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THE SEARCH FOR TRANSCENDENTAL COMMON VALUES

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# THE SEARCH FOR TRANSCENDENTAL COMMON VALUES

Our contemporary crisis is so profound it is clear that we need to find an integrating, normative consciousness on a planetary scale. Without any desire to be parochial or continue the long tradition of Western cultural imperialism, however, I would like to offer a Western prologomena to a dialogue that must become global, and thus drastically limit my present inquiry: can Western society create — and thereby discover — transcendental common values in its actual social experience? Values which are not based upon, yet are not counterposed to, the supernatural?

But even after eliminating the majority of the world from my analysis, the question I have posed is still so formidable that my answer to it will inevitably be inadequate and sketchy. In addition to all the other complications, there is a generic difficulty: the Devil, as John Milton found out, is a fascinating figure of enormous dramatic power; but making God interesting is quite hard. In the modern world, too, it is easier to identify the devils, the evils, the wrongs than to imagine how things might be made whole again. The bad is palpable and present; the good to come can easily appear to be only a dream.

Hegel understood this point brilliantly in his account of the Enlightenment: “When all the prejudices and superstitions have been banned, the question then arises: *What next? What is the truth which Enlightenment provides in the place of those it has banned?*”<sup>1</sup> As Alfred North Whitehead said, we cannot live on disinfected alone. In trying to summarize the growing secular knowledge of the holy, my work has inevitably been one of “demythologizing.” I cannot, therefore, propose new myths — for myths only function when they are thought to be the truth. We can never, Paul Ricoeur reminds us, go back to “a primitive naïveté”; “something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief.”<sup>2</sup> That is why the integrating, normative transcendentals which Western society might define for itself

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cannot be based on the supernatural. On the other hand, need they, should they, contradict the supernatural?

I can only outline my answer to these questions on the most general level. I will then proceed, if not to the particular, then to a theory of how to deal with the particulars. I will argue that atheists, agnostics and believers who share a common faith in moral values must join together in the search for a politics which will not define those values for people but create the environment in which they are likely to define them for themselves, create them for themselves.

It has, I think, been demonstrated that the political God of Judaeo-Christianity is in his death agony. There may be a new God, or a new version of the traditional God, or new gods, but the functions of that historic God of the West are disappearing. This disappearance has meant the loss of that philosophy for non-philosophers which made an intolerable life tolerable for the great mass of the people, and thus contributed to civil peace; of God the conservative, who legitimated established institutions, and that much rarer persona, God the radical, who legitimated the overthrow of those institutions; of the transcendent symbols and sacraments of human community; of the foundation of all (non-religious) values and the emergence of a hum-drum, routinized, unreflective nihilism; of the motivation for, and an altruistic interpretation of, economic activity; and finally, of a major component of personal and social identity.

Religion, as Ernst Troeltsch, the theologian-sociologist, was candid enough to realize, cannot now serve as the normative and integrating consciousness of modern societies. Functional differentiation and specialization have gone so far, and the social system become so diversified and complex, that even in nations which are historically Judaeo-Christian, the biblical tradition is becoming more and more ceremonial. Even in the state of Israel, the modern sectors are generally secular, while fundamentalism flourishes among the poorer, unwesternized Mediterranean immigrants of the last generation. For these reasons any attempt to “re-Christianize” the West would seem not only doomed to failure but likely to keep Christians from playing a very important role in society.

If it is thus true that the coherent profundities of Judaism and Christianity are incapable of providing the integrative consciousness of modern Western society, it is a thousand times truer that superficial “new religions” — both those invented in the youth culture and turned into multi-million dollar businesses by the mass media, and faiths imported from other cultures — cannot accomplish that function either. It is sobering to remember that an eminent Catholic theologian, the late Cardinal Daniélou, visited the counter-cultural neighborhood in San Francisco and found in the hippies “a fundamental protest against secularization.” They were, it is true, protesting against secularization, and were motivated in part (but only in part — drugs were a more significant factor) by a desire

for the rebirth of the sacred, but their movement was not very fundamental and came and went like a summer storm.

In his solemn, austere and stylized way Talcott Parsons understood this point. Religion, he said, must provide a cognitive response to the question of what we are and where we are in the universe. Moreover, it must constitute a moral community, and a moral community has rules and expectations.<sup>3</sup> Fashionable *gurus* may provide individual relief and release but late-20th and 21st century society can hardly be structured on the basis of faith in charismatic mystics. Another “solution,” more tempting for many, is to turn back to a fundamentalist version of either Christianity or Judaism.

I reject that strategy, but not — as some might suspect — because many but by no means all of the Christian and Jewish fundamentalists in the United States today are politically reactionary. Rather, I view the fundamentalist tactic as a way of surviving in societies in which the religious *a priori* has vanished. That approach can work for some people over a long stretch of time — the Catholic Church followed a version of it from Pius IX through Pius XII — and it may provide comfort to the remnant. But it cannot replace God the Politician. On the other side, there are sophisticated theologians and philosophers, like Schillebeeckx, Küng and Leslie Dewart, who are searching for a modern — demythologized — image of God. They may or may not succeed, but their new vision of God is, precisely, a radical revision of the Judaeo-Christian deity in social, as well as theological, terms.

My first conclusion, then, is that the basic religious tradition of the West can no longer, as a *religious* tradition, provide the core values of Western society. And my second proposition is that Western society *needs* transcendentals.

Note carefully: it *needs* such transcendentals. That does not mean that they will necessarily be created (and discovered in the process of being created). Niklas Luhman’s prophecy of the future might well turn out to be true: it could be that the process of functional specialization has gone so far that, particularly when one looks at the issue from the point of view of an emergent world society, we are entering a time when norms and values in the old sense have become irrelevant. At such a point, the only criteria for choice would be based on technical appropriateness. We would have arrived, as Jurgen Habermas described it, at the “elimination of the difference between praxis and practice.”<sup>4</sup> “Praxis,” in the language of German philosophy, is action (practice) based on theory; practice is merely the adaptation of means to an end. We realize today that there can be technocratic programs for madness — the careful organization of the Holocaust is a monstrous case in point — and science is not its own excuse for being.

Such a “value-free” society could come to pass — it would rest, of course, on that most dubious value, the notion that individuals and

societies can be value-free. Therefore, I am making a normative statement about norms. I am saying that a moral consciousness, a sense of right and wrong and of the purpose of life, are desirable for society even if they are not inevitable. In making this assertion — and I here detour slightly in order to do justice to an old friend and mentor — I am speaking in the best of the Marxist tradition. Marx was a furious foe of moralizing, a vice which he rightly thought was rampant among the socialists of the 19th century. But he has been misunderstood, sometimes maliciously, as a foe of morality, which is something else again. If, as we shall see, he was optimistic, and even naive, with regard to the ease with which socialist values would replace religious values among the masses, he was profoundly committed to the notion of a society organized around values.

Indeed, Lucien Goldmann is not entirely wrong to argue, in *Le Dieu Caché*, that there is a kind of Pascalian wager in Marx: that the proletariat will, through struggle, create a this-worldly transcendental called socialism. I disagree with Goldmann to the extent that he equates Marx and religion, since, in Western Judaeo-Christianity at least, religion involves reference to, belief in, a supernatural order. But if Marx insisted, at the very outset of his career as a revolutionary, that the movement abandon all religious rites, he certainly believed all his life that socialism would be the functional equivalent of religion. More to the point, he rightly understood that a truly human modern society needed a common set of values. Luhman could be right about the path of the future — but this would only prove that we are moving toward an inhuman society.

Since I do not accept this possibility as a fate — and indeed propose to struggle against it in the name of that truly human possibility — I proceed to my third conclusion: the necessity of a common struggle on the part of atheists, agnostics and people of religious faith.

Nietzsche has turned out to be right in considerable measure, for the death of God has indeed pointed toward the death of all higher values. For hundreds of years those values were, consciously or not, rooted in the assumption of an absolute order in the universe, guaranteed by God. When God, morality and religion were relativized by the new scientific, historical, sociological and anthropological consciousness of the 19th century, this also undermined a good part of traditional Western culture. And when, in the 20th century, it became increasingly difficult to believe in optimistic theories of liberal or socialist progress, the crisis became all the more severe. It is hardly an over-generalization to say that masses of people in the West no longer know what they believe.

This radically changes the relationship between atheism and agnosticism, on one side, and religious faith, on the other.

In the 19th century those two sides were at war with one another, and for good reason. Science was undermining religion as it had been traditionally understood; both middle class and working class atheism were on the rise; and the difference between faith and anti-faith was often overtly

political. In the Catholic and Lutheran countries of Europe, there were bitter battles against the established religion, and in more open societies, like England, against the established church. There was a “cultural war” in progress, and, on the whole, the atheists, agnostics and dissident religionists waged a good and necessary struggle.

That conflict has been over for some time and a strident, anti-clerical atheism is as dated and irrelevant as the intransigent anti-modernism of Pope Pius IX. Even more to the point, atheist and agnostic humanists should be as appalled by *de facto atheism* in late capitalist society as people of religious faith. It is a thoughtless, normless, selfish, hedonistic individualism. If Herbert Marcuse was sometimes imprecise about this trend, he was accurate as to the essentials: it was a philosophy appropriate to people bound to the status quo by the “golden chains” of mass society; it was, and is, a passive, infinitely manipulable stratum which provides technocratic rulers a measure of mindless political security. It relates to the Promethean atheism of a Marx as a mouse relates to a lion.

Even more to the point, serious atheists and agnostics now share a common cause with serious believers: a concern for values as such, for a vision of individual and social meaningfulness which goes beyond the latest consumer or cultural fad. An Orthodox Jewish Rabbi understood this fact quite well in a *Commentary* symposium on *The Condition of Jewish Belief* in the 1960's; “It is not modern thought which poses the challenge to Jewish belief,” he wrote, “but the failure on the part of most Jews to think seriously about human experience and the human condition in our times and to do so from a position of rootedness in their own historic tradition.”<sup>5</sup>

That absence of serious thought about the human condition is the common enemy of faith and anti-faith in the time of the death of the traditional Western God. Jacques Maritain, the Catholic neo-Thomist, articulated some of the implications of that fact in some of his writings after World War II. World thought, he said at a UNESCO conference in Mexico in 1947, has been rightly called “*Babelism*”, a cacophony of unresolved and warring ideologies.<sup>6</sup> And since, as he explicitly recognized, there was no longer the possibility of a single faith or philosophy organizing society, how were men and women to act together in unity?<sup>7</sup>

There could be, Maritain correctly insisted, no consensus on basic philosophic issues and world views. That was the problem, not the solution. But there could be a coming together on “common practical notions,” “not in the affirmation of the same conception of the world, man, and knowledge but in the affirmation of the same set of convictions concerning action.” (132) If this was not ideological agreement, it was something more than a joint program for action, since it involved “. . . a sort of common residue, a sort of unwritten common law, at the point of practical convergence of extremely different theoretical ideologies and spiritual traditions”. This, Maritain rightly concluded, was a development of “major importance.”<sup>8</sup>

Many of those hopes for a practical ideological convergence on a world scale were shattered soon after that UNESCO meeting by the eruption of the Cold War, and later, by a colonial revolution which sought to appropriate Western technology in a context of anti-Western values. Thus, it is clear that the proposal being made here is problematic and would require a great deal of time — it is certainly not the task of a single generation, but of generations. And this is true even if the difficulties of seeking such a practical spiritual consensus are somewhat less within the West, with its common traditions, than in the world as a whole.

There is some recent history which gives one reason to hope, despite all of these difficulties. The Catholic Church was not only anti-modernist but anti-socialist from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries. Such ideological intransigence was sometimes modified in national practice — Catholics in England voted by a majority for the British Labor Party long before Vatican II — but it was a major factor in European — and Canadian — political life. In America, one of the reasons why a mass socialist movement never developed was the hostility of the church, particularly as it was transmitted through Irish-American workers in the labor movement. It was, however, in France that this conflict was most virulent. Since the Church fought the Revolution and then the Republic, the Left was religiously fervid in its anti-clericalism.

Immediately after World War II, the Christian Democracy which had been something of an underground and dissident movement in European Catholicism, became a significant force in Italy, France and West Germany. In some measure this was because the Church was now, for the most pragmatic of reasons, attempting to come to terms with the modern world and its political forms. Under the Fourth Republic, the French Christian Democrats, the Popular Republican Movement (MRP), moved steadily to the right, but in the early years of 1945-7 it had a democratic, and even social-democratic appeal. The French Confederation of Christian Workers (CFTC), a union, was established parallel to the MRP. It was committed to Christian (mainly Catholic) social ideals and was anti-socialist as well as anti-Communist.

But over the years, the CFTC evolved more and more in a socialist direction, eventually dropping all reference to Christian principle and changing its name to the French Confederation of Democratic Workers (CFDT). Even more important for my purposes, the socialism adopted by the CFDT bore the signs of the Federation's Christian origins. The truth is that the Catholic Church was never really comfortable in capitalist society; after all, its golden age had been the thousand or so years when it was the dominant spiritual and ideological force within feudalism. In the period of the rise of capitalism Catholicism became, in general, a reactionary force, particularly in comparison to Calvinist Protestantism. Of course, the Church opposed the system largely for the wrong reasons. But after World War II, Catholic's implicit anti-capitalism expressed itself within

democratic and labor organizations, counterposing a communitarian ideal to the centralization, bureaucracy and purely technical rationality of late capitalist society.

In the process Catholic Leftists helped secular socialists rediscover some of their own history. In the period of the emergence of the socialist movement — the first half of the 19th century — most of the working-class dreams of a new society were decentralist and communitarian. This can be clearly seen in some of Marx's early writings — not only the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844-45 but also *The German Ideology*, the first pragmatic statement of Marxism — and it permeated his thought throughout his life. Moreover, this decentralist tendency was particularly marked in France as the Proudhonists struggled for cooperatives, and the unions, suspicious of politicians, took on a syndicalist hue.

Stalinism, that fateful corruption and inversion of the socialist ideal, forgot this history; so did many democratic socialists, who came to see the welfare state, and only the welfare state, as the fulfillment of their ideal. In the first years after World War II, European socialism came to stand for centralized nationalization and planning; when this conception was modified in the 1950's, it was in the direction of an even greater accommodation to welfare statism and technocracy. The student movements of the 60's, culminating in the events of May, 1968, in Paris, rejected both the Stalinist anti-socialist "socialism" and the statism of the social democrats. And so, in a much more complex and enduring way, did the trade unionists of the CFDT. When they became a part of the new socialist movement led by François Mitterrand in the 70's, they were the carriers of a distinctive idea of socialism: worker-managed, decentralized, communitarian. And that trend can now be found in almost all of the socialist parties of Europe.

That French experience might even serve as a model of the consensus being proposed here. It did not involve the CFDT in a repudiation of its origins and an acceptance of the secular, anti-clerical socialism which Catholics had always fought in France. Rather, it meant that both the traditional socialists and the new socialists changed themselves; in the process of uniting they discovered (and rediscovered) new (old) values. I am suggesting something analogous to that as a political-spiritual project for all of Western society. It is not that the religious people are being offered a gracious opportunity to surrender all of their principles. Rather, they are being urged to bring those of their religious principles which are relevant to a secular politics into that politics, to enrich it and to broaden it.

That explains the contemporary paradox: the decline in religious commitment, as conventionally measured by a drop in church attendance, a relaxation of doctrinal rigor, and the like, might actually signal a deepening of religion. In Troeltsch's famous distinction, sects, based on deep and personal faith, give way to churches, which are routine and



conventional. Many participants in the Catholic transformations of the past two decades, however, are convinced that it is now possible for the churches to become more sect-like in the good sense of the term — i.e., more serious and radical about their faith. If that were to happen, churches sparsely filled, but with truly devout people, might represent a religious growth far more significant than the packed houses of worship in the 1950's. It would also mean that the religious commitment to the consensus ideology I am trying to evoke could become all the more profound.

But what about that ideology? I have spoken of the functional need for it, but what is it that will fulfill that function? My fourth conclusion provides the outline of an answer.

This first statement of consensus will, necessarily, be irritatingly vague. It will sketch the general characteristics of an ideal integrating consciousness but exactly what that means will not become clear until politics are discussed in more precise terms. Moreover, this first approximation of the consensus will only make explicit what was implicit in all that has gone before. My method is simple and obvious: to seek equivalents for each of the functions which were historically performed in the West by the social and political God.

In a society in which the legitimacy of political power no longer participates in the sacredness of God, why obey the law or sacrifice one's self for the common good? Jurgen Habermas helps provide an answer.<sup>9</sup> Modern societies cannot integrate themselves and provide an identity for their members in terms of a traditional and objective ideology which the individual would find, in a finished form, counterposed to himself/herself, and through which he/she works out his/her personal identity. Rather, the legitimacy of modern political structures can only arise out of the participation of all the members of the society in the elaboration of the rules which bind them. This is, of course, an ideal that has existed at least since the bourgeois revolution, and it was a commonplace in German classical philosophy almost two hundred years ago. But social and economic inequality subverted the theoretical equality of the citizens. It will be remembered that Marx equated the dualism of the Judaeo-Christian vision of earth and heaven with the split in capitalist society between juridical equality (its heaven) and actual inequality (in this-world). Marx said that in order to make the bourgeois ideal come true, bringing its heaven to earth, it would be necessary to go beyond bourgeois society. Marx was right.

With these qualifications (which must still be elaborated and explored), the first principle of the new consensus is that no law is binding unless the people have had an effective participation in its formulation. The second has to do with community. If society continues its process of functional specialization, without concern for community, not only is effective participation impossible, but so is that common experience which alone can provide the basis for common values. Therefore communitarianism is an

essential component, in both theory and practice, of the new transcendental value.

Thirdly, there must be an expansion of moral motivation based on solidarity. Of course, we cannot move quickly — from a society which has spent four hundred years exalting greed and gain to one in which other reasons for action become dominant. But capitalism, as we will see, is the chief source of the mindless, *de facto* atheism which is the enemy of both atheistic humanism and religious faith. If people cannot find reasons outside of themselves and their immediate interests to make them behave in a compassionate way, they will obviously not find values outside of themselves either. Clearly, the consensus of which I speak cannot be proclaimed by some new Messiah. Common values will either be found by modern people in the course of common action or else they will never exist.

Fourth, even if I imagine this consensus as arising in the West, it must be universal. Luhman is right: a world society is in the process of becoming a fact. Our economics, science and technology long ago shattered national and regional borders. Our consciousness, as usual, lags well behind, and so do our politics. If a global identity is to become a part of the day-to-day consciousness of men and women, it will only happen through a long and painful process. Perhaps it will not happen at all, and the catastrophic nihilism of a Nietzsche, or the technocratic nihilism of a Luhman, will come to pass. But if there are alternatives to those possibilities — a question which will not be settled within the lifetime of anyone now on earth — they require, not an ethnic or a national identity, but a human identity.

These four main elements of a new integrating consciousness are, quite obviously, clichés of Western thought. That is their strength and weakness. It is their weakness because they have either become routine, or pieties that the youngest cynic knows are observed in the breach. It will, therefore, be extremely difficult to get people to take them seriously — and taking them seriously is the precondition of their resurrection from the dead. But their commonplace and faded character is also a strength. It marks them as part of that “Common residue . . . that unwritten common law,” which Jacques Maritain evoked. These are value judgments, in short, which can be arrived at within the framework of practically every serious Western tradition, secular as well as religious. The figures of Adam and Eve, for example, are the common patrimony of Christians and Jews and symbolically express the universality of the human, the common origins of all races and peoples, a view which is also central to atheistic humanism.

But what will turn these principles, threadbare from misuse, into the vital norms of a truly human — and therefore genuinely spiritual — society? Politics. Or nothing.

I take democratic socialism as the point of departure of a search for the moral reformation of the Western world.

Democratic socialism? Isn't that calling upon a cliché to revive the other clichés? Can one seriously propose that an idea and an ideal that had lost its freshness before this century began can be the key to a spiritual revival in the next? Of course not. If democratic socialism were today what it was a hundred years ago it would be totally irrelevant to the project which I propose. But the socialists have learned. I am not talking about the socialism of the 1890's or of the 1940's — which contained considerable truth and significance, but also unwitting falsehood — but the socialism of the 1980's. And I assume that this socialism too will be superseded; it is urged here as a point of departure, not as a finished answer to all problems.

To argue for a desirable social-moral consensus in the broad terms of the last section would be an almost empty assertion. The constituent elements of my proposal have been around for hundreds of years (but not, of course, within the analytic context put forward here). There is only one way to rescue them from the fate of pompous wishes: to show that there is a creditable politics which can turn them from fine sentiments into a practical reality. That means exploring the present and future in terms of the relationship between spiritual crisis and social-economic structure.

Any vulgar Marxist — or other simplistic determinist — theory that the relationship between religion and social-economic structure is one-to-one, that the former is epiphenomenon and the latter the “real” reality, can no longer be taken seriously. We have seen spiritual values both act as cause and respond as effect, as well as all of the gradations of reciprocity in between. And yet, when all of the complications are acknowledged, the fact remains that it is useless to talk about that spiritual crisis and its possible resolution without suggesting, not simply a politics, but a politics which confronts social and economic structures.

Unintended consequences turned a capitalism created by pious men and women into the first agnostic society in Western history. One of the causes of normlessness in our society is a system which has no way in which to value community. Corporate calculus counts a parking lot or an office building as “worth” more than a church or a neighborhood, as long as it will yield a higher profit. In exceptional cases this logic is not followed to absurd consequences — no one has seriously proposed to replace Notre Dame de Paris with a skyscraper — but most of the time it is pursued to anti-social, and anti-communitarian, consequences. Therefore, I would argue, anyone who is serious about the spiritual crisis of late 20th century Western society must also propose politically feasible economic alternatives to the structural sources of the crisis.

More broadly, there is a sense in which post-bourgeois society will resemble pre-bourgeois society in a way which will make ideology — visions of the world, values, culture — more politically and socially important than during the last four hundred years in the West. In the classic capitalist model of society, there was an autonomous economic and social

order which reproduced itself according to its own laws, and did not, like feudalism with its authoritative allocation of social roles and its “just” price, require political intervention. That is why capitalism relied on economic rather than political coercion and helped create the “liberal” (in the European sense of the word) state.<sup>10</sup>

It was this transient — four hundred years long, but still, historically transient — state of affairs that allowed Adam Smith, Marx in some careless moments, and many Marxists habitually, as well as others, to develop a “base-super-structure” theory in which religion (and politics and everything else having to do with values and ideas) was seen as a mere reflection of basic economic and social relations. In this view, all faiths and creeds were matters of secondary and derived importance. The analysis was superficial even in the liberal phase of capitalism, but its plausibility was the result of the fact that its over-generalizations did seem to describe some of those transient facts. That is clearly no longer the case. In every Western society — including those politically directed by conservatives elected to undo precisely this trend — the state has increasingly intervened in the economy and social structure. That is not because conservatives betrayed their principles or because liberals and socialists were bent on creating a Leviathan, but because of the increasing complexity, the national and international interdependence, of late capitalism.

Therefore, as I have argued in *The Twilight of Capitalism*, the choice before late capitalist society is not whether there will be the politicalization of economic divisions — that matter has been settled for some time — but rather, who will make those decisions, how and for what purposes? There was a time when leaders could at least pretend that an “invisible hand” was allocating resources and rewards. That time is now past. Visible hands are trying to systematize and computerize those decisions. *But on the basis of what values?* When a market system destroyed a human community, it did so impersonally, and society could thereby (wrongly) refuse moral responsibility for the actions of its most powerful members. By what norms and criteria will the conscious, political decision about preserving, or destroying, a neighborhood now be made?

If this analysis is accurate, then values — or values disguised insidiously as the commands of technological imperatives — are going to affect our lives more in the future than in the four hundred years of the immediate (and not so immediate) past. It is for that reason that I regard the issue of social structure and spiritual values as of critical importance. And in making democratic socialism the point of departure I am building on the analyses of some of the most subtle Marxists who ever lived. Perhaps more than any other thinker in the Marxist tradition, Antonio Gramsci understood the enormous importance of religion and religious values for the future of socialism. I go back to his work for two reasons: it has a relevance to our future, unfolding half a century after his death; and it shows that the socialist tradition was concerned with these matters long ago, that it has an historic claim in this area.

In the first volume of the Prison Notebooks, *Historical Materialism*, Gramsci made an extraordinary analysis of Marxism (socialism) as a movement of “moral and intellectual reform”.<sup>\*11</sup> He saw it as the continuation of the reform of mass consciousness which was undertaken first by the Protestant Reformation and then by the French Revolution. As an Italian, he was sadly conscious of the fact that his country’s fate had been profoundly affected, precisely, by the failure of that reform. The Renaissance had been an affair of high culture which did not reach out to the masses. As Erasmus had said arrogantly, “where Luther appears, culture dies.” The truth, however, was that out of the primitiveness of the Reformation there came “the German classical philosophy and the vast, cultural movement which gave birth to the modern world.”<sup>12</sup>

The Italian liberals, Gramsci continued, were like Erasmus. Croce and his friends disdained a truly popular cultural movement. It was Marxism “which represented, and represents, an historic process analogous to the Reformation and thus stands in contrast to liberalism. The latter produces a renaissance strictly limited to small groups of intellectuals.”<sup>13</sup> In saying this, Gramsci was not a romantic. If he believed that “all men are philosophers”, that philosophy was not simply an activity of the elite, he had a profound, even anguished, sense of the limitation of that mass philosophy. It was composed, first of all, of a language “which is a totality of concepts and specific ideas, not simply of grammatical rules devoid of content.” Hence it was made up of “common sense” and “good sense”, the latter being somewhat critical and counterposed to the former. Finally, the philosophy of the people was based “on the religion of the mass and in the entire system of belief, superstition, opinion, ways of seeing and acting, which are part of what is generally called ‘folklore.’”<sup>14</sup>

Religion, although a part of this philosophy, is however not philosophy because it cannot be reduced to a coherent unity. It is a “conception of the world and a norm of right conduct”.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in a subordinate social class, there are often two philosophies: one taken from high culture and honored in words; and another, which informs the actual behavior of the class. The Catholic Church, Gramsci continued with a sort of grudging admiration, had always fought resolutely against any tendency toward the creation of two religions, one for the elite, the other for the mass. Socialism had to be at least as daring. It had to understand that when its theories and ideals became part of the mass movement they would necessarily be vulgarized. Indeed, Marxism had to fight a difficult war on two very different fronts. On the one hand, it had “to combat modern ideologies in their most refined form in order to be able to constitute its own group of independent intellectuals”; on the other hand, it had to “educate the broad mass whose culture was [in Italy] medieval.”<sup>16</sup>

This reformation was not, however, simply a matter of preaching a new

\* In Italian, *la riforma* means reform, *La Riforma*, the Reformation. As the text will make clear, Gramsci clearly intended the analogy between socialism and the Protestant Reformation.

socialist morality. As long as anti-socialist ideologies were the official view of the society, they would permeate the popular mind and accentuate that contradiction between its nominal philosophy and the philosophy which informed its action. The moral and intellectual change required that there be a struggle for political “hegemony” (a favorite Gramscian word), for the permeation of society by socialist values which would open up the possibility of a unity of theory and practice.<sup>17</sup> Gramsci also formulated a central point of this essay: “To create a new culture does not merely mean that individuals make ‘original’ discoveries. It means in particular to diffuse critical truths which have already been discovered, to ‘socialize’ them, so to speak, and thereby to make them the basis of vital actions.”<sup>18</sup>

Marxism would do these things, Gramsci argued, first as a “faith”, as an “ideological ‘aroma’” emanating from a complex world view. But what would mark it off from the religions which it at first would resemble is that Marxism would not “maintain the ‘simple souls’ / *semplici* / in their primitive, common sense philosophy, but on the contrary would try to lead them to a high conception of life. One affirms the necessity of an alliance between the intellectuals and the simple people which does not function to limit scientific activity or to maintain a unity at the lower [intellectual] level of the masses, but precisely to construct a moral-intellectual bloc which will make the intellectual progress of the masses politically possible and not restrict that process to a small group of intellectuals.”<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, I have appropriated a great deal of Gramsci in my conception of the function of a new integrating consciousness which will arise in the course of political and social struggles. But what has been learned about this process since Gramsci first imagined it? In a few words: it has become infinitely more problematic, more difficult — but none the less necessary for that fact.

Gramsci wrote at a time when a Marxist and socialist “counterculture” still existed. Central European social democracy before World War I, above all the German Social Democratic Party, had created, not simply a political alternative to bourgeois leadership, but a cultural alternative to bourgeois society. There were Marxist centers for philosophy, art, and theatre, and even if, as Gramsci said, their intellectual content was not always of the highest, they did propose a philosophy for the masses. The Italian socialists, and then the Communists after the split in the movement, inherited that tradition and Gramsci wrote from within it. He was also working within a particularly backward capitalist society with more than a few feudal elements, and which contained an important ideological (and repressive) role for the Catholic Church. Yet he was sensitive to new developments, for example, seeing Christian Democracy as the functional equivalent of a new religious order. (The Church, in his view, traditionally dealt with discontent by creating religious orders to absorb it, as in the taming of the original Franciscan élan.)

Since Gramsci's death, however, capitalism, even Italian capitalism, has transformed itself in a way that makes his perspective much more difficult to achieve. Just as the decline of militant, integralist religion has sapped the strength of an atheism which was its *doppelgänger*, so the "liberalization" of capitalism in the welfare states after World War II undermined, not simply much of the socialist program, but the socialist psychology as well. Semi-affluent societies politically committed to increasing mass consumption remained under the control of even stronger corporate forces than before, and often sought to co-opt rather than destroy the opposition. The people (as Gramsci, Lenin, and Kautsky understood) had always internalized many of the norms and values of those who lorded over them, but mass society now turned this production of a false consciousness into a major industry.

The historic period which began at the end of World War II in the West may now be coming to an end. One of the premises of that "permissive," co-opting strategy was endless growth, and that utopia has been subverted by the fact of stagflation in every advanced capitalist society. It could be, in short, that social and political battles over stagnant or declining resources will revive the old-fashioned class struggles of earlier times. But even if that happens, the cultural complexities introduced by the years between 1945 and 1970 are likely to persist, even if in somewhat subdued form.

There is no question, then, of hiding the difficulties involved in a "moral and intellectual reformation." Indeed, if one were to calculate odds, the chances are that the dominant consciousness of the next historic period will be technocratic, elitist and manipulative. Fortunately, the very immensity of the transformation in progress, and the length of time that it will take, makes any attempt at calculation questionable. There is no alternative to struggling for that reformation since no one knows how the future will turn out. Who would have predicted the tremendous surge in self-conscious dignity on the part of Southern Blacks in the years after World War II? Who would have calculated the impact of Martin Luther King, Jr.? Or the growth of feminist consciousness in the late 60's and 70's?

But what, precisely, am I advocating here? I have suggested a united front of believers and non-believers in defense of the very existence of values. In the light of the relationship between psychological and spiritual attitudes on the social and economic structure, I have argued that a socialist analysis of the need for systematic change has to undergird the attempt to create a social experience of transcendentals which is not necessarily based upon the supernatural. Of course, politics are essential to the kind of a reformation described by Gramsci, but what kind of politics? Should parties now adopt "spiritual platforms"? Or isn't it true that if they did, it would simply mean an increase in a vague rhetoric which would be even more tempting than campaign promises, since it cannot be quantified?

I am *not* talking about parties taking positions on spiritual matters. Indeed, one of the most hopeful developments in European socialism in recent years has been the abandonment of official *Weltanschauungen*. One need not even be a nominal Marxist to belong to any of the socialist parties in Western Europe. That is a positive aspect of the disappearance of socialist counter-faith, for it has opened these movements up to currents, most emphatically including religious currents, which they once excluded on principle. They have, in a very real sense, adopted a consensus model of socialism, an ideological pluralism motivating a unity of action, quite like the one being urged here.

Recent history demonstrates anew that man-made religions usually end up in arrogating divine power to their founders, thus providing a rationale for authoritarian, or totalitarian, creeds. The state cult of atheism in Communist countries is the most obvious, and profoundly negative, case in point. Either transcendentals arise out of the common experience of people, or they will not come to exist. What I propose is not a world-view to be imposed upon a society by political means but one which develops spontaneously out of a social process of self-definition.

Does that mean, then, that one sits contemplatively and hopes that the masses will find some new values in the course of their daily confrontation with life? Not at all. If political religions are dangerous and contradictory, politics can take into account those economic and social measures which are more likely to create an environment in which individuals and communities can work out their own values. Capitalism did not intend to subvert Judaeo-Christian spirituality; indeed, it originally hoped to fulfill that tradition. But today we can read retrospectively the design that was implicit in capitalist reality. This permits us to recognize, and actively seek, a new design which will make a new spirituality at least possible.

I suggest then, that every social and economic measure which is proposed in our politics be examined, not simply in terms of its impact upon Gross National Product and price level, but also in terms of the way in which it hinders or facilitates the values described earlier in this essay. The promotion of *community* would then be a criterion for the effectiveness of any national economic plan. One would be systematically biased in favor of measures which accomplish functions on the most immediate, intimate level of social life (this is the Catholic principle of “subsidiarity,” as well as the libertarian socialist and anarchist principle of decentralization). Secondly, the kind of politics I propose would, at every level, encourage the use of *moral incentives* rather than economic incentives. If, as I argued in *Decade of Decision*, there were a reduction in the inequality of wealth and income in Western society, if, in Christopher Jencks’ phrase, one reduced the “punishments of failure and the rewards of success,” it might be possible for people — the young most obviously, but not only the young — to choose careers, not on the basis of anticipated gain, but in terms of social, psychological and even moral values.



Thirdly, the ideal of democratic participation, which has been so profoundly limited by capitalist economic and social structure, has to be socialized in a double sense. It must be extended to the great mass of the people for whom it hardly exists; it must be made real by tax and other policies which, by the transfer of economic power also democratize political power. And finally, there is a moral dimension to every national policy: it must, as far as possible, be formulated so as to help the most vulnerable members of the human family who live in the Third World — or in the Third Worlds within advanced capitalist societies.

There is no space here to discuss the endless examples of practical applications of these broad principles. My practical proposal here is that men and women of faith and anti-faith stop fighting one another and begin to work together to introduce moral dimensions into economic and social policy along the lines I have described. In the process, the structures of corporate rationality will have to be dismantled since they are hostile to values, and the new structures of a soul-less technocratic rationality will have to be avoided. We are emerging into a much more collective time, in each nation and on a world system. The only serious issue is whether these new collectivities will be the enemies or the emancipators of the human spirit.

The political and social God of the Western tradition is dying. An atheism of fools could rejoice in the emptiness of the heavens he leaves behind; a theism of fools could simply keep singing the old hymns. But the fact of the matter is that God's funeral is an event of such political, and social — and human — importance that it must now unite antagonists from the 19th century in a spiritual-political consensus for the 21st.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, III, 423.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 351.

<sup>3</sup>Talcott Parsons, *Action Theory and the Human Community*, pp. 319-320.

<sup>4</sup>Jurgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissen als 'Ideologie'*, (Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 91.

<sup>5</sup>*The Condition of Jewish Belief*, (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph W. Evans and Les Ward, eds., *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books, 1955), p. 132.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup>Jurgen Habermas, *Zür Rekon*, p. 106ff.

<sup>10</sup>Jurgen Habermas, *Hab Technik*, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup>Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.