Essays on Human Existence

The INSECURITY *of* FREEDOM

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To
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1 / *Religion in a Free Society*

I

Little does contemporary religion ask of man. It is ready to offer comfort; it has no courage to challenge. It is ready to offer edification; it has no courage to break the idols, to shatter callousness. The trouble is that religion has become "religion"—institution, dogma, ritual. It is no longer an event. Its acceptance involves neither risk nor strain. Religion has achieved respectability by the grace of society, and its representatives publish as a frontispiece the *nihil obstat* signed by social scientists.

There is no substitute for faith, no alternative for revelation, no surrogate for commitment. This we must remember in order to save our thought from confusion. And confusion is not a rare disease. We are guilty of committing the fallacy of misplacement. We define self-reliance and call it faith, shrewdness and call it wisdom, anthropology and call it ethics, literature and call it Bible, inner security and call it religion, conscience and call it God. However, nothing counterfeit can endure forever. Theories may intensify oblivion, yet there is a spirit in history to remind us.

It is customary to blame secular science and antireligious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull,

oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless.

Religion is an answer to ultimate questions. The moment we become oblivious to ultimate questions, religion becomes irrelevant, and its crisis sets in. The primary task of religious thinking is to rediscover the questions to which religion is an answer, to develop a degree of sensitivity to the ultimate questions which its ideas and acts are trying to answer.

Religious thinking is an intellectual endeavor out of the depths of reason. It is a source of cognitive insight into the ultimate issues of human existence. Religion is more than a mood or a feeling. Judaism, for example, is a way of thinking and a way of living. Unless we understand its categories, its mode of apprehension and evaluation, its teachings remain unintelligible.

It is not enough to call for good will. We are in desperate need of good thinking.

Our theme is religion and its relation to the free society. Such a relation can be established only if we succeed in rediscovering the intellectual relevance of the Bible.

The most serious obstacle which modern men encounter in entering a discussion about the ideas of the Bible, is the absence from man's consciousness of the problems to which the Bible refers. This, indeed, is the status of the Bible in modern society: it is a sublime answer, but we no longer know the question to which it responds. Unless we recover the question, there is no hope of understanding the Bible.

The Bible is an answer to the question, What does God require of man? But to modern man, this question is suppressed by another one, namely, What does man demand of God? Modern man continues to ponder: What will I get out of life? What escapes his

attention is the fundamental, yet forgotten question, What will life get out of me?

Absorbed in the struggle for the emancipation of the individual we have concentrated our attention upon the idea of human rights and overlooked the importance of human obligations. More and more the sense of commitment, which is so essential a component of human existence, was lost in the melting pot of conceit and sophistication. Oblivious to the fact of his receiving infinitely more than he is able to return, man began to consider his self as the only end. Caring only for his needs rather than for his being needed, he is hardly able to realize that rights are anything more than legalized interests.

Needs are looked upon today as if they were holy, as if they contained the totality of existence. Needs are our gods, and we toil and spare no effort to gratify them. Suppression of a desire is considered a sacrilege that must inevitably avenge itself in the form of some mental disorder. We worship not one but a whole pantheon of needs and have come to look upon moral and spiritual norms as nothing but personal desires in disguise.[1]

Specifically, need denotes the absence or shortage of something indispensable to the well-being of a person, evoking the urgent desire for satisfaction. The term "need" is generally used in two ways: one denoting the actual lack, an objective condition, and the other denoting the awareness of such a lack. It is in the second sense, in which need is synonymous with interest, namely "an unsatisfied capacity corresponding to an unrealized condition" that the term is used here.

Every human being is a cluster of needs, yet these needs are not the same in all men or unalterable in any one man. There is a fixed minimum of needs for all men, but no fixed maximum for any man. Unlike animals, man is the playground for the unpredictable emergence and multiplication of needs and interests, some of which are indigenous to his nature, while others are induced by advertisement, fashion, envy, or come about as miscarriages of authentic needs. We

usually fail to discern between authentic and artificial needs and, misjudging a whim for an aspiration, we are thrown into ugly tension. Most obsessions are the perpetuation of such misjudgments. In fact, more people die in the epidemics of needs than in the epidemics of disease. To stem the expansion of man's needs, which in turn is brought about by technological and social advancement, would mean to halt the stream on which civilization is riding. Yet the stream unchecked may sweep away civilization itself, since the pressure of needs turned into aggressive interests is the constant cause of wars, and increases in direct proportion to technological progress.

We cannot make our judgments, decisions, and directions for action dependent upon our needs. The fact is that man who has found out so much about so many things knows neither his own heart nor his own voice. Many of the interests and needs we cherish are imposed on us by the conventions of society; they are not indigenous to our essence. While some of them are necessities, others, as I pointed out before, are fictitious, and adopted as a result of convention, advertisement, or sheer envy.

The contemporary man believes he has found the philosopher's stone in the concept of needs. But who knows his true needs? How are we going to discern authentic from fictitious needs, necessities from make-believes?

Having absorbed an enormous amount of needs and having been taught to cherish the high values, such as justice, liberty, faith, as private or national interests, we are beginning to wonder whether needs and interests should be relied upon. While it is true that there are interests which all men have in common, most of our private and national interests, as asserted in daily living, divide and antagonize rather than unite us.

Interest is a subjective, dividing principle. It is the excitement of feeling, accompanying special attention paid to some object. But do we pay sufficient attention to the demands of universal justice? In fact, the interest in universal welfare is usually blocked by the interest in personal welfare, particularly when it is to be achieved at

the price of renouncing one's vested interests. It is just because the power of interests is tyrannizing our lives, determining our views and actions, that we lose sight of the values that count most.

Short is the way from need to greed. Evil conditions make us seethe with evil needs, with mad dreams. Can we afford to pursue all our innate needs, even our will for power?

In the tragic confusion of interests, in which every one of us is caught, no distinction seems to be as indispensable as the distinction between right and wrong interests. Yet the concepts of right and wrong, to be standards in our dealing with interests, cannot themselves be interests. Determined as they are by temperament, bias, background, and environment of every individual and group, needs are our problems rather than our norms. They are in need of, rather than the origins of, standards.

He who sets out to employ the realities of life as means for satisfying his own desires will soon forfeit his freedom and be degraded to a mere tool. Acquiring things, he becomes enslaved to them; in subduing others, he loses his own soul. It is as if unchecked covetousness were double-faced; a sneer and subtle vengeance behind a captivating smile. We can ill afford to set up needs, an unknown, variable, vacillating, and eventually degrading factor, as a universal standard, as a supreme, abiding rule or pattern for living.

We feel jailed in the confinement of personal needs. The more we indulge in satisfactions, the deeper is our feeling of oppressiveness. To be an iconoclast of idolized needs, to defy our own immoral interests, though they seem to be vital and have long been cherished, we must be able to say No to ourselves in the name of a higher Yes. Yet our minds are late, slow, and erratic. What can give us the power to curb the deference to wrong needs, to detect spiritual fallacies, to ward off false ideals, and to wrestle with inattentiveness to the unseemly and holy?

This, indeed, is the purpose of our religious traditions: to keep alive the higher Yes as well as the power of man to say, "Here I am"; to teach our minds to understand the true demand and to teach our conscience to be present. Too often we misunderstand the

demand; too often the call goes forth, and history records our conscience as absent.

Religion has adjusted itself to the modern temper by proclaiming that it too is the satisfaction of a need. This conception, which is surely diametrically opposed to the prophetic attitude, has richly contributed to the misunderstanding and sterilization of religious thinking. To define religion primarily as a quest for personal satisfaction, as the satisfaction of a human need, is to make of it a refined sort of magic. Did the thunderous voice at Sinai proclaim the ten Words in order to satisfy a need? The people felt a need for a graven image, but that need was condemned. The people were homesick for the fleshpots of Egypt. They said: "Give us flesh." And the Lord gave them spirit, not only flesh.

The Bible does not begin with man, or the history of religion, or man's need for God. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." To begin with human needs is a sign of man's pitiful perspective.

Religion is spiritual effrontery. Its root is in our bitter sense of inadequacy, in a thirst which can only be stilled by greater thirst, in the embarrassment that we really do not care for God, in the discovery that our religious need is utterly feeble, that we do not feel any need for God.

We must beware of converting needs into ends, interests into norms. The task is precisely the opposite: it is to convert ends into needs, to convert the divine commandment into a human concern.

Religion is not a way of satisfying needs. It is an answer to the question: Who needs man? It is an awareness of being needed, of man being a need of God. It is a way of sanctifying the satisfaction of authentic needs.

It is an inherent weakness of religion not to take offense at the segregation of God, to forget that the true sanctuary has no walls. Religion has often suffered from the tendency to become an end in itself, to seclude the holy, to become parochial, self-indulgent, self-seeking; as if the task were not to ennoble human nature but to enhance the power and beauty of its institutions or to enlarge the

body of doctrines. It has often done more to canonize prejudices than to wrestle for truth; to petrify the sacred than to sanctify the secular. Yet the task of religion is to be a challenge to the stabilization of values.

Religion is not for religion's sake but for God's sake Who is "gracious and merciful . . . good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made" (Psalm 145:8 f.).

II

The mind of the prophets was not religion-centered. They dwelt more on the affairs of the royal palace, on the ways and views of the courts of justice, than on the problems of the priestly rituals at the temple of Jerusalem.[2]

We today are shocked when informed about *an increase* in juvenile delinquency, or *an increase* in the number of crimes committed in our city. The normal amount of juvenile delinquency, the normal number of crimes does not cause us to be dismayed. At this very moment somewhere throughout the nation crimes are being committed.

The sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal, as a typical ingredient of social dynamics. A single act of injustice—to us it is slight, to the prophet it is a disaster.

Turning from the discourses of the great metaphysicians to the orations of the prophets, one may feel as if he were going down from the realm of the sublime to an area of trivialities. Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, one is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the market place. The prophets make so much ado about paltry things, employing the most excessive language in speaking about flimsy subjects. So what if somewhere in ancient Palestine poor people have not been treated properly by the rich? So what if some old women found pleasure and edification in worship-

ing "the Queen of Heaven"? Why such immoderate excitement? Why such intense indignation?

Their breathless impatience with injustice may strike us as hysteria. We ourselves witness continually acts of injustice, manifestations of hypocrisy, falsehood, outrage, misery, but we rarely get indignant or overly excited. To the prophets a minor, commonplace sort of injustice assumes almost cosmic proportions.

> Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
> be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord.
> For My people have committed two evils:
> they have forsaken Me,
> the fountain of living waters
> and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
> Broken cisterns
> that can hold no water.
>
> Jeremiah 2:12–13

They speak and act as if the sky were about to collapse because Israel had become unfaithful to God.

Is not the size of their indignation, is not the size of God's anger in disproportion to its cause? How should one explain such moral and religious excitability, such extreme impetuosity?

The prophet's words are outbursts of violent emotions. His rebuke is harsh and relentless. But if such deep sensitivity to evil is to be called hysterical, what name should be given to the deep callousness to evil which the prophet bewails? "They drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils; but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph" (Amos 6:6).

The niggardliness of our moral comprehension, the incapacity to sense the depth of misery caused by our own failures, is a fact which no subterfuge can elude. Our eyes are witness to the callousness and cruelty of man, but our heart tries to obliterate the memories, to calm the nerves, and to silence our conscience.

The prophet is a man who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden

upon his soul, and he is bowed and stunned at man's fierce greed. Frightful is the agony of man; no human voice can convey its full terror. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophets' words.

The prophets had disdain for those to whom God was comfort and security; to them God was a challenge, an incessant demand. He is compassion, but not a compromise; justice, but not inclemency. Tranquillity is unknown to the soul of a prophet. The miseries of the world give him no rest. While others are callous, and even callous to their callousness and unaware of their insensitivity, the prophets remain examples of supreme impatience with evil, distracted by neither might nor applause, by neither success nor beauty. Their intense sensitivity to right and wrong is due to their intense sensitivity to God's concern for right and wrong. They feel fiercely because they hear deeply.

The weakness of many systems of moral philosophy is in their isolationism. The isolation of morality is an assumption that the good is unrelated to the morally neutral values. However, there is an interrelatedness between the moral and all other acts of man, whether in the realm of theory or in the realm of aesthetic or technical application, and the moral person must not be thought of as if he were a professional magician, moral in some situations and immoral in others.

Consequently the moral problem cannot be solved as a moral problem. It must be dealt with as part of the total issue of man. The supreme problem is all of life, not good and evil. We cannot deal with morality unless we deal with all of man, the nature of existence, of doing, of meaning.

The prophets tried to overcome the isolationism of religion. It is the prophets who teach us that the problem of living does not arise with the question of how to take care of the rascals, of how to prevent delinquency or hideous crimes. The problem of living

begins with the realization of how we all blunder in dealing with our fellow men. The silent atrocities, the secret scandals, which no law can prevent, are the true seat of moral infection. The problem of living begins, in fact, in relation to our own selves, in the handling of our emotional functions, in the way we deal with envy, greed, and pride. What is first at stake in the life of man is not the fact of sin, of the wrong and corrupt, but the neutral acts, the needs. Our possessions pose no less a problem than our passions. The primary task, therefore, is not how to deal with the evil, but how to deal with the neutral, how to deal with needs.

The central commandment is in relation to the person. But religion today has lost sight of the person.

Religion has become an impersonal affair, an institutional loyalty. It survives on the level of activities rather than in the stillness of commitment. It has fallen victim to the belief that the real is only that which is capable of being registered by fact-finding surveys.

By religion is meant what is done publicly rather than that which comes about in privacy. The chief virtue is social affiliation rather than conviction.

Inwardness is ignored. The spirit has become a myth. Man treats himself as if he were created in the likeness of a machine rather than in the likeness of God. The body is his god, and its needs are his prophets. Having lost his awareness of his sacred image, he became deaf to the meaning: to live in a way which is compatible with his image.

Religion without a soul is as viable as a man without a heart. Social dynamics is no substitute for meaning. Yet, the failure to realize the fallacy of such substitution seems to be common in our days.

Perhaps this is the most urgent task: to save the inner man from oblivion, to remind ourselves that we are a duality of mysterious grandeur and pompous dust. Our future depends upon our appreciation of the reality of the inner life, of the splendor of thought, of the dignity of wonder and reverence. This is the most important

thought: God has a stake in the life of man, of every man. But this idea cannot be imposed from without; it must be discovered by every man; it cannot be preached, it must be experienced.

When the Voice of God spoke at Sinai, it did not begin by saying, "I am the Lord your God Who created heaven and earth." It began by saying, "I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Judaism is not only deliverance from external slavery, but also freedom from false fears and false glories, from fashion, from intellectual will-o'-the-wisps. In our souls we are subject to causes; in our spirits we are free, beholding the uncompromising.

The most commanding idea that Judaism dares to think is that freedom, not necessity, is the source of all being. The universe was not caused, but created. Behind mind and matter, order and relations, the freedom of God obtains. The inevitable is not eternal. All compulsion is a result of choice. A tinge of that exemption from necessity is hiding in the folds of the human spirit.

We are not taught to feel accused, to bear a sense of boundless guilt. We are asked to feel elated, bred to meet the tasks that never end.

Every child is a prince; every man is obliged to feel that the world was created for his sake. Man is not the measure of all things, but the means by which to accomplish all tasks.

As a free being the Jew must accept an enormous responsibility. The first thing a Jew is told is: You can't let yourself go; get into harness, carry the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. He is told to bear loads of responsibility. He is told to abhor self-complacency, to enjoy freedom of choice. He has been given life and death, good and evil, and is urged to choose, to discriminate. Yet freedom is not only the ability to choose and to act, but also the ability to will, to love. The predominant feature of Jewish teaching throughout the ages is a sense of constant obligation.

We are taught to prefer truth to security, to maintain loyalty even

at the price of being in the minority. It is inner freedom that gives man the strength to forgo security, the courage to remain lonely in the multitude.

Judaism is forever engaged in a bitter battle against man's deeply rooted belief in fatalism and its ensuing inertia in social, moral, and spiritual conditions. Abraham started in rebellion against his father and the gods of his time. His great distinction was not in being loyal and conforming, but in defying and initiating. He was loved by the Lord not for ancestral worship but because he taught his descendants to "keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right" (Genesis 18:19).

III

We all share a supreme devotion to the hard-won freedoms of the American people. Yet to be worthy of retaining our freedoms we must not lose our understanding of the essential nature of freedom. Freedom means more than mere emancipation. It is primarily freedom of conscience, bound up with inner allegiance. The danger begins when freedom is thought to consist in the fact that "I can act as I desire." This definition not only overlooks the compulsions which often lie behind our desires; it reveals the tragic truth that freedom may develop within itself the seed of its own destruction. The will is not an ultimate and isolated entity, but determined by motives beyond its own control. *To be* what one wants to be is also not freedom, since the wishes of the ego are largely determined by external factors.

Freedom is not a principle of uncertainty, the ability to act without a motive. Such action would be chaotic and subrational, rather than free.

Although political and social freedom must include all this, even the freedom to err—its true essence is in man's ability to surpass himself, even to act against his inclinations and in defiance of his own needs and desires, to sacrifice prejudice even if it *hurts*, to give up superstition even when it claims to be a doctrine.

Freedom is the liberation from the tyranny of the self-centered ego. It comes about in moments of transcending the self as an act of spiritual ecstasy, of stepping out of the confining framework of routine reflexive concern. Freedom presupposes *the capacity for sacrifice.*

Although all men are potentially free, it is our sacred duty to safeguard all those political, social, and intellectual conditions which will enable every man to bring about the concrete actualization of freedom which is the essential prerequisite of creative achievement.

The shock of radical amazement, the humility born in awe and reverence, the austere discipline of unremitting inquiry and self-criticism are acts of liberating man from the routine way of looking only at those features of experience which are similar and regular, and opening his soul to the unique and transcendent. This sensivity to the novel and the unprecedented is the foundation of God-awareness and of the awareness of the preciousness of all beings. It leads from reflexive concern and the moral and spiritual isolation which is the result of egocentricity to a mode of responding to each new and unique experience in terms of broader considerations, wider interests, deeper appreciation and new, as yet unrealized values.

As the object of divine transitive concern *man is;* knowing himself to be the object of divine concern and responding through acts of his own transitive concern *he is free.*

The meaning of freedom is not exhausted by deliberation, decision, and responsibility, although it must include all this. The meaning of freedom presupposes an openness to transcendence, and man has to be *responsive* before he can become *responsible.*

For freedom is not an empty concept. Man is free to be free; he is not free in choosing to be a slave; he is free in doing good; he is not free in doing evil. To choose evil is to fail to be free. In choosing evil he is not free but determined by forces which are extraneous to the spirit. Free is he who has decided to act in agreement with the spirit that goes beyond all necessities.

Freedom is a challenge and a burden against which man often rebels. He is ready to abandon it, since it is full of contradiction and

continually under attack. Freedom can only endure as a vision, and loyalty to it is an act of faith.

There is no freedom without awe. We must cultivate many moments of silence to bring about one moment of expression. We must bear many burdens to have the strength to carry out one act of freedom.

Man's true fulfillment cannot be reached by the isolated individual, and his true good depends on communion with, and participation in, that which transcends him. Each challenge from beyond the person is unique, and each response must be new and creative. Freedom is an act of engagement of the self to the spirit, a spiritual event.

Loyalty to freedom means loyalty to the substance of freedom. But such loyalty must be actualized again and again. Here our way of living must change: it must open the sight of sublime horizons under which we live.

Refusal to delegate the power to make ultimate decisions to any human institution, derives its strength either from the awareness of one's mysterious dignity or from the awareness of one's ultimate responsibility. But that strength breaks down in the discovery that one is unable to make a significant choice. Progressive vulgarization of society may deprive man of his ability to appreciate the sublime burden of freedom. Like Esau he may be ready to sell his birthright for a pot of lentils.

A major root of freedom lies in the belief that man, every man, is too good to be the slave of another man. However, the dynamics of our society, the cheapening and trivialization of existence, continues to corrode that belief. The uniqueness and sacred preciousness of man is being refuted with an almost cruel consistency. I do not mean the anthropological problem whether or not we are descendants of the monkeys. What I have in mind is the fact that we are being treated as if there were little difference between man and monkey. Much that is being done, e.g., in the name of entertainment, is an insult to the soul. What is involved is not demoralization; much of it may be morally neutral. What is involved is dehumanization; so much of it is a continual process of intellectual deprivation. Sensitivity to words is one of the many casualties in that process.

Words have become pretexts in the technique of evading the necessity of honest and genuine expression. Sometimes it seems as if we were all engaged in the process of liquidating the English language. But words are the vessels of the spirit. And when the vessels are broken, our relationship to the spirit becomes precarious (see "Prayer as Discipline," p. 259).

To be free one must attain a degree of independence. Yet the complexities of society have enmeshed contemporary man in a web of relationships which make his independence most precarious.

Inherent in man is the desire to be in agreement with others. Yet today with a mass of miscellaneous associations and unprecedented excitements, it is a grim task, indeed, to agree with all and to retain the balance of integrity.

Loaded with more vulnerable interests than he is able to protect, bursting with fears of being squeezed by a multiplicity of tasks and responsibilities, modern man feels too insecure to remain upright.

Good and evil have always had a tendency to live in promiscuity, but in more integrated societies man, it seems, found it easier to discriminate between the two, while in our turbulent times circumstances often stupefy our power of discernment; it is as if many of us have become value-blind in the epidemics of needs.

The glory of a free society lies not only in the consciousness of *my* right to be free, and *my* capacity to be free, but also in the realization of *my fellow man's* right to be free, and *his* capacity to be free. The issue we face is how to save man's belief in his capacity to be free. Our age may be characterized as the *age of suspicion*. It has become an axiom that the shortest way to the understanding of man is to suspect his motives. This seems to be the contemporary version of the Golden Rule: *Suspect thy neighbor as thyself*. Suspicion breeds suspicion. It creates a chain-reaction. Honesty is not necessarily an anachronism.

The righteous man shall live by his faith. Can he live by his

suspicion and be righteous? It is dangerous to take human freedom for granted, to regard it as a prerogative rather than as an obligation, as an ultimate fact rather than as an ultimate goal. It is the beginning of wisdom to be amazed at the fact of our being free.

Freedom is a gift which may be taken away from us. It is not an absolute but a relative possession, an opportunity. We are free only when living in attachment to the spirit.[3] The blessings and opportunities of living in a free society must not make us blind to those aspects of our society which threaten our freedom: the tyranny of needs, the vulgarization of the spirit are a particular challenge.

The insecurity of freedom is a bitter fact of historical experience. In times of unemployment, vociferous demagogues are capable of leading the people into a state of mind in which they are ready to barter their freedom for any bargain. In times of prosperity hidden persuaders are capable of leading the same people into selling their conscience for success. Unless a person learns how to rise daily to a higher plane of living, to care for that which surpasses his immediate needs, will he in a moment of crisis insist upon loyalty to freedom?

The threat to freedom lies in the process of reducing human relations to a matter of fact. Human life is no longer a drama; it is a routine. Uniqueness is suppressed, repetitiveness prevails. We teach our students how to recognize the labels, not how to develop a taste. Standardization corrodes the sense of ultimate significance. Man to his own self becomes increasingly vapid, cheap, insignificant. Yet without the sense of ultimate significance and ultimate preciousness of one's own existence, freedom becomes a hollow phrase.

We are losing our capacity for freedom. New forces have emerged which regulate our actions. Modern man is not motivated anymore, he is being propelled; he does not strive anymore, he is being driven.

The principle of majority decision, the binding force of a majority, depends upon the assumption that the individuals who make up the majority are capable of discerning between right and wrong. But we are gradually led to believe that man is incapable of making a significant moral judgment.

We have made great contributions to the spiritual defamation of man. Far from eliminating the fear of man, our novels and theories depict man as untrustworthy, passion-ridden, self-seeking, and disingenuous.

Reverence for man has been strenuously refuted as sentimental eyewash. We all ride on the highways of debunking. There seems to be no question in our mind that there is no depth to virtue, no reality to integrity; that all we can do is to graft goodness upon selfishness, to use truth as a pragmatic pretext, and to relish self-indulgence in all values.

Contemporary man is told that his religious beliefs are nothing but attempts to satisfy subconscious wishes, that his conception of God is merely a projection of self-seeking emotions, an objectification of subjective needs; God is the Ego in disguise. We have not only forfeited faith; we have also lost faith in the meaning of faith. This tendency to question the genuineness of man's concern for God is a challenge more serious than the tendency to question God's existence.

One of the chief problems of contemporary man is the problem: What to do with time? Most of our life we spend time in order to gain space, namely things of space. Yet when the situation arrives in which no things of space may be gained, the average man is at a loss as to what to do with time.

With the development of automation the number of hours to be spent professionally will be considerably reduced. The four-day week may become a reality within this generation. The problem will arise: What to do with so much leisure time? The problem will be *too much* time rather than too little time. But too much time is a breeding ground for crime (see "To Grow in Wisdom," pp. 79 ff.).

The modern man has not only forgotten how to be alone; he finds it even difficult to be with his fellow man. He not only runs away from himself; he runs away from his family. To children, "Honor your father and your mother," is an irrational suggestion. The normal relationship is dull; deviation is where pleasure is found.

The modern man does not know how to stand still, how to appreciate a moment, an event for its own sake. When witnessing

an important event or confronted with a beautiful sight, all he does is take a picture. Perhaps this is what our religious traditions must teach the contemporary man: to stand still and to behold, to stand still and to hear.

Judaism claims that the way to nobility of the soul is the art of sanctifying time. Moral dedications, acts of worship, intellectual pursuits are means in the art of sanctification of time. Personal concern for justice in the market place, for integrity in public affairs and in public relations is a prerequisite for our right to pray.

Acts of worship counteract the trivialization of existence. Both involve the person, and give him a sense of living in ultimate relationships. Both of them are ways of teaching man how to stand alone and not be alone, of teaching man that God is a refuge, not a security.

But worship comes out of wisdom, out of insight, it is not an act of oversight. Learning, too, is a religious commandment. I do not mean the possession of learning, erudition; I mean the very act of study, of being involved in wisdom, and of being overwhelmed by the marvel and mystery of God's creation (see "Idols in the Temples," p. 57).

Religion's major effort must be to counteract the deflation of man, the trivialization of human existence. Our religious traditions claim that man is capable of sacrifice, discipline, of moral and spiritual exaltation, that every man is capable of an ultimate commitment.

Ultimate commitment includes the consciousness of being accountable for the acts we perform under freedom; the awareness that what we own we owe; the capacity for repentance; that a life without the service of God is a secret scandal.

Faith in God cannot be forced upon man. The issue is not only lack of faith but the vulgarization of faith, the misunderstanding and abuse of freedom. Our effort must involve a total reorientation about the nature of man and the world. And our hope lies in the certainty that all men are capable of sensing the wonder and mystery of existence, that all men have a capacity for reverence. Awe, reverence precedes faith; it is at the root of faith. We must grow in

awe in order to reach faith. We must be guided by awe to be worthy of faith. Awe is "the beginning and gateway of faith, the first precept of all, and upon it the whole world is established."

The grandeur and mystery of the world that surrounds us is not something which is perceptible only to the elect. All men are endowed with a sense of wonder, with a sense of mystery. But our system of education fails to develop it and the anti-intellectual climate of our civilization does much to suppress it. Mankind will not perish for lack of information; it may collapse for want of appreciation.

Education for reverence, the development of a sense of awe and mystery, is a prerequisite for the preservation of freedom.

We must learn how to bridle the outrageous presumption of modern man, to cultivate a sense of wonder and reverence, to develop an awareness that something is asked of man. Freedom is a burden that God has thrust upon man. Freedom is something we are responsible for. If we succeed, we will help in the redemption of the world; if we fail, we may be crushed by its abuse. Freedom as man's unlimited lordship is the climax of absurdity, and the central issue we face is man's false sense of sovereignty.

Tragic is the role of religion in contemporary society. The world is waiting to hear the Voice, and those who are called upon to utter the word are confused and weak in faith. "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty" (Psalm 29:4). Where is its power? Where is its majesty?

A story is told about a community where a man was accused of having transgressed the Seventh Commandment. The leaders of the community went to the Rabbi and, voicing their strong moral indignation, demanded stern punishment of the sinner. Thereupon the Rabbi turned his face to the wall and said: "O, Lord, Thy glory is in heaven, Thy presence on earth is invisible, imperceptible. In contrast to Thy invisibility, the object of that man's passion stood before his eyes, full of beauty and enravishing his body and soul. How could I punish him?"

Rabbi Simon said: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to

create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, 'Let him be created,' whilst others urged, 'Let him not be created.' Thus it is written, Love and Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combatted each other (Psalm 85:11): Love said, 'Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of love'; Truth said, 'Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood'; Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds'; Peace said, 'Let him not be created because he is full of strife.' What did the Lord do? He took Truth and cast it to the ground. Said the ministering angels before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why dost Thou despise Thy seal? Let Truth arise from the earth!' Hence it is written, Let truth spring up from the earth (Psalm 85:12)."[4]

God had to bury truth in order to create man.

How does one ever encounter the truth? The truth is underground, hidden from the eye. Its nature and man's condition are such that he can neither produce nor invent it. However, there is a way. If you bury the lies, truth will spring up. Upon the grave of the specious we encounter the valid. Much grave digging had to be done. The most fatal trap into which religious thinking may fall is *the equation of faith with expediency*. The genuine task of our traditions is to educate a sense for the expedient, a sensitivity to God's demand.

Perhaps we must begin by disclosing *the fallacy of absolute expediency*. God's voice may sound feeble to our conscience. Yet there is a divine cunning in history which seems to prove that the wages of absolute expediency is disaster. We must not tire of reminding the world that something is asked of man, of every man; that the value of charity is not to be measured in terms of public relations. Foreign aid, when offered to underdeveloped countries for the purpose of winning friends and influencing people, turns out to be a boomerang. Should we not learn how to detach expediency from charity? The great failure of American policy is not in public relations. The great failure is in private relations.

The spirit is a still small voice, and the masters of vulgarity use loudspeakers. The voice has been stifled, and many of us have lost faith in the possibility of a new perceptiveness.

Discredited is man's faith in his own integrity. We question man's power to sense any ultimate significance. We question the belief in the compatibility of existence with spirit.

Yet man is bound to break the chains of despair, to stand up against those who deny him the right and the strength to believe wholeheartedly. Ultimate truth may be hidden from man, yet the power to discern between the valid and the specious has not been taken from us.

Surely God will always receive a surprise of a handful of fools—who do not fail. There will always remain a spiritual underground where a few brave minds continue to fight. Yet our concern is not how to worship in the catacombs but rather how to remain human in the skyscrapers.

NOTES

1. Portions of this section are based on Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1951).
2. Portions of this section are based on Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), Chap. 1.
3. "The Torah says: 'The tables were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets' (Exodus 32:16). Read not *harut* (meaning 'engraved') but *herut* meaning freedom, for none can be considered free except those who occupy themselves with the study of the Torah" (*Aboth*, VI, 2).
4. "The seal of God is truth" (*Shabbat*, 55b).