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*One of a Series of
Interviews on the*

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CHARACTER

*Center for the Study of
Democratic Institutions*

Religion

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Donald McDonald
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This is one of a series of interviews being conducted by Donald McDonald, Dean of the College of Journalism of Marquette University, in connection with a study of the American Character by the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. The Center is the principal activity of the Fund for the Republic. Its work is directed at clarifying basic questions of freedom and justice, especially those raised by the emergence of twentieth century institutions.

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An Interview with Robert E. Fitch

Q Dr. Fitch, what would you say are the central characteristics of American Protestantism?

FITCH: For one thing, it is pluralistic. As a matter of fact, for this country it *is* pluralism. It is pluralism within the Christian faith. It stands for an extraordinary degree of diversity and freedom and individuality.

Q Is this good or bad, or a mixture of the good and the bad? Would you like to see greater unity in Protestantism?

FITCH: It is a mixture, I think. You have to beware of two extremes, as Reinhold Niebuhr keeps pointing out: the extreme of tyranny where you have a monolithic structure (I am opposed to a monolithic structure in any church, state, or other institution); the other extreme is simply anarchy or chaos in which nobody can get together on anything. On the whole, I like the diversity within the framework of the Christian faith.

Q Are there some kinds of diversity that would be inimical to the vitality of religion, or to the theological continuity of religion?

FITCH: One thing I am disposed to say—and, of course, some Protestant theologians would disagree with me—is that the continuity of Protestantism is not, in a clean-cut sense, a doctrinal continuity. It is rather a continuity of faith, hope, and love as defined by St. Paul in the famous passage in I Corinthians, 13, and elsewhere. We share a common faith, a Christian hope (not a secular hope), and the Christian ideals—love, justice, righteousness, and everything implied in these ideals. But there is a great deal of disagreement on the details.

I find it quite significant that there has been really only one great systematic theologian in the entire history of Protestantism, John Calvin. And, of course, he isn't accepted as authoritative by everybody, even by all contemporary Calvinists. We don't have one unequivocal norm and doctrine to which we can turn, such as I believe the Catholic Church has. So there is flexibility here. No, I would say that the key words are one in faith, one in hope, and one in love, with a great deal of difference in liturgy, in discipline, in structure, in organization, and in the particular gifts of the spirit by which one church exhibits one aspect of the gospel and another church exhibits another aspect.

Q There are, I understand, forces within Protestantism now seeking greater unity. I am wondering what diversities make unity difficult to achieve. Are they theological or liturgical differences?

FITCH: The World Council of Churches was able to get together on a fundamental statement of beliefs. Now that was not an elaborate credal formula covering several pages, or comprising an entire book. But it was a basic statement of belief and there was a surprising amount of agreement. There is also, I think, an increasing measure of agreement on what constitutes Christian social ethics. One sharp point of disagreement is concerned with polity or church organization, whether it is Presbyterian, Episcopal, or Congregationalist—those are

the three basic forms, roughly speaking. Again, there are sharp differences concerning the sacraments, whether these have to do with the Lord's Supper, or with Baptism, or possibly with the laying on of hands which in some churches would be the sacrament of Ordination. Those are the two areas—church organization and sacraments—where there occurs a kind of disagreement that cannot be easily overcome.

Q Which strands of American Protestantism have been dominant or most influential in the history of both Protestantism and the nation? Have some denominations been influential at certain times and other denominations influential at other times?

FITCH: When one speaks of the origins of the country and its constitutional structure, I don't think there can be any doubt that the preponderant influence was Calvinist-Anglican. And when we speak of Calvinists, we must remember that on the right wing are Presbyterians, in the center are Congregationalists, and on the left wing are the Unitarians. Also we have to remember that a good many Anglicans, even from the time of Shakespeare and running on down through a thinker like Malthus, have been peculiarly Calvinist in their theology. Malthus's writing is the most Calvinist treatise on social ethics ever written. I would say that, later on, other unestablished churches enter into the American picture with greater force, notably the Methodists and the Baptists. Numerically they are preponderant.

Q Did they also have a formative influence on Protestantism and the nation?

FITCH: They have the social ethics that I believe have been influential. The Baptists have been the most intransigent on the question of the separation of church and state. Another thing they stand for with great rigor is freedom of religious conscience—not necessarily civil

or academic liberty, but religious liberty. The Methodists, in company with the Quakers, have exerted more influence for the welfare of the poor, the oppressed, the down-trodden (whoever they happen to be—whether slaves or Negroes or an harassed proletariat). In later times, I would say that the strength of the Calvinists, along with the Anglicans, has been in the field of general civil, political, and academic liberties. They have a strong passion for constitutionality and a particular talent in that area. I would link the Jew and the Catholic with the Calvinist so far as their common regard for law and constitutional process is concerned.

Q Do you think some of the smaller groups have exercised an influence out of proportion to their numerical strength?

FITCH: That is very hard to estimate. The Congregationalists—that happens to be my church—are a small group, but historically they were not small in the beginning of this country; they were quite preponderant and had an enormous influence. I would guess that the Quakers have had an influence out of proportion to their numbers. Somehow they have a spiritual prestige that reaches beyond the boundaries of their own particular organization. Their influence has been felt both in their work for peace and in the area of social justice and racial relations.

Q If private judgment and freedom are things Protestants have in common, is there a tendency among them now to look for more authority? I have been reading articles in recent months that would seem to indicate a desire for a greater degree of authority.

FITCH: The problem of authority is always an acute problem with the Protestant. There is no use disguising that. I think he is pretty clear about what he means by liberty—the kind of spiritual liberty that St. Paul spoke of, that Martin Luther advocated—and the freedom of

conscience that Roger Williams defended. But Protestants are always having a debate on authority. Historically, our authority is the Bible. Then the question arises: who has the correct interpretation of the Bible? Since we cannot say in a simple way, "the church has that authority" because the question arises, "which church?" we tend to develop interpretations that are fundamentalist or liberal or orthodox or neo-orthodox. This debate is endless.

Q Is the neo-orthodox group having an influence today out of proportion to its numbers?

FITCH: The "orthodox" part of the neo-orthodox group, as I see it, is an effort to recover the insights of the great Protestant reformers—notably Martin Luther and John Calvin; it is also an effort to recover the essential meaning and the authority of the meanings to be found in Holy Scripture. The "neo" part is that, unlike other fundamentalist or orthodox groups, these men are no longer quarreling with the natural sciences; they are not at war with Darwin or Copernicus, nor are they conducting a battle with the higher critics. This neo-orthodoxy is illustrated by men like Reinhold Niebuhr and his brother, the late H. Richard Niebuhr, but not so much by Karl Barth. This kind of neo-orthodoxy has pretty well won over the liberal camp in the United States today.

Q Do you see any relationship between the credal character and the moral effectiveness of religion? If there is credal relaxation, will moral relaxation follow?

FITCH: I am sure that the things you really believe make all the difference in the world in how you behave. On the other hand, to be a bit technical here, when we speak of Protestantism it is very important to distinguish between what we call "credal" and "non-credal" churches. It happens that the preponderance of the members of the student body and faculty of the particular

seminary where I teach, the Pacific School of Religion, come from what would be called non-credal churches. They have a faith; and they have articulated and defined, simply and briefly, their faith and hope and love in God and Christ, in the Scriptures, and in the destiny of man within that framework. But they are not credalists, they are not like the Calvinists or classical Anglicans or Lutherans. They don't have a "Thirty-Nine Articles." They don't have a Westminster Confession of Faith. They do not define their doctrine with rationalistic precision; in fact, they are very skeptical of that approach. So if you ask: "Does credalism make a difference?" I would say, with a good Calvinist or Anglican, "Of course, it makes a difference." But with regard to a "non-credal" church—the Methodist, Congregationalist, Disciples—I just wouldn't use that term. I would say: "What is his faith? How does he define it? Does he really hold it?" If he does, this makes a difference in his behavior.

I would like to make one more general remark here. Within the last decade or two in Protestantism there certainly has been a marked revival of concern for doctrine, even among the "non-credal" churches. This can be seen in an institution like ours, which, as I say, is in a kind of non-credal tradition. Our students, however, are turning increasingly to courses in historical theology, in systematic theology, in the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of the church. While they do not want a binding dogmatism in these areas, they do feel it is important to know what you believe with some degree of precision and to act accordingly. The Congregational Church is a good example of one definitely moving back toward a greater clarity and system and order in its beliefs.

Q Protestant churches also seem to be returning to the use of altars, vestments, candles, communion services, and the like. Even the architecture of the new Protestant churches is reflecting a desire for a more formalized liturgical character in church services.

FITCH: We may as well lay some things on the line. Apart from the historically established churches of Protestantism—that is, the Presbyterians in Scotland, the Anglicans in England, the Lutherans all over Europe—the Protestant sects are the unesthetic sects. They are like classical Biblical Judaism for that matter. They throw out the idols. They heave out the incense. They will have no images. Indeed, they are skeptical of any elaborate liturgy, or music, or painting. This is a part of their history. What they did was, I think, defensible at the time that they did it. They were necessary actions at a certain moment—to cast down Baalim, as it were. Since then, many Protestant churches have tried to recover the feeling for beauty in their worship, in their architecture and liturgy. I don't see this occurring in any wholesale way, however.

In this San Francisco Bay area, for example, we have only one Congregationalist minister who follows rather elaborate liturgical practices in his church on Sunday. He is at liberty to do so if he wishes, but he is the only one who is doing it. I know of some Unitarian pastors who do it. I think that, historically speaking, there is something of a tension between the liturgical-esthetic emphasis in religion and the prophetic passion for social ethics in religion. The Quakers are almost devoid of any feeling for the esthetic. If you can combine the esthetic with the prophetic, fine, but I don't know who does it.

Q Lewis Mumford has a comment on this in his book, The Human Prospect: "In the bareness of the Protestant cathedral of Geneva one has the beginnings of that hard barracks architecture which formed the stone tenements of seventeenth century Edinburgh, set a pattern for the austere meetinghouses of New England, and finally deteriorated into the miserable shanties that line Main Street. The meagerness of the Protestant ritual began that general starvation of the spirit which finally breaks out, after long repres-

sion, in the absurd jamborees of Odd Fellows, Elks, Woodmen and kindred fraternities."

Those are pretty harsh comments by Mumford. I don't know whether the shabbiness of Main Street and the capers of Woodmen and Odd Fellows can be laid at the Protestants' doorsteps. But there was certainly an esthetic and emotional sterility in some of the churches, as you have said.

FITCH: I want to concede a good part of what Mumford says. In fact, I said much of that a moment ago. But I think Mumford misses an important aspect of the human spirit. That was not a total starvation of the spirit. May I refer to a time when I was a graduate student, studying on a fellowship from a theological seminary? I was studying philosophy and theology at the University of Paris, and almost all of my graduate associates were artists and art students. Members of my own family have been in the fine arts. But I think we have to face the fact that there is a tension, and a sharp one, between the kind of person who is a Hebrew prophetic type, an Amos, with a passion for social justice, and the kind of person who is an artist out of, say, the Renaissance tradition. The two just don't look at life the same way; they don't think and feel the same way. Somehow or other both of these people are needed in God's world and in His church.

The Puritan-Protestant tradition at the start went back to the prophetic model, and some of the original prophets were rather ferocious, savage-looking fellows. Elijah, alongside of Jezebel, was an uncouth, untutored heathen who didn't have correct table manners and who didn't know how to behave himself in the parlor. She was a civilized lady from one of the more advanced cultures of the time. So we must be aware of both sides of the picture. I am unwilling to let go of the ethical and social and prophetic heritage of the church if that is the price I have to pay for recovering a feeling for beauty.

Q But you are making no judgment as to whether or not that is the price one has to pay for color, beauty, emotion, in religion?

FITCH: Yes, I will say that human nature, being imperfect, tends to specialize in one direction or the other. I don't know of anybody who really combines them.

Q John Conway of Harvard wrote a paper on "Standards of Excellence" in a recent issue of Daedalus in which he says that we do have a "pluralist problem" in this country but that we are not a "religiously pluralist" nation. He thinks the "real religious tension...is not between Catholic and Protestant, or between various Protestant groups; it is between the traditional faiths on the one hand, the new democratic and secularist humanism on the other." He says that the "logical end of Rousseauism is a civic religion," and he believes we now have, in fact, a civic faith and religion. He thinks "President Kennedy's anxiety during the [1960] campaign to delimit very carefully the area in which his own religious convictions would operate seems to point to the existence of a generally held socio-political creed with, in the anthropological sense, some religious overtones."

FITCH: Of course, the logical outcome of Rousseauism is a civic religion. The chapter tacked on to the end of the *Social Contract* makes it clear that one must establish a religion of the state. A secular idolatry of democracy is as damnable a thing as a secular idolatry of any other kind of government. It is fundamental to the religious heritage—whether Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant—that our loyalty to God is higher than our loyalty to the government, and that the government, in some sense, stands under the criticism—not under the authority—of the supreme commandment of God. If we

are losing that, we are heading toward some kind of totalitarianism.

Q Do you think we are losing that heritage?

FITCH: No. I think Conway's is the expression of a kind of pious humanist hope that has become increasingly disreputable with thoughtful people today.

Q He believes that "the American democracy, without any question, contains a substantial Rousseauistic component, as does any system which contains the concept of the sovereign people." He adds: "Thus, there is present the idea of the general will which presupposes a cultural and ethnic homogeneity, if not now, then ideally in the future. At any rate, such an idea cannot easily tolerate really fundamental diversities of value and outlook and belief in the entity known as the sovereign people."

FITCH: As I say, he states correctly the logic of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. But the important political difference lies between the heirs of Rousseau and the heirs of John Locke. Our kind of political democracy came out of Locke's second treatise on civil government, thank heavens, and not out of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. Ours is a kind of democracy that does allow for pluralism and diversity. By the way, I think that Gerhard Lenski's recent study of *The Religious Factor* would contradict Conway's statement of facts. That study indicates that we are moving even more definitely toward a pluralist, even a compartmentalized, society religiously. At any rate, I think it most unlikely that we will all get melted down into one common secular amalgam.

Q I don't like to throw long quotes at anyone, but I wonder if I could give you one more from Conway's paper: "In the absence of a

commonly shared religious faith in the old sense [in the United States], we have substituted an esthetic for an ethical standard. We evaluate and judge a man not on the basis of his moral life—how can we with so many differing ideas of what the correct moral life is? But instead on the basis of his gifts and the skill and integrity with which those gifts are realized. . . . This does not by any means exclude moral considerations. . . . They are an important component but they have meaning only insofar as they affect the esthetic totality. . . . The brilliant dishonest lawyer fails in excellence because his performance constitutes an esthetic affront. He does not present that harmony and unity and single-minded intellectual drive which his duty to his talent demands and merits. The observer experiences, not a moral shock in the old sense, but the shock of . . . bad form.”

FITCH: I disagree with this radically; I don't think it is an accurate statement of fact. The important thing to remember about American history — whether you are Catholic, Protestant, or Jew—is that our cultural pattern comes out of a Hebrew-Christian religious heritage and that our basic differences lie within this tradition. Within that Hebrew-Christian tradition we have certain great ethical ideals which, in fact, all people share. They are ideals of social justice that come to us out of the Old Testament. They are ideals of the love of persons and respect for the person that come to us from the New Testament. There is the later ideal of liberty, whether it is spiritual, civic, or political. These things are shared by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. And we don't get away from them. I am afraid we are not sufficiently aware of this until we go and live in another country where there is no such heritage.

I would like to add that, as far as I can see, any agnostic or atheist in any country is always parasitic for his

ethics upon the religious heritage of that country. Nehru is an agnostic, but he gets his ethics out of the Hindu tradition as shaped by the religious heritage of his people. A small number of the intelligentsia in this country think they have an autonomous ethic. Actually they have cribbed it from the Hebrew-Christian tradition. I think there is a fundamental unanimity on this.

Q I suppose the question that arises here is how long the Hebrew-Christian momentum will continue to be effective. The farther one gets away from one's religious roots, the less vitality one has.

FITCH: That is true. If this secular humanist minority became a majority, the culture would begin to fall apart.

Q How would you evaluate the part that American Protestants have played in the area of social justice—race relations, labor-management relations, and the like? Will Herberg points out that in the early years of America "frontier Protestants" were closely identified with the lower, downtrodden, and exploited classes of people, but that as a middle class emerged, they tended to get away from some of their early social concerns. Is that true?

FITCH: To make a judgment you have to bear in mind that the particular social area that needs attention changes from time to time. In the 1930's, for example, there was need for radicalism and bold leadership for the rights of labor. That would not be so true in the 1960's. I was myself active in helping labor unions "way back then," but I don't feel the same need to do that now. The race question is more important right now.

Q If you want to consider the contemporary scene, what would be your estimate of the Protestant leadership in social matters?

FITCH: We are humbly proud of the fact that some of the very fine leadership among the Negroes themselves comes right out of the Protestant church—Martin Luther King and people of that sort. This is always disturbing to the secularists because they are persuaded that religion is an opiate and that Christianity has been used to drug the Negro into acquiescing, that it has been used to keep him in a subservient state. They have become rather annoyed to see that out of these Christian churches have come some of the boldest leaders of reform within the Negro movement itself.

To complete a thought in my answer before this, some of the current social issues needing attention, in addition to the race issue, are those involving civil liberties, freedom of speech, press, and assembly, and world peace. I would add here that I don't care what church you are talking about, or what political party for that matter, the bold, prophetic leadership is always a minority. Human nature is not constituted otherwise. The larger part of the church, of the government, of the university, and of the community in general will always be on the side of the *status quo*.

Q Do you think the minority is too small at this time, or about right, or gratifyingly large?

FITCH: The minority is always too small. The Old Testament furnishes a good example of that; there were only a few great prophets. In the long run, of course, they were the most important people. But the great body of people in Israel were content with their priestly, liturgical practices, content with a little Baal worship on the side. And the prophets have to do what they can. We never have enough of this kind of bold leadership.

Q Not long ago I read a lengthy report in The New York Times in which Protestant leaders in the Middle West and Texas were quoted as saying that extreme religious and economic conservatives were trying to pre-

vent ministers and church councils from speaking out on social matters. Is this a serious problem within Protestantism today?

FITCH: I am glad you brought that up because I would like to make this cheerful statement about our church. It is notable, I think, that ever since the founding of the Federal Council of Churches (now the National Council of Churches), which is the preponderant group of Protestant churches in this country, that organization has always spoken in a boldly prophetic manner on matters of war and peace, racial discrimination, economic justice. They may have made errors from time to time—I think they have—but I would rather have a group that sticks its neck out and makes a mistake now and then; at least it is trying to do battle for justice.

Q At the time of the Freedom Rides through the South, a number of Catholic publications noted that there were no Catholics present.

FITCH: I am still pluralist, and I would insist on a diversity of strategies. Four or five years ago I attended a conference in Chicago, and I remember vividly a Catholic priest from New Orleans who spoke of the battle for racial justice in the South. I was tremendously impressed by his stand, and by the kind of thing he was doing. There is more than one way to do this job; the way that gets the headlines in the newspapers is not necessarily the most important or most effective way. I was back East a short time ago and there was a racial flare-up in Levittown on the question of whether or not a Negro could be admitted. I wanted to know why the church was not doing something in the matter, and some friends of mine jumped on me for raising the question. I looked into the matter and found to my personal satisfaction that a Congregational minister had in fact assumed a position of leadership in that quarrel and was trying to see that justice was done. But that minister was not operating in a way to capture headlines.

Q Not long ago in an interview in U.S. News & World Report on the general question of the moral climate in the United States, you painted a rather bleak picture of the moral condition of the nation. You said that a great deal of the blame for the moral breakdown in this country must be placed on the American home. Since that time, have you detected any improvement in the moral climate?

FITCH: That interview was in 1960. I am disposed to say that 1960 was a turning-point in this regard. I think that roughly from about the end of World War I to about 1960—that is a forty-year stretch—we had a rise of relativism, of permissiveness, of a high degree of tolerance and laxity in the field of morals. We had the breakdown of what were erroneously called “Puritan” standards; actually they were Victorian standards. I think this was accentuated from the end of World War II, 1945, to about 1960. It came to focus in the beatnik movement, the fake-Bohemian group that developed then. I call them “fake-Bohemian” because the genuine Bohemians who appeared after the first World War, whom I knew and with whom I lived for a while, had some ideals about morality and art and held to them passionately. They were mistaken, but they were willing to suffer and work for their ideals.

Now I think the moral breakdown over this forty-year period has about run its course. I visit college campuses and I talk to students. I have a feeling that they are turning once again to a regard for moral law, for standards and principles. Very young parents today are not as permissive as their parents were. They believe in certain objective standards of behavior that have to be enforced.

Q Dr. Louis Finkelstein has said that there is a good deal of spiritual and philosophical confusion among the professors in our colleges and universities. This, in turn, would cause confusion among the students, I imagine.

FITCH: I was a college professor most of my life: I think I know that area better than I know the seminaries. There is no doubt that relativism and positivism have been dogma in American colleges and universities for a long time. But there are signs that the intellectuals are getting fed up and are turning away from it.

Q How would you compare the churches with the schools and family life as a force influencing the behavior of men? Can the churches accomplish much if parents and schools are not doing their share?

FITCH: I find it hard to isolate the church from the home and the school.

Q Do you think the schools are hampered in their moral influence because they must be "neutral" with respect to religion and theism? I don't want to bring in the whole church-state issue here, but are the public schools handicapped because they must respect the conscience of the secular . . .

FITCH: I think that, in our religiously pluralist society, we cannot get religion into the public school. But I also think that on certain basic questions of Christian ethics the public school does a better job than the church—and I don't care which church we talk about, your church, mine, or someone else's. The public school is the one place, better than any other, in which young people from different social, racial, and religious groups are brought together. You say: "Is this Christian brotherhood?" I say, "Yes, it is Jewish-Christian brotherhood within the framework of our society." The public school is doing that job in a way that no church organization can. I welcome it and don't want to see it weakened.

Q Once you get these children together, what kind of moral truth is being communicated?

FITCH: The practical answer, I think, is that in any community a high percentage of the public school teachers are apt to be quite active in the churches of the community. In effect, the moral standards—at least the moral standards, not the explicit theology—of the public school will be those that come out of the religion of the community. These standards may not be taught in any formal, unequivocal manner. But they *are* communicated by discipline, by custom, by the folkways of the school. I think we Protestants, Catholics, and Jews are just going to have to face the fact, if we are going to live together in one country, that there will be this institution, the public school, which accomplishes this particular job and that we cannot turn it into a theological seminary or a church.

Q To what extent has American Protestantism become Americanized at the expense, perhaps, of some of its central elements?

FITCH: That question, following Herberg, could be asked of all of us. Is American Catholicism, for instance, different from Gallican Catholicism? This is always a problem in any culture—for Protestants, Catholics, or Jews.

Q It is intensified in ours, isn't it?

FITCH: I'm not sure about that. It is good to have people point it out to us when it has happened. But any religion that is universal, that reaches out beyond national boundaries, faces the problem of cultural adaptation. It has got to do some adapting in order to reach the people, to talk to them, and to function in terms of their problems. At the same time it must keep its transcendent and universal emphasis. While I can be pretty rabid about my own church when it has succumbed to acculturation, generally speaking I think the three faiths have been able to retain their basic religious integrity to do the larger task of criticism and judgment of society and the culture.

Q In your U.S. News & World Report interview you were critical of the sociological and psychological determinism that you saw in America, the idea that human behavior is beyond the control of the individual person. Do you think the determinists have re-examined their position in recent years?

FITCH: I think there is the beginning of a change. It is as simple, if you want to put it this way, as a recovery of the belief in the freedom and responsibility of the human will. After all, that is an ancient Biblical affirmation. For a while we had a kind of atheistic determinism—sometimes I call it the doctrine of atheistic Calvinism—which held that the real, omnipotent God, the determiner of human destiny, is heredity and environment. But I detect, increasingly, among counselors and psychologists, and among existentialists in philosophy and religion, an affirmation of human freedom and responsibility.

Q It seems to me that in the light of the omnipotence of science and technology a feeling of disillusionment has set in. This is a kind of paradox. We are pouring more and more of our national resources into science, into research and technology, but at the same time the people are expecting less in terms of the Utopia that an earlier generation thought the scientists could deliver.

FITCH: The American people have lost three or four idols—Baalim—in the last decade or two. This is a part of our psychic and religious trauma. One is the belief in Mammon, in the power of wealth to do everything. We have lost our faith in that because even though we are now a wealthy country, very affluent, it does not solve all our problems. Second, we have lost our faith in the omnipotence of science, in the belief that if you have enough technology all problems and difficulties will be solved and overcome. It has become clear that with

enough technology we can now blow ourselves to hell. A third secular faith the American people have lost is the belief that their unique and manifest destiny has been to be the new, chosen Israel of contemporary history. The loss of these three idolatries is a basic factor in explaining the revitalization of genuine religious faith. Of course, some Americans are also turning to Zen and Vedanta and some of the theosophical cults.

Q You said affluence solved no problems. Would you say it has created some?

FITCH: It certainly does create problems. I think Aristotle was right, politically and sociologically, when he affirmed the ideal of the mean. If you are too poor or too rich you get into a lot of difficulties, and, strangely enough, they often resemble each other. The addiction to alcoholism, to sexual indulgence, to gambling, to the quest for excitement, are common to people at the bottom and at the top of the economic scale, but not so much to those in the middle. We have gotten away from widespread poverty and we are moving in the direction of affluence and taking on the vices that seem to accompany affluence.

Q What is your estimate of the relevance of Protestant sermons to contemporary problems, say, this problem of affluence? Do they reflect what you have called the "prophetic mission" of the church?

FITCH: I think there is a fair amount of preaching that stresses our obligation of philanthropy, as persons and as a nation, our obligation in charity toward less privileged peoples all over the earth. And there are particular occasions and moments when people are called upon to give and to contribute. No doubt there is not enough of this; there never is. I would guess, however, that if there is a trend in Protestant preaching it is toward more depth in theology, to the basic doctrines in theology

that undergird our moral outlook and our beliefs about God and Christ.

Q Much has been made about the moral conduct of American prisoners of war in Korea, the collaborationism, lack of emotional stability, physical stamina, courage, and the lack of unit and personal loyalty that was found in distressingly large numbers during that war. Do you think this reflected a national moral problem in the United States?

FITCH: I was not in Korea, but I was a chaplain with an attack transport during World War II. I must say as soon as peace arrived I found myself shocked by the rapid disintegration of morale of our fighting men. It did not compare, of course, with what occurred during the Korean war, but I felt at that time, as I felt during the Korean episode, that the trouble with most Americans, quite simply, was that they did not know what they were fighting for. To put it in larger terms, they did not know what they believed was precious in life—whether it was God, or country, or mom’s apple pie, or having a good time with “the boys” back home. They hadn’t worked out in any explicit way their scale of values. I think this was a product of the whole moral relativism, permissiveness, materialism, and sentimentalism that had been going on for forty years in this country.

Q But you think 1960 was a turning-point?

FITCH: Yes, I think some kind of change is occurring. For some time I have been turning over in the back of my mind an article I would like to write called “A New Breed of Cat.” I have been tempted to use President Kennedy as an example of a certain shift in temper that I think cuts across religious lines. It is a mood that contrasts with the attitude of the existentialists who just sit back and whimper about their woes and sufferings. It is a temper that faces up to the tough problems of life and

says, "We'll take them on, we have to meet them, and we'll conduct ourselves like men." It says that there are certain historic principles in the light of which we act. We will do our best, and that is all that can be expected of us. I think this is a manly attitude; certainly it is a non-beatnik attitude. I find it not only in our rather young President but in the still younger members of the generation now coming along.

Q Do you think this will percolate from the top down?

FITCH: I don't think it is percolating from the top down. I think, rather, that the President's attitude and approach to life reflect the general change in that direction taking place throughout our society among the younger generation.

Q Do you think such matters as the revelations of price fixing by some of our largest electric corporations is symptomatic of a general decline in morality in our older generation?

FITCH: I don't see this as symptomatic of a general moral breakdown, as many of my brethren do. I see it as symptomatic of a critical change taking place in the structure of the corporate industry in this country. I think it points to the fact that the kind of traditional free competition we have always talked about is no longer a viable thing, even for the capitalists who think they believe in it. We have arrived at an awkward point in the evolution of industry in the United States, both in industry's relations with labor, which is frequently on a nation-wide basis, and in its internal relations. Now, things are done at this level that are no doubt wrong, at least by classical norms of corporate behavior. But I think they point to the need for a drastic overhaul of our whole theory of how we should cope with these problems. Frankly, I don't have an answer, and I would not venture to try to answer.

Q What would you single out as the most important area in which American Protestants can make their greatest contribution both to our way of life and to their own vitality as Protestants?

FITCH: One area in which they are learning to make a better contribution to their own vitality and therefore, I hope, to that of the country is simply in the cooperation between sects which in the past had engaged in needless and ruinous competition. I happen to believe in some measure of free competition in religion as well as in business. I think it is wholesome and useful. But Protestants are learning to get together not just on the national and world level but in local councils of churches in which they plan their work in an intelligent way and do not spend their time cutting each other's throats.

Q You also mentioned earlier a trend towards greater theological depth in sermons.

FITCH: I think that in certain places there is a movement away from a superficial theology to one that has more depth in the classical sense, that is, greater depth in both Biblical terms and in terms of the great Protestant reformers.

Q In the area of the morality of nuclear warfare, some Catholics have been sharply critical of their own theologians for not playing a greater part in the deliberations of the political and scientific people. So often, the voice of the Catholic theologian seems to be mute, if not missing, in these deliberations. Are Protestant theologians more effective?

FITCH: Some are wrestling with the problem of nuclear warfare. Dean John C. Bennett of the Union Theological Seminary and Professor Paul Ramsay of Princeton are two whose names come to mind. They have

been working and writing in this field. But I would not want to boast and say we have been doing a great deal. And if as you say the Catholic voice is missing, I would add that everybody's voice is missing.

Q The theological dimension of the problem, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish, seems to have been left out of contemporary deliberations, whether by accident or design.

FITCH: I'm not persuaded it has been left out. A theological dimension to some people would seem to dictate drastic, simplistic types of answers. If that were true, I would be very distrustful of it. We are now confronting in a very dramatic way what is involved in the whole Biblical idea of the fall of man. People once regarded the idea that one sin of Adam could involve the whole human race in subsequent catastrophe as naive and superstitious. But the fact is that as a people we are now at a point where one sin on our part or on the part of an enemy like Russia in connection with the hydrogen bomb could have catastrophic consequences for the entire human race. So we now confront the classical problem of theological morals as a contemporary reality. I think most theologians realize this. This does not mean that they can come up with a quick answer.

Q In your own seminary do you offer special courses dealing with the morality of such contemporary problems as this?

FITCH: Oh, yes. I teach in the Department of Christian Ethics and I have a course in Christianity and Politics which deals with current issues as well as with classical ones. My colleague, Albert Rasmussen, has the Department of Religion and Society and he, in collaboration with another professor, teaches a course in world affairs and international relations which deals explicitly with this problem. I'm sure this is not unique; it goes on in most of our Protestant seminaries.

Q Then you are not dealing merely with textbook problems in morality.

FITCH: No. The course is set up *de novo* each year in terms of current issues, the available resources, documents, and personnel, and how we can tackle it in a strictly contemporary way. We do not do everything in this purely contemporaneous manner, but we certainly do this kind of thing.

Q To return for a moment to personal morality, would you say that the classic tension and always rather delicate balance between freedom and authority is at a particularly critical stage in our country at this time? How does one keep this in balance? You have talked in another interview about the breakdown of family authority. We know there is a breakdown of police authority in many parts of the country. School authority is jeopardized in our largest cities. Has freedom become more akin to license than responsible liberty?

FITCH: This is a perennial problem, isn't it? I spoke a while ago of the two poles of tyranny and anarchy. I must say that the more I associate with my Roman Catholic friends the more I realize how the Catholic Church historically has understood the importance of institutional authority while we Protestants have understood the importance of liberty. I think the Catholics have gone overboard on authority at times, and I am sure we have gone overboard on liberty, even to the point of anarchy. But perhaps these two ecclesiastical traditions can supplement each other to keep a balance between freedom and authority in America. I am generalizing, of course, because I know there are some very free-wheeling people within the Catholic Church and some very authoritarian disciplinarians within the Protestant body.

Q Perhaps it comes down to distinguishing between the areas in which a greater measure of freedom is permissible and the areas in which authority is more crucial.

FITCH: I'd rather put it this way—and in this I am a Calvinist by heritage and in line with the Catholic and Jew in a belief in natural law and legal-constitutional devices—I would say it is a matter of enumerating the certain liberties that we believe in, as we believe in the Bill of Rights for instance, and in the specific freedoms—political, economic, social, ethical if there are some, sexual if you think there ought to be some. I believe we should enumerate these clearly, with the understanding that in other areas these freedoms do not exist.

Q In some cases, I suppose, if a person asserts his freedom it can be disastrous, and in other cases it may not be. A man may say there is no God or that Christ is not divine; he has the ontological freedom to make such affirmations or denials. But it does make a difference, at least to him, on how he uses his freedom. Or in the area of moral conduct, he is free to, say, commit adultery, but if he does he is "outlawed" in the moral sense.

FITCH: These are things we must continually debate and try to define. There is the broad distinction between freedom of belief and speech on the one hand and freedom of conduct on the other. In the classic civil liberties tradition there is nothing that says one may act upon any fool belief one may have. Roger Williams distinguished between "seducing teachers" — that is, those who teach and preach unorthodox doctrines — and "scandalous livers." He said civil society must tolerate teachers who seduce, though it does not have to pay them a salary or give them a job. But it does not follow that civil society can tolerate any overt action as it is defined legally and constitutionally.

Q Is America in danger of becoming a nation in which morality is determined by majority opinion or action? If a Gallup Poll, for example, were to show that 55 per cent of the women engage in premarital sexual relations, or that 60 per cent of the men have had some homosexual experience, is there a danger that the people will consider such conduct to be the norm? Would this be some of that democratic idolatry we talked about earlier?

FITCH: I would question the adequacy of such a survey or poll, whether from Gallup, Kinsey, or anyone else. A person may be guilty of one moral lapse and yet in some statistical surveys it will be treated as though it were a matter of habitual behavior. But, to answer your question, any democracy lives continually under the threat that majority behavior may be taken as the norm of what is right and wrong. But as long as it keeps its religious heritage alive the society will not do that.

Q If any religious leader — priest, minister, or rabbi — were to go overboard on the side of liberty, I suppose he himself would, unwittingly perhaps, be in danger of adapting his teaching and preaching to the prevailing winds of fashion in human behavior.

FITCH: I come back to my statement that one should not ever affirm freedom-in-general. You affirm only specific liberties that have been tested throughout history, that have been defined—sometimes legally and ethically. We believe in those particular liberties, and I think we could enumerate the legitimate ones in the Protestant tradition. They would include what is called the spiritual or Christian liberty—freedom from the dominion of sin, death, and circumstance; freedom to live a life of love and justice by the grace of God. That is the basic liberty I am sure we share with Catholics and Jews. But then there are political liberties against a foreign tyranny, and

that means, too, representative government at home. There are also specific liberties such as freedom of speech, press, conscience, and assembly. There is academic liberty. There is economic liberty, which means, under certain restraints, free enterprise in business. Also, freedom of labor. But when somebody goes beyond these and starts hollering about some other liberty I want to say, "What liberty are you talking about? I never heard of that one. This liberty has to prove itself." There is no ethical tradition or legal tradition that warrants an overall sexual liberty, for example.

Q What are the criteria for judging legitimate and non-legitimate liberties? The natural law? Traditional teaching? A combination of the two and perhaps some others?

FITCH: I am quite willing to go along with the natural law provided I can bring in Calvinist and Jewish interpretations of it as well as Catholic ones. This is something we share together. I would appeal through natural law to the moral law, but I would also appeal to the experience and the historic wisdom of the Christian people in their effort to work out particular problems. Perhaps some of our liberties are pragmatically validated, and others, such as excessive permissiveness in the home, have been pragmatically invalidated in the last decade or so. Parental permissiveness was so overdone people turned away from it.

Q From the title of your latest book, The Odyssey of the Self-Centered Self, I gather you think egoism is a characteristic of contemporary America, or at least a critical problem.

FITCH: In that book, which is religious and ethical, I traced what I think is the inevitable logic of the breakdown of the historic God-centered society. My argument was that after you give up belief in God you turn to nature. Then you turn to humanity. Then you turn to

society and its folkways. Then, after existentialism, you finally turn to the self, to your own feelings and self-interest. I said this is where we have come after about 200 or 300 years of moving in that direction. I am trying to get back to the idea of a self that is oriented to certain great objective realities, the greatest being God. I include nature in those realities, since nature is the creation of God. Yes, we have become an ego-centered, self-centered society, I believe.

Q What you said in the U.S. News & World Report interview was in line with your thesis from the book, then.

FITCH: Yes, the editors of the magazine had seen an article I had written for *Christianity and Crisis* entitled "The Obsolescence of Ethics." It was a savage critique of certain tendencies in modern Protestantism which, from my point of view, minister to ethical relativism and the abolition of belief in objective laws and principles.

Q What you have just said is what I had in mind in my early questions concerning the relationship between belief and practice.

FITCH: I am sure there is that relationship. When any religion gets so acculturated that it takes in what may be the prevailing relativism and freedom of its society, then it is breaking down the foundations of morality. Let me make this honest judgment: I don't want to get too generous to my Catholic friends, but since I assume that Protestants, in general, incline toward the side of liberty and maybe Catholics incline, in general, toward the side of stability and authority, if there is a secular trend now toward too much liberty, toward relativism, then the odds are that the Protestants will err in this direction more than the Catholics will.

Q Will Herberg says about American Protestantism that it has had its moments of dynamism

and revival, in the classic meaning of the word, but that each period of vitality has been followed by a period when the "organizers" and "institutionalizers" took over, with the result that it fell into static, non-creative periods.

FITCH: That is probably true. I think it is also true that there are different kinds of revivals, and this would hold for Catholicism and Judaism as well as Protestantism. Yes, you can have a liturgical revival, you can have an intellectual revival (a sudden thrust and movement of the church toward not merely theology but toward the universities and the schools, science, learning, and the culture of the time). You can have a revival of the prophetic impulse for social justice. These are all rebirths that can take place on different levels at different moments. And one must be ready for all of them.

An Interview with John J. Wright

Q Is there something, Bishop Wright, that can be defined or even described as "American Catholicism"? If so, what do you consider to be some of its most characteristic elements?

WRIGHT: I don't like the term "American Catholicism," as I do not like the terms "French Catholicism" or "Spanish Catholicism." It seems to imply a nationalization of that which should remain universal and transcendental. However, everyone knows what you mean by that term. You are asking whether there are characteristics of Cath-

olics in America by which they are individualized, perhaps, in the practice or in the quality of their Catholicism. So understood, the term has a valid signification, just as we may speak, for example, of an "Irish way" or an "English way" in sanctity, without on that account restricting or changing the essential and universal aspects of sanctity.

American Catholicism has been characterized from the beginning by a profound spiritual loyalty to Rome. In no small part this has perhaps been because so many of the immigrant Catholics came to America precisely as a result of their religious loyalty to Rome. I think, for example, of the Germans who came here at the height of the *los von Rom* movement in Bismarck's day; and of the Catholics of Eastern Europe where the very hallmark of the faith for centuries has been fidelity to Rome in contrast to local autocephalous and national Orthodox traditions. I think particularly of the English Catholics who settled here; passionate loyalty to Rome has always been characteristic of English Catholics in their homeland and here. The Irish have never forgotten Saint Patrick's plea that they be Romans precisely because Christians; wherever else Gallicanism may have flourished, it has not been among our Franco-Americans in what pertains to the Pope.

The American Catholic's loyalty to Rome is an almost mystical thing. It is strictly spiritual. It has little or no political overtone; it isn't always matched, perhaps, by equally unanimous understanding of such matters as, for example, specific social developments in the Papal encyclicals. Yet it does reveal profound love for that Rome of which, as Dante said, Christ was a Roman. It has nothing to do with the Rome of the Caesars; it has absolutely nothing to do with the Rome of the Risorgimento or nineteenth century Italian nationalism. The Roman loyalty of American Catholics constitutes a supra-national commitment of which we have been proudly conscious. People in the community around us have been very much aware of it, too, but sometimes they have been either uncomprehending or unsympathetic.

Q You say there are other characteristics of the American Catholic?

WRIGHT: Yes. Another, I think, is an energetic and generous disposition of the American Catholic for the performance of good works; the prosperity and flourishing of good works among us is no accident. The appeal of programs like the Vincent de Paul movement, the manner in which American Catholics will rally for the building of charitable institutions, even when they may not be equally interested in institutions for intellectual or contemplative purposes—this is characteristic and is, I think, a trait we share with Americans generally.

A third and like characteristic of American Catholicism is its heavy emphasis on moral rather than dogmatic theology, on moral considerations rather than doctrinal speculation. This appears also to be something we have in common with the non-Catholic American community. Their genius, as ours, has been heavily practical and moral. This characteristic, in my opinion, has arisen from the very geography of our country and from the circumstances of our history; the stern and rockbound New England coast left little time for philosophical speculation among the New England Protestants, and the pressing practical problems of survival which confronted our immigrant peoples inevitably influenced their cultural development.

These are three of the most obvious characteristics of American Catholicism in contrast with certain European patterns. For example, Spanish Catholicism is heavy on speculation, short on social programs; French Catholicism, in some chapters of its history, reveals a "Gallicanism" quite unlike the great awareness of Rome in the American pattern; in German Catholicism the genius, again, is more often for dogmatic and speculative theology.

Q European visitors to the United States frequently comment on the fervor and devotion of American Catholics in their practice of the

faith. Would you include this as a characteristic note of Catholicism in this country?

WRIGHT: Yes, and this, too, may be partially the result of precisely this characteristic moral preoccupation of which we have been speaking. Then, too, it has been our *practice* that has revealed us as Catholics, whereas in other traditions it has rather been the *ideas* and *outlooks* of people that revealed them as Catholics. Think, for example, of France and men like Charles Peguy. Peguy was weak in practice, but no one could be under the illusion that he was other than Catholic; all that he said and thought reflected the intense Catholicism of his mind and heart. Among us, however, faithful, even scrupulous practice of the obligations of the faith early became the familiar outward sign of our inward conviction, even when or if we weren't always particularly felicitous or articulate in other expressions of inward convictions.

Q American Catholics are said, on the one hand, to be virtually indistinguishable in their behavior from non-Catholic Americans. And, on the other hand, American Catholics are also said to be rather separatist, "non-engaged" or non-involved with much of the ongoing work of our society, whether it be in the political, social, or cultural order. One manifestation, perhaps, is the proliferation of specifically Catholic organizations which, in many instances, parallel the work of non-denominational organizations in the areas, say, of scouting, rural life, civil liberties, and all the rest.

WRIGHT: I am one of those who believe that a principal explanation of the proliferation of specifically Catholic groups duplicating or overlapping other groups in the community is that, unfortunately, for a long while we were left out of the original organizations and movements, especially in some communities. And so, in many

cases, we plowed ahead and did like things under our own auspices. It's the old problem of "which came first?" In this case, was it the exclusion of Catholics by others, or the voluntary withdrawal of Catholics from the company of others? Alas, all too often I fear it was the first.

Q Would you care to make a judgment of the extent to which American Catholics are now involved in the mainstream of American life, regardless of the causes for their involvement or non-involvement in the past?

WRIGHT: I think they are now deeply involved in American life and action. By this I do not merely mean the areas always mentioned in this regard, *e.g.*, the Army, Navy, Air Force, though the Lord knows they are heavily "engaged" there! I mean that they are deeply engaged in the American scene and, American fashion, are engaged on every side in the divided camps that comprise America. Perhaps this is one reason why we fail to give a united and characteristically Catholic witness in some areas. Certainly in political matters American Catholics function in a highly divided fashion; they bear a deployed and varied witness and I see no reason to regret this.

Q In what areas or on what levels, then, has there been a specifically and solidly Catholic witness in American life?

WRIGHT: It seems to me that we have borne such a witness, again, on the moral front. Some years ago the Protestant publisher of a New England newspaper told me that during the years of his publishing career he had observed the processes by which two communities changed from nineteenth century American communities of largely Protestant complexion to mid-twentieth century American communities of largely Catholic complexion. He mentioned three things that seemed to him to characterize the Catholic contributions to the communities. At the beginning of his career, he said, the lads work-

ing on the docks and railroads were mostly Catholic immigrants. He had seen them transformed by the temperance movements (the Father Mathew Society among the Irish, the Jean-Baptiste among the French) from a people who, in their economic discouragement, had been in danger of chronic alcoholism, into a temperate people. This was accomplished by spiritual and moral means that bore no resemblance to the pressures of the largely Protestant Prohibition movement or Carrie Nation crusades. It had been accomplished in the confessional, in parish missions, and by patient religious programs.

The second thing he mentioned was speech. He said that the foul-mouthed language of desperately poor workers had, in his lifetime, disappeared, chiefly under the tremendous and beneficent influence of the Holy Name Society. Then he remarked that he, a Unitarian, had observed that out of the ideal Catholic family and school situation there came a recognizable type of girl and woman, a type that reflected typically Catholic influences and a Catholic witness. He considered this type of girl (and corresponding types of men)—the persons so often described as “good Catholics”—as exemplifying a major contribution Catholicism had made.

Q What has been the effect, do you think, of the nineteenth century decision by American Catholics to resolve the problem of education by establishing their own school system rather than, as some Catholics then advocated, entering fully into the public school system? How has that affected the character of American Catholics and the extent to which they are engaged in the work of the general community? Has it taken them automatically and inexorably out of a large part of the mainstream of community life, and, if so, is this a significant factor?

WRIGHT: Perhaps it is, but not in the way that is sometimes feared. Indeed, I sometimes think it will prove a

significant factor in enriching the authentic American tradition in a way that may never have been expected, certainly not in the way that I once expected. I am in a peculiar position on this matter. Not only did I go to public school, but I am very happy that I went to my specific public high school at the time when I did, because I fear it would no longer be equally worthwhile to go there now. It has changed, as have all things else. Now I find myself believing, and passionately believing, that a principal contribution of the Catholic school system to the American educational tradition may be as a means and instrument for the preservation of the very freedom of education. I am not paranoid on this matter, but I have talked with people involved in it often enough to be aware of the forces in the land that are bent on establishment of a single public school system, a monolithic educational system under state, even federal, control.

As of a couple of generations ago I might have wished we Catholics had gone, in the nineteenth century, fully into the public school system. Now I consider this would have been an unmitigated political and educational disaster. Let's face it, totalitarianism is present, seed fashion, in every purely secular government as it would be in any theocracy; the moment you say that ours is a purely secular state, at that same moment you provide a basic formula for one or another form of totalitarianism and you come perilously close to Mussolini's concept: "everything within the state, nothing outside the state." The separate school system is a major and healthy obstacle to such a situation.

Q There can be a third form of political society, can there not, which is neither "purely secular" nor "confessional" in nature?

WRIGHT: Yes, there can be, and our American society bade fair to be a good example of such, but it is dubious whether it could have survived, especially if we had made a different educational decision in the nineteenth century and had not established our own school system. The

forces for secularism were already at work and they were destined to gain momentum with the passing years. Some of this momentum was gained directly from secularism itself; some came indirectly from groups not, perhaps, intent on the establishment of secularism but made the *de facto* allies of the secularists by reason of their own special interests. For example, whatever mutual understandings had been worked out between Protestants and Catholics in the Christian community, there was always in some degree and recently in great degree the pressure of the insurgent group of the secular humanists.

But not less important than the political and sociological problem is the educational question. Many things that some of us look upon as indispensable parts of education were doomed by the educational forces that were to develop in American education. One may write all the articles and dissertations one wishes in the effort to establish that John Dewey didn't really hold what John Dewey obviously held about the nature and purpose of education, and/or that his words admit of other interpretations. But the fact remains that his contentions were understood in a specific sense by universities, textbook writers, school associations, and, above all, teachers' colleges all over the land. I do not find the net result in American culture such as to make me wish we had abandoned totally our independent educational witness.

Q Then you don't think Catholic presence in the public school system would . . .

WRIGHT: Would have changed it? No. Water seeks its level. The constant temptation of our people would have been to say, "Ah, well, this is education, not cult or creed" and we would have gone along with the reduction to dead levels of standardization. As a matter of fact, even in our own schools we have too often conformed to standards and requirements set by other schools. I often fear that we have been able to retain only a minimal part of our heritage in our own schools. There are too many Catholic schools all over America where one finds

scant trace that they are in the living stream of the world-wide, historic communion of saints, except, perhaps, in the names of the schools, which are often accidental and not infrequently turn out to be names like "Our Lady of Lincoln Highway," which, all by itself, is as local in inspiration and as lacklustre as "P.S. 282"—yet even with half an hour of religion in the morning and a few memories of the saints and of the Christian centuries in the school week, there is still a free, independent witness that is essential to religion and healthy for America.

Q Is this purely a cultural difference in American Catholics that you see?

WRIGHT: It is cultural, moral, and social. I think of the men who came out of my old college in the days when it was frankly a "small Catholic college." They were typical of a whole generation. It is not a question of whether they were *better* than others; the point is they were *different*, and their differences contributed mightily to America. Moreover, one feels that more often than not they were probably *better* than the standardized Brooks Brothers suit man. It isn't that this fellow is incompetent; it is simply that he isn't significant. He has no specifically Catholic or other personality worth notice.

I think, too, of the Yankee doctor who once told me he would have died of boredom in his little Maine town had it not been for the presence there of a Catholic priest who had studied in Rome, who was of French descent, and who became his friend. In that lonely Yankee town, with its built-in conformities and cultural limitations, the priest, whose faith the doctor never accepted, kept him in touch with a whole world that he had come to know and love in the year after he had graduated from Harvard and had made the "grand tour" with his father and mother.

I think, too, of Worcester, Massachusetts, and the jewel of a Gothic cathedral that had been built by Father John Power from Boston sixty years before the diocese was established. He had studied in a Catholic tradition and

he brought into a nineteenth century mill town some of the things he had seen, learned, and loved elsewhere, things that were specifically Catholic and that would have been lost to love or even memory in a monolithic educational system. The pastor of St. Paul's in my time was an old man, Father Mike Kavanaugh, who had gone to Rome as a young student some sixty-two years before. He had studied at the old Scandinavian college in Rome and had become an authority on the medieval saints about whom Sigrid Undset was later to write. Father Kavanaugh was also a great Latinist. He read the classical authors and watched for boys who gave a hoot about such things.

Here in Pittsburgh I find what might have been a drab industrial city alive with traditions and color because of Eastern European memories kept strong in the midst of labor and struggle by groups like the Tamburitzans, flourishing around families, to be sure, but greatly encouraged by our schools.

In Pittsburgh, too, I find the magnificent monument of Sacred Heart Church, lifting the level of courage and vision — undoubtedly unconsciously — of thousands who went home every night exhausted from the steel mills. They were kept sane as well as saved by the beauty found in the church built by Father Coakley. We will have fewer such men and will make a poorer contribution to the national life to the extent that in our own schools we conform to least common denominators of a cultural and educational kind. And so, bleak as the picture sometimes is, our schools are the only contact we still have with what some of us still mean by a humane civilization.

Q Theoretically, at least, educational diversity is possible within a single school system.

WRIGHT: But historically it does not sufficiently work out that way, not any more. The great public school system which grew up in the early nineteenth century was in fact diversified. There was the old Latin school, or classical school. There was the mechanics-arts school.

There was the high school of commerce. But now every little district school must have all the departments within it. In Worcester the last class that will ever graduate from a classical high school was graduated last year. The classical high school will now be closed and all students who want to study classical subjects can take them, as incidental electives, in the local district high schools. But many subjects they will take with the boys and girls who wish to study no subjects and who are merely complying with the compulsory school attendance law. At the moment this is almost an American, indeed a "democratic," ideal and it can yet mean that our land is headed for dead levels of performance and interest, human nature being what it is.

The seeming fate of my own school, Boston Latin School, illustrates the problem. From 1635 until certainly World War II, though supported by tax funds as part of the public school system of Boston, it taught only boys who wanted to study Latin, Greek, ancient history, and the pre-liberal arts humanities and who had the privilege of doing so under masters who delighted in these subjects. Now an unholy concurrence (probably fortuitous) between the theories of some educators and the political interests of some politicians jeopardizes such schools as no longer "useful," relevant, or, forsooth, "democratic." It may be an encouraging sign that 1,700 boys of the school signed a petition demanding that the school committee leave Latin in the curriculum; but are those boys the temporary end of a tradition?

Q What social or cultural impacts do you think Catholics have had on the American character or the American community?

WRIGHT: To the extent that we may look upon the American community as enriched by certain of the great liturgical holy days of Christendom, the mysteries of which played so powerful a part in the development of Western culture, there is obviously a substantial Catholic contribution to community values. I never see a deco-

rated Christmas tree, even in the most commercialized circumstances, without remembering that we are indebted to the German Catholic immigrant for no small part of the element of our national life of which the Christmas tree is the symbol. And even when I see a candle in an absurd penthouse window on the top of a hotel, I remember that we are indebted to the Irish Catholic for the candles at Christmas time. The midnight services in Boston Congregational churches on Christmas eve show the effect the Catholic French Canadians have had on New England Puritanism, the *minuit chrétien* and the *crèche* they brought into our tradition. Emily Dickinson was suspect of being a Catholic convert because she "kept Christmas" in Amherst! I think these things are but hints of a considerable influence on the national culture.

There are other things, too, some of them hardly more than subjects of light-hearted conversational banter, that reflect the Catholic factor in our observances as a people, as, for example, when people plan a dinner and are glad to remember that the So-and-So's don't eat meat on Friday; one thinks of all the corny but friendly little jokes about Al Smith getting up for Mass at early hours of the morning or leaving "important" business to say his prayers! These are all signs of contradiction but also of assimilation; they give local meaning to phrases like "a good Catholic" or "a bad Catholic," and suggest how these have influenced American thought and values.

Q Do you think that American Catholics, by and large, are conservative? I'm not speaking in terms of the familiar liberal-conservative tensions and arguments, but more generally. Aren't they for the most part conservative in their theological thought, political and social thinking and action, cultural and artistic life, intellectual life?

WRIGHT: Why are they so? I think American Catholics, by and large, tend to be conservative on most subjects. The moment we say that we have to make immediate

exceptions; we have to point out, for example, that Catholics have been up to their necks in the trade union movement as they are now up to their necks in the New Frontier, at least those who are Democrats. But why are they so often conservative? I think they are conservative because any people with a proud tradition tends to be eager to retain it—the first families of Virginia, the Plymouth Rock people, for example. So ours are a people with immemorial traditions to cherish and defend.

This fact is also bound up with our moral preoccupation. Moral considerations weigh heavily with a conservative people. It is frequently, but too facilely, assumed that the people with strong moral emphasis in their thinking become the advanced guard. The progressive people, the “liberals” and “revolutionaries,” are more often those whom a dream hath possessed. Dreams possess those interested in speculation, philosophical and intellectual, rather than those who put their chief emphasis on morals. Moral conscience goes along with speculation, of course, but the *emphasis* is quite the other way. We American Catholics are not so much a people whom a dream has possessed; we are more often a people whom memories haunt, holy memories, happy memories, perhaps, but memories of the past rather than dreams of the future. We are a nostalgic people. Our typical nationality groups tend to be people with long memories, many of them melancholy, many of them sweet, many of them proud, but, again, memories. The Irish are characteristically nostalgic; the Poles, the Franco-Americans, and Slavonic peoples have long memories. So have the Latins.

Not only is there this nostalgic characteristic, but not a few of our people have the tenacity of those who have only lately acquired what they have of this world's goods. Those, for example, who seem most fiercely to oppose social legislation, like “medicare,” are not infrequently doctors who are just beginning to be able to educate their children on the scale that America has taught them should characterize professional men, men who are of a certain social status. Status people are much more nervous about losing their status if they have not had it long.

European nobility take their status rather casually as contrasted with recently arrived Congressmen.

Q Something that I have always been struck by is the contrast between the progressive thinking of the Holy See (which, according to its institutional character, one would think would be conservative in all things) and the excessive caution and static quality in so many areas of American Catholic life. I wonder whether the transmission processes, say the Catholic press, fail to convey the advanced word from the modern Popes with clarity and vigor. Perhaps this accounts for the contrast in the thinking of the Holy See and that of American Catholics on so many matters, social, cultural, spiritual.

WRIGHT: The Holy See is resolute for theological and spiritual reasons, but, let's face it, it can be sure of itself even psychologically, too. It has been there for almost 2,000 years. It has survived so many "destructions," so many crises, so many upheavals, and so many catastrophes that there is a sense in which for it to be morally courageous is no longer psychologically difficult. There is little sense of risk. Why did Queen Victoria never look behind her to see if the chair was there when she sat down? She knew right well the chair was there. It was *always* there. On the other hand, when a people first moves into society, they instinctively tend for a long time to check on whether the chair is there.

So it is, *mutatis mutandis*, for American Catholics, including your editors, the majority of whom may not have the social and psychological sense of security of those who see history the way the Holy See so easily can. They do not have it, as we were saying a while ago, because the sense of history is not sufficiently in their education. A characteristic question among us is: "What will happen if we try this and it doesn't work?" Those who are schooled in older traditions less often ask that question. They are

more likely to say: "The last time we tried that, this is what happened. The last time we failed to do this, that is what happened. For example, in the case of Napoleon, *this* is what happened. In the case of Hildebrand or Barbarossa, *that* is what happened." On the other hand, we in America, including, alas, Catholics, often reveal no such sense of history, and so we say to ourselves, "Dear Lord, what will be the reaction if we use the word 'socialization' instead of such-and-such? What will be the effect on the circulation of our paper? What will be the effect on our Protestant neighbors, who mustn't be scandalized? etc., etc. . . ." In its best moments, the Holy See is more likely to say, "This is what we must do or say because this is the direction of history; *Vox temporis, vox Dei*: This is the manifest requirement of the hour."

They don't look behind them to see if the chair is there; they know it is there. We *do* look. The editor may even look behind him every morning to see if it has been removed from under him during the night. There are spiritual values involved here, but there are also cultural, psychological, and educational influences. It comes back, therefore, to the reason why our educational system should be not merely American and Catholic in its moral emphasis, but also Catholic, even papal, in its doctrinal and historical content. We cannot possibly teach our children too much about Pope St. Leo the Great, Pope Hildebrand, Pope Pius VII, and all the indestructible saints.

Q You seem to assign great importance to the educational and the intellectual in your estimate of the character of the Catholic tradition or of any tradition.

WRIGHT: The intellectual element must always be *basic* to a society. The moral element is essential, integral, indispensable, but not enough. When you have only moral motivation for social action, it may tire very early in the fight. When Edna St. Vincent Millay writes that there is no man dies in Capri but she dies, too, she may be talking sentimental rubbish unless her moral idealism

is firmly rooted in a philosophy or dogma concerning *man* and, indeed, *death*. It is only a powerful *doctrinal* consideration that compels a Vincent de Paul to pursue the poor, not with poetry but with exhausting *work*, seeking out fallen girls and guarding their babies not in Capri, but next door as well—which is more difficult and more rare, but also more to the point. He lives a moral life and leads a social revolution in accordance with the dynamic that comes from his *dogma*. He doesn't get up in the morning asking himself what the sensitive moral conscience should say about the problem of his underprivileged contemporaries. Rather, a consuming *dogma* makes him seek the image of Christ in every place, person, and problem. There is and must be a doctrinal foundation for the action he performs, or he grows perfunctory in the action. The very nature of the human beast requires that in the last analysis we be moved to action by *ideas*, not by *codes*. It is not enough that *noblesse oblige*, unless those obliged have clear ideas of why *noblesse* obliges and of what *noblesse* is. Here could and should be the potential Catholic contribution to any effective ferment of an intellectual and social kind. Otherwise we fritter away our moral heritage and fail our proper vocation as people of faith. Sometimes we seem perilously close to such a default now. We are living on a moral heritage which in point of fact has survived for several centuries without sufficient dogmatic renewal. Herein lies an embarrassment for religion in America and a peril for America herself.

Q It has been said that American Catholic theologians are sometimes more concerned with textbook theology problems than they are with some of the pressing issues of the day such as the morality of nuclear warfare, a theology of work or a theology of toleration, the whole Church-and-State issue, and so on. Whether or not there are theological "solutions" to all of these things, do you think there has been, from the Catholic side in this

country, any theological illuminations of the discussions and dialogues that are going on in these areas?

WRIGHT: On the obliteration-bombing question we have, I fear, an example in the general community of the precise kind of moral preoccupation without robust doctrinal premises that underlies the problem of culture that we have been discussing. I think that many people who are worked up about The Bomb are merely appalled at the prospect of everybody being killed at once, though some of them could take in stride the elimination, one by one, of a whole generation if only it be done "decently" and by some less physically horrible means. The Christian, on the contrary, is appalled by the killing of even one man, one *foetus*, or one baby born imperfect. The emotional drama and logical fallacy of massive numbers killed by The Bomb are both irrelevant to the moral issue.

Another item: in *McCall's* magazine, for June, 1962, I find an article on the childless marriage by a Dr. David R. Mace. The doctor raises the question of how we are going to provide children for unfortunate couples whose marriages have been infertile. In the midst of the discussion he naturally comes to a discussion of artificial insemination. He says that, admittedly, it presents certain psychological problems and, at the moment, even certain legal problems. However, he considers that it may be desirable for the following reason, and on the cultural and moral implications of this sentence I ask you to meditate in terms of girls now of school age: "*If at some future time our contraceptive techniques are so perfected that the supply of children conceived outside marriage and available for adoption falls off sharply, then it will be inevitable that there will be a greatly increased demand for artificial insemination.*" In other words: Should we finally bring things to such a level of "perfection" that contraceptive devices will be easily obtained by the youngsters who now get into the "trouble" that brings them to unmarried mothers' homes, then we won't have any babies for adoption and *this* will leave many couples

childless, so that we will have to have increased artificial insemination! So long as sentences like that are read (and written) blandly in family magazines, I reserve judgment about the depth of the *moral* fears or indignation about bombing expressed elsewhere in the same or like circles.

Q Nevertheless, do you think American Catholic theologians are paying adequate attention to the bomb and other such questions?

WRIGHT: I submit that the things on which theologians are prepared to talk in 1962 are those on which they did their homework in 1932. I argue that such work must be done this patiently and even, in a sense, quietly if it is to be done worthily and lastingly. I am deeply persuaded that the homework *is* being done in 1962 on what we will eventually be able to say the more clearly and cogently on these other questions. It is being done here in America; it's being done all over the world. There is an enormous amount of searching of the Scriptures and the other sources, rational and revealed, on these new questions, on new formulations of old questions and problems.

There is not, by the way, a single new worry, including the obliteration-bomb, that involves totally new moral concepts even when they do involve staggering new dimensions. I would be made suspicious — as a matter of fact, I would be discouraged — by any sudden show of brilliant clarity on the part of our theologians in matters so complex. I would fear that whatever they might have to say so glibly would be as unimpressive intellectually and unimportant historically as what I find being said on these questions by others, Catholic or non-Catholic, who have spoken too soon and with what seems brashness.

Q Are there any even tentative manifestations of the homework that is now being done on some of these large-scale questions?

WRIGHT: Yes, I think so. On the bomb question, a good series appeared in *Commonweal* a few months ago. The

Catholic Association for International Peace convention was taken up totally with the ethics of modern war a few years ago. At that time many people said of Father John Courtney Murray's paper on the subject that they were glad he hadn't tried to be too final on this so delicate issue. Some were kind enough to say the same thing about my own paper at that time. Father John Ford has been doing much work on this question. It took John Ford years before he put down his thoughts on depth-psychology and its relation to certain moral problems. I don't think that a truly Christian sense of urgency expresses itself on the intellectual questions of the hour by rushing forward with final answers. Spontaneity is possible and obligatory in the performance of the works of mercy; you give the glass of water right away because it is here and now needed. But moral philosophy is not so spontaneously worked out.

Q Then, as a matter of your own personal conviction on this question of American Catholic theological speculation, you are not . . .

WRIGHT: Dismayed or disturbed? Temperamentally I chafe with impatience at the slowness with which it is done, but in my better moments I know why study is slow, particularly when I read what emerges from the off-hand solutions by others of long-range worries. Moreover, I think it an unduly narrow statement of the question to ask what "American theologians" are doing on these problems. This carries an implication which is un-Catholic, the implication born of a tendency to over-emphasize the *American* conscience, the *English* conscience, the *German* or *French* conscience. The problem is one for the *human* conscience and/or the *Christian* conscience.

So it is important to ask not what is being done in any single national tradition, but what is being done in the Church everywhere and anywhere. I should hate to think that we would ever be so dependent on whatever American theologians might think out by themselves that we would no longer continue to profit from the enormous thinking of the French theologians or the Germans, or

others who are at work on the formation of a Catholic Christian moral judgment of the new problems. But even with that said, I still feel that many American theologians are doing no little patient groundwork on the great issues of the hour, particularly in the area of moral theology.

Q In recent months there have been a great many articles, news stories, editorials, and talks with regard to the place of the layman in the life of the Church. One bishop has announced that laymen will be participants in his next synod, another has appointed laymen to his archdiocesan school board. In Montreal, Cardinal Leger has turned over an entire Catholic college to lay administrators. Do you think the American Catholic laity are acquiring a new, deeper maturity? Will this be a significant new factor in the history of American Catholicism?

WRIGHT: Undoubtedly. But, once again, the discussion we have been hearing is often in terms that are reductively sociological, political, and merely historical rather than sufficiently in terms most relevant to any discussions of the Church, namely, *theological*. We should be on guard against our American tendency to think in terms of organization with scant reference to organic realities. This could be easy and fatal in talk about the place of the layman in the life of the Church. Is he going to be heard, for example, on school boards? Is he going to be heard on the question of how many collections should be taken up on Sunday and whether or not we will continue to have seat money? Well, I would hope he will be heard on all these things, but I hope that these peripheral questions of a policy and purely organizational kind are not made the measure of a baptized Christian's true place in the organic life of the Church. And this brings us back to the question of the appalling need in which we stand of a greater knowledge of theology, above all dogma, if the place of the Church in American culture is to be vital and the

place of the layman in the life of the Church is to be worth talking about.

A refreshed theological understanding would make us gratefully aware that we all have our place in the life of the Church not as a result of an election or an appointment but as a result of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Matrimony, and Eucharist, sources of a dignity greater than human. How many laymen have the slightest glimmer of the theological realities behind their dignity as baptized persons, as confirmed persons, as persons who receive the Eucharist? Can you imagine discussing the place of the Blessed Virgin—a member of the laity, by the way—in the life of the Church in terms of her influence on the appointments made by the Apostles?

Q You think, then, that theological formation, among other things, must precede full, organic participation of the laity in the Church?

WRIGHT: Yes. The Church is not a purely human society. It is not a merely historical phenomenon. Like Christ, it is not of this world. This means that it is a theological phenomenon, and this, in turn, means that to appreciate it or our places in it we must become a people with a theological sense. I don't mean only lay people; I mean the bishops and clergy and Religious, all of us, must continually refresh our dogmatic insights, the theological roots of all that we are and are yet to be. Unless we do, what difference does it make, with or without laity on the administrative boards, if nobody knows or cares about the organic realities? Would the incomparable place of Thomas More in the life of the Church have been enhanced had he been on the board of administration of some English diocese in his day? Would the beneficent influence of Frederick Ozanam in the Church have been greater if the Archbishop of Paris had consulted him in the purchase of real estate?

Q There are some things, however, that distress Catholic parents and do not fall into the cate-

gory of the merely organizational aspects of the Church. The quality of some of the textbooks, for example, and how they can approach the problem of replacing inferior texts with good ones, assuming that some are indeed inferior. I think a good many of the laity are not concerned with getting in on the administrative or organizational activities of the Church, but they are concerned with the quality of the intellectual and spiritual formation of their children.

WRIGHT: Agreed—and they are frequently quite right. In any case, they doubtless need and deserve far greater voice in such matters. It would be good for the Church. But my point is that such administrative and organizational problems do not sufficiently involve what should be our profound understanding of the “place of the layman in the life of the Church,” and I am afraid the present debate on that place is in danger of becoming merely an argument on such *relatively* superficial levels.

Q To the extent that lack of theological formation of the laity exists, doesn't this reflect the quality of their Catholic education?

WRIGHT: I am afraid so. The Catholic educational system, with all its substantial accomplishment, still owes it to the Church and to America to correct a situation in which so many thousands of boys and girls can come out of it so little able to tell us about Dante and his profoundly theological thought—or St. Paul, or Thomas More. They have read too little by far of these men—and without these they cannot possibly catch for themselves or communicate to others the social, historical, and cultural implications of the Incarnation. It is not enough that our students be merely prepared to tell us things they would have learned equally well had they gone to strictly secular schools. There is an impressive argument for our “holding on” to our schools, not only for the preservation

of our own religious tradition but also for the spiritual witness that is essential to the national culture.

Q You said that the American Catholics' responses to most of the social and political problems of our times will be adequate or inadequate according to how clear their understanding may be of the implications of the Incarnation, the fact that God assumed human nature in the person of Christ. If American Catholics sometimes do not seem as fully committed to the legitimate work of the temporal and earthly order, can this be due in part to a defective understanding of the Incarnational aspects of Christianity?

WRIGHT: Perhaps we are faced here, again, with the defect of a virtue, that is, the heavily moral emphasis of American Catholicism. But, alas, any moral code is predestined to be superficial unless it has deep roots in the inexhaustible doctrinal riches of Christ of which St. Paul teaches. A people who had anything like a due understanding of the implications of the Incarnation would be a people with commitment and passion in their humanitarianism, as well as in other things, far greater than any with which we are ordinarily familiar. The proof of that is the saints. St. Vincent de Paul, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Joan, all were distinguished by a passionate intuition into the nature and corollaries of the Incarnation, which took place precisely because God Himself so loved the world as to send His very Son. The saints are relevant to our discussion because the contribution of Catholicism to America, as to any other nation, should be the raising up of saints. Our embarrassment may well be the extent to which we have not done this more fully, though, in all truth, I often suspect our contribution of hidden but saving sanctity has probably been rich.

Q Do you think that as a matter of fact one of the great problems of the Christian is how to

come to terms with both the temporal and spiritual sides of his nature? He is confronted with this dualism and tension, and how he works it out will determine to a great extent his attitudes and his actions in both orders, the temporal and earthly order and the spiritual and supernatural order.

WRIGHT: Yes. And perhaps our gravest deficiency (a failure that would have been even greater, I feel, had we gone the way of the non-humanistic education that threatens to dominate secular education in America) has been the failure to date of American Catholicism to produce a persuasive Christian humanism in our land. This is all the more lamentable because, as I have intimated, in the nineteenth century I think we were well on the way to producing such a humanism. However, to the extent that we abandoned or neglected our specifically Christian humanistic heritage, as Americans we have let the Church down and, as Catholics, we have let America down. America desperately needs a truly devout humanism. We were in the process of bringing such an emphasis to America; we may yet help bring it. Unless we do, I don't know who else will; any other humanism that is apt to find substantial following in our land suffers from the pernicious cultural anemia of secularism.

Q People like Father Walter Ong say that some American Catholics seem to be looking back to Europe too much, that they ought to be more concerned with forming and developing a distinctive American tradition.

WRIGHT: Agreed, but with one qualification. Just as it would be dated for us to be looking back to Europe in terms, let us say, of nineteenth century Europe, or early twentieth century Europe, so Father Ong's point of view, too, it seems to me, reflects a bit of a cultural lag if it fails fully to consider the fact that the world is becoming ever more close-knit in its unity, so that for new reasons we

must not so much "look back" but "look over" to Europe, even as Europe, indeed, must "look over" to us. Human affairs are constantly becoming more interrelated and interwoven. It is not a question of "looking back" to dated things, as, for example, to a romantic medievalism, but of moving forward, together with Europe and all the human family. The Common Market is simply the most recent symbol, on a rather lowly level, of the trend that has long been developing on other levels, scientific, literary, and religious. Our culture, more and more, will be neither European nor American, but *human*, and, I pray, *divine*. Hence the relevance of the Incarnation to our cultural problem, national and cosmopolitan.

Q In a lecture on the historic role of the American Catholic bishops you stressed the fact that the hierarchy has always been close to the laboring man and to his aspirations, and that American Catholics in general have been strongly identified with the laboring man and the labor movement. Was that identification primarily an economic rather than an ideological one? Have American Catholics ever worked out, say, a theology of the working class? In the absence of such a theological or ideological conviction about labor and the laboring man, have American Catholics abandoned their identification with the laboring man as they have moved up the economic ladder in recent years and have taken on the attitudes of the middle class?

WRIGHT: This is probably true, but it doesn't alter my essential point in the lecture. What made the hierarchy close to the working people is secondary to the fact that they *were*. And that this was good both for America and for the Church was the point I was making. Whatever the reasons, even if merely economic or social, it was historically a blessing that the clergy were, in fact, so

close to the workers. It spared us from the anti-clericalism that marred the life of the Church elsewhere. Also, this closeness of the clergy to the workers brought into the organized labor movement a saving influence, even a certain conservatism, that kept it from going to the extremes of socialism and ideological materialism which hurt so many nations elsewhere. I think, too, that it has a beneficent effect on the family sense of the American workingman. Probably nowhere in the world has there been so great an emphasis on the rights of the workingman precisely as the head of the family. I see in this a result of the religious influence.

Conversely, the fact that we were a working people, in the main, has colored, more often for good than otherwise, the quality of our Catholicism. If one re-visits the older sections of most American cities he finds an interesting illustration of what I mean. In almost all of them there is a great church of a religious order—the Gesu in Milwaukee, the Immaculate Conception in Boston, others of the Jesuits, for example, in New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Baltimore—and invariably alongside of them there is the first college that our people built in each of these cities. More often than not, the college itself has long since moved, but note well how early it was founded and that it was founded precisely in working-class areas. It represented the dynamic of our people, as Americans in this land of opportunity, to see to it that their sons went to college. Moreover, these colleges, humble when they built them, were, if I may so put it, darned good ones. In the things that matter to me, in the humanistic branches and in the realms of religion, they were sometimes better than they are now.

I remember Francis Rogers, then Dean of the Harvard Graduate School, speaking at Assumption College in Worcester and reproaching us because at the moment our colleges are doing the things done elsewhere, but often are doing them less well. He lamented that we are not keeping alive in the intellectual community of America those values for which we established colleges a century ago. I subscribe to that. When our colleges and univer-

sities were founded, they had a clear commitment both on the cultural level and on the religious level. For a long, long time they met that commitment, courageously and competently. They are not always equally clear about their commitment now, and that worries me. If they clarify their commitment, religiously and culturally, they are more likely to provide the spiritual philosophy of labor, of family life, and of other human values that you properly ask of them and that their devout and patriotic founders dreamed would be their contribution.

Q Are there any other specifically Catholic influences you can discern so far as the American character is concerned?

WRIGHT: Oddly enough, I think the Catholic influence has produced some of our most constructive revolutionaries, or, at least, people identified with our most constructive revolutions. Many of our nationalities happen to be involved historically in revolutions, which is one reason why we happen to be here. It is interesting to me that many people, quite outside the household of the faith, when they relate the stories of their part in America's typical progressive movements, tell of their indebtedness to specific Catholic priests for encouragement.

Q And yet, wouldn't you say that one of the characteristics of American Catholics is the intransigence with which they cling to the articles and content of their faith, a certain resoluteness in matters of faith?

WRIGHT: No doubt, and I am glad that this is so. I also think that American Catholics are, if I may use the word, the "prayingest" people in the world. Constantly on the lips of our people are phrases asking or promising prayer—prayers for the living and for the dead. Throngs of people at noontime and at odd hours of the day drop into our city churches habitually to pray before the Blessed Sacra-

ment. This is a strictly voluntary, almost mystical, characteristic of American Catholics. It involves no species of conformism or legalism. It is impossible to believe that this enormous fact of constant and universal prayer is not without tremendous effect and repercussions in our national life, especially when we add this massive force of popular lay prayer to the daily treasury of prayer and meditation in our contemplative houses, monasteries, schools, and churches. Heaven knows, whatever else we may be, we are a people who pray. I think it is important that this witness of prayer be thought of whenever we are talking about how a religious group influences the nation.

Q The Supreme Court recently ruled that a prayer prescribed for voluntary recitation in the public schools of New York State was unconstitutional. The State Supreme Court of California last year threw out as unconstitutional certain local ordinances and laws governing narcotics traffic, pornography, prostitution, and the like. Do you think the moral climate of our nation is deteriorating, and the courts are perhaps hastening the process by accommodating the law to what they think is the majority viewpoint on morals?

WRIGHT: This appears to me, as one among many, to be ground for grave concern. We tend at the moment, I think, to be too facile about the overly sharp distinction between what is legal and what is moral. Sometimes the Supreme Court seems almost too eager to say that it cannot define concepts like "blasphemy" or "obscenity" and so cannot rule on questions involving these concepts. True, our generation, by and large, considers morality a private affair, but one cannot help feeling that moral liberalism so extreme neglects the intimate interrelationship between law and morality, even though the formalities of conscience and the formalities of legal obligation differ. So wide a distinction between legality and morality as that which aggressive secularism demands leaves us

open to a dreadful harvest. It will require much more than the new electronic devices to catch income-tax evaders and other scofflaws if the glib dismissal of any moral implications in the areas of legal obligation becomes the permanent pattern of our national law.

It is unquestionably true that the realm of moral conscience and that of civil law are often distinct in their premises and in their sanctions; frequently in history both religious and political freedom have depended on the due distinctions between these, not only in "pluralistic" societies but everywhere. But the exclusions of the secularism that is so aggressive at the moment are quite another matter; they forget that unless the Lord build, they labor in vain who strive to build the human city. I fear that as excesses of authoritarianism historically lead to extremes of libertarian reaction, so the present extremes of libertarianism will lead to a conservative reaction, even a reactionary conservatism.

Q *Something you said early in our discussion about the theoretical possibility of a third kind of political society which would be neither purely secular nor confessional or sacral reminds me of something Father John Courtney Murray once said in his description of America. He called it a "lay state," which, he said, should not be confused at all with a "laicized" state.*

WRIGHT: Yes, and we had the happy makings of that, the makings of an entirely unique political society, before the recent drive of secularism. We had, in a sense that Cavour and his crowd never dreamed of, "a free church in a free state." We may not much longer have it. We had it in the sense of a free church which enjoyed a certain favor of the law within the free state. And we had a free state which enjoyed the full blessing of the free church. That was an enviable situation. It did not entail an establishment, either of religion or of a church, but it gave the favor of the law to morality, as certain things may have

the favor of the law without on that account being part of the government. Certain decencies enjoy the favor of the law. That favor was reflected in tax exemption of charitable, religious, and educational work. It was reflected in the attitude of the Northwest Ordinance toward religion, virtue, and piety. It was reflected in many ways. It was, in point of fact, the reason for the enormous system, unique in America, of chaplaincies in the Army, Navy, and Air Force, in mental institutions, poor houses, and elsewhere. Such favor of the law did not mean an establishment of religion by the state.

By the same token, there was and still is no place in the world where the Church is so eager to be positive in its approach to the civil institutions and secular traditions as it is here in America. We do well to pray and to work that this tradition, so uniquely American and so favorable to both civil and religious progress, is not lost to us under the pressures of sheer secularism, anti-clericalism, or clericalism—home-grown or alien.

An Interview with Louis Finkelstein

Q Is it possible, Dr. Finkelstein, to speak of "American Jewry"? Is there such an entity as American Jewry?

FINKELSTEIN: Many Jews in America feel ties of kinship with one another and a common cultural background. Most of them, I think, have a common concern for the future of their tradition, and there is a great deal of informal cooperation among them. But there is no organized American Jewry.

Q You said in one of your writings that Judaism is not an organization, as such.

FINKELSTEIN: That's right.

Q And that there is no person or group of persons to whom the Jewish people everywhere owe obedience or whose views must be accepted by all Jews as binding.

FINKELSTEIN: Yes.

Q Doesn't this raise a question, then, as to how theological accuracy may be continued and guaranteed within the Jewish tradition?

FINKELSTEIN: Up to about 100 years ago, all Jews, to the extent that they were Jews, accepted the Hebrew Scriptures, which are commonly called the Old Testament, and the Talmud, which is a discussion of it, and the books based on the Talmud, as at least theoretically their guides in life. About 100 years ago a group of Jews in Germany tried to introduce into Judaism the same element that Protestantism had introduced into Christianity. They tried to build a concept of Judaism in which the congregation could modify, interpret, or innovate. And they didn't consider either the Bible or the Talmud binding upon them in their lives. These are the Reform Jews. In the past 100 years there also have been a large number of Jews who simply do not observe Judaism. So it cannot be said that the Talmud is a guide to all Jews in their way of life. But insofar as they are Jews there is no other guide. A few years ago, Mr. David Ben-Gurion asked twenty-five Jews: "What is a Jew?" Some of those questioned observed their religion, some didn't; some were Reform, some Orthodox, some Conservative. They all agreed that they had no other way to answer that question but through the Talmud.

Q Those are the three major divisions of Jews—Orthodox, Reformed, and Conservative?

FINKELSTEIN: Yes. Our seminary is generally described as Conservative. Conservatism extends all the way from Orthodox to almost-Reform.

Q What factors in American Jewry inhibit or enhance whatever influence the American Jews have had or are having on the American character?

FINKELSTEIN: The influence of American Jews on the national character can be considered in two parts. There is the influence of Judaism as a way of life. This has been very considerable. The Puritans were great students of the Old Testament, and some of them were students even of the Talmud. Many of the ideas that flourished early in American history had their origin in Rabbinic Judaism. The concept of the rights of man, which in the Talmud takes the form of the duties of man, was one of these ideas. The Puritans were fascinated to discover such concepts in Judaism. But secondly, I would say that the Jews as a group exercise no influence on American life. Jews represent as many different viewpoints as does the rest of the American community.

Q You mean they exercise no religious or moral influence on American life?

FINKELSTEIN: I don't think they are exercising any religious influence as a group because they are very divided. One would think, from the fact that Jews play so very important a part in a number of industries, including the communications industry, that something of Judaism would percolate through these areas at least. But this isn't so, because the Jews who have developed great competence and leadership here know virtually as little about Judaism as the Christians do. Jews, *qua* Jews, have no great spiritual or moral influence on America except insofar as individual Jews who are very close to their tradition might influence others by their example. Of course, that would be true of Catholics and Protestants as well.

There are two exceptions one should mention perhaps. I have been told by Professor Paul Tillich that Martin Buber is the greatest force in American Protestantism. And I think the influence of Professor Abraham J. Heschel of this seminary is growing and is being recognized. But these are extraordinarily gifted individuals.

Q Jews have had enormous cultural and esthetic influence, but that gets away from the specifically religious character.

FINKELSTEIN: Yes. And Spinoza had a great deal of influence on the world, but not as a Jew. He happened to be a great philosopher. Freud had great influence, but not as a Jew. Einstein knew virtually nothing about the Jewish tradition. Freud knew little about it and was quite unaware of the Talmud. The place where Jews have influenced American life, I think, is in philanthropy. Organized philanthropy is the one commandment that continues to be fulfilled. By example, American Jews may be exerting some influence in this area.

Q It has been said that Jews are not a proselytizing group, that they do not feel compelled, as those in other faiths, to convert others to Judaism.

FINKELSTEIN: The Jews have not been a proselytizing people since the rise of Christianity. One hears lonely voices from time to time expressing the need to go back to proselytization. But they *are* lonely voices.

Q Would anti-Semitism have a direct, or indirect, effect on the amount and quality of influence American Jews can exert on the American character?

FINKELSTEIN: That question reminds me that the lack of Jewish influence in America was never clearer than during the Hitler period. Hitler was a great threat to the

world, and every Jew knew it. He happened to be a direct threat to the Jews, an immediate threat to them. But he was an even greater threat to the world. There was no way, however, in which the Jews could explain that to America. They tried very hard, but nobody believed them. But I don't think anti-Semitism plays an important part in what we are talking about. The problem is a Jewish problem, not a problem of the outer world. If the Jews were better Jews and knew more about their religion, obviously they would have a great deal of influence in the world. And there is a great deal in Judaism that could influence the world. St. Thomas Aquinas was deeply influenced by the Jewish philosopher, Maimonides. Maimonides was a very good Jew, steeped in Judaism. St. Thomas found much in Maimonides that was useful, even when he refuted Maimonides, or tried to refute him. Today we don't have any large number of Jews who have their roots in Judaism and also know it well enough to be able to interpret it. We have a terrific problem just trying to explain Judaism to Jews.

Q Your use of the word "Judaism" reminds me of an essay I read recently by Arthur Cohen, who says that Judaism is not so much a religion as a way of life.

FINKELSTEIN: I think what he was saying is that Judaism is not a creed or a philosophy, but a way of life. I'm not sure that people of other religions would say that theirs is not a way of life also. Judaism expresses its ideas mainly in action symbols. The person who confesses his faith in Judaism has achieved nothing unless he translates that into action. His action is what matters.

Q The central doctrine of Judaism, I think you once said, is the belief in One God, the Father of all mankind. Another source has added a second element as being indispensable in Judaism—the covenant, the election of Israel to be the bearers of this belief.

FINKELSTEIN: Belief in One God is central in the sense that if you don't have that you have nothing, and then all the rest becomes merely fossilized custom. But in itself belief in God doesn't differentiate Judaism from any other religion. It doesn't make one a Jew, and if it is unassociated with action it isn't even terribly important. Of course, without that belief one can't get very far. Hillel, the great Jewish rabbi of the first century, was asked by a pagan to define Judaism in a single sentence. Hillel said, "What you do not like, do not do to your neighbor; all the rest is commentary." Hillel came much nearer to what Judaism is than many of us have. The whole of Judaism, according to Hillel, is a footnote to that doctrine. That is essentially the Golden Rule expressed in different words. I don't know to what extent so difficult a doctrine can influence people who are really not within the tradition.

I might add that it is a curious thing that the Jews in the Middle Ages, though they were persecuted and never knew when extermination might face the community and were driven out from place to place, nevertheless had more influence on their world than we have had on the modern world. There were great rabbis and great sages among the medieval Jews.

Q What accounted for that influence?

FINKELSTEIN: In those days Jews spent an awful lot of time doing an awful lot of thinking about their religion and about the relation of their religion to the world. If they did the same in our time, I don't doubt that they would have similar influence.

Q To what extent has formalism crept into Judaism? Will Herberg, for example, says that the Bar Mitzvah ceremony has become more of an elaborate social affair than a religious ceremony or a liturgical rite. Formalism is a danger that all religions fear. To what extent has it appeared inside Judaism?

FINKELSTEIN: Undoubtedly Americans, generally speaking, pay lip-service to their religion and prefer to live religion on specific days and on specific occasions. And they are not necessarily eager to translate their religious ideas into action in the marketplace. I imagine this is to a certain extent true of Judaism. However, it is possible to overstate this. A boy who is going to be Bar Mitzvah (Son of the Commandment) has to attend the services, he has to study a lot, and this process of studying and being Bar Mitzvah at thirteen years of age, when he is responsible for his own actions, is a serious matter in his life, even though his parents might reduce it to a lavish party, which seems a little absurd to the rest of us.

Q What percentage, would you say, of the five and a half million American Jews practice their religion in a regular fashion?

FINKELSTEIN: That's hard to say because at least a million of them are Reform Jews, and while they consider themselves practicing their religion, obviously the Orthodox Jews do not agree with them. I suspect that the Orthodox Jews do not consider even the Conservatives as practicing their religion.

Q How many Conservative Jews are there in this country?

FINKELSTEIN: There are perhaps a million and a half Conservative Jews. Most Jews in America practice their religion to some extent. I imagine that on the Day of Atonement, out of the five and a half million, four and a half million will attend the Synagogue, or fast, or in some way set aside that Day of Atonement. Maybe four and a half million Jews have some kind of party on the first night of Passover which reminds one of the old Passover Service. I think virtually all the five and a half million, either willingly or to a certain extent unwillingly through the pressure of their friends, practice philanthropy, a central commandment of Judaism.

Q In the area of political and social thought, American Jews seem to be consistently on what is known as the "liberal" side, even though their professional and business occupations might tend to align them with political and social conservatives in this country. Is this liberalism traceable to their religion or to other elements in their lives or background?

FINKELSTEIN: Many Jews are conservatives, but perhaps the more articulate ones aren't. The large unions in New York were founded by Jews and are led by Jews, and they are obviously what you would call on the "liberal" side. Men like David Dubinsky and Sidney Hillman have had great influence within their groups. A place where the Jews, *qua* Jews, may have had some influence is in the law. Judaism, of course, is a system of law, and therefore many people get a training in Judaism which otherwise they might not have. It is not entirely by accident that so many extraordinary judges, like Brandeis and Cardozo and Irving Lehman, were Jews.

There is another point to be made about the contribution that Jews can make to political and social mores in this country. There is an important role which a small minority can play in this land that no one else can play, and precisely because the minority tends to be sensitive to any act of disparagement to the stranger. The members of the majority often will, without malice but thoughtlessly, and without really entering into the spirit of members of a minority, do things that will hurt the stranger. Because the Jewish community is articulate and extremely sensitive, it has been able to help the American people understand this situation; and in that way it has been able to help all minorities, and above all, the American spirit.

Q What is the attitude of American Jews towards involving themselves in all the various areas of American life? Nathan Glazer has said that one of the great anomalies of Amer-

ican Jewish life is that the Jews, who by objective criteria are eminently suited for personal success and civic responsibility, nevertheless feel themselves apart from the mainstream of American social life. He says that through a combination of their own wishes and the wishes of other Americans they lead a life apart in their own communities.

FINKELSTEIN: Dr. Glazer is a very able man, and if he says something I suppose he has the facts to back it up. I don't think he is referring to involvement in American political thinking, however. He's referring to social life, in the sense of the social milieu. There is an invisible wall here, and I don't know who creates it. People feel more at home with those whom they are like, and they tend to drift together. But I am not sure this is altogether natural because one does not find it in small children. It begins to assert itself among boys and girls only after they reach the age of fifteen or sixteen, so perhaps there is an artificial element in this picture.

Q Glazer also talks about the "present closed community" of Jews in this country and the "set of parallel institutions" which, he says, shows no signs of weakening. All this sounds remarkably similar to the things American Catholics say about themselves—the problem of withdrawal, non-involvement, parallel Catholic institutions and organizations. But you say this separateness of Jews is more a social fact than anything else.

FINKELSTEIN: It is a fact, and I don't know whether it is altogether good or bad. Obviously Judaism is helped to survive when Jews are a closed society. But this also deprives them of a good deal.

Q A sociological study made in an American community revealed that 9 per cent of the

non-Jews acknowledged that they "felt differently" toward Jews; but 39 per cent of the Jews in that community thought that the non-Jews "felt differently" toward them. This may mean that a long tradition of persecution has left Jews understandably sensitive.

FINKELSTEIN: I don't know if that study helps us very much here because a man will tend to underestimate his "feeling differently" toward others. He might say, "As far as I am concerned, everyone's alike." But in point of fact he might not feel that way at all. The Jew who has been in contact with the world might be more aware of this. With experience limited to about half a century I could furnish some astonishing examples of people who are famous for their liberalism and who, I must say, have even a friendly personal regard for Jews, as Jews, but who nonetheless on occasion in my presence will say to me, "There is a certain feeling of strangeness regarding these people" (the Jews).

Oddly enough, this strangeness increases as the Jew tends to be more like his neighbor. When the Jew looks and acts like everybody else, a big part of the world starts worrying about him. I wonder whether, if Hitler's target had been the Baptists or the Episcopalians or the Catholics, the rest of the world would have stood by as quietly and seen them exterminated, as it did with the Jews. It seems incredible that the world would stand by and watch a religious group be exterminated and never lift a finger.

Q Over the many years that you have been teaching and writing, what would be your estimate of the American Jews' practice and belief of their religion today compared to what it was, say, a generation ago?

FINKELSTEIN: The impression one gets is that in the past ten years there has been something of an upsurge in religious interest among Jews, as well as among other Americans. Call it wistfulness if nothing else. Young

people tend to be getting a better Jewish education than they used to get. But I must say that in the thirty years immediately preceding the past ten that was not so. And I am not sure that the upsurge in the past ten years is keeping pace with the increase of the Jewish population. More Jews are being born and so we get the impression that there is more Jewishness, when perhaps there isn't. The key ceremonial in Judaism, of course, is the observance of the Sabbath. Throughout Jewish history a Jew who did not observe the Sabbath was considered to have virtually abandoned his faith. That was the last thing a Jew would give up, short of giving up his religion altogether. In America the Sabbath is about the first thing he gives up. How that reversal occurred, I don't know.

Q I suppose the sociologists would cite this as another example of Americanism, or an Americanist acculturation.

FINKELSTEIN: Yes, Saturday is used as a shopping day or as the day to go out and play golf.

Q How significant in the general context of American Judaism is this abandonment of the observance of the Sabbath?

FINKELSTEIN: It is tragic, because the Sabbath day was the day set aside by Judaism for Jews to be Jews and nothing but Jews. It was strictly observed as a day for study and for living as a Jew. It is a day on which Jews should mingle with fellow-Jews on a spiritual plane, on which they should contemplate, on which they should sit home with their families, a day of complete rest, of cessation of work, cessation of worry and anxiety. If you abandon that to play golf or to go shopping or to go to work or to do a million and one other things, that is a great calamity, and it has befallen us as Jews.

Q Do the Jews, as I have heard it said of some Catholics and Protestants, look upon religion

as simply a means by which they can satisfy personal needs rather than as a manifestation of praise and honor for God? Would this help to account for the "religious upsurge" you have noted?

FINKELSTEIN: There is, of course, a great deal in every religion, including Judaism, that is useful to people. Certainly it is clear that the Sabbath, as it has been observed by Jews through the centuries, has been a great life-preserving institution. It is good to take a day off from worldly affairs and simply enjoy living, studying, and contemplating. I wish I could find some way of persuading Jews that it is a good thing. A very famous Jew was here once at our seminary on the Sabbath and he told me afterward that it had been a wonderful experience. He said that for the first time he forgot all about financial reports for his company.

Q Can a comparison be made between the quality of Judaism in this country and in others?

FINKELSTEIN: Judaism, at least in certain phases, is a highly intellectual religion. To live it one has to know a great deal of a civilization that is remote; one has to know another language in order to pray in Hebrew; one has to know a wholly different calendar from the secular calendar; one has to know what the holidays are; and in order to keep the Sabbath one has to know literally hundreds of precepts. Therefore it requires a great deal of study. To be a good Jew also requires a great deal of training of one's mind to be responsive to specific situations. Generally speaking, Americans—and Jews among them—do not like study. They hate learning new languages. So most American Jews find very hard the mastery of what Judaism has to tell them.

It is said that in Israel young people are not religious. I suppose that on the average they are not more religious than American Jews. Still they know a great deal more. Their language is Hebrew. Sabbath is all around them,

holidays are all around them. So they catch on to a great deal more, right from the cradle. Each time I am in Jerusalem I am very much impressed by the great amount of religion going on there, even when people think they are not religious.

Q What educational system exists within American Judaism to give this intellectual training? Is this training compulsory or voluntary?

FINKELSTEIN: We have a voluntary system, it cannot be compulsory. It takes several forms. The most intensive form is the Jewish day school, which corresponds to the Catholic parochial school and is becoming more and more popular. About 7½ per cent of the Jewish children who are getting any religious education in New York are getting it from a Jewish day school. Our Conservative group, which hasn't had Jewish day schools until recently, is now developing them at a great rate. Some of these day schools are eight-year schools, some run through high school, a couple run through college, combining Jewish studies and secular studies.

Q How do children who do not attend Jewish day school get Jewish intellectual orientation?

FINKELSTEIN: They go to afternoon school and Sunday school. These are sometimes five-days-a-week afternoon schools, sometimes three-days-a-week schools. The one-day-a-week school doesn't help very much at all, in my opinion. Since most children are going to attend the three-days-a-week school, we will have to discover how to make each hour count more. I think in that respect that Jewish teachers have been lax; they have not thought through in the past fifty years any new ideas that I know of which would help transmit more quickly to Jewish children what Judaism is all about.

The only really new Jewish idea that has appeared is the camping system that we at the seminary conduct. We have six camps in which children spend two months in

the summer. In these camps the child finds himself transported to a far different world. To a great extent the language is Hebrew and the customs are all Jewish religious customs. And there is a great emphasis on character training. The results have been quite remarkable, so remarkable that we could fill six more camps if we had them. We now accommodate 1,500 children each summer and if we had the camps we could take in another 2,500 or 3,000 who seek admittance. This is something that has developed in the past twelve years.

Q Has the number of rabbinic students in your seminary increased?

FINKELSTEIN: It has multiplied by four in the past twenty years. We have to multiply by three more. We have 123 students and we would like to have about 360 to meet the demands for rabbis from this institution.

Q Has the liturgy of Judaism become Americanized in any way?

FINKELSTEIN: The American Jewish religion differs in its emphasis and in some specific facts from other forms of the Jewish religion. Every Reform synagogue and almost every Conservative synagogue has dropped the segregation of the sexes which had been traditionally observed until a hundred years ago. Also, many Conservative and almost all Reform synagogues have much of their services in English, in the vernacular. This is not prohibited in the Talmud. But it does suggest that the congregation is not taking the trouble to study Hebrew. You would think that the least the Jew would want to do would be to study the language of the prophets so he could understand what they said.

Q What can you and other Jewish leaders do to attack the problem of increasing the influence of Judaism on Jews, a problem you have said is basic?

FINKELSTEIN: I spoke about what we are trying to do with our camps. Also, we have about 700 graduates from this seminary who are serving congregations, so to a certain extent the ideas worked out here percolate to the congregations. Also, adult study groups are now very popular. I am amazed to see how the older people will come to study and spend weekends trying to find out what Judaism is really about. The development of the State of Israel has also helped because people go there and see Jewish religion, although sometimes they are more impressed with an eight-inch irrigation pipeline than they are with the spiritual development of the country. But I don't think we have even begun to do our work. You perhaps know about the radio and television program we conduct here, "The Eternal Light." It is listened to by Americans of all faiths, but it has many points, of course, that are specially addressed to Jews.

Q You say much more remains to be done?

FINKELSTEIN: Yes. I don't think we have yet come to grips with the problem. We have to do something that is very hard for all of us here, for anybody. I can explain this by telling you a story about Solomon Schechter. He was the president of this seminary when I came here as a young man. He gave the entrance examination and afterwards he asked me to read a text. He said, "All right, you know enough to come in here. Now I want to ask you some questions to find out whether you have any common sense. Why do you want to come here?" I said, "I want to come here because I want to study." He said, "In that case, you aren't clever at all, because you could study much more rapidly in the library than you could in class. In class you are one of many and a lot of people would hold you back. So this isn't an efficient way to study." I thought I wasn't going to be admitted. I said, "Dr. Schechter, why do I come to the seminary?" He said, "You come to the seminary to associate with great men. We have very great men on the faculty here. And by association with them and by osmosis you learn an

awful lot." That has been true; it has been a great privilege. For fifty years I have associated with great men—teachers and now my colleagues and some of my pupils.

Q Judaism's influence on Jews is tied in, then, with the quality of its "great men"?

FINKELSTEIN: Judaism is a religion that has to be taught very largely through osmosis and by people willing to undertake being great men. Jewish leadership has to carry an enormous burden because it is not easy to be a great man in the sense that I am using that term. One has to give up lots of things. I would say that the future of American Jewry—the main task in that future—is to persuade the rabbis and teachers who graduate from this seminary, and the lay people who are associated with us, that this is their business—to try to be great men. There is no escape from it. If they won't, then nothing that is said, nothing that is preached, nothing that is written, is going to make any difference at all.

About that Hillel answer to the pagan on the definition of Judaism, a professor at the seminary here once said, "Isn't that strange; all of us have told that story and nobody has become a Jew because of it. But when Hillel told the story, the pagan became a Jew." Hillel had something that we lack. What Hillel was saying he was also living, and the pagan was convinced not so much by what he said as by the fact that Hillel said it.

Q As you have been talking about the great demands that Judaism makes on the individual Jew, I have been thinking about the climate or environment in America in which those demands are made and either met or left unmet. Can there be an American expression of the Judaistic law that would make the demand not easier to fulfill but perhaps more congenial or apposite to the American context? Or would such adaptation cause Judaism to lose something essential in the process?

FINKELSTEIN: Judaism exists under many conditions. It can be lived in America. It can be lived in any other country. Its message is addressed to a world in need. Everything that goes with Judaism—its comforts, its consolations, its directions, its prohibitions, its commandments—is addressed to people who are suffering, perhaps especially Jews.

In a country like ours in which there is plenty to eat, plenty of freedom, and in which Jews are treated like anybody else, the whole religion has to be thought through all over again, not so much as to what has to be done but as to new opportunities.

For instance, we have had a Jew who was Governor of the State of New York. There is no provision in the Talmud for guiding a Jew who is Governor of New York. It never occurred to anybody that a Jew would be governor of anything. A Jewish governor has new responsibilities. Or take the Sabbath—if I have a store, I must not do business on the Sabbath. But suppose that I have shares in the New York Central Railroad and I am therefore a part owner of that railroad and the railroad works on the Sabbath as well as on every other day. There is nothing in the Talmud to tell me what my obligation is in this situation. Or, suppose that I own shares in an electrical company that has engaged in nefarious practices. The Talmud says I should not steal, but it does not say what my obligation is if I am part owner of an electrical company that steals.

There is a whole series of things that have to be thought through in an entirely new world. And there are some Jewish commandments that simply cannot be observed in the way they used to be observed. One of the basic Jewish commandments is to visit the sick. Today, visiting the sick in the hospital is mostly a nuisance to the sick, and if the person is really sick the hospital won't let you in. In the Middle Ages this was a very important matter because there were no nurses and when you went to see a sick person you helped him, you tended him. But today what happens to the great Jewish commandment of taking care of the sick?

Q Whose task is it to explicate and elaborate this American application of the Jewish law?

FINKELSTEIN: That task, I should think, falls on our seminary, at least as far as our group is concerned. It falls on a combination of the faculty of the seminary, who are great scholars, and the rabbis and graduates, who are also scholars and who are in contact with life. This is an entirely different matter from making Judaism an "easier religion" to follow. I don't think Judaism has to make religion easier to follow; religion should not be easy to follow.

Q I was not thinking of adaptation in terms of "easier" but more in terms of perhaps a closer correspondence between Judaism and the American context.

FINKELSTEIN: The American people—and the Jews are part of the American people—need not less discipline, but more discipline; not less willingness to sacrifice, but greater willingness to sacrifice. You cannot walk out of your traditions and reduce them to some kind of tepidity.

Q Will Herberg has said that religion in American society has become "secularistic" in that our guiding values and goals are secular values and goals.

FINKELSTEIN: I am not sure that that is something new in this world. If you went into a small town in Poland where all the Jews kept the Sabbath, there was nothing to do on the Sabbath but keep it. There was no temptation not to keep the Sabbath. In New York there are many things to do on the Sabbath, a great many temptations. I don't think the New York boy who doesn't observe the Sabbath can be classed as "less religious." But I have no doubt there is a problem with which all of us have to come to grips—and that is the problem of trying to get the American people of all groups, and especially us of

the Jewish group, to be much more morally sensitive. I stress "morally sensitive" before "liturgically sensitive" because I think the latter will come.

Q Are young Jewish college students able to maintain and develop their religious life in the secular colleges and universities? What provisions have Jewish leaders made for them?

FINKELSTEIN: There is a Hillel Foundation and Hillel groups are on the campuses. Under some of its directors there is great spiritual activity and influence. They attract young men and women to services and study. At other places I don't think the Hillel group amounts to much more than boys and girls coming together to have a pleasant social time. I am not sure that most Jewish college students like the Hillel groups. The last time I was in England I noticed that there are 350 Jewish students at Oxford but only about fifty of them attend services on the Sabbath. Forty years ago, when I first went to Oxford, there were only fifty Jewish students at the school, but they all attended Sabbath services. Something has happened in those forty years.

Our colleges, of course, are the seats of great spiritual confusion. Teaching religion is not permitted in any of the tax-supported institutions, though apparently teaching non-religion *is* permitted. So a biologist can say that he does not believe in God or that he thinks man is an "accident." But if a religious person said that biology cannot be understood without reference to a wise Creator, he might be fired for trying to "indoctrinate" his pupils.

Q I have been told that 75 per cent of American Jews live in five metropolitan centers. Are the Jews who do not live in those centers being taken care of spiritually?

FINKELSTEIN: They are not being taken care of, that is one of the great pities. We can't get enough rabbis to serve them.

Q Judaism considers a man once a Jew always a Jew, doesn't it?

FINKELSTEIN: The ancestors of all the Jews, according to the Book of Exodus, were on Mount Sinai, and they accepted the observance of Judaism for themselves and all their descendants. Therefore, all of us are bound by that. There is no way in which this covenant can be unilaterally abrogated by any Jew. A Jew is a Jew.

Q What about intermarriage with non-Jews? Jews seem to be almost as vigorously opposed to intermarriage with non-Jews as Catholics are with non-Catholics.

FINKELSTEIN: Jews are hostile to intermarriage with people of another faith. This is not too well understood. Jews are not hostile to intermarriage with people of another race, if they are Jews. The basic doctrine here is that the home is a sanctuary and it has to be maintained as a sanctuary. It cannot be so maintained if either the high priest or the high priestess, so to speak, belongs to another faith. That is something Jews do not like—marriage outside of their fold—because it means the children will not be Jews, or will be only half-Jews. Jews feel strongly about the importance of preserving Judaism because there are very few Jews. Judaism does not consider it an unreasonable sacrifice for a Jewish man or woman to shun marriage or even the thought of marriage to a non-Jew.

Q What about the future of Judaism here? Are you going to get enough "great men"?

FINKELSTEIN: Each of us has to do the best he can, but he shouldn't fool himself into thinking he can do it all alone. Solomon Schechter used to say that you have to leave a little bit to God.

