is presented in a line-for-line horizontal fashion, similarities and differences are readily apparent. The reader scans blocks of lines, following each lead gospel through consecutively, while at the same time, seeing all parallel materials from each of the other gospels. In this way, the slightest difference in interpretation can be easily noted.

Dr. Bruce M. Metzger of the Princeton Theological Seminary has said about Dr. Swanson's work – 'Having examined specimens of the *Horizontal Line Synopsis of the Gospels* by Reuben J. Swanson, I am impressed by the clarity and speed with which one can ascertain the similarities and differences among the Gospels. Unlike the traditional harmonies which arrange the text of the Gospels in parallel columns, Swanson's interlinear arrangement enables the eye to take in much more immediately the several details of parallel passages. I think therefore that many students will find that his work will be a most useful tool in the study of the Gospels.'

Swanson holds Ph.D. and S.T.M. degrees from Yale University Graduate School, and is an ordained minister of the Lutheran Church in America with 12 years of parish service and 16 years of University Professorship.

Dr. Swanson is currently Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Western Carolina University and is an active member of the Society of Biblical Literature and the Committee on Patristics, International Greek New Testament Project. Previous publications in-

clude *Spokesmen for God, Teacher's Guide for Young People and Adults; The Story of God and His People, Teacher's Guide and Student's Book;* as well as numerous articles and reviews in religious journals, including the *Harvard Theological Review and the Journal of Biblical Literature.*

In addition to carrying a full teaching load at Western Carolina University and working on *The Horizontal Line Synopsis* manuscripts, Dr. Swanson has organized Western North Carolina Press (including the sale of securities), and serves as mayor of the town of Dillsboro, North Carolina. The thoroughness and clarity typical of Dr. Swanson's work is readily evident in *The Horizontal Line Synopsis of the Gospels.*