

symposium

THE UNIVERSAL vs THE PARTICULAR IN RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

Emanuel Rackman / Jacob Neusner / Howard B. Radest



Parti

Emanuel Rackman

TODAY'S YOUNG GENERATION is not the first to ask whether one ought to remain a Jew — but it does have a new angle. It talks of assimilation not because of Jewish hardship but because of Jewish success. It argues that we no longer need retain our separateness as a people because our values are now cherished by all men. We have, they say, fulfilled our mission; by assimilating we would not only spare ourselves much misunderstanding but would also contribute to the ultimate unity of all mankind.

To this I make reply but not without stating in advance that just as Hamlet was emotionally ill when he asked "To be or not to be," so the younger generation may be Jewishly deficient when it asks "to be or not to be Jewish." A mentally healthy individual chooses life and seeks to live it as abundantly as he can. Similarly, one who is knowledgeable Jewishly, and spiritually secure, chooses to live Jewishly because his Jewishness is as natural to him as his humanity. I no more want to run away from my heritage than I want to cease breathing. My desire to live Jewishly is as natural to me as my basic will to live.

Nonetheless, today's youth does not share this feeling and wants a rationalist, rather than a naturalist, response. I will try to make one available.

I WOULD LIKE to submit that even if all the values which are part of our heritage as Jews were presently universal values, even if our values of freedom, justice, spiritual excellence, were cherished by most civilized human beings, nonetheless, Jews would want to live these values and express them in their historic Jewish context, in their historic Jewish form. We not only *want* to do this — we *must* do this. We feel morally compelled to do this by our own personal existential situation.

A Jew once said that he loves being Jewish because it is the least difficult way he knows to be human. His ultimate value was to be human and the way he found most natural and human for himself was to live a characteristically Jewish life. Most of us also want to be human, but for many of us, to live a Jewish life is unnatural. Our environments warrant non-Jewish patterns of behavior, non-Jewish symbols, heroes, and concerns. Yet even for such of us as would find it easier to be human in a completely assimilated status there ought to be the desire, the drive, and the compulsion to fulfill the values of life in an authentic Jewish frame. Why? Simply because one of the most cherished of universal values is individuality, personal uniqueness. Judaism always stressed this value and humanists cherish it, too. Mother nature is ambivalent with respect to it. She makes us alike and different at the same time. Ours is the choice to lose our identity in a pool of sameness with other human beings, or to accentuate difference even as we maintain

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mutual respect for all mankind because of that which all of us have in common — our inviolable endowment of personality.

Even as a Jew among Jews, most of us want to retain our individuality, our uniqueness. Even as we share a common core of Jewishness with each other, we also want to give expression to our own tastes, styles, feelings, views, and interpretations. By the same token, as human beings among humans, Jews cannot permit themselves to surrender to those social and cultural forces which would make them altogether like everybody else in their environments.

Political philosophers always dreaded the effects that democracy would have on individuality. And in our day, preoccupation with, and the worship of, science and technology are a greater threat than democracy ever was. Science has internationalized thought and enterprise, which is good, but at the same time the very internationalism and universality of its discourse and its symbols are a threat to the diversity of personal and uniquely human expressions of thought and feeling such as poets were wont to give us. Technology has been even more of a leveller. And by being human in a Jewish way of life we enrich the diversity which aggrandizes man's ultimate freedom to know and be himself.

The history of Judaism with which we are identified, and whose course we still want to help steer, is an inspiring record of this emphasis on personal freedom and uniqueness. Abraham elected to withdraw and be different. Moses sanctified his people by differentiating them from others. Prophets resisted kings who sought to acculturate with pagans. The Maccabees warred with Hellenists for freedom to worship God in their own way. Talmudic genius and acumen helped Jews maintain their identity against two world religions whose adherents outnumbered

*The Procession,
Elbert Weinberg,
The Jewish Museum*



them by astronomical proportions. Zionism itself was an answer to those who urged Jews to lose their identity. And we today, when democracy, science, and materialism reign supreme, can find in our Jewish past the goals and the inspiration to defend the most priceless ingredient of our humanity—our individuality and our uniqueness. Our very desire to be human should force us to live Jewishly. Otherwise, we would forfeit some of our humanity and we ought to choose to forfeit none of it.

However, I also find the Jewish frame for universally cherished values to be not only the most ancient, the most tested and tried, the most pervasive, but also the most enjoyable. For me, Sabbath peace is not only the most remarkable way ever conceived to achieve withdrawal from the pressures and tensions of one's economic situation with its emphasis on gain, greed, and envy, but also an inspiring medium to stress the value of freedom — our transcendence of enslaving preoccupations — and our surrender to gracious living and preoccupation with our families and the ends of life, rather than its means. Sabbaths and festivals are liberating forces — their very restrictions liberate one for delights not otherwise readily attainable.

Dr. Abraham Heschel, in his *The Earth Is the Lord's*, tells of a pious Israeli woman whose son was a *chalutz*. She observed the commandments; he did not. This upset her and she sought the aid of her rabbi. "Rebbe," she said, "I do not worry that my son may not have a share in the world to come because he performs no *mitzvot*. I am absolutely certain that his sacrifices as a *chalutz* will entitle him to greater share of *olam haba* than I will have. What does worry me is that he is missing so much on this earth when he does not have the simple joy of living a traditional Jewish life."

That is why my first point is that we owe it to our posterity to transmit Jewish values in their authentic frame — the frame of Jewish life and experience. No matter how universally accepted these values now are, or may hereafter become, my children have the right to learn freedom through Passover and to learn justice and peace through the insights of the Bible and the Talmud. And you and I must ponder ways to achieve the transmittal of these values in Jewish forms and moulds. They cannot be transmitted only as abstractions. They must be transmitted by doing — and why should I not choose to do them in a Jewish frame.

HOWEVER, I submit — and this is my second point — that there are uniquely Jewish values with which I want to enrich humanity and it may be centuries or millennia before these are universally accepted. My daily preoccupation with Torah is for the sake of discovering these insights and hardly a study period in my life passes without their discovery.

The first value I might suggest is the love of mankind. The major premise of today's argument for assimilation is that all mankind cherishes Jewish values. But does mankind cherish Jews? Do we not yet remain the perennial butt of their hatred? If we choose to assimilate to spare ourselves this hatred, then are we not declaring *ab initio*

that even the commandment to love one's neighbor as one's self has not yet taken hold?

Furthermore, the Jewish people are committed to values of human personality which differ from those of the majority of mankind, including the values of other world religions and even the dominant values of East and West. If we, for example, have achieved, throughout our millennial history, an incomparable regard for every member of the family within the family unit, the result is due to unique concepts of personality which Jewish law fostered. Ours is still the only major religious tradition that sanctifies the total human being — his body and his soul, his intellectual prowess as well as his natural appetites. Nothing about the human being created in the divine image is inherently evil. Even the instincts are dignified and sanctified and can be harnessed for good or evil.

It is especially interesting that despite the initial damage done to the Jewish tradition by Freud, there is already a revolt against many of Freud's teachings and the core of the Jewish position is now gaining respect in the very circles which once demeaned it. Dr. Nathaniel S. Lehrman, a prominent American psychoanalyst, once described the different attitudes toward sex that have prevailed in human history. He wrote in the *Journal of Religion and Health* that there are three basic approaches. One he called the celibate, religious-suppressive, standard of which Christianity was the most representative exponent. Many of the guilt feelings that plague moderns, and that even give rise to such bizarre and destructive revolutions as Hitler inspired, can be traced to standards which are not biblical or talmudic in origin. Furthermore, what this analyst called the comfortable, psychological, permissive standard of many moderns is doing damage to men and women, and especially women whose so-called sexual emancipation has not been an unmitigated blessing. Judaism, with its connubial, religious-responsible, standard is the ideal which he says "establishes a high family-centered sexual goal to which every human being can aspire, and that most can actually achieve: in a sense it makes available to all the pursuit of sexual excellence."

Now, if the proponents of mental health are discovering that Judaism is committed to a concept of man which is yielding the greatest good, then can we be so wasteful as to discard it?

I see in the complete pattern of Jewish law regarding both food and sex not simply folkways or primitive taboos, but a remarkable, divinely ordained prescription for the dignification and sanctification of every drive and impulse of man — endowing even his most basic drives with a divine dimension. Man may be an animal. He has appetites which must be satisfied. But Judaism never regarded instincts as evil. Even sex was not evil. The so-called fall of man is not an authentic Jewish idea. If God had wanted the complete repression of appetites, he would have created man differently.

What God asks of man is rather that the satisfaction of his natural desires shall be achieved on a higher plane. In sexual intercourse our erotic tastes and deportment are more refined — we hope — than those of beasts. And what the *halachah* sought to achieve was to add considerations of holiness to the aesthetic. Satisfy the appetite, but do it in accordance with the divine will. The gratification of the

instinct is thus transformed from an animal-like performance to one charged with dignity and sanctity. To the value of the beautiful we add the value of the holy. Eat and sleep and clothe yourself — even shave and build your home — as God willed you to. Be aware of God even as you fulfill your basic needs and requirements. In that way you will transform acts that are presumably without spiritual value into acts that are religious in character — acts that link you with the Infinite. In that way, too, you will avoid those feelings of guilt and even disgust with yourself that frequently accompany the satisfaction of appetites.

It is principally in the area of civil and criminal law that one discovers how high is the value placed by Judaism on the dignity and sanctity of human personality. In our political and social philosophy, this value is reflected in every instance. Let us take one example, the right against self-incrimination, which is cherished in the democracies of the West.

Forced confessions have become the principal basis for convictions behind the iron curtain in crimes of a political nature, and to some degree also in the United States in crimes of violence, particularly when members of racial minorities are involved.

Traditional Jewish law held any and all confessions — no matter how voluntarily offered — to be without legal effect as far as the state was concerned. Confessions of debts or thefts might obligate one to make payment or restitution to an aggrieved party at the latter's insistence. But the confessions were nullities in criminal proceedings. As a matter of fact, the person making the confession could not even be impeached as a witness in a subsequent and different proceeding on the ground that he had confessed to the commission of an immoral act.

The Talmud establishes this rule against self-incrimination by means of a syllogism. Relatives are incompetent to testify against each other. A man is a relative to himself. Nonetheless, one does find that a man may make admissions against his interest which might give rise to suits for money judgments by persons in whose favor the admission was made. Logically, the same syllogism ought to apply. Yet the Talmud indicates that with regard to financial obligations, an admission might create a liability in the maker of the admission and a power to sue in the party for whose benefit the admission was made. It is only the state that is barred from enjoying this advantage.

What is of special interest, however, is the rationale of the Jewish rule. The confession is a nullity because of the incompetency of the confessor to testify. In the United States, in a federal investigation, a man was once forced to incriminate himself with regard to an act which is a crime under state law, but not under federal law. The immunity against self-incrimination guaranteed by the federal constitution then applied only to self-incrimination under federal law. This decision has since been overruled. The Jewish rule would bar any self-incrimination whatever because of the incompetency of the confessor. In addition, the immunity guaranteed by the federal constitution applies only to crimes, and not to matters which are not punishable by law, such as membership in a legal but unpopular organization.

The truth is that while law-enforcing agencies have been aided by the gradual contraction of the immunity against

self-incrimination, personal freedom has also suffered. Jewish law, on the other hand, gave legal recognition to admissions against interest when they involved the waiver of one's wealth. One could not, however, waive one's flesh or freedom.

Jewish law generally seeks to stress what modern capitalism reluctantly accepts and what Russian communism vociferously rejects — that human life is more sacred than property. Human life is cheaper in the Soviet Union than state property. You get the death penalty more readily for sabotage against the latter than murder against the former. The rabbis in the Talmud, however, even explained that the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," applies not to property but rather to kidnapping. We may not steal human beings and sell them into slavery. A prohibition against stealing property is important but not important enough for inclusion in the Ten Commandments.

Thus, our heritage has unique insights with regard to values and it becomes our duty to conserve that heritage for the benefit of mankind.

IT IS MY THIRD and last point that will evoke the most vigorous dissent. However, even if all cannot accept it, everyone should remember that it is the historic Jewish position and that millions of Jews still embrace it. Young people have a moral obligation to help those millions survive as a people that they might give expression to their thesis even as those who reject it might continue to ponder it and perhaps ultimately fathom its merit. It is the unique commitment of Jews that Jewish values are valid and worthy of pursuit because they are the will of a transcendent Being who in fact revealed His will.

Thus, even as I maintain that we Jews ought to live and transmit universal values in the context of our own cultural heritage, and even as I maintain that our values often have a different and uniquely Jewish component which warrants pursuit, articulation, and implementation, so do I maintain that the philosophical validation of our values is such that it alone can induce commitment. Not all accept my position which is the position of a Jew committed to halachah. But Jews have not been relativists in ethics. For Jews, as Professor Carl Friedrich once expressed it, law is the will of God. The right, the just, the good, are not man-made. They are ordained by God. Needless to say, to affirm this position requires an act of faith. But this is Judaism's historic position. And it warrants the most earnest consideration of young people.

One asks, What is the good life? In our day the life expectancy of every human being has been increased. Child mortality has been reduced considerably and there is the likelihood that more and more people will live to be one hundred years of age. Yet, can it be said that there has been a comparable achievement with regard to the good life? Does one have to cite statistics to indicate the extent to which precisely the people with economic means and physical security have to resort to some form of therapy or use of tranquilizers? These facts have been repeated often enough in the press and in other forms of mass communication to make us realize that simply to add years to life does not

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necessarily mean that medicine has succeeded in bringing to us the good life. Yet, in all fairness to the psychiatrists it must be said that they are pondering this question. They, too, want to know why it is that man, modern man, who is enjoying better health and more security than any generation of human beings ever did before, is not happy, is more neurotic and psychotic than ever. Now, one of the most significant of contributions made on this subject is by a very distinguished psychiatrist who was himself a victim of Nazi terror. He spent many years in a concentration camp and there he asked himself a fundamental question, Why did some survive while others perished? What gave some an incredible will to live while others could not withstand the indescribable agony about them? This man, Dr. Viktor Frankl, came to a remarkable discovery, but a discovery so simple that one wonders why it took genius to reveal it. Dr. Frankl came to the conclusion that earlier students of the human mind had not gone far enough. Freud studied the human being and felt that it was the pleasure principle that was responsible for all of man's behavior. Man has certain needs and these needs create tension. When these needs are satisfied, man has pleasure because the release from tension is pleasure.

Dr. Frankl said that this description of man could basically be described in two words, "man is," or by a declaration of man, "I am what I am. I have needs and these needs must be satisfied."

After Freud, another group of psychiatrists realized that man is more than a bundle of physical wants and needs. Man also has a desire to fulfill himself. He wants to advance and achieve recognition. He has a potential intellectually, socially, economically, and is driven to achieve status as he seeks respect for that which he can accomplish. There came Jung and Adler and they stressed, for example, the desire of a younger child to have the same status in the family that the older child has. They referred to the conflict between Ishmael and Isaac, between Esau and Jacob. These conflicts they regarded as symptomatic of what goes on through life. These psychologists stressed the search for status and recognition as one of the most important factors in human motivation and human behavior. Just as Freud made the problem of what man is his central concern, so they made the problem of what man *can become* the focus of all their attention. For Freud the central statement was "I am"; for Jung and Adler the central statement was "I can be" or "I can become." But Dr. Frankl recognized that neither is enough. There was something more required for the good life than simply the satisfaction of wants, and even more than the achievement of self-fulfillment. Who knows this better than Americans? We do not want for food, shelter, or clothing. What is more, even with regard to sex there has been such a breakdown of moral standards that very few are frustrated in this connection. Furthermore, the very people who have achieved status and recognition, like celebrities in cinema, art, and letters, are among the most unhappy. And Frankl discovered in concentration camps that man craves not only self-development and self-fulfillment,

but an additional dimension. Not only does man say, "I am" and "I can become"; he also says "I ought to be."

I o LIVE man requires the "ought." But what other than something beyond the self provides the "ought"? If it is the self alone that yields it, then man's response to it leaves him in the second dimension of self-fulfillment. The third dimension requires a transcendent source to which are related man's moral imperatives. It is because of this source that not every ethical position is equally valid or correct. Nazi morality was not just as relatively right for Nazis as Jewish morality is relatively right for Jews.

The Greeks and the Romans sought the answer in natural law. In Judaism, it was the creator who was also the supreme legislator. Indeed, I find it very difficult to explain why millions of people are perfectly content to accept the idea that God created the universe but are reluctant to accept the idea that God revealed His will to man at one point in universal history. The truth is that if we do not accept the idea of revelation we have no sound basis for accepting the idea of creation. No nation, no ethnic group, no religious community held the idea of creation before it was expounded in the Bible. The idea of creation is uniquely and exclusively Jewish. Indeed, Aristotle rejected it, and Maimonides was hard put to disprove Aristotle's thesis. It requires an act of faith in order to maintain that the world was created. Certainly the oriental religions did not subscribe to it. That the world now embraces the idea is due to the fact that it was revealed to Moses and from Moses it entered the philosophical tradition of the West so that scientists and philosophers alike seek evidence to support it even though the evidence cannot possibly be conclusive. Nonetheless, because of an act of faith, most of us assume that the world was created. Why, however, should we reject the rest of the biblical document which postulates creation and refuses to believe that the same creator made His will known to man? The revelation of that will is still the principal source of our knowledge of what is right and wrong, what is good and what is evil, what is just and unjust. Creation and revelation are one in Judaism. Both derive from the same authority, the authority of the Bible or the authority of faith. That we are ready to accept one side of the coin and not the other is explicable only in terms of the evil in human nature. We accept what we like and what is irrelevant to our behavior — the idea of creation, and we reject what must govern our behavior — the idea of revelation. The authority of the law makes demands upon us; the idea of creation makes no such demands. However, this position is not defensible intellectually or morally.

Now, ours is an age when basic values and beliefs are either disintegrating or are largely gone. Emile Durkheim calls it a state of "anomie." At such a time it is more imperative than ever that some form of order be maintained

— some form of constitutional loyalty — lest there be a total breakdown of the social and legal order. The only constitutional loyalty which Jews had in their millennial history was to the sovereign of the universe. He endowed our values with their ultimate validation. Yet even if many of us find a return to Him impossible, we ought not be unmindful of the losses that will be ours if we fail to respect those who want to return and those who have never abandoned Him. We must help them to survive as a people, as a religious fellowship, as a covenanted folk.

Part 2

Jacob Neusner

MINORITIES feel themselves “particular,” see their traditions as “ritual,” and distinguish between the private, unique, and personal, and the public, universal, and commonplace. Majorities do not. Standing at the center and not on the fringes, they accept the given. Marginal men, such as the Jews, regard the given as something to be criticized, elevated, in any event to be recognized as distinguished from their own essential being.

One who asks “Why be Jewish”—and for two centuries, Jews have been asking that question—cannot hope for a persuasive answer, for no one has thought of any. Why be my father’s son? The answer is not to give reasons, but rather to analyze the question and its foundations. One wonders, Why does a person ask such a question? Is it that “being Jewish” has proved a source of self-esteem or of anguish? Are the things that make a man into a Jew precious to him and appreciated by society? Or are the particularities of “being Jewish” the things that diminish his esteem in the eyes of others and of himself?

JEWES WHO ASK, “Why be Jewish,” thereby testify against the society that imposes the question upon them or elicits it from them. They give evidence that “being Jewish” somehow repels, separates a person from the things he wants. American society, though it is opening, still is not so open that men who are different from common folk can serenely and happily accept that difference. True, they frequently affirm it, but the affirmation contains excessive protest and is, therefore, not much different from the denial. The quintessential datum of American Jewish existence is anti-Semitism, being outside and different, along with uncertainty of status, denial of normality, and self-doubt. The results are many, but two stand out. Some overemphasize their Jewishness, respond to it not naturally but excessively, to the exclusion of other parts of their being. Others, as we have seen, question and implicitly deny it. The one compensates too much; the other finds no reward at all.

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For me, therefore, the road is clear. I cannot abandon Judaism because I cherish her values. I must transmit these values in their historic frame; I must continue to discover the uniquely Jewish components in Jewish values; and I must ponder the source, and the divine, absolute, validity of our values as they emanate from God. Let others choose a different road. I will respect their choice. I pray them, however, to remember and respect the approach I have described which is trebly charged to achieve the survival of Judaism and the more abundant living of Jews.

As Kurt Lewin pointed out in *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics*:

... Every underprivileged minority group is kept together not only by cohesive forces among its members but also by the boundary which the majority erects against the crossing of an individual from the minority to the majority group.

An underprivileged group-member will try to gain in social status by joining the majority—to pass, to assimilate. The basic fact of life is this wish to cross the boundary, and hence, as Lewin says:

He [the minority-group member] lives almost perpetually in a state of conflict and tension. He dislikes ... his own group because it is nothing but a burden to him. ... A Jew of this type will dislike everything specifically Jewish, for he will see in it that which keeps him away from the majority for which he is longing.

Such a Jew is the one who will constantly ask, “Why be Jewish,” who will seek, or at least fantasize about, a common religion of humanity, universal values that transcend, indeed obliterate denominational and sectarian boundaries. It is no accident that the universal language, Esperanto, the universal movement, communism, the universal psychology, psychoanalysis—all were the creations of Jews.

True, too, Jews may find a place in social groups apparently indifferent to their particularity as Jews. But a closer look shows that these groups are formed chiefly by deracinated or de-Judaized Jews, along with a few exceptionally liberal non-Jews who stand in a similar relationship to their own origins. Jews do assimilate. They do blot out the marks of their particularity, in ways more sophisticated, to be sure, than the ancient Hellenist-Jews who submitted to painful operations to wipe away the marks of circumcision. But in doing so, they become not something else entirely, but rather another type of Jew. The real issue is never to be or not to be a Jew any more than it is to be or not to be my father’s son. It is this: What kind of a Jew, what kind of a son, will I be—and become?

Lewin makes this wholly clear: “It is not similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that constitutes a group, but interdependence of fate.” Jews brought up to suppose being

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Jewish is chiefly, or only, a matter of religion think that through atheism they cease to be Jews, only to discover that not believing in God helps not at all. They are still Jews; they are still obsessed by that fact and compelled to confront it, whether under the name of Warren or of Weinstein, whether within the society of Jews or elsewhere. Indeed, it is outside of that society that Jewish consciousness becomes most intense. Among Jews one is a human being, with peculiarities and virtues of one's own. Among Gentiles he is a Jew, endowed with traits common to the group he rejects. That is probably why Jews still live in mostly Jewish neighborhoods and associate, outside of economic life, mostly with other Jews, whether or not these associations exhibit traits supposed to be Jewish. And when crisis comes, as it frequently does, then no one doubts that he—his emotions if not his mind, his heart if not his soul—shares a common cause, a common fate, with other Jews. Then it is hardest to isolate oneself from Jews, because only among Jewry are these intense concerns shared. Among them one lives best as man and best, too, as Jew.

The common fate of Jews, however, makes them not a single group but a collection of groups. The Six Day War, for instance, called forth two sorts of reactions, indeed distinguished between two kinds of "being Jewish." The one, the majority, viscerally reacted in favor of the State of Israel. The other, the minority involved in the New Left, viscerally reacted against it. It served, indeed, as a means of denying one's Jewishness to condemn "Israeli aggression," in truth to ignore that the condemnation of "Israeli aggression" served the party-line of the Communist foreign policy. But more generally, the Pavlovian liberalism of the Jewish community bears the marks of a not-too-dissimilar phenomenon: espouse what is "universal"—meaning what is not my own—and deny what is "particular," private, self-serving. Would that men could achieve such purity and nobility as to bear no needs, interests, base motives. But they do, and vigorous, healthy men do not deny but recognize and build upon their whole being, not only part of it. It is not a mark of health to serve everyone but oneself. It is not a mark of self-respect to obliterate oneself, to pretend one does not have needs, interests, indeed, integrity.

Groups today flourish that have determined to destroy us. We Jews have nothing in common with such groups. We cannot hope to remove their hatred through education, reasonable discussion, amelioration of their condition. They do not hate us because of what we are, but because they need to hate someone, and we are—or seem, because of our self-abnegation—weak, purposeless, even suicidal. Again Lewin:

Such a fight in self-defense would be more than a self-centered act. It would have a direct bearing upon the struggle of the majority for the solution of their economic and political problems. . . . Anxiety is characteristic of one who is confused and does not know what to do. One who faces danger rather than waits to be



The New York Times

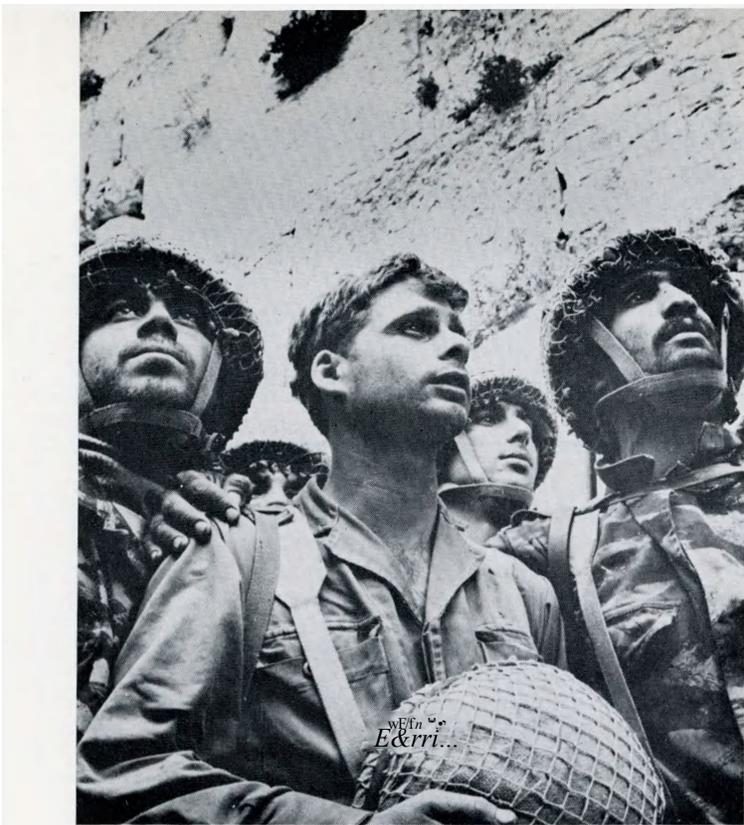
crushed under the enemy's heel can again live in a clear atmosphere and is able to enjoy life even when surrounded by danger.

This, I think, accounts for the health of Israeli Jewry, and the sickness of American Jewry, sickness symptomized by the universalism no one else believes in, the thirst for justice, peace, and love for everyone but Jews.

THE JEWISH community needs, therefore, to face up to the self-hatred endemic in its life and to overcome it: Self-hatred is a subtle matter. Jews are shrewd enough to explain they are too busy with non-Jewish activities to associate with Jews. Students coming to college do not say to themselves or others, "I do not want to be a Jew, and now that I have the chance not to be, I shall take it." They say, "I do not like the Hillel rabbis." "I am not religious so I won't go to services." "I am too busy with studies, dates, or political and social programs to participate in Jewish life." From here it is a short step to the affirmation of transcendent values and the denial of a particular "religious" identity. That those who take that step do so mostly with other Jews is, as I said, proof of the real intent.

The organized Jewish community, however, differs not at all from the assimilationist part of the student generation. Indeed, it shows the way. Leadership in Jewry is sought by talented and able people in particular when their talents and abilities do not produce commensurate results in the outside world. Status denied elsewhere is readily available, for the right reasons, in Jewry: ability here becomes its own reward.

The higher one rises on the ladder of Jewish community life, the more one is measured not by the standards supposedly espoused by Judaism and Jewry, but by those of



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quired social standing in the larger community. They were just rich Jews, and that wasn't much. . . . The officers were rich, bitter, opinionated men. A whole life of work had brought them neither recognition nor contentment. There was one place where their word was absolutely law. They ruled the synagogue with an iron determination. All the recognition they craved in the outside world they finally found in the synagogue. . . . Here their success was recognized, their money counted....

So it goes, in the community and in the synagogue. What are the results for Jews, for their self-respect and self-acceptance?

The universal consequence is this: Jewry devotes its best energies and the greatest part of its community budget to activities approved of, therefore by nature non-sectarian, by the outside community. Vast funds go into "Jewish" non-sectarian hospitals and into organizations working toward a good public opinion of the Jews. Jewry invests disproportionately little capital in the things which make Jews Jewish: education, culture, and the like. Further, Jewish social institutions, such as community-centers, fraternities, country clubs, youth groups, and the like are by no means held to a modest criterion of Jewishness when seeking Jewish community support and participation. Quite to the contrary, religious programs and youth groups—which stress the things that make Jews Jewish—are not even eligible for Jewish community support in many places. Jewish cultural and scholarly institutions, such as the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, receive an annual pittance, for one must do "something for culture"—but not too much when it is Jewish. This is paradigmatic.

the gentile establishment. Rabbi Kenneth D. Roseman, in an article entitled "Power in a Midwestern Jewish Community," refers to this phenomenon as "leaders from the periphery." The leadership of the Jewish power-structure is, he says, "lax concerning Judaism and Jewishness." He quotes Kurt Lewin:

In any group, those sections are apt to gain leadership which are more generally successful. In a minority group, individual members who are economically successful . . . usually gain a higher degree of acceptance by the majority group. This places them culturally on the periphery of the underprivileged group and makes them more likely to be "marginal" persons. . . . Nevertheless, they are frequently called for leadership by the underprivileged group because of their status and power. They themselves are usually eager to accept the leading role in the minority, partly as a substitute for gaining status in the majority. As a result, we find the rather paradoxical phenomenon of what one might call "the leader from the periphery." Instead of having a group led by people who are proud of the group, who wish to stay in it, and to promote it, we see minority leaders who are lukewarm toward the group. . . .

Rabbi Roseman has shown how these facts work in a mid-western community.

Rabbi Richard Rubenstein, in an unpublished essay, "A Rabbi Dies," brilliantly characterized the officers of a synagogue:

His [the rabbi's] officers were a rough bunch. They were all self-made men. ... To the gentile world, they were just pushy, overly-clever Jews, to be watched and not to be trusted. They made their money in jewelry and dry-goods, real estate and small banking. As they made their money they realized they were still regarded as second-class citizens. . . . They never ac-

A MERICAN JEWS want to be Jewish but not too much, not so much that they cannot be men, part of the mythical undifferentiated majority. And herein lies the pathology: American Jews suppose one can distinguish between one's Jewishness, humanity, personality, individuality, and religion.

A human being, however, does not begin as part of an undifferentiated mass. Once he leaves the obstetrics ward—and everyone does—he goes to a home of real people, of history, a home that comes from somewhere and was made by some specific people. He inherits the psychic, not to mention social and cultural, legacy of many generations. Chromosomes differ—and so do the parents, the homes, the ways of life that determine much else.

One can reject one's Jewishness, and many do, just as one can reject one's parents, home, and personal history. One can seek to take over and dominate one's legacy, in all its dimensions, and so to master and shape one's self and

destiny, and many do. But it is an evasion, unreal and unhealthy, to pretend there is nothing to be done, no challenge to be met.

I close on a personal word: I believe in justice, truth, and peace, because I am a Jew. I discover what these things have meant and can mean through my *Yidishkeit*, my Jewishness, and not outside of it. I am not a human being, then a Jew, for these cannot be separated from one another. I am a Jewish-*mensch*, a Jewish human being, no more capable of distinguishing between being Jewish and being human

than able to separate the breath I breathe from the thoughts I think.

I find nothing more “particularistic” about the rituals of the tradition, the specific institutions that preserve the tradition, the particular identity shaped by it, than about my very being: a particular person, myself, son of particular parents, a Jew, heir to a particular way of perceiving and shaping reality. To cultivate “universalism,” I begin within, because for me mankind begins here, with this one person—and never ends.

Part 3

Howard B. Radest

RELIGION simultaneously celebrates its environment and criticizes it—i.e., it is both priestly and prophetic. But, for it to be an effective source of coherence and synthesis, it must first be credible. Alas, for too many, inherited faith has become incredible. The consequence is the failure of religion at a time when it is most needed by a culture in disarray, and aberrant behavior that adopts a religious costume. The celebrative deteriorates into aesthetic dilettantism; the prophetic deserts its platform for secular sycophancy. In desperation, opportunism becomes the rule while here and there an increasing fundamentalist rigidity seeks, foolishly, a return to a yesterday forever gone.

Obviously, there are and will continue to be exceptions to this pattern. Nor do I take any pleasure in identifying the deeply rooted failures of church and synagogue. But unless we face—in all its crudeness and bluntness—the problem of a valid religious survival, we will not be doing anyone any good. One way in which the issue may be drawn is by setting particularist and universalist approaches in religion against each other. I shall try, in the course of this commentary, to assess that polarity and suggest directions away from what might become an utterly empty debate.

Despite all of its problems, the affirmative quality in the modern situation is the latent global awareness that is gradually coming out in the open. Especially (but not only) among the young, we find a vital commitment to the transcendence of inherited boundaries. Their common discourse is of humanistic values—peace, love, justice, human acceptance, and dignity. I find it, therefore, somewhat disingenuous for the adult world to complain of the negativity of our critical young. Their alleged nihilism is really our adult defensiveness against a critical attack that is largely justified. Their seeming anarchism—anti-structure, anti-organization, anti-state—poses a rather interesting problem with both affirmative and negative implications. For example, I would suspect that the prophetic tradition still could be understood as “anarchic” in the same way!

What is really being maintained (often with disturbing vulgarity and without saving courtesies) is that no existing institutional form is adequate to the genuinely necessary

values of our contemporary world. Some, but by no means all, seem to conclude from this that no institution can ever be adequate—a true anarchism. For most, however, I suspect the real problem is the discovery or creation of institutional forms commensurate with the demands of the situation, e.g., the calls for participatory democracy, community control, etc. We hear this too in the cry for “relevance” though it has become something of a cliché these days. And, we will not do justice to the situation or to people who find themselves in it if we dismiss it or if we merely accede to it uncritically.

It should come as no surprise that the moral categories which were appropriate to a nomadic tribe are no longer appropriate. Similarly, life-styles nurtured in a pastoral

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...Life-styles nurtured in a pastoral culture cannot possibly speak helpfully to industrial urban man....

culture cannot possibly speak helpfully to industrial urban man. In consequence, much of religious life — as inherited — becomes rather quaint and certainly is isolated from the general pursuits of life and living. Inherited religion thereby adds to our fragmentation and alienation, i.e., defeats us precisely in those areas where it is supposed to help us be victorious. Deserting institutions which result in such consequences is probably a sign of health and vigor. This heresy at least is a form of sanity. It might be taken as indicative of the affirmative thrust of the critical that they experiment now with this, now with that form of experience which seems to give promise of transcending mere protest and rebellion. Esoteric cults, hippiness, and the drug culture are symptomatic of a valid quest — and we dismiss these or grow punitive about them to our peril. The more sensible response would be to try to identify what is being said and sought. Then, we might be in a position to see if a more adequate answer can be made. We must, in short, overcome our defensiveness, our nostalgic sentimentality, and our self-righteousness. Truth and complacency were always uncomfortable bed-fellows. Yet, how many of us these days (not least of all in religion) are complacent about the truth we “own.” I say this even though aware of the supposed changes and modernization going on within the walls. My own assessment is that these are tactical and not essential reforms. Jazz, the vernacular, T-groups, even much of social action in the churches and temples seems to me to be adopted as a technique of seduction. Change at the center has yet to be admitted. Even the announcement of the “death of God” seems more of a stratagem than a metaphysics and in any case assumes the once living God. More is being admitted about man than is being said about God in that theological aberration. A forthright acceptance of the disappearance of deity would

have to conclude for the invalidity of Judaism and Christianity — but this implication is not drawn by the insiders. Hence, not only theology but integrity comes under a cloud. Atheists for Jesus (or Moses) is tragically laughable.

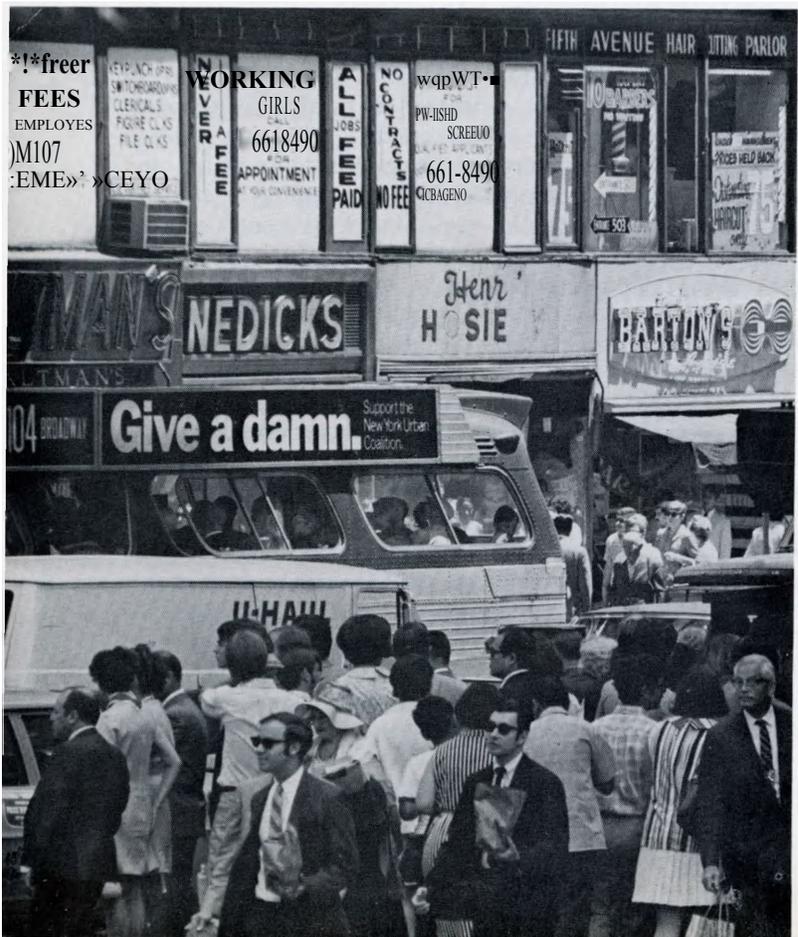
^^^TUIITE RIGHTLY, we can find in the confusions of our time a trend toward global values that are not presently embodied in any major institution. We can identify nearly all inherited institutions — religious and political — as afflicted with sectarian and chauvinistic interest. And, we can, in justice, accuse most of our institutions of practices which fragment the human race. The indictment of inherited religion docs stand up. If the word particularism adequately describes it then so be it. In any event, we cannot afford the luxury of a separated humanity.

But an examination of the indictment suggests directions for solution, however unpalatable these may be to those of us nurtured in interests scarcely recognized as historically and culturally conditioned. What is the situation that a single humanity on an impacted globe must confront? Simply stated, it is the modern fact that we are unavoidably implicated in each other. But even this is insufficient. For we are as a species caught up in a complex environment of other species too which we cannot ignore and still survive. The central fact of modern life may be summed up in the notion of an ecologically interdependent planet. From that fact numerous consequences flow for religious values and their implementation.

Among other things, it means that Old Testament naturology is not merely false but disastrous. Any view which imposes a hierarchy of being and a lord of creation is going to be deadly these days. Any view which encourages man to conceive himself as a stranger to the globe is going to be suicidal (e.g., the Pauline view — to be in the world but not of it). We are either going to recognize our partnership with all the rest of being or we aren't going to survive — and such a recognition in its democratic form goes counter to our Judaeo-Christian traditions. The issue, you see, is not only at the level of social ethics (working out the implications of the brotherhood of man) but at the level of the root values of life itself (the implications of an inclusive naturalism). It is revealing that those so-called Eastern faiths which have taken the fancy of some of us are identified precisely by their doctrines of the acceptance of all being. This is why a mere social gospel cannot really reach through to the despair of so many.

If this latter description of an inclusive naturalistic partnership can be called “universalism” (though I think that it is a misnomer) then we have now defined the issue of this symposium much more clearly. We are not dealing with a confrontation between disembodied values like peace, love, and justice as over against embodied practices and ideals like Christ and Torah. No, we have instead to account for a basic change in perspective and perception — a shift from one view of mankind to another; from one view of this globe to another. To polarize this around a supposed difference between old and young or between liberal and conservative is to miss the radical import of the change the human race is experiencing. For the first time in human

Black Star

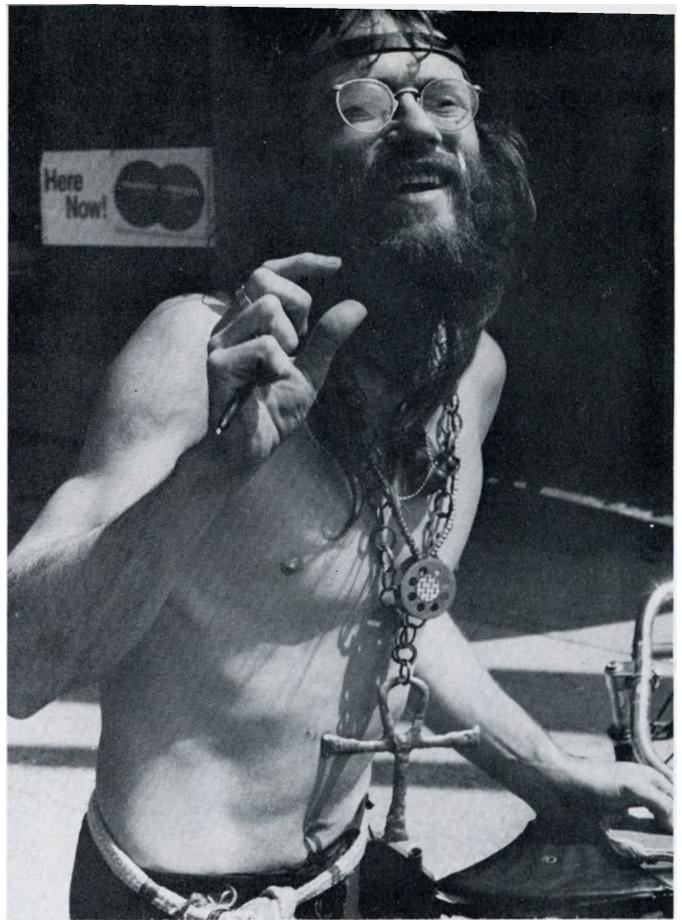


history we must confront a genuinely global future in many dimensions. And that means that all of us are probing new territory with inadequate guidelines. A mood of humility and toleration ought, therefore, to be characteristic of us all — instead of the stridency of attack and defense.

Because a certain hesitancy seems the part of wisdom, I would like now to try out certain ideas without claiming anything more than a suggestive character for them. Does this inclusive naturalism, this globalism, mean that we ought to opt for one new single and inclusive faith to replace the many fragments we have inherited? It is worth examining this even if it is obvious that for the foreseeable future institutional inertia would stand in the way. Strangely enough for someone like me — an Ethical Culture leader committed to the search for common ground, and a Humanist — I am not enamored of a single universal religion. And my concern is one of principle not prudence. The authoritarian possibilities of any single true way are simply too great to be risked. On the positive side, the richness of a nourishing variety seems to me too precious to be dispensed with. Hence, even were it feasible, I would not find it desirable to struggle toward a single global faith.

A second suggestion arises. Would it be desirable to dispense with “organized” religion altogether leaving each individual to find his own way toward his view of life and destiny? Alas, I find this suggestion — the obverse of a single global faith — doubtful too. Human beings require the reinforcement of their fellows. We are still social animals and we need each other in all areas of life including the area of ultimate values. There is, properly, a social dimension to the religious quest. This is something that the anarchic mood misses — but then too much of religious fellowship has become so superficial that one can understand why people draw back from it. Bazaars, fashion shows, card parties, and bingo are a poor surrogate for spiritual community. Moreover, a radical religious personalism would leave the human situation without the organized consistent criticism it needs. The marginal stance of religion — its independence from its culture — is vital. Some countervailing voice against the thrust of the state must be preserved; some disciplined criticism of the ways of the world is urgent always. Even though I am a naturalist, therefore, I am not a secularist. And finally, insofar as there are dimensions of life worthy of both contemplation and celebration (the epic moments of birth and death, the great moments of openness to all of being which the mystics have called to our attention), then some “aesthetic” institutions ought to be around to nurture the life of responsiveness and expression.

I PARADOXICALLY, having suggested that neither one faith nor everyman is consistent with the ecological fact, I would seem to be heading in a rather reactionary direction. But, as is already evident, the many traditional ventures in faith are simply too afflicted with their own history to do at all. Are we then caught with an unresolvable dilemma? If, neither one faith nor many nor none, then what? This seeming trap is escapable by a radical communal experimentalism — and here the young are simply much more attuned to the world than we are. To get at this I will



Black Star

probably be advocating approaches that go against some of our deepest habits in religious life. I will suggest life-long freedom of choice, an appreciative pluralism and experimentalism as our guidelines. And while we have been adopting these (albeit unwillingly) in many areas of life we have resisted them with the greatest vigor in religion.

I am convinced that we need to provide for a vast variety of life and experience; that a deadly homogeneity is latent in an industrial world which demands explicit resistance. Too often, however, while there is pious acquiescence to a notion of variety it is subverted by putting such variety as we do tolerate into a rigid context. Thus, we tend to support a religious pluralism that consists in fixing any given individual in his place and developing a strategy of peaceful coexistence between places. By contrast, I am suggesting a much freer environment in which the person can choose many options as he moves through his life without the trauma of guilt at betrayed eternal loyalties. We must learn to challenge the pressures of exclusivity on principle. It is not merely the avoidance of religious warfare that is our goal, but the much more affirmative end of personal evolution through a freely experienced variety. This would mean the coming into being and the passing away of forms of religious expression — and dispensing with sacral sanctions for the religious institution as such.

Moreover, we must be prepared for, and indeed nurture, a valid religious experimentalism. I hasten to draw a distinction between the experimentalist and the dilettante lest I be misunderstood. By experimentalism I mean the inclusion not alone of varieties of religious experience but an assessment of their relation to religious ideas and to the consequences of interwoven idea and experience. Critical intelligence has a role to play or else one has missed the point of an experiment. As over against a total neutral-



Black Star

ity — everything goes and it is all a matter of taste — we would have to be prepared to assay the validities of any experiment. Here the global humanistic values suggest the sources for criteria of judgment. For example, a religious experiment which led its devotees on a crusade against the unbeliever would be invalidated by those values. On the other hand, types of experience which any one of us might find pointless if not downright repugnant would have to be permitted unless violative of some commonly agreed to general values. Parenthetically, this suggests that the development of a universe of discourse within which such general global values could be used becomes urgent. An era of religious debate looking toward that achievement ought to be on our agenda. There is some sign of its coming in all the talk about dialogue that we hear. But I am afraid that the blandness of religious life is still very much with us and that the so-called ecumenical movements move us in the wrong directions.

Two basic themes underlie this view of a resolution of the issue between the universal and the particular in religion. I am convinced that a dialectic approach is required; that it is never either/or. From time to time we will have to move in one or another direction in order to correct for a distortion, an extremism. But, in any case, the choice is not really between the universal and the particular. It is rather the development of ways of faith which relevantly embody the universal through the particular. While this may have been the way in which some inherited institutions got their start, it is not the way in which they presently express themselves. Institutional inertia, cultural limitation, and intellectual emptiness mark the decay of what was once valid. A period of new creation is, therefore, both necessary and desirable. To return to an earlier comment, there is that much evident and valid in the cultism

.. .The critical young are genuinely caught up in a religious revival....

and dilettantism of the young. What is lacking is the critical intelligence needed for assessment. Instead, they engage in a self-defeating subjectivism and we, in defensive warfare. The critical young are genuinely caught up in a religious revival. We scarcely recognize it for what it is because its forms are different from our habitual expectations.

AND THIS LEADS me to the second main theme. A concept of style is central to an appreciative pluralism of often momentary institutions. By style I do not mean the subjective decision to play an idiosyncratic game. Nor do I intend some superficial mannerisms. Rather, I mean the behavioral expression of deeply held and deeply felt values. Thus, whatever our other evaluations of it, the love-culture of the hippies is a good example of style. The Africanization of the blacks is another. My point is that we must provide for an openness of styles in the religious life. The pedagogy of taste may well be the central thrust of future religious education.

If dialectic and style are basic conceptual themes for communal experimentalism, they are contextualized by history and by global values. Man, who has both memory and imagination, is never thrust into a totally novel situation. This is where valid continuities have their place. Tradition becomes a repository of information not a source of law. I have a hunch, too, that there are emergent directions in the situation which the talk about global (or universal) values identifies. This implies that the openness of our experimentalism will find its boundary lines and does not occur in a totally neutral universe. Despite Dostoevsky, it is not true that if God is dead everything is possible. Those who recoil from some of the extremity of behavior around us might be more sensible if they grasped this historic fact: even the wildest of the current forms has its roots and its commentaries.

The conflict between the universal and the particular in religion is unresolvable, precisely because it sets a battle on a battlefield from which nearly all of the antagonists are withdrawing. More to the point is the identification of a new human situation, long in coming, which makes many of our old quarrels as irrelevant as our old solutions. If we are truly troubled by the emptiness of today's religious institutions, then we will not engage in a wasteful game of "you're another." Rather, we will as honestly as we can and with the humility of admitted ignorance probe the possibilities and problems of a new world. By admitting the questing character of our present situation, we will go further to reestablish connections with our separated populations (young, old, and indifferent) than with all our assertive claims, appeals to anxious guilt, and well-honed time-worn arguments. All the young ask, for example, is that we start by being truthful even about our incapacities. And that's where religious life really begins today, as it has for people in other times and other places. C>