ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD OF TOMORROW*

by

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There is a profound sense of urgency and a deep sense of hope as to the possible encounter between Judaism and Christianity, and of both the sharing and the creative disagreements which I hope can be possible in the future of this dialogue. I would like, therefore, to divide my reflections on this subject into three parts: the first will be an attempt to define common experiences in spirituality - a spirituality that I think both Jews and Christians share - but I will speak from my experience of that spiritual dimension in contrast to Greek philosophic thought, to indicate the points of distinction between a philosophic world view that grew out of Athens and a philosophic world view that grew out of Sinai. The second part will deal with the fusion of Athens and Sinai, where I believe this fusion to have been creative, as well as where it has been destructive. In the third part, I will try to indicate how, in the future, Judaism and Christianity must face the modern world and the challenges which that world presents to them.

THE MOSAIC AND THE PLATONIC VISION

1. *Anthropological differences*

There are two important differences, one anthropological and one theological, between the Platonic and the Mosaic vision of man's spiritual destiny. To the Sinai vision, spirituality has a common matrix as an essential element of its character. History is the arena in which God and man meet in their essential passion and essential relationship. In some very mysterious way, the God of Being desires to be in history, desires to be reflected in the life of man, desires to meet man within his "lived" reality. In contrast to the Sinaitic matrix of history in community as the arena for the spiritual encounter, the essential realm in Plato and Aristotle, as they influenced religious thought, was nature rather than history. It is through reflections upon nature beginning with an empirical world that one begins to ascend the ladder of spirituality to a trans-empirical world. One finds this concept in the *Symposium* of Plato, and above all one finds it in the *Republic*. In the allegory of the cave in Plato we see the human world as a world of shadows, as a world of unreality; only in breaking out and turning

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one's face upon the human condition does one find the way towards the truth. Plato, in Book 7, says: "It is for us as founders of a commonwealth to bring compulsion to bear on the noblest natures. They must be made to climb the ascent to the vision of goodness, which we call the highest object of knowledge, and when they have looked upon it long enough they must not be allowed, as they are now, to remain on the heights, refusing to come down again to the prisoners, or to take any part in their labors and rewards, however much or little these may be worth ... You will see then, Glaucon, that there will be no real injustice in compelling our philosophers to watch over and care for the other citizens."

There is a sense in Plato and Aristotle, then, that spiritual perfection is an autonomous role; spirituality – the ultimate excellence of man – is an individual experience based upon the ascent through grades of knowledge. It is an achievement, a concern with truth; the idea of goodness is that which brings man to perfection. The relationship between cognitive contemplated excellence and the world of men is one to which the philosopher is compelled to return; this return is in some way demanded of him. though personally it does not add to his perfection. In his book *Merit and Responsibility,* Atkins has shown (and I believe correctly) that neither Plato nor Aristotle offered any fundamental justification, in terms of their own conception of excellence, as to why the philosopher should return to community, because fundamentally community is not an essential feature of his own perfection. In the Sinai notion, on the other hand, the prophet is born from the matrix of community. In fact, I would say that prophecy is itself a correlative term. A prophet's essential role is to speak and to bring a message to a community. If we can draw an analogy between the cave story of Plato and the Biblical story, we can describe Moses as being on the top of the mountain and the people below worshipping the golden calf – a world in which community lives in shadows, and the enlightened one, the prophet, is alone contemplating the ultimate reality. There is a very beautiful *midrash* in rabbinic literature which says: "Moses, go down; anything I have given you is only because of Israel." Therefore, if Israel is dancing around the golden calf, that reality must be faced. One senses often the pain of Moses saying: "I cannot carry this alone." What one senses even more often in the Moses story is the passion of the prophet's commitment to community. This is made explicit in the Jethro story, in which his father-in-law has come to see Moses (Ex. 18). He finds Moses constantly involved with the community, constantly answering all their questions, and he says to Moses: "You cannot carry this." Here there is a definition of the philosopher-prophet as one who cannot contain his passion for the community, who cannot live alone; there is an inner drive in his very being to find himself and to express himself within the nature of this collective reality. This is fundamentally the difference between history and truth: if nature, which leads to the essential notion of truth, leads to self-sufficiency in the spiritual life, history, on the other hand, leads to community, which in turn leads to awareness that one's self-realization as a spiritual human being has to be within the matrix of community.

There are yet further anthropological implications in the two traditions. To Plato, truth is achieved through recollection, and anamnesis to Plato is the way in which men recollect that which they already know. The function of the spiritual teacher in Plato's *Meno* is that of the midwife, in some way helping his student to give birth to that which the student once knew; the teacher is merely a midwife, helping the person to discover that which he already had. Cognitive recollection is the ground of spiritual perfection. In the Biblical framework, however, the fundamental task of the teacher is not to help the student discover that which he already had, but rather to help the individual person to realise that his identity is only whole if it is anchored to the historical reality of his people. The essential element is not cognitive recollection but historical recollection, to continue in the consciousness of the memory of Sinai. In Deuteronomy 4, the important message is that you must make known to your children and to your children's children the day that you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb.

In a very significant way, the teacher in Talmudic Judaism is a parent. There is a sense in which the student in Plato is self-sufficient; there is a sense in which the student in the Biblical tradition is not self-sufficient. On the contrary, there is a profound role of the teacher as a parent who gives birth to memory, who gives birth to the child's past. The function of the parent and the function of the teacher is to introduce a broader dimension of memory and history and past into the student's consciousness. In the moment of his birth the thing that he must be given is a broader memory through which he can define his own self-reality. Therefore the source of evil to Plato is ignorance: the source of evil in Biblical tradition is the absence of memory. When one loses one's memory, when one loses one's historical identity, then one loses the source of morality. This is the reason for the urgency of transmission within the Biblical tradition. In Biblical ethics, or in the classical ethical statement in *Pirqei Avot* in the Talmud, you will notice that ethical statements do not contain merely statements of moral maxims; before they begin to discuss ethics, they place ethical considerations within the context of the *shalshelet ha-kabbalah:* Statements begin with Moses receiving the Torah at Sinai. For example, *Pirqei Avot* is a tractate on ethics which deals with the spiritual training and development of the *chassid*, the pious man. It does not begin with a maxim, with the norm of ethics; it begins by placing all ethical discussions within a context of a transmission nexus beginning with Moses' encounter on Sinai! He transmits it to Joshua, Joshua to the judges, the judges to the prophets, the prophets to the men of the great assembly, and then they begin to speak

Before there is content, there is memory; before there is a text which tells one what to do, one is first informed that the whole discussion must be placed within *Heilsgeschichte*, within a whole framework of history which begins with Sinai and points ultimately to redemption.

2. *Theological differences*

These are the *anthropological* distinctions: self-sufficiency of the intellect in Plato, dependency on memory in the Biblical history, memory as opposed to truth, transmission as opposed to merely being the midwife. But there are also *theological* differences. Theologically, Plato's God is discovered fundamentally via the road of nature – nature reveals the autonomy and wisdom of God – whereas the Biblical model reflects the mystery of creation as it finds its consummation in the act of revelation and redemption. The Biblical God of nature consummates his creative activity in nature through history; history is the scene of the ultimate realisation of his wisdom and self-expression.

Theologians have been bothered by the problem that God in some way needs man, in some way wants to be in the world of men. It is embarrassing, and indeed the whole Biblical description of the jealous God was embarrassing to medieval philosophers, because jealousy somehow reflects urgency and desire, need and concern. God desires man's response to him, and he is jealous when it does not come, when his love is not in some way responded to. Because of this distinction between nature and history, between a self-sufficient God and a God who is in search of man (to use Heschel's language), we have as well a fundamental point of departure which is crucial for our discussion here. The reality of the *Biblical God* – the God of history – is to be testified via the reality of man. "You are my witnesses;"[3] the concept is that men bear witness to the reality of God, that man's existence proclaims the reality of God. God's existence must be proclaimed, his existence must be reflected out of the lived reality of the community. I Am because of the way you are. The reality of the *God of nature* is not a mediated reality, his reality and his perfection are not dependent upon men; he bears witness to his own truth. There is a total self-sufficiency and a grandeur of perfection, and this is what attracted both Christian and Jewish thinkers and philosophers in the Middle Ages; there is a grand perfection to this autonomous God whose perfection is self-sufficient, whose truth is not dependent upon the reality of man. Therefore, when Maimonides wants to prove the existence of God, he says that he will do so even on the premise that the world is eternal (the premise of the eternity of the universe is one which rejects the whole Biblical world view, because eternal necessity cannot make intelligible the world of history). But Maimonides is somehow

[3] Isaiah 43:10; 44:8.

driven to prove God's reality autonomously from history, and this is the influence of the profound theological world view that comes out of Athens, whereas the Biblical world view does not contain the autonomous perfection of God. Rather, God selects a people through which his reality will be known in the world – the concept of election. Election in turn implies not so much who these people are, but more importantly, implies a God who seeks to be revealed through the quality of life of men.

AN ATTEMPT OF SYNTHESIS

Having discussed certain theological and anthropological distinctions, we turn to the processes whereby Christian and Jewish philosophic thought attempted a synthesis. Here I want briefly to point out two aspects. This synthesis between these two world views was in some ways very creative, and in some ways, I believe, destructive to the spiritual life. It was creative in the sense that one could not build a spirituality based upon history and memory; it ignored the empirical world of truth. The creative aspect of the synthesis was that it did not allow religious man to establish a conception of reality which was impervious to natural reason. It did not allow men to build their conception of meaning totally insulated from other sources of experience. This synthesis of spirituality developed the humility of religious men to take seriously the notion of truth that came out of a source which is not validated by revelation; it forced revelatory man to confront his world and to try to find the way in which he could make intelligible his spiritual world view in relationship to other criteria of meaning. It shattered a complacent insular notion that man's memory and history are the sole defining features of reality; it opened spiritual man to broader conceptions of truth and knowledge. This aspect – "the shattering of insulation" – was a profound contribution of the synthesis between the Biblical world view and the Greek philosophic world. However, there were profound negative features. It adopted the language of truth; it in some way co-opted Athens into its own system, and theology, or the religious experience, ceased being based essentially on history, experience, and memory, and became based upon notions of truth. Monotheism therefore became a "truth system," and because it became a truth system it also demanded universalization. Truth must be universal; there is only one truth. When religion becomes understood as truth, in the attempt to appropriate the whole spiritual life that proceeds out of the philosophic tradition, then you have very grave consequences: there were debates in the Middle Ages as to who had the truth; there were people who persecuted others because they in some way believed, as Maimonides said, that when someone refused to accept the truth, that refusal must be based on ill will. If there is a refusal to accept that which is self-evidently true, then it must be the result of some sort of internal refusal. I can accuse you of ill will if your spirituality is grounded in your own experience and own history and own memory. When religion became discussed in the language of truth, then something went wrong in the history of Western civilization.

I see in this historical development a profound distortion. I do not emphasize here a cognitive distortion; I emphasize rather the human implications of this distortion, in which man felt that they were close to God because they felt they had the truth, and that the truth was in some way able to justify actions which did not reflect spiritual love, compassion, and humility. When one feels that one has the absolute truth, it can blind one to the ugliness of one's own actions. There is always the great distortion between the mind and the reality, the mind and one's experience. This is always so with people who think they had the absolute truth, and that therefore virtually any form of logic can be justified because they have the truth. Stalin could have the purges in the 1930's in the name of truth, for if one is on the side of truth, then ultimately how can one's activities be wrong, how can truth err? Human frailties are not shown, because one's own identity is placed within a larger absolute conception. Truth is a dangerous word, and religious men need somehow to wash out this word from their religious vocabulary.

Furthermore, truth and nature neutralize one of the essential elements of the God of history – that God must be borne witness to via the living reality of man. Once an ontological proof for the existence of God has been posited, once God's reality becomes a self-evident truth, then the urgency to have him revealed and reflected in the life of man is neutralized. The idea that God dwells in a contrite spirit, that God dwells in a holy people, becomes neutralized if the certainty of God's existence is reflected in epistomological categories. Therefore community, the lived reality of community, ceases to be the essential matrix through which God's presence is seen in history, and a life of community is no longer urgent to reflect his reality. This neutralization may be seen in many aspects, too numerous to indicate within this article, but I will just indicate what I feel to have been fruitful in the medieval synthesis. Its fruitfulness was that it broke the insulation of spiritual man, it forced him to encounter other epistomological systems, other systems of knowledge. Because he encountered these things, he appropriated them and perceived himself within a truth system -- and there he went wrong. He went wrong because he neutralized history and community, the living witnesses that men's love and compassion and human reality have to be a witness to God.

A THEOLOGY OF MEMORY

Therefore, how do I see the future of Jewish and Christian spirituality? What must be the direction and what can be the direction? We must, I believe, recapture the concept of lived events and memories as the ground of man's spiritual life. We must then recognize that spirituality is based upon man's sense of identity, his own sense of who he is, rather than on some sort of external truth system. I am David Hartman; I was born into a family. This family is not a necessary fact, it is a contingent fact. My existence is shot through with contingency. All self-definitions based upon identities and memories are contingent. I am a Jew, because my mother and father were Jewish, and they brought me up as a Jew, as a proud Jew. My father taught me how to sing; he taught me the melodies he had from his father. At a certain moment of my life I could have chosen to abandon those memories and the melodies that I received from my father, but I chose to be true to those memories, I chose to continue that which I received. If I know this about myself, and I know that I made contact with my God via my father and mother, who made contact with their God via what they received, then in some way there is no necessary "truth" to my spirituality. I can live in the world without having to plug my meaning in to a conceptual system of necessity. I have meaning without necessity. Nationality does not necessarily entail necessity; the contradiction to the arbitrary, to meaninglessness, is not necessarily necessity. There can be a sense of the reasonable, a sense of rationality, which does not lead to necessity, and therefore which does not lead to "truth." I can make sense of my existence, all the while knowing that much of my existence is a feature of contingency rather than necessity. The things I care about, the things I love, the things that happen to me, come to be because of experiences and the way I reflect on those experiences. If each one of us examines the things that are important for him, he will discover that much of what he cares for, much of what he is prepared to die for, grows out of the lived reality he was exposed to, and his reflections on that lived reality.

When you build your spirituality within the context of history, you are building it within a context of the given, a given that you do not necessarily create, but a given that you are thrown into. You make sense of your reality even though it has the quality of thrown-into-ness, if one wants to use an existential category. According to the Talmudic tradition, one is born against one's will, and therefore one can make sense of that which he has chosen to live by, and to love, without necessarily having to place it in some sort of framework of ontological necessity. One can be committed to his spiritual life, because of the contingent history that he has received and the memories that have nurtured this spiritual tradition.

So I call for a theology based upon memory and experience, in which one has to appropriate and to ask himself in terms of this own experience of that memory, what type of meaning his spiritual life will have, rather than a spiritual life which is in some way confirmed via conceptual categories which have no relationship to his own experience and identity rooted in memory. A spirituality based upon memory has a metaphysical ground for pluralism; there is no ground for pluralism if monotheism is grounded in "truth," because there is only one truth. If we have spirituality grounded in memory, then memories can speak to each other, and memories do not have to falsify each other.

PLURALISM

I have come to a position of pluralism by way of the *Halakhah* of Judaism, which is really the ground of my epistomology. If you take the defining characteristic as being *Halakhah*, the law, then in some way you are not dealing with a truth system but with a normative system, and norms are not descriptive statements. In the Jewish tradition we have many passages which read: "These and these are the words of the living God," where you have disagreements between Hillel and Shammai. Or you have the famous example of the disagreement between the sages who were disputing a point of Jewish law, and Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkanos calls upon the trees to support his argument – and the trees uproot themselves. Rabbi Yehoshua and the other sages told the trees to stop interfering in the argument. Then R. Eliezer called on the stream to support him – and it flowed backwards; and it, too, was told not to interfere. Then R. Eliezer called on the walls of the Beit Midrash to prove his point – and the walls began to fall, R. Yehoshua told them not to interfere, and the walls, not knowing which rabbi to honour, remained inclined. Finally a voice from heaven, a *bat kol*, was heard affirming that the law was according to the interpretation of R. Eliezer, to which R. Yehoshua responded that it is written in the Torah: "After the majority you should follow." The majority was of R. Yehoshua's opinion, so why did the *bat kol* interfere? The text says that at that same time Elijah met God, who said to the prophet: "My children have defeated me."[4] This scene in the *Halakhic* tradition is one in which there is no objective truth, but human reason attempting to apply the law, and there are multiple approaches that one can take to the understanding of that law. Revelation no longer acts as the criterion through which one should understand the law. In other words, from the normative *Halakhic* tradition, I do not see a Platonic "truth" model working itself out; I see legal arguments, reasonable arguments, working themselves out in terms of trying to apply standards of conduct. In an important way, Talmudic Judaism neutralizes the concept of the single prophetic revelation, producing instead the sage who argues on the basis of his understanding, as distinct from the prophet who announces categorically the word of God. By means of this epistomology of *Halakhah*, I neutralize truth claims and recognize that we build on a normative tradition.

[4] b. Baba Metzia 59b.

When I speak of memory, I am attempting to find a source for a belief system which does not necessarily lead to assertions of "truth." In other words, my belief system does not lead to necessity or have its ground in necessity; it is simply the belief system that I have chosen to live with. A belief system does not lead to an ontology; it leads more to a direction of life, of action. Belief must become translated into normative judgment, rather than into ontological judgments. I therefore define faith not as a source of *knowledge*, but as a source of *action*, because I want fundamentally religious claims to be evaluated on the basis of action claims rather than descriptive claims. To test out the meaning of a statement is to test out the different practices that the statement leads to. Truth claims are not measured by a falsifiable on the basis of empirical conditions. Falsification must be defined not by means of ontological conditions, but by means of behavorial conditions. Therefore I want to "Halakhasize" even the belief system, and that is why I believe that *Halakhah*, or law, is the source from which I build my pluralism.

Furthermore, we must recognize that God's reality is mediated through the quality of community that each spiritual vision builds. The thrust of our theological commitment must manifest itself in the type of students and people and families and communities and societies that we build; spirituality has to grow in the market-place of history. It has in some way to prove itself, but not by some "truth" system, nor by claiming some sort of mystery of revelation in which I have a truth which no one else has. Faith must not be a criteria for truth; faith must be a criteria of commitment, to sustain one's spiritual vision and to be able to hope and to believe in what is possible in human societies, the courage to sustain one's commitment, the courage to build a better world in spite of the darkness we see. Faith does not give one, then, access to a truth not available for the non-believer; rather, faith gives one the courage to persevere in one's dream, irrespective of the ugliness which is seen in the world. Therefore we do not look upon the non-believer as in some way blind, but we bear witness to our faith by the type of community we build. We must recapture the concept of God who says: "I want to be sanctified in the midst of their lives; I want my reality to be shown in the way they build their economic societies, in their attitudes toward each other, in their attitudes towards the widow, in their attitudes towards the stranger. It is there that their faith is shown to me, rather than in some set of assertions." We have in some way to anchor our commitment within history, and not in some sort of other-worldly spirituality; our investment must express itself in the historical reality, and the commitment of faith must lead to a commitment to build a different world.

If we recapture together these features, and if we create community as the essential feature of spirituality, maintaining that God is revealed in history and in the societies that men build, and that man's spiritual life is based upon the memories that nurtured him, then we have at last the ground of spiritual pluralism. The ugly discussions of who has the "truth," of whom does the Father love, who is the chosen child, and who is the elect, and who is the true Israel – those discussions which led to the most violent acts in history – have to be thrown out. We cannot build a spiritual life indifferent to what this type of discussion and this type of concern has led to. We must completely, radically, give up this notion that eschatologically the "truth" will be shown. We cannot in some way leap to some eschaton and live in two dimensions; to be pluralistic now but to be monistic in our eschatological vision, is bad faith. We have to recognize that ultimately spiritual monism is a disease. It leads to the type of spiritual arrogance that has brought bloodshed to history. Therefore we have to rethink our eschatology, and rethink the notion of multiple spiritual communities and their relationship to a monotheistic faith.

Other peoples do indeed have their own Sinai, their own desert, their own Egypt. I do not view Sinai and Egypt as ontological, as defining what history means. I view the election of Israel as the story of God with *one* people, but not as the story of God with the *only* people. I know that I am treading on controversial ground with this statement, because it is clear from the Bible that as far as the prophets were concerned, there is only one history and that is the history of God with Israel. Then the question arises: Who is Israel? The fight is inevitable, because if there is only one history, the question of who is called Israel is of crucial importance. In order for Christianity to define itself it had to call itself the "new testament," and we have to recognize that the term "old testament" is not a neutral term, but evaluative. When I was teaching in an English college, people were amazed to hear me say that I taught New Testament; in their view I must, as a rabbi, teach Old Testament. But I pointed out that the terms "Old" and "New" are not here a neutral description of periods, but are loaded with evaluative language. I believe in the new testament, because I do not think my Torah is old – it is not old, it is new. I can understand that the questioner must call me "old" in order to explain his own position, but if in order for him to be legitimate I must become illegitimate, I am not prepared to accomodate him.

Therefore I insist that Biblical history, in which there is only one history, itself created the whole question of Who is the Real Israel, thus producing the insanity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all trying to show others that they had the truth. We are all guilty of the same mistake. I know that one can claim that this is not a mistake, and that is the question which the philosopher faces. I do not delude myself as to how far I am going when, just as I tell my children that the story of Adam is the story of one man and not the story of the first man, I say that the story of Israel is the story of God's love for a people retained in our family memories.

Other people have their own Egypts, their own deserts, their own Sinais, and each one builds from his own; mine is not definitive as to what is authentic. I have no criteria as to what is not to count as a person's Egypt or Sinai or desert.

IDOLATRY

If you ask if my faith commitment limits what is possible among other people, I would say no, but I recognize that I have to deal with idolatry because there are certain things that I can not let go. Certain things are so central that my faith cannot deny them; if belief is compatible with absolutely everything, then ultimately it is without content. I am trying to give a content to my belief, which involves also a negative content, and therefore idolatry becomes an important issue.

I would claim that idolatry is the central problem of pluralism. What does one do with the Biblical uncompromising God who has no tolerance for idolatry? Does the pluralistic system have room for what was essential to the monotheistic experience – the "no" to idolatry? Does pluralism allow for virtually everything? Can you build a monotheistic system honestly without including a serious conception of what is idolatry? Can it be said that a Judeo-Christian pluralistic system is true to the past without in some way facing that problem of the God who says "No" to any other worship than that which is to him? Is it indeed true to claim that the source of intolerance grew from the influence of a "truth" system; does it not rather have indigenous roots within the Biblical refusal to accept idolatry?

The movement to idolatry today surely is not grounded in the forms of worship that a human being has, but rather in the characterology that results from that form of worship. Idolatry is not an expression of, or does not reveal itself in, the objective style of worship, but in the subjective appropriation of that worship. We are to recognize the idolator not in his form but in his character. I would claim that all forms of worship are finite in some way; but that I mean that no one has contacted the *ein-sof*, the infinite. We worship only finite manifestations of what is infinite, inexpressible; the forms of that worship are finite forms, never claiming that this is the ultimate definition of the Infinite, but a way of mirroring it, a way of moving closer into contact with it. Therefore all religious language, all speech about God, is in some way idolatrous, because all speech must have the quality of the finite. How can speech express the Infinite?

If we recognize that finiteness, then in some way, forms of worship cannot be the defining feature of what is idolatry. There is an interesting discussion of this issue between Maimonides and the Rabad (Rabbi Abraham ben David) in the Middle Ages. Maimonides, who was very deeply influenced by the truth system of Aristotle, said: He who believes that God is corporeal is considered a heretic. The Rabad, a very brilliant Kabbalist, said to

Maimonides, in a little glossary note in the *Mishneh Torah*, that there were many Jews, much nicer than you, Maimonides, much more pious, who believed that God was corporeal. Even though belief in God's corporeality was a conceptual mistake, he was not going to measure a person's being an idolator on the basis of his concepts! So there is a tradition within Judaism that was prepared to accept conceptual mistakes as long as this did not lead to experiental mistakes. The important thing was not what one thought, but what one did as a result of what one thought. Therefore, I claim that we should measure idolatry in the way in which the Talmud says we should.

Maimonides, interestingly enough, although accepting Aristotle's middle road regarding virtue, does not accept the *derekh zahav*, the golden mean, between the two virtues of arrogance and humility. In these two virtues, insists Maimonides, everyone must be exceedingly humble; man must move beyond the middle path in the virtue of humility and arrogance. Regarding the question of anger, for which he drew upon a reliable source in the Talmud, Maimonides says that to break things in a fit of rage is the beginning of idolatry. Commenting on the commandment: "You should not have with you a strange God," the Talmud interprets this as "You should not have *in* you a strange God." If you are subject to fits of rage, in which you lose control of your temper, then a strange God lives inside of you. According to the Talmud, God says to the man who is arrogant: "You and I cannot live in the same world." A person whose ego is inflated to a point at which he is not subject to criticism and to a point where he does not recognize his own limitations – that person is considered in the Talmud as if he were the idolator.

So we notice, then, a description of idolatry vis-à-vis characterology: a nation, or political leaders, which claim that they are above criticism; a spiritual system that claims infallibility; a man who in some way considers himself to have transcended the problems of being finite and human. This is idolatry, because that attribute of absolute self-sufficiency belongs only to God. Therefore, I do not give up the concept of idolatry – I cannot – but I choose to see its focus differently. I choose to look at an idolator not by asking him to show me his church; I choose to recognize an idolator by asking him to show me his home, show me his children, show me his farms, show me his family. It is there that I will know if he worships God, or if he is a pagan. If monotheism can say this to the modern world, it may have a second chance. If monotheism lives spiritually insulated from the world, walking around in its own language of spiritual faith, which is neutral to the world, I think it will be the end of the Judeo-Christian heritage. The beginning or the end depends on whether we are prepared once again to discover what God says to men: Through the way you live, I will be known.

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