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A VIEW OF DYNAMIC RELIGION AND AMERICAN SOCIAL
PROBLEMS by Rabbi Herbert M. Baumgard, DHL, DD

I AM GRATEFUL TO THOSE WHO MADE POSSIBLE MY COMING TO STETSON UNIVERSITY TODAY. I HAVE BEEN WELL-FED AND GRACIOUSLY WELCOMED BY PRESIDENT DOUG LEE AND HIS WIFE, MARGARET, BY THE REVEREND JEFFERSON ROGERS AND HIS WIFE MARY GRACE, BOTH OLD FRIENDS, AND BY MANY OF YOUR FACULTY MEMBERS AND THEIR SPOUSES. ALREADY, I AM CONVINCED THAT STETSON IS A WONDEFUL INSTITUTION.

AT THE ONSET, LET ME SAY THAT I AM SOMEWHAT OF A MYSTIC WHO IS ATTRACTED TO CERTAIN EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION, BUT FROM MY EARLIEST YEARS, I BEGAN TO THINK OF RELIGION PRIMARILY IN ACTIVIST TERMS. I CAN SAY, THEREFORE, THAT I BECAME A RABBI NOT BECAUSE I HEARD THE VOICE OF GOD CALLING ME BY NAME BUT BECAUSE I WAS ATTRACTED TO THE ACTIVIST MESSAGE OF THE HEBREW PROPHETS, AND BECAUSE I SAW AND EXPERIENCED CERTAIN INJUSTICES IN SOCIETY WHICH I FELT IMPELLED TO TRY TO CORRECT.

A TRAUMATIC INCIDENT OCCURRED IN MY LIFE WHEN I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD. A MUSCULAR TEENAGER IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD RAN UP TO ME SUDDENLY ONE DAY AND SHOVED HIS FIST INTO MY BELLY UP TO HIS ELBOW. AS HE DID SO, HE SHOUTED, "YOU DAMN JEW!". THE SHARP PAIN AND THE LOSS OF BREATH WHICH I EXPERIENCED BECAME FOREVER ASSOCIATED IN MY MIND WITH THE TWO WORDS, "DAMN JEW!" FROM THAT MOMENT ON, I FELT I HAD TO LEARN WHAT

A "DAMN JEW" WAS. SINCE MY PARENTS HAD OFTEN TOLD ME THAT I WAS A "GOOD BOY", AND SINCE MY PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS REGULARLY GAVE ME AN "A" ON BOTH SCHOLARSHIP AND BEHAVIOR, I HAD TO LEARN WHY I WAS SO HATED SIMPLY BECAUSE I WAS WHAT I WAS. FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, I KNEW THAT PREJUDICE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH HATRED AND VIOLENCE.

THE BROADER NEIGHBORHOOD IN WHICH I LIVED IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, WAS DIVIDED INTO THREE SECTIONS, A CLUSTER OF WHITE CHRISTIANS, MOSTLY CATHOLIC, LIVING IN THE SOUTHERN SECTION, A LARGER NEIGHBORHOOD OF BLACKS IN THE NORTHERN SECTION, AND A SINGLE STREET OF JEWISH FAMILIES WHICH RAN DOWN THE EDGE BETWEEN THOSE TWO SECTIONS. ALL THE FAMILIES WERE POOR, SOME POORER THAN OTHERS. IN THOSE DAYS IN THE 1920's, IN THE SOUTH, THERE WAS VERY LITTLE SOCIAL CONTACT BETWEEN THE PEOPLE OF COLOR AND WHITE PEOPLE. SCHOOLS WERE, OF COURSE, COMPLETELY SEGREGATED, AND STREETCARS AND BUSES HAD SECTIONS FOR WHITE PEOPLE UP FRONT AND A SECTION FOR BLACK FOLKS IN THE REAR. I NEVER COULD UNDERSTAND THIS KIND OF DISCRIMINATION, SINCE I WAS NOT TAUGHT PREJUDICE AT HOME. I RECALL ONE OCCASION WHEN I WAS A FEW YEARS OLDER THAN EIGHT THAT I WAS SITTING WITH A BLACK MAN IN THE REAR OF THE BUS. AN AGITATED WHITE MAN CAME UP TO ME, TOOK MY ARM AND LED ME FORCEFULLY TO THE FRONT OF THE BUS. ONCE AT THE FRONT, HE PROCEEDED TO EDUCATE ME IN THE CUSTOM OF SOCIAL SEPARATION. "BOY", HE SAID ICILY, "WHITE FOLK DON'T SIT WITH BLACK FOLK", AND HE POINTED TO A VACANT SEAT AT THE FRONT OF THE BUS. NOW I WAS ALWAYS AN OBEDIENT CHILD, BUT SOMETHING IN ME REBELLED AT WHAT THIS MAN WAS TRYING TO GET ME TO DO. IT SEEMED TO ME THAT IF I SAT IN THAT VACANT

SEAT IN THE FRONT OF THE BUS, I WAS INSULTING THE BLACK MAN WHO HAD BEEN MY SEATING COMPANION IN THE REAR OF THE BUS. IN SPITE OF THE FIRM TONE IN THE WHITE MAN'S VOICE, I RETURNED TO MY SEAT IN THE REAR OF THE BUS. I DID NOT THINK ABOUT WHAT I WAS DOING, BUT I AM SURE THAT SUBCONSCIOUSLY I IDENTIFIED WITH THE BLACK MAN, AS A CO-VICTIM OF HATRED AND PREJUDICE. LONG BEFORE I KNEW IT IN MY HEAD, I KNEW IT IN MY BELLY-RACISM WAS CRUEL. APPARENTLY, (TO PARAPHRASE SHAKESPEARE) THE BELLY HAS A MIND, THE MIND MAY NOT KNOW OF.

ABOUT THIS TIME OF MY LIFE, I JOINED A BIBLE CLASS AND THERE I HEARD FOR THE FIRST TIME THE WORDS, "AND GOD CREATED HUMANKIND IN HIS OWN IMAGE, MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM". HEARING THESE WORDS WAS LIKE THE TURNING ON OF A LIGHT BULB FOR ME. THIS WAS THE RELIGIOUS CRYSTALLIZATION OF A PERSPECTIVE I ALREADY HAD BUT COULD NOT VERBALIZE. I IMMEDIATELY THOUGHT, SURELY ALL HUMANS, EVEN THE JEWS AND THE BLACKS, WERE PRECIOUS IN THE EYES OF GOD, FOR EACH OF US WAS CREATED IN HIS IMAGE. I WANTED DESPERATELY TO BELIEVE THIS, BECAUSE THIS SCRIPTURAL VERSE RAISED ME AS A "DAMN JEW" FROM THE GUTTER, AS IT RAISED ALL OTHER HUMANS TO AN EXALTED PLATEAU.

IF YOU ASK ME, THEN, WHAT IS DYNAMIC RELIGION, I WILL ANSWER, IT IS THE EFFORTS OF RELIGIOUSLY MOTIVATED INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS TO TREAT ALL HUMAN BEINGS AS IF THEY WERE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF THE DIVINE. DYNAMIC RELIGION IS THAT EXPRESSION OF RELIGION THAT REACHES OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY AND SEEKS TO SHAPE IT IN THE FORM OF THE GOOD SOCIETY. DYNAMIC RELIGION NOT ONLY "TALKS THE TALK, IT

ALSO WALKS THE WALK". IT IS NOT ONLY PREACHING ABOUT THE GOOD, IT IS ALSO ACTING OUT THE ETHICAL PRECEPTS OF ONE'S RELIGION.

SOME OF YOU MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH THE TALMUD. THE TALMUD IS A COMPENDIOUS JEWISH WORK, WHICH INCLUDES THE DEVELOPED LAW AND TEACHINGS OF THE RABBIS OF 2,000 YEARS AGO. IN THE TALMUD, THERE IS THIS HOMILY BY ONE OF THE RABBIS:¹

"TO WHAT IS A PERSON WHOSE LEARNING EXCEEDS HIS WORKS TO BE COMPARED? (AND THE ANSWER IS GIVEN) - HE IS TO BE COMPARED TO A TREE WITH MANY BRANCHES WHICH HAS SHORT ROOTS. THIS TREE IS VULNERABLE TO THE SLIGHTEST WIND. (THE HOMILY CONTINUES) TO WHAT IS A PERSON WHOSE WORKS EXCEED HIS LEARNING TO BE COMPARED? (AND THE ANSWER IS GIVEN) - TO A TREE WITH DEEP ROOTS AND NO STORM CAN EVER BEND IT." THE HOMILY TEACHES THAT IT IS ONLY WHEN WE WORK HARD AT UPHOLDING OUR FELLOW AND SISTER HUMAN BEINGS THAT WE SINK DOWN OUR OWN DEEP ROOTS AS A HUMAN BEING. IN A MOMENT WE WILL GIVE SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THIS ELEMENTAL TRUTH.

ANY ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF DYNAMIC RELIGION MUST LEAD US TO THE BIBLICAL STORY OF THE BURNING BUSH. YOU ALL KNOW THE STORY. MOSES HAS SETTLED DOWN TO THE CONTENTED LIFE OF A SHEPHERD IN THE DESERT OF MIDIAN. HE IS MARRIED. HIS LIFE IS SECURE AND PEACEFUL, BUT ONE DAY, HE SUDDENLY BEHOLDS A BUSH UNLIKE ANY OTHER BUSH HE HAS EVER SEEN, FOR IT IS COMPLETELY AFLAME AND STILL IS NOT CONSUMED. WHEN MOSES TURNS ASIDE FROM HIS WORK AND

¹ _____ In the tractate, "Pirke Avot, The Sayings of the Fathers". Here paraphrased. Words in parenthesis by this author.

APPROACHES THIS REMARKABLE FLAMING BUSH, HE HEARS A VOICE, WHICH ANNOUNCES THE PRESENCE OF THE GOD OF HIS ANCESTORS. THE VOICE PROCLAIMS TO MOSES "COME NOW, LEAVE YOUR LIFE OF SECURITY AND PEACE, AND COME WITH ME TO EGYPT TO HELP LIBERATE MY CHILDREN, YOUR ENSLAVED PEOPLE".² THIS IS WHAT WAS UNIQUE ABOUT THE GOD OF ISRAEL. HE REVEALS HIMSELF AS A GOD WHO CARES ABOUT SLAVES. HE CARES ABOUT THOSE VERY PEOPLE WHO, IN THE EYES OF THE CIVILIZATIONS OF THAT TIME, ARE REGARDED AS THE LOWEST AND LEAST WORTHY OF ALL PEOPLE. FROM THE MOMENT HE ENCOUNTERED GOD IN THIS WAY, MOSES ENTERED INTO THE LIFE OF DYNAMIC RELIGION, THE LIFE OF ACTIVE SERVICE TO THE NEEDIEST PEOPLE.

IT IS BY NO ACCIDENT THAT THE STONE MEMORIALIZING MARTIN LUTHER KING IN ATLANTA BEARS A QUOTATION FROM THE HEBREW PROPHET, AMOS, WHO DECLARED IN THE NAME OF GOD, "LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN AS THE MIGHTY WATERS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE AN UNFAILING STREAM". WHEN THE PROPHET, MICAH, ANSWERED THE QUESTION, "WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF US?", HE SPOKE IN WORDS OF ACTION. GOD WANTS US TO DO JUSTLY, TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY..."

I FIND A RELATED MESSAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WHERE JESUS IS QUOTED AS SAYING, "IN AS MUCH AS YOU DO IT UNTO THE LEAST OF THESE, YOU DO IT UNTO ME". THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE TELLS US THAT HUMANKIND IS CREATED IN THE DIVINE IMAGE. THE NEW TESTAMENT TELLS US THAT A KINDNESS RENDERED UNTO THE LOWEST HUMAN BEING IS REGARDED AS A KINDNESS TO GOD HIMSELF. I SEE THESE TWO AS PARALLEL TEACHINGS (LEAVING ASIDE THE QUESTION OF THE DIVINITY OF JESUS).

² Exodus 3:1-10. (Here paraphrased)

AGAIN, JESUS IS QUOTED AS PRAYING, "LORD, WHAT WILL YOU HAVE ME DO?" THIS CAN BE REGARDED AS THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION PAR EXCELLENCE: "LORD, WHAT WILL YOU HAVE ME DO?" AND THERE IS THE PROPHET MICAH'S ANSWER- "ONLY TO DO JUSTLY TO LOVE MERCY AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD", AN ANSWER WHICH WE CAN TRY TO FLESH OUT A BIT. GOD WANTS US TO LOVE ACTIVELY THOSE WHO ARE DAILY ABUSED OR NEGLECTED. GOD WANTS US TO OBTAIN JUSTICE FOR THOSE WHO ARE ALLOWED TO SINK IN THEIR POVERTY, ILLNESS, OR IGNORANCE. AN ALLIED QUESTION IS WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO TO PROTECT THOSE WHO ARE, FOR PERVERSE REASONS, HIT IN THE BELLY, OR LYNCHED, OR INCINERATED OR MURDERED, AS IN THE RECENT CASE OF POOR MATTHEW SHEPHERD OF WYOMING? CERTAINLY, THESE SHOULD BE THE FIRST RECIPIENTS OF OUR CONCERN AND CARE.

LET ME SHARE WITH YOU AN INCIDENT THAT TOOK PLACE WITHIN MY HEARING WHILE I WAS IN AN INFANTRY BATTALION IN CAMP SHELBY, MISSISSIPPI. IN THE AUTUMN OF 1943, TWO OF MY FELLOW SOLDIERS WERE SITTING SIDE BY SIDE IN OUR BUNK WHICH HOUSED ABOUT A DOZEN MEN. ONE SOLDIER HAD JUST RETURNED FROM FURLOUGH, OR AN OFFICIAL VACATION. THE SECOND SOLDIER, AFTER SOME SMALL TALK, SUDDENLY ASKED HIS COMPANION, "HOW MANY NIGGERS DID YOU KILL WHILE YOU WERE ON FURLOUGH?" I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE MY EARS! THE RECENTLY RETURNED SOLDIER SAID, "I DON'T RIGHTLY KNOW. BUT I DID DRIVE DOWN TO COLORED TOWN ON SATURDAY NIGHT AT MID-MIGHT. I TURNED OFF MY LIGHTS AND DROVE AS FAST AS I COULD DOWN THE MAIN STREET. WHO KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED?" LAUGHTER FROM

THE SECOND SOLDIER. IT WAS OBVIOUS TO ME THAT FOR THESE YOUNG MEN, AND GOD KNOWS HOW MANY LIKE THEM, BLACK PEOPLE WERE NOT CONSIDERED TO BE NORMAL HUMAN BEINGS. IN THE EARLY YEARS OF MY LIFE I LEARNED THAT THROUGH THE PROCESS OF PREJUDICE, YOU FIRST PAINT THE OBJECT OF YOUR HATRED AS BEING LESS THAN HUMAN. ONCE YOU HAVE STRIPPED THESE PEOPLE OF THEIR DIGNITY AND VALUE, IT BECOMES POSSIBLE TO DO ANYTHING YOU WANT TO THEM. ONCE YOU CONVINCED YOURSELF THAT THE BLACK PERSON, OR THE JEW, OR THE HOMOSEXUAL IS LESS THAN HUMAN, YOU CAN PUNCH HIM IN THE BELLY, OR LYNCH HIM, OR INCINERATE HIM, OR BEAT HIM TO DEATH.

HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT BEFORE OUR COUNTRY OR ANY COUNTRY GOES TO WAR, IT FIRST CONDUCTS A CAMPAIGN OF PAINTING THE ENEMY AS THE TOTAL INCARNATION OF EVIL? ONCE THAT IS ACCOMPLISHED, IT BECOMES O.K. TO SMASH THE ENEMY, TO SHOOT HIM, TO BLOW UP HIS HOME. NEVER MIND THAT IN A FEW YEARS, THIS "ENEMY" WILL BE YOUR ALLY AGAINST STILL ANOTHER NATION THAT HAS SUDDENLY BECOME THE "ENEMY".

TO ILLUSTRATE THE NATURE OF DYNAMIC RELIGION, LET US NAME JUST A FEW OF THE MORE FAMOUS MODERN PRACTITIONERS OF ACTIVIST RELIGION. WE HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED MARTIN LUTHER KING, A BAPTIST MINISTER, WHO AMONGST OTHER THINGS GALVANIZED THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE 1960'S AND HIGHLIGHTED THE CONTINUING TREATMENT OF BLACK AMERICANS AS SECOND CLASS CITIZENS. THERE IS THE RENOWNED MAHATMA GHANDI, A HUMBLE LAWYER IN INDIA, WHO USED THE TACTIC OF ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE TO PERSUADE THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO

RELEASE ITS STRANGLE HOLD ON HIS COUNTRY. THERE IS MOTHER THERESA, A CATHOLIC NUN, WHO DEDICATED HER LIFE TO SERVING THE NEGLECTED MASSES OF CALCUTTA, THOSE VERY MASSES WHO WERE THE POOREST OF THE POOR AND STRICKEN WITH CHRONIC AND DEBILITATING DISEASES. THERE IS HOWARD THURMAN, PREACHER, PROFESSOR, AND POET, WHO FROM A PULPIT IN SAN FRANCISCO TO A COLLEGE CAMPUS IN BOSTON OR WASHINGTON, D.C., ADDRESSED PEOPLE OF ALL FAITHS AND RACES AND INSPIRED THEM TO BELIEVE THAT THEY, AND ALL OTHER HUMANS, WERE, INDEED, MADE OF THE DIVINE STUFF. THERE IS ALSO RABBI STEPHEN S.WISE, RABBI OF THE FREE SYNAGOGUE IN NEW YORK CITY AND FOUNDER OF THE SEMINARY WHICH I ATTENDED, WHO, DURING THE 1930'S, MADE BOLD TO ATTACK FACTORY AND BUSINESS OWNERS WHO FORCED MEN AND WOMEN TO WORK 12 HOURS A DAY JUST TO EARN ENOUGH FOR BREAD. RABBI WISE AROUSED THE POPULATION OF NEW YORK TO PARTICIPATE IN GRAND MARCHES ON FIFTH AVENEUE IN ORDER TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE PLIGHT OF WORKING PEOPLE, AND HE MADE BOLD TO BRING THEIR CAUSE TO LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL OFFICIALS.

I HAVE NAMED JUST THESE FEW BECAUSE OF LIMITATIONS OF TIME. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, MANY OTHER EXEMPLARS OF DYNAMIC RELIGION, BOTH PAST AND PRESENT, SOME OF WHOM LABOR IN SMALL TOWNS AND IN REMOTE LOCATIONS. MOST OF THESE DEDICATED SOULS RECEIVE LITTLE NOTORIETY, AND SOME OF THEM HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED FOR THEIR ACTIONS, BUT THEY ARE, NONETHELESS, HEROIC IN STATURE.

YOU HAVE NOTED, I AM SURE, THAT I HAVE NOT CITED

RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO CAN BE PLACED IN THE FAR RIGHT OF THEIR RESPECTIVE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS. I HAVE OMITTED THEM FROM MY ARBITRARY LIST NOT BECAUSE THEY FAIL TO TRY TO DO GOOD, BUT BECAUSE THEIR DEFINITION OF WHAT IS GOOD SEEMS TO ME TO BE TOO NARROW AND EXCLUSIVE. MY LIFE EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN THAT WHEN YOU ARE TOO QUICK TO DESCRIBE OTHERS AS BEING EVIL AND DESTINED FOR HELL, YOU ARE ENCOURAGING YOUR DISCIPLES TO RESORT TO VIOLENCE AGAINST THOSE YOU HAVE LABELLED AS THE OUTCAST... AS IN THE ASSASSINATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, WHO WAS VILLIFIED BY J. EDGAR HOOVER AND THOSE THREATENED BY KING'S SUCCESS; AS IN THE ASSASSINATION OF PRIME MINISTER ITZHAK RABIN WHOSE CRIME WAS THAT HE WAS WORKING FOR PEACE; AS IN THE BOMBING OF ABORTION CLINICS; AS IN THE RECENT SAVAGE BEATING OF MATTHEW SHEPHERD IN WYOMING.

LET ME CARRY YOU BACK TO THE END OF WORLD WAR II. MOST PEOPLES IN THE WORLD AT THAT TIME WERE EXPERIENCING A KIND OF EUPHORIA IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE GREAT SLAUGHTER OF HUMAN BEINGS, BOTH IN THE GAS CHAMBERS AND ON THE BATTLEFIELD, HAD CEASED. A CLUSTER OF AMERICAN GENERALS, HOWEVER, HAD OTHER THOUGHTS. THEY BEGAN A CONCENTRATED PUSH TO CONVINCING THE AMERICAN AUTHORITIES TO DROP THE ATOMIC BOMB ON THE SOVIET UNION, BEFORE OUR ALLY COULD MAKE THE BOMB FOR ITSELF. DR. ROBERT HAVIGHURST, RENOWNED PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, ORGANIZED A COUNTER EFFORT KNOWN AS "THE COMMITTEE FOR PEACEFUL ALTERNATIVES." THE PRESIDENT OF OUR NEW YORK CHAPTER WAS A

WONDERFUL WOMAN, THE DISTINGUISHED WIFE OF A METHODIST MINISTER OF WORLDWIDE REPUTATION. I WAS QUITE SURPRISED WHEN MRS. FISHER INVITED ME TO SERVE AS THE VICE-CHAIR OF THIS STATEWIDE COMMITTEE. OUR COMMITTEE WAS ENGAGED IN SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE BEHIND THE SCENES MANEUVERING OF THESE CONSPIRING GENERALS, AND WE TRIED TO RALLY THE PUBLIC BEHIND THE EFFORTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE WHICH THE UNITED NATIONS WAS ONLY JUST ORGANIZING. SINCE "THE COMMITTEE FOR PEACEFUL ALTERNATIVES" WAS IMMEDIATELY WASHED WITH RED PAINT AND LABELLED AS PRO-COMMUNIST, THOSE FEW MINISTERS AND RABBIS WHO HAD THE COURAGE TO JOIN THE COMMITTEE SUDDENLY FOUND THEMSELVES IN A FIGHT FOR THEIR JOBS. SEVERAL PROTESTANT MINISTERS WERE, INDEED, FORCED OUT OF THEIR POSTS BY THEIR CONGREGATIONS. THERE IS OFTEN A HIGH PRICE TO BE PAID FOR ACTING IN BEHALF OF PEACE, AS THE OPPONENTS TO THE VIETNAM WAR LATER DISCOVERED, MARTIN LUTHER KING AMONG THEM.

THOSE OF US WHO ARE MOVED TO EXPRESS OUR RELIGION IN A DYNAMIC FASHION HAVE FOUND MANY DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN EXPRESS OURSELVES. LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT SOME OF THE THINGS WE HAVE DONE IN MIAMI. OUR AREA, AS YOU HAVE NO DOUBT HEARD, CONSISTS OF MANY DIVERSE ETHNIC GROUPS. A RECENT SURVEY DEMONSTRATED THAT OVER FIFTY LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN THROUGHOUT OUR COUNTY. IT WASN'T UNTIL 1960, HOWEVER, THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE MAJOR FAITHS IN OUR AREA, CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT, AND JEWISH, WERE ABLE TO SIT DOWN TOGETHER TO ESTABLISH JOINT ACTIVITIES.

THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE UNTIL THAT TIME, BECAUSE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAD TAKEN AN OFFICIAL STAND AGAINST CATHOLIC PARTICIPATION IN SUCH TOGETHERNESS. WHEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CHANGED ITS POSITION, IT BECAME A MAJOR FORCE IN OUR MOVING FORWARD.

WITHIN A YEAR, WE HAD ORGANIZED THE INTERFAITH AGENCY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND BY THE NEXT YEAR, WE HAD SPONSORED A LARGE INTERRACIAL HOUSING PROJECT. ULTIMATELY, THE INTERFAITH AGENCY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COUNTYWIDE COMMUNITY RELATIONS BOARD WHICH INCLUDED REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL THE MAJOR ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS. THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THIS NOW OFFICIAL COUNTY AGENCY HANDLED MANY COMMUNITY PROBLEMS DIRECTLY, BUT OUR MOST EFFECTIVE ACTIVITY, I THINK, WAS OUR MONTHLY MEETING IN THE CHAMBERS OF THE COUNTY COMMISSION WHICH WAS BROADCAST OVER BOTH RADIO AND TV. TO THIS MEETING RESIDENTS OF THE COUNTY WERE INVITED TO COME TO EXPRESS A COMPLAINT THEY MIGHT HAVE AGAINST ANY COUNTY DEPARTMENT, OR AS SO OFTEN HAPPENED, AGAINST THE POLICE THEMSELVES. SINCE THERE WAS A PRIOR SCREENING OF THE ISSUES, WE WERE ABLE TO NOTIFY THE PROPER REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COUNTY AND/OR THE POLICE TO BE ON HAND, AND AT OUR NEXT MEETING, THEY WERE EXPECTED TO COME FORTH WITH A PROPOSAL TO SOLVE THE INDICATED PROBLEM.

DURING THE MIAMI RIOTS OF SEVERAL DECADES AGO, WHEN MUCH OF THE BUSINESS SECTION OF THE CITY'S MAIN BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD WAS PUT TO THE TORCH, IT WAS REPRESENTATIVES

OF THE CRB, NOT THE POLICE, WHO ENTERED THE RIOT ZONE AND SUCCESSFULLY BROUGHT THE DESTRUCTIVE ACTIVITY TO A HALT. YOU SEE, OUR PEOPLE WERE TRUSTED BY THE RIOTERS WHO BELIEVED THAT WE CARED ABOUT THEM.

FOR THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF THE CRB'S EXISTENCE, THE CHAIRPERSONS WERE RELIGIOUS LEADERS. THEREAFTER, LAY PERSONS WERE ENCOURAGED TO LEAD, WHILE SOME OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS CONTINUED TO SERVE ON THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES ITSELF.

WHEN HURRICANE ANDREW DEVASTATED THE POORER SECTIONS OF SOUTH DADE COUNTY, SOME OF OUR RELIGIOUS LEADERS HELPED TO ORGANIZE VARIOUS KINDS OF ASSISTANCE INCLUDING THE ERECTION OF TENTS AS A TEMPORARY MEASURE FOR THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE MADE SUDDENLY HOMELESS. FOOD SHIPMENTS WERE ARRANGED WITH HOUSES OF WORSHIP AS COLLECTION DEPOTS. CHURCHES AND SYNAGOGUES COLLECTED FUNDS TO BE USED FOR THE REBUILDING OF HOMES FOR THOSE WITHOUT INSURANCE, WHICH WAS THE GENERAL PLIGHT. WHILE THE COUNTY, STATE, AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS LATER RENDERED ABUNDANT AID, THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, TO THEIR CREDIT, WERE AMONG THE FIRST ON THE SCENE AND RENDERED MUCH OF THE INITIAL HELP WHICH WAS SO CRITICAL.

IN MIAMI, WE HAD OUR OWN MARTIN LUTHER KING. THEODORE GIBSON, A BLACK EPISCOPAL CLERGYMAN. GIBSON WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE. WE OFTEN HAD LUNCH TOGETHER. WE WALKED TOGETHER IN MIAMI'S CIVIL RIGHTS MARCHES AND TOGETHER WE SERVED ON THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY BOARD AND IN THE NAACP.

WHEN THE COMMUNIST HUNTING JOHNS COMMITTEE OF THE STATE LEGISLATURE DEMANDED THE NAMES OF ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE MIAMI CHAPTER OF THE NAACP, THE REV. GIBSON, WHO WAS ITS PRESIDENT AT THE TIME, REFUSED TO HAND OVER THE LIST AND WAS SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR CONTEMPT. THE CONVICTION WAS LATER REVERSED. AFTER REV. GIBSON'S DEATH, WE ORGANIZED A FOUNDATION NAMED AFTER HIM, WHICH UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF GIBSON'S WIDOW, LABORS TODAY TO ESTABLISH UNITY AMONGST THE DIVERSE ETHNIC GROUPS OF GREATER MIAMI. OUR ANNUAL DINNER REGULARLY DRAWS OVER 400 PEOPLE AND RAISES FUNDS FOR OUR ACTIVITIES WHICH INCLUDE YOUTH PROGRAMS AND SCHOLARSHIPS FOR IMPOVERISHED YOUNG PEOPLE. OUR GROUP IS CURRENTLY DRAWING PLANS FOR A SCHOOL BUILDING TO BE BUILT IN COOPERATION WITH THE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM. THE SCHOOL WILL BE FOR YOUNG STUDENTS "AT RISK" WHO ARE TO BE TAUGHT SKILLS IN THE COMMUNICATION FIELDS, SUCH AS RADIO, TV, AND COMPUTER.

NEARBY MY SYNAGOGUE IS THE RIVIERA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, WHICH REGULARLY HOLDS MEETINGS TO EDUCATE THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT THE NATURE OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE HOPES AND FEARS OF PEOPLE WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN THAT GROUP. FIFTEEN MINUTES FROM ME IS THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF COCONUT GROVE WHICH HOLDS PROGRAMS TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT AIDS AND AIDS ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS. SIMILAR PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN HELD IN MY SYNAGOGUE. ONE OF THE ACTIVITIES CO-SPONSORED BY OUR CONGREGATION, WHICH IS IMMENSELY POPULAR, INVOLVES THE HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PROGRAM. AT STATED INTERVALS MEMBERS OF OUR CONGREGATION VOLUNTEER TO HELP

PREPARE HOMES FOR THOSE IN NEED. SEVERAL CHURCHES FOLLOW A SIMILAR PROGRAM.

I NEED NOT GO ON TO DESCRIBE WEEKLY PROGRAMS FOR FEEDING THE HUNGRY AND ASSISTING THE ELDERLY. THESE ARE RELATIVELY EASY PROGRAMS FOR WHICH TO FIND VOLUNTEERS. RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED PEOPLE RESPOND READILY TO APPEALS FOR CHARITY. THEY HAVE TO BE EDUCATED TO FEEL THE IMPULSE TO RESPOND TO APPEALS FOR JUSTICE. ON THAT SUBJECT, I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DIDN'T MENTION THAT OUR FRIEND JEFFERSON ROGERS, IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF A MAN WHO BELIEVES IN DYNAMIC RELIGION AND COMMENDABLY ACTS OUT THAT BELIEF. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU ARE AWARE THAT THIS SAME JEFFERSON ROGERS HAS SERVED AS THE POINT MAN AND COORDINATOR FOR RELIGIOUSLY BASED SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMS IN SEVERAL REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY. HE ALSO WORKED CLOSELY WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS CAREER. JEFFERSON IS STILL TRYING TO DO THOSE THINGS THAT WILL BRING DIVERSE GROUPS TOGETHER TO APPRECIATE THE POSSIBILITIES FOR GOOD IN ONE ANOTHER. I AM HERE TODAY ONLY BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN WHAT JEFFERSON IS TRYING TO DO. HE IS A MAN WITH A VISION WHO REFUSES TO TIRE.

ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO I WAS PRIVILEGED TO BE THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF AN ORGANIZATION KNOWN AS THE SYNAGOGUE COUNCIL OF AMERICA. THE SCA AT THAT TIME CONSISTED OF REPRESENTATIVES OF ORTHODOX, CONSERVATIVE, AND REFORM JUDAISM. JEFFERSON, FOR HIS PART, WAS DIRECTOR OF NEW BIRTH CORPORATION, WHICH HAS SOME OF THE GRAND GOALS

WHICH MARK JEFFERSON'S CHARACTER. TOGETHER WE ARRANGED FOR TWO CONFERENCES BETWEEN BLACK AND JEWISH NATIONAL LEADERS. ONE CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN DAYTONA, AND ONE WAS HELD IN WASHINGTON, D.C. JEFF AND I LIKE TO THINK THAT WE HELPED TO SET IN MOTION A NUMBER OF OTHER SIMILAR MEETINGS THAT HAVE BEEN HELD BY OTHER ORGANIZATIONS SINCE THAT TIME.

THE HISTORY OF HUMANKIND SCARCELY SUPPORTS THE VIEW THAT HUMANS ARE BUT LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS, TO USE THE PSALMIST'S PHRASE. HUMAN HISTORY SEEMS TO BE THE STORY OF ONE GROUP OR ONE PEOPLE TRYING TO DOMINATE ANOTHER OR ONE RELIGIOUS GROUP TRYING TO ELIMINATE ANOTHER. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT MOST HUMANS HAVE NOT ACCEPTED THE SCRIPTURAL TEACHING THAT ALL OF US ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF THE DIVINE.

MODERN ARCHEOLOGISTS HAVE DISCOVERED IN RECENT DECADES AN ANCIENT BABYLONIAN TABLET WHICH READS IN THE SEMITIC LANGUAGE OF 4,000 YEARS AGO, "THE KING IS THE SHADOW OF THE GOD; THE PEOPLE ARE THE SHADOW OF THE KING." FROM THIS HYPOTHESIS, THE BABYLONIAN KING COULD JUSTIFY TREATING HIS PEOPLE AS SLAVES. THIS NOTION DOMINATED THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AS WELL AS THE FAR EAST. IN ANCIENT EGYPT, FOR EXAMPLE, SLAVES PLUS WIVES AND OFFICERS OF THE KING WERE SLAUGHTERED AND BURIED WITH HIM AT HIS DEATH, SO THAT IN HIS REBIRTH, ACCORDING TO THEIR BELIEF, HE WOULD HAVE ATTENDANTS AND SEXUAL PARTNERS.

LOOK CLOSELY ENOUGH INTO THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIETIES OF THE GREEK AND ROMAN EMPIRES, AND YOU WILL

OBSERVE THAT THEY WERE BUILT ON A BASE OF SLAVERY. THE BRILLIANT AND MUCH FOLLOWED GREEK PHILOSOPHER, ARISTOTLE, COULD SAY IN HIS PROFOUND WISDOM, " THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE BORN TO BE SLAVES".

IN THE HEYDAY OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, IF A PERSON COULDN'T PAY HIS DEBTS, HE WAS THROWN INTO PRISON AND CONDEMNED TO INDENTURED BONDAGE UNTIL HIS DEBT WAS PAID. MONEY WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HUMAN FREEDOM. MANY SETTLERS IN EARLY AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA WERE SUCH INDENTURED SLAVES. LIFE-LONG SLAVERY WAS PRACTICED IN CERTAIN PARTS OF AFRICA AND WITH THE SPREAD OF PLANTATION FARMING TO THE WEST INDIES, SUCH SLAVERY SPREAD TO THE NEW WORLD. FROM THE WEST INDIES, IT SPREAD TO SOUTH AMERICA AND FROM THERE TO NORTH AMERICA. THE AGENTS OF TRANSFER IN THIS DEVELOPMENT WERE THE MARITIME EUROPEAN NATIONS WHO PROFITED GREATLY FROM THE BUSINESS OF SLAVERY. AMERICA'S EFFORTS TO EXTRICATE ITSELF FROM THE POISONOUS TENTACLES OF SLAVERY HAVE BEEN TORTUOUS. THE NOBLE DREAM OF REAL DEMOCRACY WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL HAS PROVED TO BE A GOAL TO BE ACHIEVED RATHER THAN SOMETHING IMMEDIATELY GRANTED TO ALL. HOPEFULLY, AN INCREASING NUMBER OF US WILL BECOME INVOLVED IN EFFORTS TO BRING THE GOAL NEARER TO REALIZATION.

WE HAVE TO ADMIT THAT RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN LESS THAN FRIENDLY ALLIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SPREAD OF HUMAN RIGHTS. IN EUROPE, THE CHURCH WAS OFTEN ALLIED WITH THE KINGS, ALTHOUGH MARTIN LUTHER SIDED AT FIRST WITH THE REVOLT OF THE IMPOVERISHED MASSES. LATER LUTHER RECANTED HIS EARLIER PROGRESIVISM. IN AMERICA IT WAS SAID THAT FOR TOO LONG THE MOST RACIALLY SEGREGATED HOUR OF THE WEEK WAS 11 O'CLOCK ON SUNDAY MORNING. IN THE ORTHODOX JEWISH SYNAGOGUE, FOLLOWING AN ANCIENT CUSTOM, WOMEN WERE RELEGATED TO SEPARATE SEATING, USUALLY IN THE BALCONY. SUCH SEPARATION OF THE SEXES AT WORSHIP IS COMMON TO ISLAM. IN TODAY'S SOCIETY, THE CHURCH IS SPLIT ON THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S CHOICE WITH RESPECT TO THEIR OWN BODIES, AND SOME CHURCHES AND SYNAGOGUES RESIST STRONGLY THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN AS OFFICIANTS AT RELIGIOUS SERVICES.

WE ALL KNOW THAT IN MOST SOCIETIES FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, WOMEN WERE NOT GIVEN SIGNIFICANT LETTERED EDUCATION, BECAUSE SUCH AN EDUCATION WAS NOT DEEMED NECESSARY FOR THE DUTIES OF COOKING AND CHILD REARING. SINCE THEY DENIED WOMEN THE PRIVILEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, MEN CAME TO BELIEVE THAT WOMEN WERE INCAPABLE OF SUCH LEARNING.

SO THE PROCESS HAS ALWAYS WORKED DOWN THROUGH HISTORY. THE IN-GROUP DENIES THE OUT-GROUP CERTAIN VALUED PRIVILEGES AND THEN DECLARES THEM INCAPABLE OF, OR UNWORTHY OF, SUCH PRIVILEGES. THIS WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF

THE JEW FOR LONG CENTURIES IN EUROPE. THE JEW COULD NOT OWN LAND, SO HE COULDN'T BECOME A FARMER. HIS CHILDREN COULDN'T ATTEND THE ACADEMIES, SO THEY NEVER LEARNED THE SECULAR KNOWLEDGE THAT MADE POSSIBLE ADVANCEMENT IN THE PROFESSIONS. MOREOVER, IF THE JEW SOMEHOW AMASSED SECULAR KNOWLEDGE, HE STILL WAS NOT PERMITTED TO EARN HIS LIVING TEACHING. SUCH WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF ALBERT EINSTEIN FOR MANY YEARS OF HIS LIFE. IN ADDITION, THE JEWS COULDN'T BECOME MEMBERS OF THE GUILDS ESTABLISHED BY ARTISANS, WHICH MEANT THEY COULDN'T BECOME WATCH MAKERS OR SILVER SMITHS. WHAT DOES A PEOPLE DO WHEN IT IS SHUT OUT OF ALL NORMAL OCCUPATIONS? OBVIOUSLY, IT HAS TO INVENT NEW OCCUPATIONS. SO THE JEWS BECAME MUSICIANS, OR PEDDLARS, OR, BY A PECULIAR TWIST OF FATE, A FEW JEWS BECAME MONEY LENDERS. SIMILARLY, BLACK PEOPLE IN AMERICA, AFTER THE EMANCIPATION HAD TO INVENT NEW OCCUPATIONS FOR THEMSELVES. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY WE HAVE SO MUCH WONDERFUL MUSIC WRITTEN BY BLACKS AND SO MANY REMARKABLE BLACK ENTERTAINERS AND ATHLETES.

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION IN AMERICA WAS A LONG TIME COMING. WHITE MEN, ESPECIALLY PROPERTIED WHITE MEN, WERE GRANTED THE RIGHT TO VOTE AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR DEMOCRACY, AND BLACK MEN TECHNICALLY ACQUIRED THAT RIGHT IN FULL AFTER THEIR EMANCIPATION. OF COURSE, MANY STATES PLACED AS MANY OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF THE BLACK MAN'S VOTING AS POSSIBLE. STILL WOMEN, WHITE OR BLACK, DID NOT ACQUIRE THE RIGHT TO VOTE UNTIL THE 20TH CENTURY, AND IT TOOK A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT FOR THAT. WOMEN ARE STILL

STRUGGLING TO BE CONSIDERED FOR EQUAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND TO BE PAID EQUAL MONEY FOR THE SAME JOB.

YOU AND I KNOW THAT THE BELIEF THAT ALL HUMANS ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD IS NOT TRULY HELD BY MANY. INSTEAD, THE MAJORITY OF US USUALLY LOOK AT THOSE OUTSIDE OF OUR OWN GROUP IN TERMS OF THEIR SHORTCOMINGS, AS WE PERCEIVE THEM TO BE. INDEED, WE ARE OFTEN THREATENED BY THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOMEONE FURTHER DOWN IN THE PECKING ORDER MIGHT HAVE THE SAME VALUE AS OURSELVES.

I CONSIDER THAT I HAVE ONLY GONE SO FAR AS TO INTRODUCE THE SUBJECT OF DYNAMIC RELIGION TO YOU. OBVIOUSLY, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL TO DO FOR THOSE WHO SHARE THIS RELIGIOUSLY BASED PERSPECTIVE; THERE ARE MANY GOALS STILL ONLY PARTIALLY ACHIEVED. SINCE WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO GO FURTHER TONIGHT, LET ME CONCLUDE WITH A STORY.

TWO MEN ARE SITTING AT A BAR, GETTING PROGRESSIVELY MORE MELLOW OR DEPRESSED, AS DRINK WILL DO. AFTER A WHILE, ONE SAYS TO THE OTHER, "YOU'RE NOT REALLY MY FRIEND"! GREATLY AGITATED, THE SECOND MAN REPLIES, "HOW CAN YOU SAY I AM NOT YOUR FRIEND, WHEN WE HAVE BEEN BUDDIES SINCE CHILDHOOD. WE HAVE BEEN NEIGHBORS THROUGH OUR ADULT LIVES. WE DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER; AND WE EVEN MARRIED TWO SISTERS. HOW CAN YOU SAY I'M NOT REALLY YOUR FRIEND?" THE FIRST MAN WAS SILENT FOR A MOMENT AND THEN SAID SOFTLY, "HOW CAN YOU SAY YOU ARE MY FRIEND WHEN YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HURTS ME?"

THIS BRINGS US BACK TO THE SCRIPTURAL STORY OF THE

BURNING BUSH. READ THE STORY AGAIN, AND YOU WILL NOTE THAT GOD SAYS OF THE SLAVES, "I HEAR THEIR CRIES; I KNOW THEIR PAIN...". THIS SURELY IS THE PATTERN OF SENSITIVITY THAT GOD SEEKS FROM US. OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS MOVE DAILY ALL AROUND US, EACH PERSON WITH HIS OR HER OWN HOPES AND FEARS AND PAIN. IF WE ARE INDEED CREATOR IN GOD'S IMAGE, THEN WE WILL GROW TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE PAIN OF OTHERS, AND WE WILL WANT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.