

of precipitate action and of passivity, and the awareness that one is fitting into purposes larger than one's own, that America needs to have. These qualities have not been wholly absent in the American religious heritage at its best, though they are certainly missing from it at its worst. And within the American churches it might just be the best which is slowly being recovered.

On the Symbolic Order of Modern Democracy

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SOCIETY establishes a common bond between its members by symbols. Language is man's fundamental symbolic form because the symbols of language guarantee man's active participation in the life of a polity. The symbols of language may rule tacitly and only "by implication," but they are nevertheless agents for social order, perhaps more powerful than the overt rules of a community. It is therefore not accidental that in many societies the word is still considered the prerogative of a citizen who actively participates in the life of the polity; while slaves, women or children are treated as "infants" who have no right to speak since their judgment amounts to no more than an expression of arbitrary preference or animal faith.

Authority, sovereignty, omnipotence, decision as *deus ex machina* belong equally to the basic vocabulary of religious as well as of political language. The striking similarities between religious and political language have of course been stressed frequently by sociologists and political theorists motivated by an effort to "unmask" the religious and political "ideologies." It might be more useful, however, to go beyond the polemical and to inquire whether the parallelism of religious and political language could not serve as a guide for understanding the structure and history of our society; whether, in short, certain tensions in the symbolic canon between religious language and political rhetoric might not indicate a critical state in the spiritual and temporal structure of our society.

The language of religion culminates in the liturgy of the religious community. Liturgy, as the Greek term suggests, enacts the "service" of the people to their divine King; it is service as "worship." The entire liturgy of the Western religions is founded on monarchic symbols. The psalms, which contain a hymnology of the "divine

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enthronization" enacted yearly, serve together with the sacred symbols of the Roman Emperor cult as the basis for occidental liturgy. God is adored as the *rex coelestis*, the King of Heaven; Christ is worshiped as *rex regum*, the King of Kings whose splendor eclipses all *reguli*, the earthly kings. The divine majesty is not an empty formula in the liturgy of the churches.

But what is a king in the perspective of our age? Does not the "royalist" symbolism of theistic religions stand in tension to the anti-hierarchical structure of modern "democratic" society? Is the royal symbol not reduced in a democratic society to a mere petrified allegory that has no root in the consciousness of the community? Is not, therefore, the entire realm of liturgy uprooted from its natural soil and reduced to a revered but barren piece of antique tradition? Does not the language of "spiritual" dominion stand incongruously to the language of "temporal" power? Can the religious symbols flourish if they are not rooted in man's concrete political experience?

To be sure, the language of liturgy is a symbolic language. But a symbol is not a loose "figure of speech." To be meaningful it must permit a point of comparison between the figure of speech and the set of reference. The decomposition of the symbol of divine kingship in our age is therefore related to the general waning of many of the religious archetypes and images that symbolize the structure of political society. In the case of the symbol of divine kingship, the decomposition of the symbol can be specifically connected with the developments of the social and political history of the last centuries.

The ideologists of the French Revolution were well aware that the religious theistic pattern conflicted with the democratic ideology of the Republic. When Voltaire unmasked the life of Charlemagne, the first of the "holy" kings of the Middle Ages, as the life of a criminal and labeled him a tyrant, he not only debunked the traditional image of a king, but challenged the whole sacred order of monarchy—specifically the French *rex christianissimus*, the king who was anointed with sacred oil in the Cathedral of Rheims. Because the declaration of the "natural" right of every citizen by implication

contested the "divine" right of kings, the American declaration of independence and the French *declaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* have become the models for the democratic societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The "natural" rights of every man not only opposed the "divine" right of kings but also presupposed the basic *égalité* of all human beings, demanded the *liberté* from all feudal and patriarchal prerogatives and established the *fraternité* of all persons by executing the king, the living symbol of the divine right of kings.

It should not be too difficult for a generation that has gone through the mills of William Robertson Smith, Frazer and Freud to discover the connection between the killing of the patriarchal ruler and the proclamation of *fraternité* among men. For the "fatherhood of God" is not only complementary to the "brotherhood of men" (as the predominant contemporary view would like to have it) but also antagonistic to it. The interrelationship between the execution of the divinely anointed king and the free association of brethren, between regicide and fraternity, could thus serve as a chapter heading of the spiritual history of Western civilization in the last two centuries. Indeed, Freud's interpretation comes only at the end of the long line in the development of the specifically modern perspective of the structure of society whose milestones include Turgenev's story of the antagonism between *Fathers and Sons*, Dostoevski's tale of the killing of the "father" in *The Brothers Karamazov* and Nietzsche's account of the "death of God." The regicide of the French Revolution was only the beginning of the deicide in the universal democratic egalitarian society. The hiatus between the symbolism of a monarchical liturgy and the self-interpretation of society therefore points to a crisis in the relation between the religious and political consciousness in our time.

II

It should be made clear at the outset that we are not talking here about religious institutions, but about religious consciousness. Institutional religions have always accommodated themselves without

difficulty to various forms of government; indeed the elasticity of religious denominations in matters of political expediency is amazing. They seek the peace of the city wherein they are established and pray for the welfare of the authorities. In the course of time, the institutional religious bodies accept every form of government and try to function within it, whether the constitution is monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic. In Europe the Roman Catholic Church defends monarchies and in the United States the same Church supports democratic institutions. Thus the relation between church and civil authority, between religious institutions and a specific form of government is not the issue at all in our analysis. What is involved is something "intangible": whether the religious and political symbolism of traditional, theistic religions is capable of providing the symbolic canon for the democratic society; or whether on the contrary the democratic structure of modern society does not so affect the traditional theistic symbolism, that the same dogmatic nomenclature actually covers different images of the deity. For the transformation of the religious idea of the equality of men before God into a political postulate implies more than establishing a logical consistency between two parts of a theory, it also involves transformation of a basic element of theistic religion: the image of man.

The theistic religions of the West envisage man in the image of God, but they judge him on the basis of the corruption of this image through sin. To be sure, different denominations stress the degree of man's sin differently. One extreme teaches the absolute corruption of man's nature, while more reconciling doctrines speak only of a weakening of human nature. But to free man's nature *entirely* from the corrupting effect of the original act of sin runs completely counter to the spirit of the theistic creeds whose basic doctrine of man's inherent sinfulness is reflected in the statement of Genesis: "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." The article of faith which asserts that man was created in the image of God is rendered preposterous if one fails to remember that it applies, according to the doctrine of Western theistic religions, to man in his perfect state before the original act of sin. If man is

not seen in the light of his failure and sin, we turn his "fear and trembling" for salvation into a farce. Were it not for grace and mercy, man would be lost on the Day of Judgment — this is the refrain of all prayers of penitence.

What then becomes of the current slogan of the "optimism" of the theistic religions? No one who follows the various liturgies of penitence can see in it anything but a misunderstanding. It is one thing to be "optimistic" about God's victory over man's sin and revolt and quite another to be "optimistic" about man's nature. On this point a democratic philosophy in the tradition of Rousseau differs radically from the theistic religions. For the philosophy of Rousseau and his disciples asserts that man is "naturally" good and not evil, even when put in its most moderate form, that over the long run, *most* men are good. Circumstances, not man's inherent nature, produce evil and, given the possibility of changing the circumstances, there is no limit to man's perfectability. Democratic philosophy, therefore, not only aims to better conditions; it insists that no limit can be assigned to man's evolution, a belief clearly inconsistent with traditional religious canons.

But the fundamental difference between the symbolic structure of a democratic order and the royal symbolism of theistic liturgy concerns the sanction of authority. In the symbolic structure of the democratic order, the consent of the people establishes law and order: democracy implies that the people are the only sovereign, the ultimate authority. The will of the people is always right — or at least more often right than any individual will — and represents the highest law of the state. The government functions in the name of the people and has no authority of its own. In Lincoln's statement on "government of the people, by the people, for the people" the anti-hierarchical symbolic structure of the democratic order finds powerful expression. The authority of the government is not derived or ordained from "above" but guaranteed in a mystical equation of the *vox populi* with the *vox Dei*.

The divine law of the theistic religions of the West, on the other hand, does not derive its legitimacy from the consent of the people;

it is established by decree. To be sure, the arguments for a democratic congregational order of society are not unknown to theistic authoritarian religions, but they are believed to be arguments of rebellion, and they are usually put into the mouths of rebels. For what is it but a program for democratic order, when Korah argues against Moses and Aaron, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" Korah's argument against religious hierarchies is repeated again and again through the centuries, finally issuing in Luther's protest against the rule of the Papacy. The logic of the protest is always the same; all the congregation is holy, every one of them — there is no need for priesthood or hierarchy.

As a result, democracy flourished not in the orthodox tradition of Christian religions but among the mystical heretics and sectarians of the Middle Ages who renounced the Roman Catholic system of hierarchy, attacked the feudal order of medieval society, and tried to penetrate the entire population with the "egalitarian" message of the Gospel. The heretical sects stressed the equality of church members and insisted that elders and preachers should be elected by the local congregations. It was no accident that the Anabaptists, who emphasized the identity of the divine and the human spirit, had to deny the idea of sin. The "religious democracies" which came to birth in England in the seventeenth century felt themselves "blessed communities" in the sense that each individual was ennobled through his fellowship with kindred minds, and this same spirit carried over to some degree into the political democracies which grew out of the religious congregations. The democratic principle of church organization which the Anabaptists were the first to put into practice and which came to the fore again in the sects of the English Commonwealth became in the course of time the basic principle of English and American democracy. Nearly every one of the constructive principles of the sectarian movement came to be written into the Constitution of the United States.

Democracy was therefore, as Rufus M. Jones observes, inherently

and intrinsically "mystical" in character. Only in terms of a mystical experience does a saying like *vox populi vox Dei* make sense without falling into banality. The will and consent of the people cannot be vested with infallible authority unless one presupposes that the people as a community is guided by the divine spirit. The individuals are fused into a living organic group so that each individual finds his wisdom and insight heightened through his group life and team work for common ends. Otherwise, why should the majority or even all of the people be less susceptible to error and crime than an individual? The democratic principle makes sense only if I assume that the general will of the people constitutes a quality that is not inherent in any single person. Such a political order "is at heart a mystical order. There is something more in each individual than there would be if he were operating in isolation. He becomes in a real sense *over-individual*, and transcends himself through the life of others."¹

III

It was the pantheism of the sectarians which prepared the way for deism and hence for the American and French revolutions. The impact of American ideas on France would not have been so powerful had it not been for their common basis in medieval sectarianism. The doctrine of the identity of the human and the divine spirit, the argument that the congregation as a whole is holy, provided the arsenal of ideas for both the American and the French revolts against royal authority. Tocqueville remarked that when conditions in society become more equal and each individual becomes more like every other, men get possessed by the idea of unity and are not content to believe that there is an absolute division between creation and Creator. They seek to expand and simplify their conceptions by including God and the universe in one great whole. For the deistic deity has no absolute power, but reigns over the universe like a king in a constitutional monarchy. In the seventeenth

¹ Rufus M. Jones; *Mysticism and Democracy in the English Commonwealth*, Cambridge, 1932, p. 25.

century the presuppositions of absolute monarchy still seemed so "self-evident" that Descartes could base his central philosophical thesis on the analogy of the sovereign will of the ruler: God had established the laws of nature just as a king establishes the laws in his kingdom. Descartes' argument was enough to convince his friend Mersenne that the laws of nature were indeed subject to the sovereign will of God. At the moment, however, when the divine King was in effect removed from His throne, the "self-evidence" of political monarchy collapsed as well. Mathiez, Aulard and P. de la Gore, who have studied the religious history of the French Revolution, have proved that the cults of the French Revolution, the "Cult of Reason," the nationalist Decadal fêtes, the Cult of the Supreme Being and the Cult of Theophilanthropism were popular illustrations of a deistic philosophy of religion.

But how does one pray to a deistic God who stands perhaps at the beginning of the world, but no longer rules it or takes any interest in man's life? How does man lift his eyes to heaven when there is no longer any "above" or "below" in the universe and everything is on an equal footing? The prayers of the theophilanthropic *Manuel*, composed in the summer of 1796 and actually used in 1797 give us a vivid picture of the difficulties involved in a deistic liturgy. It is the same difficulty that haunts all prayer books of modernistic religions. And just as man cannot pray to a pantheistic God, he cannot use in prayer the political symbols appropriate to that climate of belief. He cannot substitute the term President for the royal symbols. For even if the president's power were to exceed that of a king, it would not rest on his own personal authority. He is president only by the grace of the people, and is therefore not fit to represent the sovereignty of God in the language of faith. An earthly king, however, may be compared with or put in opposition to the divine King because the authority of power is personal in both cases. Thus throughout the nineteenth century the concept of a transcendent God was progressively eliminated hand in hand with the increasing trend toward political egalitarianism, and the issues of politics and religion were reduced to the alternative between authoritarian religion and atheism.

either "back" to a transcendent sovereign God or "forward" to atheism. And the spiritual and political history of the last hundred years is still under the spell of this formulation.

There was considerable movement in both directions. Whereas the political implications of a transcendent deity were developed by the Protestant Kierkegaard and the Catholic Donoso Cortés, the political implications of atheism were developed in different ways by Karl Marx and Proudhon. All four were laymen who were passionately interested in the symbolic order of religion; all four represented two sides of the same coin, for they agreed in their analysis of the function of religion in society. Each received an impetus for his analysis from the revolution of 1848 and each arrived at the same "result": dictatorship, which they unanimously favored against a balanced union of authority and general consent. The Protestant theologian emerged with the dictatorship of the Martyr over the revolt of masses; the Catholic Grand Inquisitor with the dictatorship of the Church over liberal society; Marx with the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as a transition to the free, atheistic society; and Proudhon, the ideologist of anarchism, wanted to destroy the last remnant of authority and elevate the emancipated man to the throne.

Kierkegaard is invoked today by Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish theology because he stressed the impassable gap between the divine and the human, and insisted that the divine is the "totally other" in no way to be compared with the human. He directed his attack against the pantheistic "distortions of God's transcendence," which had come into vogue in Europe since Hegel. But modern theologians and philosophers who hail Kierkegaard are hardly aware of the significant connection between Kierkegaard's theological meditations and his political theory of authority, of the necessary connection between a theology opposing all liberal mediation in religion and stressing "authority" and "obedience" in the political realm. Kierkegaard, who violently opposed the democratic revolution of 1848, was more consistent than his heirs, who extrapolate or eliminate the political implication of his theological assumptions. The bourgeois liberal society, according to Kierke-

gaard, was in no position to govern, since a rebellious antagonism to all superior authority stood at its source. Moreover, the revolt of the proletariat, first attempted in the revolution of 1848, showed that the bourgeois hope of balancing authority and consent was illusory. For with the symbols of authority invalidated by the liberalism of the bourgeoisie, no one was left — neither kings nor Pope, generals nor Jesuits — to stem the revolt of the fourth estate. Only the martyr remained to establish authority against the yelling mob; only his sacrifice enabled the martyr to achieve in death what he could not attain while alive: the taming of the insurgent masses.

For Marx, too, the critique of religion was the basis for a critique of society. Man creates religion and society reproduces an image of itself in the divine hierarchy. But religion also realizes man's vision of himself, if only in fantasy. Religious consolation is only an "imaginary sun" around which man revolves as long as he does not revolve around himself. It was the "task of history" to establish the "truth of this earth" and dissipate the illusory divine truth. The revolt against heaven was for Marx the basis for every revolt against earthly powers, and thus the critique of theology became a prologue to a critique of politics. Atheism is a prerequisite for the revolution that will destroy the power that created all gods.

Donoso Cortés, the heir of the Spanish Inquisitors, would not have denied the accuracy of Marx's description. He would have found in it further evidence for his conviction that the germ of revolution lay in the revolt of man against God: "You will be like the rich" was the formula of the socialist revolution, directed against the middle classes. "You will be like aristocrats" was the formula of middle-class revolution, against the aristocracy. "You will be like kings" was the formula for the aristocracy's revolt against kings. Finally: "You will be like gods" — such was the formula of the first revolt of the first man against God, and, from Adam to the last socialist blasphemers, such has been the formula of every revolution.

Against the current semi-religious ideology of progress, Donoso argued that while liberal society believed that civilization was "advancing," in reality it was taking great strides toward the constitu-

tion of the "most gigantic and destructive despotism which men have ever known." For as religious authority declines, political control must increase, even to the point of tyranny. To Donoso, the revolution of 1848 proved that the choice was no longer between liberty and dictatorship, but between the dictatorship of insurrection and the dictatorship of government. He chose the dictatorship of government since it implied a less onerous and a less shameful tyranny: "The monarchy of the divine Right of Kings came to an end with Louis XVI on the scaffold; the monarchy of glory, with Napoleon on an island; hereditary monarchy, with Charles X in exile; and with Louis Philippe came to an end the last of all possible monarchies, the monarchy of prudence."

If the institution of monarchy could not be preserved by divine rights or legitimacy, by glory or by prudence, then the hour of dictatorship had come — as God sometimes directly manifests His sovereignty by violating the very laws which He has imposed upon Himself, thus interrupting the natural course of events. When God acts in this way, could we not say — if human language can be applied to divine matters — that He acts dictatorially? The dictatorship of God was, for Donoso, the Catholic answer to the fundamental negation made by liberal democracy and socialism: the negation of sin, which could end only in nihilism. Donoso's apocalypse was thus not only the product of the events of 1848, but a consequence of his theological principle that there exists no middle course between God as Creator and Ruler of all things visible and invisible, and atheism. Since the royal symbols were dead he resorted to the symbols of tyranny to describe the divine intervention. And, indeed, anyone concerned with theological argument in our century will notice to what an extent "dictatorial attributes" are ascribed to God in modern theology. He is described as the total stranger, the totally other, with whom no communication is possible from the human side, who breaks into human life with terror and requires total obedience and blind faith. Are these metaphors only symbols, or do they express a definite opinion about man's situation in the present age?

Donoso's vision of the tyranny of God was the reverse side of Proudhon's revolt against God. In Proudhon's antitheism Donoso saw the ancient heresy of Manicheism resurrected, and yet he was attracted by Proudhon, "this awful object of Divine wrath," since both spoke the same language: the language of theology. Just as Donoso emphasized the notion of order as eternal and innate to mankind, so Proudhon stressed the idea of revolution as innate and eternal. The Revolution did not begin in 1789, in a spot situated between the Pyrenees, the Atlantic, the Rhine and the Alps; it belonged to all ages and all countries. And because religion legitimizes governments and makes the principalities of government sacrosanct, Proudhon turned his arrows against the idea of God as the root of evil. Whereas Voltaire, the enemy of theistic religions, counseled the wise to "invent" a deity if God did not exist, Proudhon considered it "the first duty of an intelligent and free man unceasingly to drive the idea of God out of his mind and his conscience," for God, if He exists, is essentially hostile to man, and the society in no wise depends upon Divine authority. "We attain knowledge without Him, our well-being without Him, and a community without Him; each one of our progressive steps is a victory in which we crush the divinity." The ways of God are not inscrutable—many may fathom them. And Man reads in them proofs of God's impotence, if not of His ill will. The idea of God stands for human stupidity and cowardice, for hypocrisy and lies. "God is tyranny and misery. God is evil."

Proudhon wrote his *La Philosophie de la Misère* with an unheard violence of language against the theistic belief that seemed to him like slavery. If God exists, man must be His slave. Since man ought to be free, God cannot exist; and if He does, man will have to kill Him. Whereas Donoso chose the dictatorship of the Church and the authority of the sword because the sword was more noble than the dagger, Proudhon chose the dictatorship of insurrection and the authority of the dagger. Proudhon would have accepted Donoso's description of man as a rebel and chosen to risk everything in the chance of realizing man's absolute freedom on earth. And still,

in Proudhon's Manicheism, Kierkegaard's authoritarian image of God is coming to life. Was not Kierkegaard insisting on the abyss which separates God and man? Did not Kierkegaard claim that Christianity exists "because there is hatred between God and man"? Did he not call God man's "mortal enemy"?

IV

If it is true as Rousseau, the father of all modern political theory, observed, that a state was never established without religion as its foundation, then the socialist and anarchist critique rightly turned against established religion as the foundation of the polity. It was no accident that Donoso and Kierkegaard considered the socialist and anarchist critiques far more serious a threat than the prevailing liberal skepticism that "in its arrogant ignorance despises theology." For Donoso recognized "the strength of socialism" in the fact that it is "a system of theology." Socialism was destructive not because of its critical aspect but because it was above all a "satanic theology." Socialism was at one with the Roman Catholic theology in rejecting the "fundamental error" of liberalism that questions of government were alone important. The defenders of theism who affirmed that evil comes from human sin and that the sin of the first man corrupted human nature, could understand, as they abhorred, the Socialist argument that man's nature was inherently perfect and that only society made it sick. Donoso was fascinated by the appeal of socialism to humanity to rise in rebellion against all political institutions, while he despised the uncertain twilight of liberal ideology.

The dramatic element in the controversy of 1848 has fascinated political theorists in an age that has put "decision" above "consent." Carl Schmitt, the apologist of the Nazi revolution in Germany, invoked Donoso Cortés and tried to read into the oratory of the Spanish Inquisitor his own nihilistic theory of decision. The basic premise of both sides of the controversy of 1848 had been the equation "God is power, religion is authority": Donoso and Proudhon, Kierkegaard and Marx never questioned these equations. Wherever the liberal ideology shared this premise it could live only in an uncertain

twilight despised by the protagonists and antagonists of religious authority and political sovereignty.

Neither the categories of Kelsen nor those of Carl Schmitt exhausted the problem, however. These dilemmas were well understood by Hans Kelsen and Carl Schmitt, two of the most perspicacious political theorists of the Weimar period, a period when Germany sought to build a liberal democracy entirely on a secular foundation. Kelsen considered a relativistic skepticism a sufficient basis for the democratic process of rule; indeed, he presented in his pure theory of law a theory of the state without a state, debunking "God and State" as mythical ghosts that only spooked in the minds of unenlightened people. In short, the divine was eliminated from secular life which required no internal ceremony or rite to represent its mystery. It was precisely this justification of democracy that led Carl Schmitt to conclude that a democratic constitutional state had no legitimizing principle and was therefore doomed to end in a new Caesarism.

For the real source of the democratic belief lies not in these basic authoritarian equations but in the religious and political experience of the medieval and modern sects. There the image of God is not seen in the colors of power nor the image of society in the colors of arbitrary sovereignty. Religion is not authority, but participation in the community; the deity not the sanction of power, but of love. The principle of association that came to the fore in the sects is still a legacy to the future and the question is still open whether a community so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.

The principle of congregational association among men in the religious and political realms has a venerable tradition of its own: it is foreshadowed in the message of the Hebrew prophets and in the theology of Paul which prepared the way for a universal "catholic" church recognizing no barrier between Jew and Greek, slave and master. Paul's doctrine of the unity of mankind "in Christ" did not, however, directly touch the social and political stratification of the Roman Empire. The universal church of Paul remained a "mystical" body that did not "incarnate" itself into the structure of civil

government. Therefore the political principalities and powers could continue to rule as ordained and established by divine authority. Paul established the religious equality of men "in Christ" but defended the status quo of political inequality in the frame of the Roman Empire.

The entire problem of the era of Christian history turns around the fulfillment of the Christian idea of man in the temporal realm. Such a transformation of Paul's religious idea of the equality of men into a political postulate implies more than establishing a "logical" consistency between two human realms; it will involve a transformation of the basic elements of theistic religion. It is a cardinal point of all medieval and modern Free Spirits that the Christian image of man can only be realized and materialized by abandoning the theistic frame of reference — the idea of divine sovereignty, the concept of a divine "Kingship." The Christian man cannot achieve the state of perfection unless he becomes a part of Christ. From the English sectarians in the time of the Commonwealth who, like Henry Barrowe in the sixteenth century, stated that "Christ's government is tied to the whole congregation and extendeth to the action of every Christian," the development leads to the philosophers and ideologists of the French and American revolutions who tried to establish the heavenly city on earth. The religious congregation is still a *corpus mysticum*, a mystical body distinct from the social and political existence of man. In the mystical body of the Church the equality of men is transposed into "heaven." If men should, however, also become brethren "on earth," they must overcome the principle of domination that rules both the spiritual and temporal realms of the old dispensations.