



NOTES TO MYSELF:

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Part Three

JESUS OF NAZARETH AND GOD:

A FOOTNOTE

Front Cover: <sup>window</sup> ~~Kausalya's vision~~ "Stonewall Jackson"  
Back Cover: <sup>clear</sup> ~~visu...~~ "Horse Sacrifice"

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## INTRODUCTION

As an introduction to this volume I felt I might relate a few of the experiences which led to its production. These experiences are deeply etched in my memory, and they are rooted clear back into my childhood, so that at least the modern clinically-oriented individual might find them interesting. The stories are well-known to and warmly remembered by me, so I, too, might have some pleasure relating them.

Arjuna once asked Krishna why He knew so much about everything. Krishna replied that Arjuna remembers from his earlier years events that are important to him. The number of events Arjuna was involved in far exceeds the number he remembers. For, he remembers only those that he himself considers important. Well, Krishna continues, He, Krishna, was involved in so many events also, but He considers all of them important and so He remembers them all, easily, any time He wants to. Arjuna was humbled by Krishna's reply. God knows everything because He participates in every event and regards them all as equally important. So, He knows them all.

Now, I can hardly claim to remember all the experiences I have had. It has been my experience, however, that I often remember considerably more of some events than others who were also in them do. Not a few people have asked me why I bring up thus and so which is such ancient history. The implication is that if it happened so long ago, it is no longer important, and to think that it is may indicate the presence of a pathology of some sort. People spend scarce money hoping to have a counselor talk them out of remembrances they wish they did not have.

Well, I have always accepted to own my own remembrances because I feel they are all, in some way, of Providential origin -- both the events and the remembrances of them -- and I ruminate long and deeply on them to discover what it is I should learn from them. Since, over the years, this procedure has yielded me much peace and happiness, I do not see why I should accept a clinician's statement that I am pathologically fixated in the gone-forevers. Besides, I am a student and friend of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, and my days with that sublime soul did not go for nothing.

The first clear memory I have of a catholic or humanitarian nature is of Thanksgiving Service at Claremont, California. It was an annual custom for all the local Protestant Churches to foregather on Thanksgiving Sunday at "Big" Bridges Auditorium (there was also a "Little" Bridges Auditorium) on the campus of Pomona College. The various church choirs processed in multi-colored splendor, and the clergymen, in strict episcopal style, processed behind. These people gathered on the stage, which had been decorated to resemble a Reformed Tradition chancel, and the rest of us sat out in the audience. I tried always to sit on the aisle because I enjoyed hearing the voices of the choir members and the clergy moving by and giving out that great Hymn, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come." It was inspiring, indeed, to a young lad, and especially this one. Each year, when it was all over and we were leaving the Auditorium, I would ask, as if to myself, "Why can't we do this every Sunday?" I still do not know the answer to that question.

Sometime during my Junior year in High School I was asked by some students at the Claremont School of Theology if I would meet with their class in

systematic theology and agree to be interviewed at large by the members of the class. I agreed to do this. For an hour or so they asked me questions on philosophical and theological topics of current and eternal significance and I answered them as best I was able. They were, I gathered, impressed with my knowledge of these fields for they kept having surprised looks and saying they had never heard such stuff from a high-schooler. I remember wondering why they were surprised, for they had asked me there knowing that I had been stewing in the great issues of the nature and destiny of man for many years.

One topic they brought up I remember clearly. This was the life and work of Albert Schweitzer. Now I had grown up with Schweitzer in much the same manner that other lads my age grew up with Duke Snyder and Phil Rizzuto. The interests of my father were similar to Schweitzer's (music, theology, medicine) and these were, in an absolute sense, my interests also. And, I will say, I have had about as much difficulty as my father and Schweitzer had in blending these interests together.

In any case, the students asked me what I thought of Schweitzer, apparently not knowing my familiarity with the man, and I remarked that he is a pantheist. That remark took them by storm and they fairly bounced in their seats and then on top of one another in an effort to be the first to ask me to clarify that statement. I remember feeling stunned by the vehemence of their reaction. Clearly, they had not thought of Schweitzer as a pantheist. I think they also thought it a dreadful epithet for one of such heroic mould. And coming from an infant?! This was a little much.

So I just restated that Schweitzer is indeed a pantheist and recognized that not everyone in the room agreed with this assessment. Shortly thereafter the interview ended with cheerfulness all around and I went home wondering how I got involved in that situation. Of course, I knew I had agreed to it. And I had a chuckle.

Schweitzer states that his one really inspiring moral love is Stoicism, which, technically, as these things are customarily classed, is a variety of pantheism. Few people today know that in his own day Schweitzer was recognized as the world's foremost authority on the Poet, Goethe. He once lectured an international conference on that Great Yogi in Colorado.

When I went East to attend the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, it was in fulfillment of all my boyish dreams. However, the car broke down in Cleveland and I had to fly the remaining distance. This was an augury. When I got there I found myself apparently in the wrong place. It happened thus:

My father graduated at Union Theological Seminary not long after my birth. He had been a deep admirer of Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor of Christian Ethics at Union. In fact, he was Niebuhr's first student assistant.

I was baptized into the Communion of Faith, by David E. Roberts, Professor at Union and pioneer in the field of Psychology and Religion. When I was near six years of age Niebuhr remarked about me that I was a healthy-looking Californian, our home since 1946. Shortly after that remark, I entered the hospital for nine months, paralyzed. *My First Grade teacher had despised a painting I did of sea creatures deep in the ocean.*

My undergraduate study was done at the University of Redlands under Drs. Douglas Eadie and Gordon Hines, of Northwestern University and Union Theological Seminary, respectively. Seniors in good standing at the University were allowed to undertake an honors study project on a subject of their own selection, upon approval by the faculty. As my subject I chose the works of Reinhold Niebuhr. It was a delightful semester. Only four academic units were allowed an honors project so I had to carry a near full load in addition to an enormous amount of reading and writing for the honors project. But, I made the most of the opportunity and emerged from it a self-conscious Niebuhrian. I never worked harder in my life.

One telling incident I remember from this period. Some editors had solicited a number of essays from prominent Theologians and Academicians on the topic of Reinhold Niebuhr's work. These essays were published as a book together with Niebuhr's comments on each essay. The volume was a pert and puissant contribution to the intellectual community. Niebuhr, always a stirring man, was never more vigorous than in rejoinders. His impulses were pugilistic, and I have sometimes thought he would have made a good General.

Well, one of the commentators was Paul Tillich, colleague of Niebuhr's at Union and a man apart from whom the recent history of Western civilization, not to mention, for many of us, the history of our own hearts, cannot be written. Tillich wrote for the book that Niebuhr's understanding of Christian Theology is here imprecise and there inadequate but, on the whole, he is a fine fellow. That is a liberal paraphrase of what Dr. Tillich wrote. But Niebuhr caught the Gothic Gist and responded breezily that,



while he did in fact learn his Christian Theology from Dr. Tillich, and is aware that Dr. Tillich feels he did not learn his lessons well enough, nevertheless, he, Niebuhr, feels compelled to say about Dr. Tillich's remarks that .... I have chuckled over this exchange for many years and still the scene is as fresh to me as today itself.

So this young Niebuhrian entered upon a course of study leading to the degree of Bachelor of Divinity (now styled Master of Divinity) at the Apotheosis of the American School of Theology, Union Theological Seminary. His whole being was quivering with expectation of the Real Presence.

Shortly after we arrived and before the upper-classmen did, the entering students were summoned to a banquet provided by the Seminary and presided over by the President of it, himself. The purpose of this affair was to welcome the newcomers to the Seminary community. We were all agog.

The Refectory at Union is done in a grand old neo-Gothic style, exposed beams and all, rather like West Point. From the walls peer the portraits of Professors past, dark eminences, reflecting the institution's Presbyterian heritage. The food then was as uniformly atrocious as was the food at West Point in its early years. In fact, I remember several of my classmates uniting together in solemn oath never again to approach the place for food unless reduced to the direst extremity. I was among their number.

As I look back now, aware of the importance of proper diet, I wonder that anyone could have eaten there and remained a Christian. *(In fact, no one did.)* It was that bad.

After we choked down dinner, the President arose and prepared to address

the gathering. I do not remember that he made any thankful remarks in the direction of the kitchen. But I do remember his very first words. And they were these: "Now that the era of Reinhold Niebuhr has passed ...."

Had someone driven a dagger into my heart or slammed my head with a sledgehammer, the sensation would not have been different from the one produced in my soul by those words. I got hurt and hot on the instant, and I had an urge to pack up and leave immediately. Perhaps I should have. But I did not do that. I stayed.

Sometime after I had settled into the routine of classes, I called Niebuhr, who was in retirement, to ask if I might visit him at his home. Enthusiastically, he invited me to come, and I appeared at the appointed hour. His wife, Dr. Ursula Niebuhr, ushered me in warmly and remarked that I could not stay long because Reinhold was recovering from a stroke. I agreed to her condition and she ushered me into the living room, where sat Dr. Niebuhr. He rose graciously but with palsied limbs to welcome me to his home. The fire in his eyes burned as brightly as I had been told, but the physical frame was now ripe and ready to fall from the tree, its purpose fulfilled.

We sat for some few minutes talking quietly when suddenly, almost impulsively, Niebuhr interjected that his Doctor wanted him to exercise regularly, that it was a beautiful day and wouldn't it be nice to talk while we strolled along Riverside Drive. The other Dr. Niebuhr objected lightly to this suggestion, feeling it as perhaps an undue strain on her husband, and, besides, they had a visitor -- myself. But Niebuhr was adamant for a walk and asked me if he could hold my arm while we strolled along. To

this request I readily agreed.

And so we did. For half an hour or so we strolled slowly along Riverside Drive, he using my arm for a support and talking the while of important matters. He asked me what I thought of this problem of integration of the races -- in early 1966 it was daily front-page news. I estimated that it was not much of a problem at all and that the thing would be done without much trouble. He disagreed with this and said it would take a long time and a lot of fighting before Negro people were treated fairly.

I think the truth of this exchange was that, innocently, I was speaking for myself, whereas, he was referring to the American masses. Many times I have been tripped up by this tendency of mine to be really speaking for myself when I suppose I am speaking for everyone. I am still this way. If I do not see a problem, I cannot understand why others should. Anyhow, "integration" was the main topic of our discussion, very au courant at the time, and we came away, I think, disagreeing because of a misunderstanding. Or, maybe it was not a misunderstanding. For me, it was a deeply treasured experience, a gift and a blessing.

Reinhold Niebuhr passed away a few years later. I wept inside then and I do today at the thought of his passing. Tillich had already passed away during my first year at Union. I remember the tears in my father's eyes as he spoke to me of the great sorrow Tillich's passing aroused in him. I never did meet Paulus that I remember, although I am told that he smiled on me as an infant. Both men, Tillich and Niebuhr, are carried in my heart as icons, warm, friendly, familiar, as present to me as water to a fish or

air to a bird or ground to an elephant. My father has the galley proofs of one of Tillich's volumes in systematic theology -- a gift from the author.

Some years later, I was invited to attend a meeting of Clergymen of the United Church of Christ in Phoenix, Arizona. It was an informal affair at which our host, also a graduate of the University of Redlands, was to educate us in the novel work of one Harvey Cox, Professor at Harvard Divinity School. We were to have readings from a strange book by Cox titled, THE SECULAR CITY. This book was all the latest stuff for these Clergymen.

I had, like everyone at Union, gotten through THE SECULAR CITY five years previous, and <sup>I</sup> had not enjoyed the experience. It was my impression that Cox wanted to be a sanctimonious libertarian and I was keenly disjoined by his self-important disdain for Paul Tillich. Paul Tillich had been University Professor at Harvard University while Cox had been otherwise engaged. Paul Lehman, Professor of Systematic Theology at Union during my days there, had gotten knowing grins from our class by referring to Cox and the then-ascendent "Death of God Theologians" as "newspaper theologians." In fact, not long thereafter, Cox was writing movie reviews for one of the "religious publications."

In any case, in Phoenix in 1970, Harvey Cox was the latest word, and our host that evening was on to his message with the enthusiasm of an apostle. I noticed that this clergyman lived in a kind of nouveau mansion. His driveway held a pick-up truck, flame red, with enormous camper and a large, matching motor boat. Inside, the place was furnished in luxury and decorated without regard to cost. The man had the demeanor of a business tycoon.

He was the most widely feared of the Clergymen present that evening.

I said little about his exegesis of Cox. Mostly I was observing. But when we were leaving and he was boasting to a brother Clergyman, who could not afford it, about the splendors of weekend boating in the wilds and offering as how it was just too bad not everyone could have these pleasures of the Christian ministry, I accosted him with a sharp and shapely rebuke about it being unwarranted for a rich man, especially a clergyman, to dilate in full to his poorer bretheran about how good his life is while the latter is burning in envy and the former is fueling the flames. He stopped dead in his words, astonished at my impertinence, and, fixing me with an icy stare, inquired as to just who I thought I was that I felt competent to render him advice on his manner of living. Furthermore, he emphasized, in case I had not already gotten the gist, every man is entitled to do just exactly what he wants to do if he has the means to do it and that is what Harvey Cox is saying, after all. Lastly, he invited my attention to the fact that, if I was offended by the way he chose to live, I need never return to his house. I accepted this invitation and did not return.

A few years later, this clergyman was honored by the University of Redlands as its Alumnus of the Year. Perhaps by now he is a ranking Church Executive.

I bless that the laity of all religions may have leaders who will fight the devil rather than invite him to dine with them by candlelight. May all men everywhere be happy, and may Truth, Righteousness, Peace and Love be established upon the earth.

Now we shall have a little fugue, at the Ninth.

David R. Graham  
Adwaitha Hermitage  
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