

FAITH AND CULTURE: JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES

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Nearly sixty years have passed since Helmut Richard Niebuhr published *Christ and Culture*, a landmark study of Christian theological typology. The duality, Christ and culture, Niebuhr employed as shorthand for every way Christianity has understood the relationship between Christian faith, especially its theological distillations, and the cultural settings in which these Christian theologies have developed. In this lecture I wish to examine the three great monotheistic traditions of faith—Jewish, Christian and Muslim—employing analogically the three major categories of Christian encounter with culture sketched by Niebuhr. Furthermore, I wish in each instance to examine contemporary examples of these three tendencies.

Those three great types Niebuhr characterized as “*opposition* between Christ and culture,”¹ “*fundamental agreement* between Christ and culture”² and “*the church of the center*”³ that seeks to maintain “*the great differences between the two principles*” and yet, at the same time, undertakes “*to hold them together in some unity.*”⁴

Before I discuss the various ways in which these faith traditions have entered into dialectic with culture, let me offer short-hand definitions of both faith and culture. (1) By faith I mean every way in which human beings in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions respond to the God who invites them into a relationship. Such faith-filled response to a faithful God I have described in my inaugural lecture as the human *Amen* to God’s prior *Amen*. At least in these three religious traditions, faith takes much of its basic imagery from the secular covenant relationship between sovereign and vassal, although the meaning of faith is not exhausted by that imagery.⁵ (2) Under the category of culture I include everything that human beings do with their respective settings. Latinists will recognize that the word culture derives from the third conjugation verb *colo, colere, colui, cultus*, a configuration that yields in English colony, agriculture, cultivation and cult, all deriving from this single root. Niebuhr, following the lead of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, specifies that culture is (a) a social reality, (b) a human achievement as opposed to a natural phenomenon, (c) good for human beings, (d) concerned with the temporal and material realization of values and (e) pluralistic.⁶

I. FAITH AGAINST CULTURE: CONTEMPORARY JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM EXAMPLES

Niebuhr traces a line of development for the Christ-against-culture type in Christian history from certain New Testament writings (most notably the First Epistle of John) to Tertullian in the late second and early third century to Leo Tolstoy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Niebuhr rightly characterizes such thinkers and the movements that they have inspired as “Christian withdrawals from and rejection of

the institutions of society.” He notes, however, the ironic fact that these movements of withdrawal and rejection “have been of very great importance to both church and culture.”⁷ Is this sort of thing only a phenomenon in the past? Are there examples of such counter-cultural movements—faith against culture—in twenty-first century Judaism, Christianity and Islam? In a brief scope let me suggest some examples.

(a) Faith against Culture in Contemporary Judaism

The most prominent contemporary form of faith against culture in a Jewish setting manifests itself in those minority movements within Orthodox Judaism that characterize themselves as *haredim*.⁸ *Haredi* Jews represent approximately one-third of Orthodox Jews in Israel (about 300,000 people) and one quarter of Orthodox Jews in the United States (about 125,000 people).⁹ *Haredim* can be found elsewhere, but Israel and the United States account for most *haredim*. All told, *haredim* probably account for about 3% of the 13.5 million Jews in the world today. Those figures both in Israel and the United States may be rather fluid, since the rate of child-bearing among the *haredim* in both countries is high. Furthermore, some *haredim* actively recruit other Jews.

Why do I characterize the *haredim* as a faith-against-culture type? Like all Orthodox Jews, the *haredim* strive to lead their lives in strict adherence to *halakhah*, Jewish religious law, but they continue in details of lifestyle and occupation to adhere to the customs of an earlier age, most visibly in forms of dress and coiffure, making as few concessions to modernity as possible, tending to live apart from others, including other Jews. The noun *haredim* derives from the Hebrew Bible, most notably from the final chapter of the Book of Isaiah, a part of so-called Third Isaiah. A post-exilic author less than enthusiastic about the hopes of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple in the late sixth century B.C.E., Third Isaiah, speaking on God’s behalf, puts more stock in those post-Exilic Jews who were *concerned* with or *tremble*¹⁰ over the Word of God: “Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word” (Isaiah 66:5)¹¹

The *haredim* are not one single group but a whole panoply of religious Jews, mainly Ashkenazi (Eastern European) in origin but also including some Mizrahi (long term Middle Eastern) and Sephardi (originally Spanish, later also Middle Eastern) Jews living now in the State of Israel. Within the majority Ashkenazi *haredim*, one can distinguish two categories of such devotees: *Hasidim* attached to particular charismatic *rebbe*s and yeshiva students who adhere to particular smaller or larger academies and their *roshei yeshiva* or deans. It might even be asserted that loyalty to charismatic personal leadership characterizes nearly all *haredi* sub-groups.

The *haredim* of modern times, whether in Israel or in the Diaspora, can be defined as Jews for whom the study of the Torah takes precedence over all other mundane concerns, including concern for the State of Israel. Generally speaking, *haredim* have never reconciled themselves to the secular origins and aims of the Zionist movement. They cite a text from Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in Babylon and a *midrash* or studied interpretation from the Babylonian Talmud as the basis for their anti-Zionism.¹²

Needless to say, such a stance by Jews in modern times, in the aftermath of the *Shoah* and the creation of the State of Israel, is highly controversial, especially in Israel. For the most part the *haredim* within Israel are exempt from service in the Israel Defense Force.

(b) Faith against Culture in Contemporary Christianity

Much could be said about Christ-against-culture trends in Protestant circles since the time of Niebuhr, but I will concentrate here on faith-against-culture phenomena in modern Catholic settings. Much controversy has arisen since January 24, 2009, when Pope Benedict XVI, in a preliminary effort to reconcile to the Catholic Church the followers of the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, lifted the excommunication of the four bishops ordained without papal authorization by Lefebvre in 1988.¹³ It was not only reaction against the vernacular liturgy that characterized the Lefebvrists from the beginning. The Lefebvrists also repudiate much of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), especially its teaching on episcopal collegiality, religious liberty, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.¹⁴

The desire of Pope Benedict to reconcile the Lefebvrists follows a pattern in recent Catholic history in which attempts have been made to bring back schismatics when their schism centers on views more stringent than those of the papacy. Individual theologians who have embraced positions that may be called less stringent than those of the papacy have been censured. But none of these theologians has fostered a schismatic movement.¹⁵ Although some German theologians critical of the definition of papal infallibility joined a schismatic movement after the First Vatican Council (1869-1870),¹⁶ schism has been a reactionary preserve in the years since the Second Vatican Council.

Over sixty years ago an American schism began surrounding Father Leonard Feeney, a New England Province Jesuit at the time who was eventually dismissed from the Society of Jesus for disobedience and excommunicated from the Church. The papacy's ministry charged with doctrinal orthodoxy, at that time called the Holy Office, considered Feeney's expressed opinions an excessively narrow understanding of the traditional Christian teaching that salvation is impossible outside the Church: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("No salvation outside the Church").¹⁷ Followers of Father Feeney, including some who had converted to Catholicism under his influence, rejected a broad interpretation of the question as to who will be saved. Banded together under the aegis of the Saint Benedict Center, an independent Catholic student club near Harvard Yard, Feeney and others in the group eventually founded a religious congregation of men and women called the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Withdrawing in the 1950s to Harvard, Massachusetts, they lived a separate communal life as Catholics more Catholic than the Pope for more than two decades. In the 1970s, however, the then Bishop of Worcester, Massachusetts, Bernard Flanagan, made a successful attempt to reconcile the aging Father Feeney to the Catholic Church, without demanding of him a specific repudiation of his interpretation of the formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Since that time most (but not quite all) of Feeney's surviving disciples have also been reconciled with the Catholic Church on the same terms.¹⁸

At least with schismatics more stringent in their opinions than the papacy, the Catholic hierarchy on all levels seems to have learned something from the experiences that split the Roman Church from the Churches of the East in the fifth century and the eleventh century and the Protestant churches of the West in the sixteenth century. The attempts by Pope Benedict to reconcile the Lefebvrists in the early twenty-first century follow the pattern of the endeavors made in the era of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II to reconcile the Feeneyites. Time will tell how successful this attempt to reconcile the Lefebvrists will prove, given the complication of illicit episcopal ordinations and the broad range of the Lefebvrists' opinions opposed to the teaching of Vatican II.

(c) Faith against Culture in Contemporary Islam

The message of the Qur'an received by Muhammad between 610 and 632 C.E. was in some sense very counter-cultural, the culture in question being what the Qur'an calls the *jahiliyyah* (ignorance) of Muhammad's faithless Arab contemporaries. But *jahiliyyah* in the Qur'an was not quite so severe a term as *kufir* (infidelity), a Quranic term designating the utter ingratitude of those who knowingly repudiate the generosity of God.¹⁹

In the first Muslim century a rigorist interpretation of Islam emerged among northern Arab nomads who had converted to Islam. They seceded in 657 C.E. from the camp of 'Ali, the fourth successor of Muhammad. 'Ali had shown himself willing to negotiate the justice of his struggle against Mu'awiya in the first civil war in Muslim history. The secessionists from 'Ali's camp, called Kharijites from the Arabic word for secession, considered 'Ali's willingness to compromise with his opposition as nothing less than total apostasy. By the end of the seventh century the Kharijites had split into numerous smaller and smaller rigorist groups, usually taking their names from one or another charismatic leader.²⁰

Although Kharijites have not survived as a major sect of Islam,²¹ some aspects of their rigorism in defining who is a Muslim and who is an infidel (*kafir*) surfaced in the fourteenth-century teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah²² and the eighteenth-century doctrine of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab,²³ forefather of the dominant Wahhabi school of religious thought in Saudi Arabia. In the twentieth century forms of such radical rigorism emanated as well from the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966)²⁴ and the Indo-Pakistani Mawlana Mawdudi (1903-1979).²⁵ These twentieth-century writers, more independent autodidacts in religious and legal questions than traditional scholars, condemned all Muslims who compromised with non-Muslim agenda as agents of *jahiliyyah*, often equating their *jahiliyyah* with *kufir*.²⁶

The *Takfir wa'l-Hijrah* sectarians who had withdrawn into the desert in Egypt to live a pure Muslim life kidnapped and killed in 1977 the former Minister of Religious Endowments in the government of President Anwar al-Sadat.²⁷ Similar sectarians assassinated Sadat himself in 1981. Both groups derived at least some of their thought from the writings of Sayyid Qutb, who had been put to death by the Egyptian government in 1966.

Elsewhere in the Muslim world, the school of Islamic disciplines (Dar al-‘Ulum) at Deoband, and others madrasahs related to it in northern India,²⁸ have proven fairly stringent in their interpretation of Islam.²⁹ These schools in Deoband have in the three decades since the Soviet and American-NATO invasions of Afghanistan encouraged some of their students (*taliban*), especially those who were Afghani refugees, to join the struggle (*jihad*) against these foreign occupations by infidels. Although originally quite distinct in their religious orientation, some of these Deobandi *taliban* have joined politically with Jama‘at-i-Islami, the Pakistani political disciples of Mawlana Mawdudi.³⁰

The religious and political program of Wahhabis, Sayyid Qutb, Mawlana Mawdudi and the Taliban in Afghanistan idealizes the era of Muhammad and the first four caliphs. Such a vision of Islam lacks the historical depth that might incline it towards a more humane understanding of what Islam has meant for over fourteen centuries. Charismatic leaders like Mullah ‘Umar and ‘Usama ibn Ladin have encouraged people fired with these ideals to imitate Muhammad’s *hijrah* from idolatrous Mecca to an abstract Medina in the caves of Tora Bora. Even if the Muslim faith-against-culture tradition does not exhaust Muslim attitudes towards culture, it has garnered more than a little publicity in the Western media in the past few decades.

II. FAITH OF CULTURE: CONTEMPORARY JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM EXAMPLES

Niebuhr cites no particular portion of the New Testament as an example of what he calls “the Christ of Culture” (83), but he does suggest that the New Testament contains references to “believers in the Lord” [who also] “seek to maintain community with all other believers. . . So they harmonize Christ with culture, not without excision, of course, from New Testament and social custom, of stubbornly discordant features” (83-84). The prime examples of this would be the Judaizers with whom Paul came into conflict and the intellectual ancestors of the Christian Gnostics of the second century, some foretaste of whose doctrine may be referred to polemically in the Johannine and Deutero-Pauline writings of the New Testament. In later history the term “Culture-Protestantism” (84), evidently coined by Karl Barth, characterizes all those thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who extolled a version of Christianity that “commended itself to all those who used their reason but used it in the ‘reasonable’ manner characteristic of an English culture that found the middle way between all extremes” (91). Do such varieties of Judaism, Christianity and Islam exist today?

(a) Faith of Culture in Contemporary Judaism

Judaism of culture has an ancient history, not entirely savory, in the *hityavnut* (Hellenization) that characterized at least some of the priestly class in Jerusalem in the era of the Seleucid tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.). The First Book of Maccabees narrates how “certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, ‘Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us’” (1:11). The feast of Hanukkah

commemorates the ending of that era in the Maccabee insurgency and the renewal of Temple worship that had been profaned by Jews anxious to conform to Greek ways.

But there have been in the European past harmonizations of Jewish faith with culture more subtle than the *hityavnut* of the Seleucid era. What has been called the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment dating from the career of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), sometimes resulted in the absorption of highly educated Jews into the ambient cultural scene. Moses Mendelssohn remained a Jew himself, learned in the Jewish tradition and willing to defend Judaism in terms comprehensible to his intellectual contemporaries,³¹ but four of his six children became Christians. His son Abraham, in an attempt to disguise his Jewish surname, added Bartholdy to it; thus we still know Abraham's son, the Romantic composer, as Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.

Although secularized or less than totally religious Jews are known in Israel and other parts of the world, movements have taken shape in the United States that attempt to construe Judaism in terms that evade much overt 'God-talk.' One such movement, Reconstructionist Judaism, originated with a rabbi born of an Orthodox family in Lithuania but raised and educated here in New York City, Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983). Much affected by his study of the philosophy of John Dewey, Kaplan found himself in controversy with his colleagues at Jewish Theological Seminary, a leading Conservative Jewish institution on the Upper West Side. For Kaplan, "God may . . . be defined as the Power that endorses what we believe ought to be, and that guarantees that it will be."³² Such a definition of God estranges Reconstructionist Judaism from mainline varieties of Jewish faith.

Another American-originated and even more resolutely secularist revision of the Jewish tradition has been called Humanistic Judaism. Humanistic Jews completely eliminate prayer or any other mention of God from their congregational practice. This movement traces some of its intellectual roots to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century secularist thought. Sherwin Wine, formerly a Reform rabbi, began to enunciate the program of Humanistic Judaism in Michigan in the 1960s. Convinced that scientific rationalism had made the hypothesis of God the Creator superfluous, Wine wrote that "the age of reason is the age without God. While nostalgia preserves him in the vocabulary of the powerful, he has lost his substance."³³

Long before Kaplan's formulation of Reconstructionist Judaism in the 1930s or Wine's proposal of Judaism without God in the 1960s, Felix Adler (1851-1933), the son of the chief rabbi of Temple Emanu-el here in New York City, founded the New York Society for Ethical Culture in 1876. The weekly Sunday meetings of the Society for Ethical Culture help to define it as a definitively non-Jewish venture, and many of its adherents today have never been Jewish.³⁴

(b) Faith of Culture in Contemporary Christianity

The United States has given birth to varieties of Christianity more than a little embedded in the ambient culture, especially the American cultural notion that human

beings are endowed with an inalienable right to “the pursuit of happiness.”³⁵ Niebuhr makes reference to how Thomas Jefferson “excerpted from the New Testament the sayings of Jesus which commended themselves to him.”³⁶ But the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, a phrase introduced into the Declaration of Independence by Jefferson, derived not from the New Testament but, more probably, from philosophers of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment. It probably meant, according to Garry Wills, “public happiness,” which was “a secular and scientific term for men of the Enlightenment, a ‘heretical’ displacement of man’s hopes from the hereafter to those immediate gratifications.”³⁷ In the era since Niebuhr wrote, a number of Christian movements have arisen in America that interpret the happiness to be pursued less philosophically and more therapeutically as the right to feel good about oneself.

The late Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993), for decades the pastor of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, created a movement aimed at what he called “positive thinking,”³⁸ a mixture of comfortable Christianity with popular psychology. Peale’s prestige began to decline when it became known that a psychoanalyst who had once worked collaboratively with Peale, Smiley Blanton, did not want to be identified with positive thinking.³⁹ Peale’s alliance with the Republican Party, and especially his parishioner, Richard Milhous Nixon, as well as his opposition to the presidential candidacy of John Fitzgerald Kennedy on the basis of Kennedy’s Catholicism, also alienated a considerable segment of Americans from positive thinking after 1960.⁴⁰

In the years since the decline of Peale’s popularity, other varieties of positive thinking have grown exponentially in Christian settings in the United States, and especially in the churches that propagate what has been called the Prosperity Gospel. Easily exported, the Prosperity Gospel has caught on as well in economically volatile Third World settings, especially in Africa and Latin America over the last two decades. Several popular American television preachers fit loosely into this category of Christianity, but not all of them are entirely happy with such a characterization. Perhaps the most popular television evangelist of recent years is Joel Osteen, a Texan and the son of a former Southern Baptist pastor. Without much formal religious training, Joel Osteen succeeded his father in the pastoral direction of the non-denominational Christian Lakewood Church in Houston when his father died in 1999. The Church has since grown dramatically and moved from its original quarters to take over a basketball arena in Houston seating 16,000 people. Services conducted by Joel Osteen can be seen on television on Sunday mornings not only in the United States but also in other parts of the world.⁴¹

Joel Osteen describes himself “as a life coach, a motivator.” He seldom mentions sin or repentance in his preaching and his arena church lacks specifically Christian symbols like the cross. Speaking on *60 Minutes* in 2007 Osteen summed up his message for an ideal television audience member: “I want you to get a bigger vision. There are exciting things in your future. Your future is filled with marked moments of blessing, increase, promotion. . . . Time and chance are coming together for you.”⁴² The therapeutic pursuit of happiness, dislodged from the Protestant Christian foundations still

visible in the preaching of Norman Vincent Peale, has triumphed in the careers of Osteen and many of his fellow proponents of the Prosperity Gospel.

(c) Faith of Culture in Contemporary Islam

In the Middle Ages, a coterie of Sunni Muslims evinced an interest in Greek philosophy (*falsafah*) that may be described as a variety of Islam engaged in a non-Islamic or even secularizing cultural pursuit. The most famous Muslim philosophers maintained throughout their lives their identity as Muslims. But their esteem for the Qur'an was somewhat attenuated, hinting that it mainly helped the masses to perceive truths that were available to the philosopher through speculation.⁴³ The denunciation of *falsafah* by al-Ghazali (1058-1111)—what he called, in the title of a major work, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*—did much to reduce the influence of philosophers in the Sunni Muslim world.⁴⁴ Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126-1198), however, valiantly took up the cudgels for philosophy in his critique of al-Ghazali entitled, provocatively, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*.⁴⁵ After 1200 C.E., however, the pursuit of *falsafah* mainly flourished in Shi'i Muslim circles.

Secularized Muslim-majority countries like Turkey, Albania and some of the former Soviet republics in central Asia could be cited as examples of places where an Islam-of-culture tendency prevails today. But in the contemporary Muslim world the version of Islam propagated by Colonel Mu'ammār Qadhafi in Libya provides the most striking example of Islam that has been modified to fit into its ambient cultural setting. There are in Qadhafi's thought many elements of the Arab nationalist and socialist ideology enunciated by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the founder of modern Egypt, more than fifty years ago.⁴⁶ But unique ideas emanate continually from Colonel Qadhafi himself, especially on matters Islamic.

When he first seized power in Libya in 1969, Qadhafi attacked all elements of Libyan society that seemed to favor compromise of Islamic values with those of the West. Thus he banned the consumption of alcohol and the licensing of nightclubs, closed down Christian churches and enforced traditional Islamic criminal penalties.⁴⁷ As the 1970s progressed, however, Qadhafi increasingly promoted social and economic policies that differed quite dramatically from standard Sunni Muslim practice. Between 1975 and 1980 Qadhafi published three slim volumes called collectively *The Green Book*. Given the prominence of Islamic concerns in the first years of Qadhafi's rule, the paucity of references to anything even remotely Islamic in *The Green Book* is quite striking.⁴⁸

On the occasion of the inauguration of the Muslim year 1399 (on 1 December 1978), Qadhafi called for a major change in the Islamic calendar. No longer would it date from the *hijrah* (Muhammad's departure from Mecca for Medina in 622 C.E.) but from Muhammad's death in 632.⁴⁹ What was the point of this uniquely Libyan calendar? It eliminates the necessity to refer to the *sunnah* or customary practice of Muhammad's lifetime as reported in *hadith* literature. Thus Qadhafi attacks one of the principal sources of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the scholarly class that practice it.

In recent years the singularity of Qadhafi's opinions on Islam has been amply demonstrated in lengthy lectures posted on his website. At the end of 2006 Qadhafi suggested that the *hajj* should be open to non-Muslim people of monotheistic faith as well as to Muslims. "If the Papal Legate wants to go tomorrow to circle the Ka'aba, then that is his right, because the Ka'aba is for all people."⁵⁰ By expressing such opinions Qadhafi intends to provoke not only the authorities in Saudi Arabia but also more traditional Muslims critical of his ideas within Libya. "Brother Leader" should not be confused, as the media sometimes do, with those Muslims whom the Western media regularly called fundamentalists in the past or Islamists today. Qadhafi's version of Islam is simply unique.

III. FAITH INTEGRATING CULTURE: CONTEMPORARY JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIMS EXAMPLES

Niebuhr at some length distinguishes three varieties of the church of the center that he describes as synthesist, dualist and conversionist. I will not try to use these three subdivisions of the church of the center to describe the varieties of contemporary Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But all three forms of faith have centrist traditions, even if those centrist traditions include a fairly broad range of understandings of the faith tradition in question. The distinguishing mark of the centrism of these three traditions is their ability to engage with their ambient cultural settings and to integrate those cultural settings into their faith. This centrist integration has been achieved in each case without the respective faith traditions being absorbed into their cultural settings, and also without the centrist religious faith traditions so reacting against the cultural milieu as to constitute a faith-based counterculture. In the interests of brevity, I will examine only one major cultural issue. How have centrist Jews, Christians and Muslims today faced up to an overwhelming fact of contemporary culture: the encounter, not always amicable, between adherents of these major monotheistic traditions.

(a) Faith Integrating Culture in Contemporary Judaism

There are many eminent Jewish thinkers in modern times who have faced up to the pluralism of the world in which we live, and especially the pluralism of monotheistic faith traditions. These thinkers can be found in the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox families of Judaism. Let me sketch briefly the thought of only one contemporary Orthodox Jew: Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Great Britain and the Commonwealth. Living as he does in London, Rabbi Sacks cannot ignore the religious pluralism of the world in which he lives any more than we can do so here in New York City.

Rabbi Sacks has written a great deal, but I wish to quote from a book published in 2005, *To Heal a Fractured World*. Early in this work Sacks retells the story once told by a Yale law professor, Stephen Carter. As a boy Carter, an African-American, moved with his family to the Cleveland Park section of Washington, D.C., a white neighborhood. Eleven-year-old Stephen sat with his brothers and sisters on the front steps of their home wondering how they would be received in this new environment. No one greeted them,

confirming their suspicion that they were unwelcome. Then, quite suddenly, a white woman, who lived across the street, greeted the children heartily. After entering her own home, she came out again, bringing the children cream cheese and jelly sandwiches and something to drink. Carter learned that the hospitable neighbor was Sara Kestenbaum, who, Carter eventually found out, was a religious Jew. “In the Jewish tradition,” Carter writes, such civility is called “*chesed*—the doing of acts of kindness—which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God.”⁵¹

Rabbi Sacks develops this theme at some length, noting that in the Jewish tradition “*hessed* [is] *covenantal love*.”⁵² But does that definition limit the love involved only to those linked to God in the covenant of Abraham? Following rabbinical tradition, Sacks insists on a much broader perspective. “*Hessed* is born in the phrase in the second chapter of Genesis, ‘It is not good for man to be alone.’ . . . *Hessed* is the redemption of solitude, the bridge we build across the ontological abyss between I and Thou.”⁵³

Later in the same book Sacks notes the existence of a narrower sense of *hessed* as the bond of loyalty that exists between God and the Chosen People or the loyalty that should prevail between members of that Chosen People themselves. He ascribes this narrower notion of *hessed* to the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible. In contrast he develops at some length what the later rabbinic tradition calls, borrowing a phrase from the Book of Proverbs (3:17), *darkhei shalom*, the paths of peace. “*Darkhei shalom*,” Rabbi Sacks writes, “is essentially *hessed* universalized and applied to those who are not members of our faith.”⁵⁴ Sacks prefers the rabbinical notion of the *darkhei shalom* to the narrower prophetic notion of peace: “The attempt to bring prophetic peace by human action creates not peace but war.”⁵⁵ The rabbis in post-Second Temple Judaism “knew that in this not-yet-fully-redeemed world, peace means *living with difference*—with those who have another faith and other texts.”⁵⁶ In a world of competing religious absolutisms, Rabbi Sacks prefers the ways of the later rabbis, “the lights of peace (the Sabbath candles)” rather than “the lights of victory (the Hanukkah candles).”⁵⁷

The rabbinical ethic of *darkhei shalom* enunciated by Rabbi Sacks sheds a very gentle light on our modern situation of inter-faith communal living. It integrates a profoundly Jewish faith with the realities of London, New York and every metropolis where Jews, Christians and Muslims—as well as men and women of every faith tradition and no faith tradition—must learn to live together in community.

(b) Faith Integrating Culture in Contemporary Christianity

There are many recent Christian thinkers in the Catholic and Protestant traditions who have theologized about religious pluralism. Pope Benedict XVI is not generally counted among the leaders in this area. Some even assert that Pope Benedict has withdrawn from the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra aetate*). I would suggest, however, that the Pope’s attitudes towards inter-faith dialogue and the pluralistic culture in which we live today have been developing over the past five years. Because of the centrality of the

papacy in Catholic Christianity, the developing attitudes of Pope Benedict exercise an important influence on Catholic approaches to the ambient culture of religious pluralism.

The media have given much attention in recent years to criticism of Pope Benedict on matters concerning Catholic relations with Jews. But an examination of the Pope's writings both before and after his accession to the papacy demonstrates the depth of his reflection on and sympathy with the Jewish tradition.⁵⁸ At Christmas in the year 2000, the then Cardinal Ratzinger deplored the past history of anti-Semitism and noted that "our dialogue with Jews is situated on a different level than that in which we engage with other religions. The faith witnessed by the Jewish Bible . . . is not merely another religion to us, but is the foundation of our own faith."⁵⁹ Speaking in May 2009 at Jerusalem's Memorial to victims of the Shoah, Pope Benedict began with the text from Isaiah that is the source of the Memorial's name, *Yad va-Shem*: "I will give in my house a memorial and a name" (Isaiah 56:5). Of the millions who died in the Nazi era the Pope declared that "they lost their lives, but they will never lose their names . . . their names are forever fixed in the memory of Almighty God."⁶⁰

Pope Benedict's relations with Muslims have also come in for criticism. His September 2006 lecture at the University of Regensburg on "Faith, Reason and the University" began by quoting with seeming approbation harsh words from a controversial dialogue of the third-last Byzantine emperor, Manuel II Paleologus, with an unnamed Persian scholar. The Pope's journey two months later to Turkey offered him an opportunity, in that majority-Muslim but decidedly secular state, to express more clearly his "sentiments of esteem for the Muslims and for the Islamic civilization." He also recalled, in a reflective address later delivered in Rome, an unscheduled visit to Istanbul's Blue Mosque while he was in Turkey. "Pausing for a few minutes of recollection in that place of prayer, I addressed the one Lord of Heaven and earth, the Merciful Father of all humanity."⁶¹ A papal moment of prayer in a mosque says more than many irenic words.

The response of Muslim scholars to the Pope's Regensburg address led eventually to dialogue with those scholars, and especially the *Common Word* initiative, to be discussed below. By May 2009 the Pope, addressing Muslim religious leaders in Jordan, declared that "Muslims and Christians, precisely because of the burden of our common history so often marked with misunderstanding, must today strive to be known as worshippers of God . . . mindful of the common origin and dignity of all human persons."⁶² The Pope also noted that "the more recent *Common Word* letter . . . echoed a theme consonant with my first encyclical: the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour, and the fundamental contradiction of resorting to violence or exclusion in the name of God."⁶³

Muslim and Jewish responses to Pope Benedict over the past five years have not always been positive, but the very fact that dialogue goes on bodes well for the possibility of building a culture of inter-faith understanding.

(c) Faith Integrating Culture in Contemporary Islam

The *Common Word* letter referred to by Pope Benedict was an open letter written to the Pope and twenty-six other heads of churches throughout the world in 2007. The original signatories were 138 prominent Muslim scholars.⁶⁴ The actual author of the open letter is Prince Ghazi ibn Muhammad ibn Talal, first cousin of the present King of Jordan, ‘Abd Allah II. The prince wrote the open letter as a follow-up to an earlier open letter, published in 2006, reacting to Pope Benedict’s address at Regensburg.

The title of the 2007 open letter derives from a verse in the Qur’an in which God instructs both Muhammad and the Christians of Najran in south Arabia to come to terms on common religious principles (Qur’an 3:64). That divine instruction during the lifetime of Muhammad to seek common religious ground with Christians serves as a model for what the author and his fellow signatories urge on the Christian leaders addressed. The letter seeks ways to coordinate the teaching of the Qur’an and the *hadith* (reports of Muhammad’s sayings) with what has been called in the Christian tradition the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor (Mark 12:30-31 and parallels). These two commandments derive from the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18).

Even if many would claim that the two great commandments are primarily Jewish and Christian, the *Common Word* letter argues that the same two commandments play a central role both in the Qur’an and in the oral traditions ascribed to Muhammad. Thus Part I of the letter, “Love of God,” concludes with a reflection on a quotation from Muhammad on the absoluteness of God not only in the revelation he had received but also in “the prophets that came before me.”⁶⁵ Part II of the letter, “Love of the Neighbour,” draws the parallels between the second of the two great commandments and various passages from the Qur’an and Muhammad’s own teaching. “Without giving the neighbour what we ourselves love, we do not truly love God or the neighbour.”⁶⁶

The third and final part of the letter comes back to the theme with which the letter began. Although the letter is only addressed to Christian leaders, there are hints in Part III that Jews might also be included in its purview: “The *Two Greatest Commandments* are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur’an, the Torah and the New Testament . . . Thus the Unity of God, and love of the neighbour form a common ground upon which Islam and Christianity (and Judaism) are founded.”⁶⁷ Later in the same section the writers declare that “Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them.”⁶⁸

Alas, the breadth of these quotations from Part III of the letter is compromised in a section of “Frequently Asked Questions” appended to the 2009 edition of the letter available on line. Responding to a query as to why Jews are not addressed in the letter, the unknown respondent notes that “Jewish scriptures are invoked repeatedly and respectfully” by way of “preparing for a further document specifically addressed to Jewish scholars.” This is fair enough, as far as it goes, but then the unknown respondent concludes by stating that “this is a Theological document and the problems between Jews

and Muslims are essentially political not Theological.”⁶⁹ I would venture to suggest, however, that both Christians and Muslims have to come to terms with the Jewish roots of their respective traditions before there can be any genuine mutual understanding.

Whatever its limitations, the *Common Word* letter represents an attempt by a broad conspectus of Muslim scholars to speak for Islam. It begins to face up to the situation in which humanity lives today, and especially the cultural frontiers where Jews, Christians and Muslim face each other in fear and trembling, but also in hope.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the Book of Genesis we read how Abraham in the heat of the day welcomed three strangers at the entrance of his tent near the oaks of Mamre. Insisting on the duties of hospitality, Abraham, together with his wife, Sarah, fed those mysterious guests. The aged couple received as their reward almost unbelievably good news from the Lord, the birth of a son (Genesis 18: 1-15). The Letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament alludes to this hospitality: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13: 2). The Qur’an also narrates how Abraham and Sarah received their guests: “‘Will you not take something to eat?’ [Abraham] said, beginning to fear them. But they said, ‘Fear not!’ They gave him good news of a knowing son” (Qur’an 51: 27-28).⁷⁰

The tent of Abraham and Sarah, concretized in the various contemporary traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam described in this presentation, is large and welcoming. Not every guest of Abraham and Sarah will be exactly the same as every other guest, but the tent *is* large and the hospitality abundant. Not only must Jews, Christians and Muslims recognize each other across religious lines as fellow visitors to the tent of Abraham and Sarah, but different types of Jews, different types of Christians and different types of Muslims have a lot to learn about proper comportment among themselves in the tent. As people of faith we can and must look into the faces of our fellow guests and recognize the image and likeness of God in each one of us.

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), 40 and Chapter 2; italics are in the original.

² *Ibid.*, 41 and Chapter 3; italics are in the original.

³ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵ See Patrick J. Ryan, S.J., “Amen: Faith and the Possibility of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” Fall 2009 McGinley Lecture, Fordham University, November 18 and 19, 2009. This lecture was published in *Origins* 39 (December 24, 2009): 469-78 and in pamphlet form by Fordham University.

⁶ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32-39.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸ External critics of the *haredim* usually call them ultra-orthodox, a pejorative term that the *haredim* reject.

⁹ Samuel C. Heilman and Fred Skolnik, “Haredim,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 348. See also Samuel C. Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992) and the same author’s more recent *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Words from the triconsonantal root H-R-D are so translated.

¹¹ The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) so translates. The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation prefers forms of the word *concern* where the NRSV uses *tremble*.

¹² “At the outset of the Jews’ exile to Babylonia, the prophet Jeremiah . . . proclaimed G-d’s message to all the exiled . . . : “Seek out the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray for it to the Almighty, for through its welfare you will have welfare” [Jeremiah 29:7] . . . King Solomon in [the] Song of Songs thrice adjured the “daughters of Jerusalem” not to arouse or bestir the love “until it is ready” [Song 2:7, 3:5, 8:4]. The Talmud explains that we have been forsworn, by three strong oaths, not to ascend to the Holy Land as a group using force, not to rebel against the governments of countries in which we live, and not by our sins to prolong the coming of the moshiach [Messiah]; as is written in Tractate Kesubos 111a.” See “Three Strong Oaths” available online as www.jewsagainstzionism.com. I have added in brackets editorial clarifications.

¹³ Canon 1382 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law specifies that “a bishop who consecrates someone a bishop and the person who receives such a consecration from a bishop without pontifical mandate incur an automatic (*latae sententiae*) excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See.” See *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, eds. James A. Corriden, Thomas J. Green and Donald E. Heintschel (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985). The seriousness of this excommunication is underlined by the fact that it is one of only five excommunications reserved to the Pope. Even if the four bishops’ excommunications are lifted, they (as well as all their allied priests) are still suspended from licit liturgical practice.

¹⁴ See Yves Congar, O.P., *Challenge to the Church: The Case of Archbishop Lefebvre*, trans. Paul Inwood (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1976.) Appendix I reproduces Lefebvre’s ‘Profession of Faith’ (dated 21 November 1974), in which he specifies that “we refuse and have always refused to follow the Rome of neo-modernist and neo-Protestant tendencies which clearly manifested themselves in the Second Vatican Council” (77). Appendix IV, written by Francis Whyte, succinctly elucidates for an English-speaking readership the connections between Lefebvre and the right-wing French political ideology, *Action Française*.

¹⁵ The devotees of Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo of Zambia have not in large numbers followed him into his present adherence to the Korean-founded Unification Church.

¹⁶ The Bavarian church historian von Döllinger was excommunicated in 1871 for his critique of the definition of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. Thereafter he and other theological dissidents identified themselves with the Old Catholic Church, a German schismatic church that derived its episcopal succession from the Church of Utrecht, an originally Jansenist schism from Roman Catholicism. See the articles “Döllinger,” “Old Catholics” and “Holland, Christianity in” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

¹⁷ For the Latin text of the Holy Office condemnation of this rigorism, see *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 32nd edition (Barcelona/Freiburg im Breisgau/Rome/New York: Verlag Herder, 1963), sec. 3866-3873.

¹⁸ See George B. Pepper, *The Boston Heresy Case in View of the Secularization of Religion: A Case Study in the Sociology of Religion* (Lewiston, NY/Queenston, Ont.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988). For insider accounts of these events by followers of Father Feeney, see Catherine Goddard Clarke, *The Loyolas and the Cabots: The Story of the Crusade of Saint Benedict Center 1940-1950* (Richmond, NH: Saint Benedict Center, 1950) and the more recent work of Gabriel Gibbs, O.S.B., with Owen J. Murphy, Jr., *Harvard to Harvard* (Still River, MA: The Ravengate Press, 2006).

¹⁹ In one passage from the Qur'an the more frivolous wives of Muhammad are rebuked for decking themselves out "in finery of the first era of ignorance" (33:33). This is an offense far less serious than *kufr*. See the Editors' brief article "DJĀHILIYYA" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, eds. B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), II: 383b-384a. Further references to this source will be cited as *EI2*, with the volume and its date specified.

²⁰ W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1973), 9-37.

²¹ Only one of these movements survives today, the Ibadiyyah, the mildest in their definition of who is a Muslim and who is an infidel. See Tadeusz Lewicki, "al-IBĀḌIYYA," *EI2* (1971), III: 648a-660b.

²² See Henri Laoust, "IBN TAYMIYYA," *EI2* (1971), III: 951a-955a.

²³ See Henri Laoust, "IBN 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB," *EI2* (1971), III: 677b-679a.

²⁴ See J. J. G. Jansen, "SAYYID ḲUṬB," *EI2* (1997), IX: 117a-118b.

²⁵ See F. C. R. Robinson, "MAWDŪDĪ," *EI2* (1990), VI: 872a-874a.

²⁶ "We are also surrounded by *Jahiliyyah* today, which is of the same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper. Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws—is *Jahiliyyah*, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought are also constructs of *Jahiliyyah*! . . . We must also free ourselves from the clutches of *jahili* society, *jahili* concepts, *jahili* traditions and *jahili* leadership. Our mission is not to compromise with the practices of *jahili* society, nor can we be loyal to it. *Jahili* society, because of its *jahili* characteristics, is not worthy to be compromised with. Our aim is first to change ourselves so that we may later change the society." Seyyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar al-Ilm, n.d.), 20-21.

²⁷ See Maurice Martin and Rose Marie Massad, "'Al-Takfir wal-Hijrah': A Study in Sectarian Protest," in *Arab Culture 1977: Religious Identity and Radical Perspectives* [C.E.M.A.M. Reports, 5] (Beirut: Dar al-Mashreq, 1980).

²⁸ See Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²⁹ See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963, rpt. 1969), 363-64.

³⁰ Juan Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 171-72.

³¹ See Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*, tr. Allan Arkush (Hanover and London: University of New England Press for Brandeis University Press, 1983). The original was published in German in 1783.

³² *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, Inc., 1947), 323-24.

³³ *Judaism Beyond God* (n.p.: KTAV Publishing House, Inc/Society for Humanistic Judaism/Milan Press, 1995), 32.

³⁴ See Benny Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: the Religious Evolution of Felix Adler* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1979).

³⁵ The phrase occurs early in the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”

³⁶ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 92.

³⁷ Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 254-55. In the new introduction to this 2002 edition of a book Wills originally published in 1978, Wills admits he may have exaggerated the influence of the Scottish philosophers in the original edition, but he left the text unchanged. “If I were to rewrite it, I would make a more nuanced case for the Scottish influence, but I would still be making that case” (ix).

³⁸ Peale first published *The Power of Positive Thinking* in 1952, and it has been reprinted many times since then. See Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), described on the cover as “the great inspirational best seller of our time.”

³⁹ On the gradual alienation of Blanton from Peale, see Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers: Popular Religious Psychology from Mary Baker Eddy to Norman Vincent Peale to Ronald Reagan*, rev. ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), esp. 265-68.

⁴⁰ See Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 188-89. The Democratic presidential nominee in 1952 and 1956, Adlai Stevenson, who had earlier been criticized by Peale over his status as a divorced man, memorably said of Peale that “Speaking as a Christian, I find the Apostle Paul appealing and the Apostle Peale

appalling.” He seems to have recycled this quip when Peale criticized Kennedy’s Catholicism. See Michael O’Brien, *John F. Kennedy: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 474.

⁴¹ See Richard Young, *The Rise of Lakewood Church and Joel Osteen* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2007).

⁴² See http://www.cbsnews/stories/2007/10/11/60minutes/main_3358652.shtml. See also John Heilpern, “Minister of Finance,” *Vanity Fair* (April 2010), 80.

⁴³ Marshall Hodgson, in *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974) sums up the approach of the Muslim philosophers very well: “The Philosophic search is the truest way of honouring and worshipping God; the cults and moral rules and doctrines of ordinary ignorant people are merely imperfect attempts at the true Philosophic way.” (vol 1: 427).

⁴⁴ See W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazali* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1963), 57-65.

⁴⁵ See Roger Arnaldez, “IBN RUSHD,” *EI2* (1971), III: 909b-920a, esp. 915a-916b.

⁴⁶ See Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Economica Books, 1959.)

⁴⁷ See Lisa Anderson, “Qaddafi’s Islam,” in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 134.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 141-42.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 144-45.

⁵⁰ “The Meeting of the Brother Leader with the Heads of Churches Present throughout the Great Jamahiriya, the Ambassadors of Friendly Counties, and Political, Religious and Cultural Figures in Libyan Society” (30.12.2006) available on line at www.gathafi.org.

⁵¹ Stephen Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 71.

⁵² Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 45. Despite different orthographies, both Professor Carter and Rabbi Sacks are discussing the same concept, transcribed more formally as *hesed*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 103.

⁵⁸ See on this subject the early assessment (15 July 2005) of Pope Benedict XVI by Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, Director of Inter-Faith Relations of the Anti-Defamation League: “After 100 Days, It’s Clear that New Pope is a Friend of the Jews” available on line at www.adl.org.

⁵⁹ “The Heritage of Abraham: the Gift of Christmas,” *L’Osservatore Romano* (29 December 2000).

⁶⁰ “Visit to Yad Vashem Memorial: *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI*,” Monday, 11 May 2009, available on line at www.vatican.va.

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, “General Audience,” Wednesday, 6 December 2006, available on line at www.vatican.va.

⁶² “Meeting with Muslim Religious Leaders, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Rectors of Universities in Jordan: *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI*,” Saturday, 9 May 2009, available on line at www.vatican.va.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See *A Common Word Between Us and You* (Jordan: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2009), available on line at www.acommonword.com.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 277.

⁷⁰ My rendering in English.

McGinley Lecture Response

Daniel Polish

I want to express my thanks to Fordham University and to Father McShane for their wonderful hospitality. Most especially I want to express my gratitude to Father Ryan for inviting me to share some thoughts with you about the very provocative topic he has chosen as the theme of his spring public lecture.

I am glad to have the opportunity to think again in the categories delineated by H. Richard Niebuhr. I believe they are useful in articulating a clearer understanding of the Jewish tradition and in exploring the ways it is and is not analogous to its sister traditions of Christianity and Islam. I confess I find myself again, as I was in the fall McGinley lecture, providing a footnote to Father Ryan. But I think, too, that there will be instances where I formulate the issues -- even the same data -- somewhat differently from Father Ryan. More consequentially, there will be places where I find that the Jewish experience diverges significantly from the Christian experience of "Christ and Culture" and hope that these may prove of interest. I will not take the easy way out and say "'Christ and culture' boy is that not our issue." I will assume that Niebuhr is using the term "Christ" here as a metaphor more generally for religion so that he could have examined Buddhism and culture in Japan, or, as I do here, Judaism and culture.

I begin my response where any proper Jewish discussion of religious issues must begin - with the Bible. And I feel called upon to stress that, even as any number of American fundamentalist spokesmen make use of the Bible to sustain the patterns of the existing cultural order; the Bible was, on the contrary, in its original setting, very powerfully in opposition to the prevailing culture. From a long inventory, I mention just a few. In a cultural

setting where polytheism was the norm, Biblical religion grew to assert a monotheistic belief. In a world where the gods were the subject of extensive mythology, the Bible¹ presents us with virtually no discussion of God save in interaction with human beings.²

In terms of religious practice: the Bible was consistent in repudiating the rites of Israel's neighbors. In a world where religious practice was identified with the worship of idols or images, the Bible is vehemently in opposition to such practices: explicitly so in the second commandment, consistently throughout the Bible and most sardonically in Isaiah 44. In a world that was tolerant of human sacrifice, the Bible was explicitly in opposition. Perhaps we can hear this as the subtext of the story of the binding of Isaac.

Possibly most consequentially countercultural of all, Biblical religion represents a reconfiguration of the very concept of religion itself. In a way that its neighbors did not, Israel elevated ethical concerns to the central place in religious life. In a world defined by social hierarchy, Israel's major tendency was to advocate for social equality. In a cultural context that deferred to the powerful and prominent, the Bible betrays a preferential prejudice for the poor. The very notion of positing the foundational experience to be, not royal derivation, but the escape from slavery is representative of this tendency.

It is when we move beyond the Bible that the question of the relation of Judaism to culture becomes most provocative – especially in relation to the experience of Christianity and Islam. To state my hypothesis at the start I would argue that it is in the question of the relation of faith to culture that the Jewish experience is most disjunct from these other two traditions. This is because while each of them has, in various times and places, had the experience of constituting the dominant culture, Judaism has not, since the end of the Biblical period, enjoyed the same kind of cultural hegemony. Quite the reverse. Indeed I was tempted

to subtitle this section of my remarks: “ ‘Judaism and Culture’? You’ve got to be kidding”. It seems to me that the history of Judaism in the diaspora has almost universally been one of unremitting opposition and resistance to the dominant culture. The strong countercultural valence of post Biblical Judaism serves, as Father Ryan has already noted, as the engine of the story of the Maccabees³ – and the attendant Jewish celebration of Chanukah. These rest on the repudiation of Hellenism, the dominant Greek inspired pattern of culture and, by extension, add a religious imprimatur to the rejection of assimilation into the dominant cultural patterns.

The story of Jewish life in Christian Europe is one of persistent opposition in the face of overwhelming, and often lethal, cultural pressures.⁴ The stubborn maintenance of religious and social patterns even while living as a statistically insignificant minority is perhaps a paradigm of faith as antithetical to culture.⁵ The paradigm of this is the Marannos of Spain who insisted on living a secret Jewish life even at mortal risk in opposition to the decrees of the Inquisition and the temporal powers.⁶ In more recent times we see this withdrawal from the dominant culture concretely represented in the creation of specifically Jewish enclaves in places like Crown Heights in Brooklyn or Kiryas Joel in Rockland County. Nor can we ignore the Refuseniks, the Jews of the Soviet Union who insisted on living secret Jewish lives in radical opposition to the official atheism of their government

I do not wish to overstate this case. But it seems that a fair reading of Jewish history would suggest that its dominant mode put it at consistently at odds with the prevailing culture. Would I then find no resonance with Niebuhr’s typology of the agreement of faith and culture? Clearly such agreement did exist in those instances -- and they are not a few -- where the predominant culture was, itself, Jewish. We are reminded that the great twentieth

century Jewish thinker Mordechai Kaplan identified Judaism as a “Civilization”⁷ -- that is as culture.

To advert again to the Bible, the Psalms betray an ideology of religious assent to the political prerogatives of the Davidic dynasty -- as in Psalm two’s depiction of God’s assertion to David, “You are my son, this day have I begotten you” or the frequent citations, as in Psalm 18, of the divine promise that David’s descendants would sit on the throne “forever”. During the period of the first Temple we note the extent to which the priesthood was enmeshed with the monarchy. Perhaps it is this that is symbolized by the literally fraternal relationship between Moses, who held political leadership of the people, and Aaron, the first of the priests. Or was it embodied in the figure of Samuel who functioned as both priest and prophet -- two modes of religious authority -- and judge -- military/political leader -- and who seems to have resisted the disentangling of those roles.

We see a similarly positive relationship between faith and culture in post Biblical Jewish life. It is present in the Jewish life of Eastern Europe -- at least as it is idealized in Abraham Joshua Heschel’s “The Earth is the Lord’s”. What we know historically about these communities is that here, was in fact, a collective communal life -- in other words a culture -- patterned by religious commitment and devotion. Certainly the reality of that vanished world was one in which there was a close association of the religious leadership with the wealthiest -- presumably the culture shaping -- strata of that insular society. The most prominent rabbinic leadership customarily married into the families of the socially elite. We see a seamless integration of faith and culture today within the enclaves of Haredi and Chasidic life notwithstanding -- or precisely as a consequence of -- their alienation from the dominant culture.

Yet there have been instances of interpenetration of Jewish religion and the non-Jewish dominant culture. In Spain during what was called the golden age of Spain, Jewish religious life was fully integrated with the intellectual and political life of the Moorish dominated society. In Germany in the wake of the enlightenment and emancipation German Jews prided themselves in what they imagined was a perfect harmonization of their “Mosaic persuasion” and the German culture in which they resided. Today it is taken as a truism that in America we see an -- at least ascribed -- harmonization of Jewish values with the ideals of the predominant culture. Such an idea was popularized by writers like Will Herberg in his “Protestant, Catholic and Jew” in which Jewish values were perceived to be wholly congruent with the “civil religion” of Americanism with their mutual emphasis on justice, equality, and self-discipline.⁸

Let us return to the instances in which Judaism itself provided the cultural context. Here we find examples not only of harmonization of faith and culture but instances in which Jewish faith itself was opposed to (Jewish) culture. The Bible is, at the very least skeptical of the institution of the monarchy. Indeed both Deuteronomy 17 and Samuel, in his role as prophet explicitly warn the people against enthroning a king -- this despite the remarkable fact that much of the text may have found expression under the patronage of one of the members of the Davidic dynasty. The prophets were unsparing in their critiques of various of the kings, typified most powerfully by the prophet Nathan’s dramatic denunciation of David, or by Elijah’s imprecations against Ahab and his impolitic prediction of the king and his wife’s imminent and violent deaths. The prophets were similarly denunciatory of the sacrificial cult and the people’s empty, mechanical enactment of it. Countless examples from the prophets could be cited, most stirringly Isaiah 58, “is this the fast I have chosen” or Jeremiah mocking

the people's vain belief that the Temple would protect them from immanent attack by Babylonia (7:1ff). These are Biblical instances of Jewish faith against culture, even when the culture was Jewish.⁹ Examples could be cited from post-Biblical history

It is the third of Niebuhr's types that offers the greatest opportunity for provocative speculation. Is there such a thing as Jewish religion mediating culture? I would suggest that this is the very complicated project presented to Judaism today by the creation of the State of Israel. For the first time in two thousand years we see the establishment of a fully autonomous Jewish culture. This creates a very complex dynamic. At this moment, a small vocal minority with disproportionate political influence clearly would be delighted with the creation of a theocracy -- that is they would determine the direction of that society and culture in the name of their interpretation of the religious tradition. The achievement of this goal would represent a perfect meshing of religion and culture -- a full realization of Niebuhr's second type.

At the opposite extreme are those who are antipathetic to this theocratic program and whose aspiration is the creation of a wholly secular state and culture. In such a setting religion would be confined to the private realm, utterly cut off from the public square and non-determinative of the common life. Religion would be left to rail against the predominant culture: how terrible that stores are allowed to be open on Shabbat; look at those impious women in short sleeves; men and women riding in the same bus, how degraded; how dare they sell bread on Passover. Religion against culture in a Jewish idiom.

But it is here, in the midst of the still emerging culture of Israel, that we find the most promise for the emergence of a mediating role: a Judaism at one with the predominant culture but providing the chastisement of the ethical correctness of the way that society lives

its collective life -- reminding culture of the ethical values at the core of the inherited tradition. We have already seen some of the first tender shoots of this type of mediating Judaism: groups like rabbis for human rights; the fact that it is religious voices which are speaking most clearly for the rights of refugees from Darfur or demanding that menial laborers be treated with justice. All of this portends the unfolding of a Jewish future unlike anything we have known for over two thousand years. However, one caveat.

Even as Judaism has, since 1948, come to live in the midst of what the earliest theorists of Zionism aspired to: a “normal” society and culture,¹⁰ the very context of that predominantly Jewish culture is in the process of changing dramatically. One approach to Jewish history has seen the Jewish people as the canary in the coalmine of human experience. Whatever befalls the Jews ultimately happens to everyone else. In this case the fact that so much of Jewish experience transpired in the context of a culture not their own now becomes a paradigm for all religious groups. As we enter the age of a globalized culture every religious community will now occupy a subsidiary status. The new global culture will not be dominated by any single religious perspective and will function essentially independent of all of them. Indeed, all of religious groups will be interacting with that culture from a minority posture. One dominant culture, many religious minorities relating to it in a host of ways. How those various religious communities will respond to this new context in the terms of Niebuhr’s typology can, for now, only be the subject of fascinated conjecture.

NOTES

¹ At least after Genesis 1

² What does God do when not bothering with us?

³ Paradoxically related in a book which is not even included in the Jewish canon

⁴ This is true, too, in the main, in cultural settings that were dominantly Muslim, though, as a rule, to a lesser degree and, generally, less destructively

⁵ More mundane examples abound: the widespread literacy of Jews (including women) on a culture of predominant illiteracy; the establishment of alternative political structures that characterized many of the Jewish communities scattered throughout Europe.

⁶ Whatever the historical reality of the situation of the Marannos, the fact that this episode in Jewish life has attained mythic status and continues to be a live part of the Jewish telling of their own story is suggestive of the self understanding of Jews and representative of a reflexive willingness to be oppositional to the dominant culture

⁷ A term that Niebuhr, himself uses, at times, interchangeably with culture

⁸ Perhaps we can talk another time about the extent to which these particular ideals are realized in this society; and to the extent they are not, how Judaism would, again, be identified typologically as a faith in opposition to the dominant culture -- but perhaps this is an example of yet another of Niebuhr's typologies: religion playing a mediating role in culture, a subject to which we shall shortly return.

⁹ We can find similar examples of Jewish faith in opposition to Jewish culture in the various schisms within Jewish life. We see it in what historian Ellis Rivkin calls "the Pharisaic revolution" against the dominant religious/cultural patterns embodied by the Sadducees. This was not only a struggle over religious perspectives but was fraught with socio-economic overtones. Perhaps we see this same sort of cultural opposition in the struggle reflected in the Book of Acts and many of Paul's epistles between that group of Jewish believers in Jesus who constituted the early church and the prevailing norms of Jewish life advocated by James the brother of Jesus. A similar cultural disjunction is seen in the opposition of the Karaites against the prevailing culture of the Rabbinites. In Eastern Europe we see much the same phenomenon in the emergence of Chasidism as an expression of opposition to the dominant scholarly mode of Jewish piety and all of its associations with the social elite. And in Western Europe beginning two hundred years ago in 1810, the creation of Reform Judaism as a reaction against the then dominant norms of Jewish life as ultimately articulated by the movement that came to be called Orthodoxy can best be understood as a tear in the social fabric of the world of that culture.

¹⁰ Actually this was very much the subject of debate from the very beginning of the Zionist enterprise. While one camp -- the political Zionists, represented by Theodore Herzl -- aspired to a normal existence, to be a nation like all the other nations; another camp -- the cultural Zionists, embodied in the work of Asher Ginzberg, called Achad Ha'Am -- wanted to create a Jewish state that embodied values at odds with the normal states with which its adherents were all too familiar: a "light to the nations" in a modern context and idiom.

McGinley Lecture Muslim Response

Amir Hussain

Greetings and good evening: *al-salaamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatahu* (Peace be upon you and the Mercy and Blessings of God). I am honored and delighted to be invited back to Fordham to offer a brief response to the wonderful spring McGinley lecture that we heard from Fr. Ryan. A very simple and a very sincere “Thank you” to all of you here. I need to single out Fr. Joseph McShane for his hospitality and his kind introduction, Sr. Anne-Marie Kirmse for her help with the arrangements, Rabbi Polish for his remarks, and of course to Fr. Ryan for inviting me to respond to his lecture.

We all began our remarks last November in memory of our teacher, Wilfred Cantwell Smith. On January 24, Wilfred’s widow, Muriel MacKenzie Struthers Smith, passed away in Toronto. I was privileged to be asked by her family to speak at her memorial service on February 7, and I began my remarks with the Chinese Communist saying, “Women hold up half of the sky.” That line was appropriate on both Chinese and Communist counts, as Muriel began life in China, the daughter of missionary parents, and she and Wilfred both had—how to say this in polite company?—youthful indiscretions with Communism. I will return to Muriel at the close of my response, but let me offer my remarks this evening in memory of her.

I will keep my remarks brief, as Fr. Ryan has done a superb job with his lecture. I am, as ever, amazed by his erudition, and can only congratulate you, yet again, on your wise decision to make him the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of

Religion and Society. I also want to say what a delight it was to re-read H. Richard Niebuhr's text, *Christ and Culture*. Almost sixty years old, the book is still marvelous, to the point that I found the new introductions in the fiftieth anniversary edition by Martin Marty and James Gustafson to detract from it (and by that comment I don't mean any disrespect to Professors Marty and Gustafson, both of whom I admire).

There are almost no references to Islam or Muslims in Niebuhr's text. The Prophet Muhammad is mentioned once in passing on page 13, and there is a reference to Muslim and Jewish Aristotelianism on page 130. To Christian eyes, this may not seem surprising. After all, why should Muslims be mentioned in a book about Christ? However, to Muslim eyes, there should be some mention, as Jesus is named in fifteen chapters and ninety-three verses of the Qur'ān. More to the point, eleven times he is referred to as *al-masih*, Arabic for the Hebrew, *moshiach*, the messiah, which becomes the Christ in Greek.

As a Muslim, the Qur'ān commands me to understand Jesus as Christ, and so I read the New Testament to learn more about him. Of Christ in the New Testament, Niebuhr writes: "The fact remains that the Christ who exercises authority over Christians or whom Christians accept as authority is the Jesus Christ of the New Testament."¹ To this, all that I can say is, "From Niebuhr's lips to God's ears." I only wish that more people would read the New Testament, and discover Jesus, the Christ, found therein. Let me quote my favourite lines from the New Testament, from Matthew's Gospel. And believe me, I understand the irony of a Muslim reading from the Gospels in front of priests and nuns. Thankfully,

this isn't a Mass so I'm allowed to do this.

And as I read these words, I'm reminded by Jack Miles, a friend of Fr. Ryan in their salad days at Harvard, that the "you" in the Greek text, when Jesus is speaking, is not the singular you, the individual Christian, but the plural you, the Church. This is the parable of the Great Judgment, Matthew 25:31-46, which I don't remember Niebuhr citing in his text. It runs in part:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to visit you?" And the King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40).

I feel the need here, with Fr. Ryan beside me, to confess—to confess the terror that I sometimes feel when I read these words, and am reminded of how often I fail to live out what Jesus commands us. Then again, perhaps I wasn't brought on this panel to proclaim the Gospel, but to talk about Islam.

Niebuhr uses a common Christian metaphor, that of the world,² as a pejorative synonym for culture, and a contrast to Christ. The same metaphor exists among Muslims, *din* (or religion) and *dunya* (the world). The world, of course, usually carries negative connotations. It is what my Rastafarian friends,

following usage in Jewish history, refer to as Babylon. Or to quote from Niebuhr citing C. H. Dodd's translation of the First Letter of John 2:16: "pagan society, with its sensuality, superficiality and pretentiousness, its materialism and its egoism."³ For a good Angeleno such as myself, this of course is a description of New York City, although, I *can* see how you here in Gotham might think of it, instead, as a description of the City of Angels.

Fr. Ryan has marvelously articulated for us examples of the tension of these two opposites, faith and the world, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is what Niebuhr refers to as faith against culture. In the modern Muslim context, the example of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab illustrates both faith against culture, as well as faith against faith. It is instructive to remember that in the eighteenth century, when Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab wanted to drive out the foreigners from Arabia and purify what he saw as a decadent culture, those foreigners were not Christian Europeans, but fellow Sunni Muslims, the Ottoman Turks.

Another helpful dichotomy was one articulated by our teacher, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, that of "faith" and the "cumulative tradition." Of this, Wilfred wrote in 1981:

. . . It seems quite evident, and readily demonstrable to the sensitive and informed, that what used to be called the religions are each finite, human and historical –as well as infinite, divine, and timeless. This applies to one's own, as well as to others.

Each is a divine-human complex in motion. That is why careful historical scholarship separates each into two component elements: what I have called respectively 'cumulative tradition' and 'faith'. In faith, we are in touch with God. Seen more largely, God, if we are to use that theistic term, is in touch with particular men and women and children, at particular times and places, through particular mundane forms. Human history is and always has been in part

mundane, transitory, finite; and in part, transcendent. Human beings, each in a particular earthly context, are in relation to God; faith is my name for that relation, wherever, and in whatever form, it occurs. More precisely, it names the human side of the relation. Historical awareness is increasingly able to see that the cumulative tradition is finite, human, and historical. It is in constant process. To imagine that any cumulative tradition is stable is now seen as a historically conditioned, albeit historically understandable, error. Christian doctrines have evolved. They are still evolving. None is finally true. The Torah and the *shari'ah* (Jewish and Islamic 'Law') came into historical existence slowly; and today they are in process of revision.⁴

There is so much more to talk about here. Perhaps during our discussion I could talk more about the faith of culture, that, for example, of Muslims for Progressive Values, or the Humanistic Judaism of Rabbi Sherwin Wine, and my own experiences at Wine's Birmingham Temple.

Or we could talk of faith integrating culture. Here, I think most often about the success of Jesuit missions in Asia, where other Christian missions often failed. Those failures often originated in European Christians trying to turn Asians into Europeans. The Jesuits, instead, expressed the Christian message in Asian terms, and did not require Asians to become Europeans.

Another great good accomplished by Jesuits is in their universities, in one of which I am privileged to teach. This semester, for example, I am doing a course at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles on Muslim/Jewish theology, team taught with Rabbi Chaim Seidler-Feller, for over 30 years the Hillel Director of UCLA. In that classroom, I am discovering connections that Rabbi Polish mentioned in his response, as my experience as a Muslim in North America has been that of one member of a minority. I have only lived briefly in places where Islam was the dominant religion. In that regard, I share the Jewish experiences of being a

religious minority.

But let me end here with a reference to Muriel Smith that I promised at the beginning. In any discussion about faith and culture, we, particularly when it is a male “we,” have to keep at the front of our minds the crucial roles of women in both faith and culture. I was reminded of that at Muriel’s funeral. Born in China, she was educated in English Canada. When Wilfred was hired at McGill in 1949, they moved to Montreal. At that point, they had three small children, Arnold, Julian, and Heather, with a fourth, Brian, born in 1951.

So there was Muriel, an English Protestant woman in a French Catholic city with a husband at work and four small children at home. And in those days, new professors did not command the princely sums that we currently enjoy, and so there were economic hardships as well.

In this context I thought for the first time about the shared experiences, the shared culture, of Muriel and my own mother, Feroza. My mother is a Muslim woman from Pakistan, who found herself in Protestant Toronto, raising two small children on the working class salary of my father, Iqbal, who worked in factories. Until that moment, I had always thought of Muriel as a white woman of privilege, with no connections to a poor immigrant woman of color like my mother. Although living in very different cultures, these two women shared in both faith and culture. Women, we need to remember, hold up half of the sky.

Thank you!

NOTES

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 32.

³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "History in Relation to both Science and Religion," in W. C. Smith and John Burbidge, eds, *Modern Culture from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 16. This chapter was originally published by Smith in the *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 2 (1981): 3-10.