

command: 'Distrust thyself. Trust rather in thy congeries of selves. Look to the peripheries of thy being for that is where life exists.'"

This mentality, however, is by no means as contemporary as it is often thought to be. It goes back at least to the Renaissance bias of favoring the possible over the actual, the future over the past, processes over products, the fluid over the fixed. This is basically a Faustian attitude: infinite striving, the inability to rest at any point of completion, is taken to be a mark of what is divine or morally excellent in man. It is a bias that perverts many attempts to construct a "new reality." I have nothing against process or new realities. What I want to stress here is the danger of total openness to future possibilities. We can only indulge in this kind of indeterminacy at the price of never becoming anything at all. Adventuring randomly among alternate life styles is, in the final analysis,

adolescent and counter-productive. The modern celebration of peripheral being ends in enslavement to pointless change and the immediately given; it dooms us to perpetual reconstructions. Experience thus arranged *seriatim*, falsely assumes that authenticity obtains when life is impregnated with challenges and changes, when human resources are animated by a perpetual crisis of transition.

I would stress further that the reality of the centered self rather than the myth of nothingness is the key to political renewal. Nor does the latter lead in any necessary way to the former. Countless people in our society experience nothingness; there are few centered selves, few authentic personalities, few real people. I am surprised Novak doesn't see that his ideal of the self is no improvement over the pragmatic self he condemns. In fact they are very much alike. But perhaps we can argue about this some day.

SPIRITUALITY AND POLITICS

Literary and Cinematic Notes

James F. Schall

While in Florence recently, I came across an essay, "'Spirituel'—'Spiritualité'" (*Christus*, October, 1969) by my colleague, the French Jesuit Charles Bernard. These terms have a long and intricate history, yet, as Bernard suggested, there are many types of spirituality in the Christian world that are present by right and by necessity within the overarching structure of the same faith. On my return to Rome, I remarked to Bernard, à propos his essay, that I had the impression that spirituality was becoming an ever more important subject in the contemporary world. That is correct, he told me, for our current problems are at bottom spiritual ones out of which our public difficulties arise.

I too am more and more under the impression that our political life is becoming ever less "political" in content and more theological and spiritual, though in a highly confused and even dangerous sense. (Cf. J. Schall, "Caesar as God," *Commonweal*, February 6, 1970.) Thus I am less than enthusiastic, I must confess, over the religious quality and intelligence of

those secular movements which seem, at first sight, to be most obviously spiritual ones—the anti-war, anti-poverty, anti-pollution, and anti-population cults of recent years. It is not that I do not think there are real problems involved in these areas, but I sense, rightly or wrongly, that these contemporary ideologies are actually based upon a theology and a spirituality that somehow seem to have distinctly anti-human presuppositions.

Unfortunately, there is very little hard thinking about the intellectual origins and implications of these movements. Furthermore, if I understand them correctly, these movements are not conceived in the West as pragmatic "political" events with limited scope and value, but as moral and even mystical missions in which man's "holiness" and "wholeness" are somehow involved. I always find myself suspecting that I am really dealing with religion and not politics when I am in contact with these issues.

For this reason, then, I am inclined to believe that this "spiritualization" of public life, which at first sight might seem most attractive, is not modeled upon the wide varieties of "spiritualities" within Christendom, but rather on the classic "heresies," practically all of

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which had spiritual origins. "In the twentieth century," the late Waldemar Gurian wrote, "heresies appear not in the form of theological doctrines, but as explanations of history and social development" (*The Catholic Church in World Affairs*, Notre Dame, 1954, p. 4). It is my feeling that the public cultural life of the Western world, and especially in America, must be more and more understood as a manifestation not of "politics" but of historical and social theologies and their deviations. We are in the process of forgetting the classic origins of Western politics as an enterprise of this world as distinct from theology and metaphysics.

Christianity has always held that the greatest danger to man comes from those beliefs which propose an ideal too spiritual or too mystical for him. Man is most defenseless precisely against "the holy." The "temptations of the flesh," so to speak, have never been considered particularly dangerous or disruptive—at least in comparison with those doctrines and men claiming absolute purity and sanctity. The "sinner" in this sense has always been much closer to Heaven than the "saint," because the sinner remained close to the human reality of finiteness and weakness. The great sin was always self-righteousness and pride—essentially spiritual phenomena. The harlots and the publicans enter the Kingdom before the scribes and the pharisees.

James Reston sensed some of this, I think, in his Easter sermon. (The columnists are, after all, the modern Scottish divines.)

The problem now is that there is a crisis of belief, no common faith either in the old religious doctrine or in the new secular rules, no agreement about the facts, no common moral or intellectual discipline. . . .

Still, the individualists on Park Avenue this Easter weekend were trying to say something about the human spirit, and essentially what they were saying is optimistic. They were rejecting the conventional wisdom of politics and even manners in America today, and at least some of them are searching for a new morality and equality, which is not so different from the old religion.

They may be right or wrong but at least some of them are crying for a new religion (*Herald-Tribune*, Paris, March 30, 1970).

But Reston wants to retain the secular advantages of belief without facing the fundamental task about deciding the validity of the theological concepts that justify it.

The Italian journalist, Nicola Abbagnano, is quite clear that the origins and content of today's secular movements do have such theological implications:

In the Christian sphere, the multiplication of currents and problems is directly connected with the diverse modes of understanding God. The "theology without God," the new "catechisms," the various "churches of the poor," are examples of these currents. And in the context of each of these, as in the more traditional ones, these are proposed as diverse solutions for problems which are, by themselves, evidently only of a marginal character, as those of sexual freedom, limitation of births, divorce, celibacy of the clergy, peace, war, the struggle against poverty, and, in general, of the cult of rendering to God.

These concrete problems are the rock of comparison for the disparity of the idea of God which sometimes exists in the ambient of the same religious community or, better, of a religious community which seeks to remain the same. When these problems lead to diverse and opposite solutions, it means that there are diverse and opposite concepts of God (*La Stampa*, April 4, 1970).

Here too, however, the Western political tradition, precisely because it separated the things of Caesar and those of God, recognized the diversity of practical solutions to public problems. There was no one solution, but a variety according to which the community was free to choose. Only when political solutions became merely surface manifestations of the ultimate nature of things was it necessary to take a specifically theological stand in civil society. What marks our time is the reappearance of absolute theologies in the guise of contemporary politics. In this sense, we are not being faced with a variety of "spiritualities" but with social "heresies."

In ordinary circumstances, I suppose, we are culturally forbidden from speaking about such "heresies." Yet, we can never avoid for long the notion that ideas have consequences which sooner or later manifest themselves in the public order. By now, our time has surely had enough experience with "ideas" made flesh in political movements to realize that we cannot remain indifferent to the concept of man and God upon which social movements are based. Furthermore, one of the essential points of Christian theology is that man is historically and metaphysically free enough to choose social systems which will deform and imprison him. In fact, Christianity seems to suggest that the social order is especially vulnerable to theological deviation because the idols opposed to God can only find their validity and power if they are made visible in the world of men. And since the "city" is that human institution which is most properly "of man," it becomes the logical and necessary place for the erection of false gods. Thus, the content of "heresies" does

make a difference; we are never free from the intellectual burden of examining the direction and spirit of the political movements of a given era.

Undoubtedly anyone who is used to reading books as his primary source of information would be loathe to accept the notion that "heresy" has suddenly become a vital topic. But Marshall McLuhan is surely correct: The masses of men are no longer formed primarily by reading, if indeed they ever were. Indeed, the reality of "heresies" is quite different when the area of the film is considered. Last fall in San Francisco, I saw the movie, *Alice's Restaurant*, a picture I rather liked. Yet I had the uncanny feeling that I had heard all about this mood of the film before. The more I thought about it, the more I was sure that I had read the central thesis of this movie in *Denziger*. In fact, I distinctly remember telling someone that the movie settled my notion that I was going to teach a course entitled "current heresies" and that the first lecture would consist in seeing *Alice's Restaurant*. For, it seemed to me, this was a modern chiliasm, a Joachim of Flora, and a new spirituality. I was even more convinced of this other-worldly atmosphere after I attended the November 15 Peace Moratorium in San Francisco followed by a seeing of *Hair*. What I found especially fascinating in all of this was the almost total collapse of any historical sense among the believers in these movements. For it is history which prevents old heresies and errors from rising again, and the necessary presupposition for any new enthusiasm is the loss of a feeling for the past of our civilization.

Returning to Italy this spring, I made it a point to see quite a few films—a series by Jean-Luc Godard, some Pasolini, Truffaut, Fellini, the excellent films of the Brazilian directors Ruy Guerra and Glauber Rocha (*I Fucili, Il Dio Nero e Il Diavolo Biondo, Antonio das Mortes*) and Luis Buñuel's *Via Lattea*.

The Buñuel film is most significant. I mentioned *Denziger*. Anyone who has studied theology in a formal fashion knows that the basic handbook in which Christian "heresies" are listed is *Denziger*—the name of the nineteenth-century compiler of the *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum, et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*. This handbook is a collection of the main historical decisions of the papacy, the councils, and some episcopates. For many, this may well be the world's dullest reading. Nevertheless, *Denziger* has provided the basic text for Buñuel's remarkable film in which the heresies and enthusiasms of the past come alive in a very contemporary way. The Brazilian films were also placed in a background of religious heresy and modern revolutionary psychology as were Godard's *La Chinoise* and *Week-End*.

I mention all of this because it seems to me obvious that film-makers, who must make visible the beliefs and motives of contemporary man, see more clearly than most of us the theological levels of our society. And what is significant is that these current fashions are, in one form or another, often classic heresies about man and God. The films are not wrong in their instinct about the religious content of the fashionable social philosophies of this generation.

The heresies and
enthusiasms of the
past
come
alive

This spiritual level of our contemporary politics can be seen from another viewpoint perhaps. Edward C. Banfield seems to have touched one of the essential issues when he suggests that American civil turmoil is caused not so much by actual poverty and hardship as by the imposition of upper middle-class expectations about what the poor should have (*The Unheavenly City*, Little, Brown, 1970). In other words, an unrealistic, other-worldly concept about what all men must have, here and now, is the major cause of social disorder. And it becomes clear that essentially spiritual attitudes towards this world's goods have contributed greatly to our crisis. (It is interesting to reflect that the classic Christian attitude towards riches was designed precisely to prevent this destructive aspect of the unlimited nature of human desires.)

In recent years, theology has shifted chaotically from a death-of-God thesis, to a theology of hope, to a theology of revolution, without rhyme or reason. There are encouraging signs recently of a shift to a theology of play, festivity, and beauty. The death-of-God theology found man's dignity and holiness in his earthly task. It was scientifically and technologically oriented and accused Christianity of being too other-worldly, of ignoring the earthly task. But it is no longer necessary for Christianity to "refute" such accusations. For just a few years after the death-of-God, we find the naturalist theology of ecology and

anti-pollution now accusing Christianity and science of being in cahoots to strip a "divine nature" of its mystery and beauty. The theology of hope too had worldly origins and tried to salvage history from the clutches of divine alienation. But current revolutionary theology will have none of this; it has a great contempt for what the human race has produced in its past, together with an anti-intellectualism which insists on action instead of thought. Its ideals and motives are apocalyptic and messianic, capable of forming a sort of super-charged community exempt from the critical nature of this world's realities.

This turmoil in theology is often spoken of as a crisis of religion. However, I believe that Bernard Lonergan was more correct when he remarked that we do not have so much a crisis of religion as a crisis of contemporary culture (cf. B. Tyrrell, "The Phenomenon of Bernard Lonergan," *America*, March 21 1970). It is rather here where the religious crisis lies. What is changing is the secular world, which is becoming spiritualized and radicalized without a sound or consistent faith or theological heritage.

Several years ago, Denis de Rougemont noted that in the Orient everything appeared as sacred. The visitor saw there almost only holy places and shrines. In Europe, the scene is still dominated by the bell towers and the statues and the religious places. However, "in America," he continued,

there is not a single sacred place outside the churches with their luxurious false gothic, towered over by the skyscrapers. There is not a single place of pilgrimage nor a real chateau. Plains and immense cities, denuded of mystery, cleaned of all trace of primitive religion or of veneration for things, for plants or animals, or the supernatural. But there is a moral comfort and a material luxury largely shared by all the classes (*L'Aventure occidentale de l'homme*, A. Michel, 1957, p. 22).

Perhaps this is it. America has always felt that its mission was to teach man how to provide an abundance for all men. Now it may well be in search for its own holy places, its own shrines and its pilgrimages. "Earth Days," "rock festivals," ecology, the revolt against science and technology may well be a sign that we have eschewed the holy too long—or perhaps that we are rejecting our belief that the dignity of the individual man in our political tradition was the ultimate foundation of our economics and politics and holiness.

Yet, "the holy" is not a politics—or at least not a politics of this world. "We must get away from the notion that the democratic process is designed to bring perfection," Postmaster General Winton Blount recently remarked in a classic understanding of American politics. "It is designed to permit improvement"

(*Time*, May 4, 1970). There is, to be sure, a kind of valid, pragmatic spirituality of the marketplace and the political hall, which seeks to create a finite world of abundance and distribution. Historically, this is what the commercial and industrial revolutions are about. Only if the radicalization of American and world politics fails, I suspect, will there be any real abundance for man, not to mention real liberty. Alberto Ronchey's comment about the paradox of May Day rhetoric is probably correct—in ten or twenty years, the so-called working classes for whom the Day was invented will be reduced by the evolution of economic society itself to a very small percentage of the population (*La Stampa*, April 30, 1970).

But the economic and technological orders are, in a way, frail things which must be protected from religious enthusiasms if they are to do their tasks for the benefit of men. What our society is in vital need of is a concept of religion and nature that can again place its mysteries and its enthusiasms—admittedly things we need—where they belong—which is not in the marketplace or in the forum. Perhaps a theology of play and festivity is the direction in which we must go, for our primary task lies in making human life and nature itself meaningful in a world in which work and production come to be displaced by the advance of society itself. This is why, too, the exploration of space is now, for man, a spiritual necessity.

Indeed, the further paradox is, as Buckminster Fuller never tires of pointing out to a public opinion that is slow to listen, that the major solutions to our earthly problems will undoubtedly come from the results of our space efforts. (Cf. *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity*, Bantam, 1969.) It is precisely for this reason that the anti-technological aspects of modern revolutionary movements are a danger sign for the future of mankind.

The "heresies" of recent times in one form or another all seem to be based upon a belief that the theological attributes of Heaven—that is, perfect peace, eternal justice, continuous ecstatic love—can and must be achieved here and now in visible political society or else men must turn and destroy it because they cannot tolerate anything less than the perfect and will not allow others to do so. Aristotle had already warned that something like this would happen if men did not clearly separate politics and metaphysics, because this-worldly politics is no match for the drive to the ultimate if that drive takes political form.

Why a basic spirituality is absolutely necessary for politics, then, is to prevent politics from becoming a

radical mysticism which finds its outlets in political revolutions. That something like this has been happening seems to me evident. What it ultimately means is that our politics and our economics will be prevented from performing their natural tasks because they become infused with the theological and religious uncertainties and enthusiasms of a people that has no longer a religious realization about the limits of man and of his earthly life. In the end, then, politics is not a spirituality, but it cannot survive without one.

What is heresy in our tradition is that we can discover our spiritual reality and justification in political movements designed to transform the world. What is orthodox is that the world is a place for man and that

it can be made into a better place for him and his fellows. In other words, paradoxically, the political and spiritual dignity of man is safer and more valid when there is some injustice and inefficiency, and even corruption in the human city. The only real alternative to this is the advent of the "holy city" on earth. There are many of our contemporaries who are prophesying that it is about to come through their new-found political vision. On the *Via Lattea*, on the pilgrimage to Compostella, this too is one of the heresies: "*Quod homo potest ita finalem beatitudinem secundum omnem gradum perfectionis in praesenti assequi, sicut eam in vita obtinebit beata*" (Denziger, #894). I wonder if Buñuel remembered to quote it.

VIETNAM — — AND BEYOND

Donald Brandon

The military utility of the limited Cambodian campaign should be clear to those capable of assessing the facts. It will help protect the withdrawal of American troops, and reduce the Communist capability to launch attacks in the southern half of South Vietnam. It will, in short, help the process of Vietnamization. On the other hand, the fate of the Lon Nol regime in Phnompenh remains in doubt. Should South Vietnam, and perhaps other countries in Southeast Asia, help the new Cambodian government after American withdrawal, it could withstand the efforts of Sihanouk, Hanoi et al. The venture gained time at least to shore up the Lon Nol regime, while not assuring its survival. Nixon's expressed hope that the venture might prod Hanoi into serious negotiations can be dismissed in the light of North Vietnamese patience and determination.

One of the most important and least commented on aspects of the Nixon decision concerns his effort to signal Moscow, Peking, and Hanoi that America is not a "paper tiger." In the Middle East as well as in Southeast Asia, Nixon's "low profile" has been responded to by "high profile" efforts by the Communist countries. The President recalls the miscalculations which led to World War II, and more recently the

mistaken impression of President Kennedy's weakness which led Khrushchev to precipitate the Cuban missile crisis. He wants to avoid similar miscalculations at present, and his Cambodian venture was in part designed to achieve this obviously important objective. Informed students of contemporary history should understand this, although university students who are ignorant of the nature of international politics and foreign policy of course don't get the point.

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Shortly after the second world war, Herbert Agar wrote in his *Price of Power* that "America's long preserved virginity of mind has at last been deflowered by the facts of international life." It is apparent from the history of the cold war that a large number of adults as well as young people today have not in fact lost their illusions. Senator Fulbright continues on his bizarre path, Senator Mansfield wins majority support in the Senate for a resolution calling for a substantial reduction in American forces in Western Europe. Other examples abound at present. Old myths persist in the face of old realities of international politics. It is possible that the Vietnamization gamble will fail, and Indochina will be taken over by Hanoi. This would result in more "wars of liberation" in that area and elsewhere in the Third World. It is possible that the American people, regardless of the outcome in Indochina, will move irrationally to a general withdrawal from international responsibility. Worst of all, though less likely, Moscow and/or Peking could make a major miscalculation which would result in general disaster for all mankind.

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