

THE ENGADINER KOLLEGIUM

by Erich F. Steinthal

For nearly three thousand years, man, so far as he belonged to the Judaeo-Christian orbit, conceived himself to have been created in the image of God. He believed that this happened in two steps. He was formed from dust, to which he is fated to return. He was animated by the spirit of God in direct contact. This did not turn him into a god nor establish his equality with God. Collectively it made him, in the Jewish tradition, God's chosen people; in Christianity, with its greater emphasis on the individual, it enabled him to become the son of God as promised by Christ to his followers, provided they strove spiritually towards that status and lived up to it in their moral obligations.

During the last three hundred years that image had become badly shaken through an increasing secularization of human cultural life, a spreading agnosticism and atheism. It received a final blow through the proclamation of the "Death of God," accepted today even by some theologians who find themselves with a logos without a God.

At the same moment when Friedrich Nietzsche announced the death of God, he offered to his contemporaries the image and ideal of "Superman." He did so confronting them with the image of "the last man," the man of bourgeois smugness and complacency, of whom he drew a devastating caricature. It also was an attempt to counteract a rising nihilism which, he felt, was about to take hold completely of the mind of Western man, a prophecy which proved to be only too true, as it manifested itself in the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre and in the mood which led to the atrocious annihilations in the two world wars.

At the same time, the dualism between mind and matter, body and soul, which had been reinforced by Rene Descartes, became heavily weighted in favor of matter and the body, mind and soul being assigned the role of an epiphenomenon. Yet this did not do away with the dualism, neither epistemologically, nor morally, nor in practical action. Of this, the physician, unless he is a mere technician, is made aware most painfully everyday in his practice. This is particularly true for the psychotherapist who so often is at a loss whether to attribute the woes of his patient to an organic, physiological, or to a psychological, mental cause. Yet, in psychotherapy he has to help his patient to face himself in depth, to find his identity, and form a comprehensive image of himself, to which he has to live up with all the moral obligations which this entails. The psychotherapist can render such a service satisfactorily only when he himself has formed a comprehensive image of man, free from narrow moral, racial, national, denominational, and political prejudices.

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TO SEARCH FOR A COMPREHENSIVE IMAGE OF MAN

It is this that set Balthasar Staehelin to search for a comprehensive image of man with all the moral obligations which such an image would impose. Staehelin, to introduce him, teaches psychiatry and psychosomatics at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and is engaged in psychotherapeutic private practice. In the search for a new image of man, Staehelin was guided by the experience gained in his psychotherapeutic practice.

C. G. Jung, the late Swiss psychoanalyst, had noticed that, in nearly all of his patients past middle age, religious concepts and symbols and the need for religious commitment surfaced in the course of treatment. Staehelin found this to be true for most of his patients even in earlier years. He came to the conclusion that there is in human nature a hidden, often heavily buried desire to come in touch with a reality which transcends that of everyday life, a "second reality," as he calls it. He claims that this quality, he speaks of it as *Urvertrauen* ("basic faith"), is not something added to man's physical organization but is vested in the totality of body and soul. *Homo naturaliter religiosus*, man is religious in his very nature. Staehelin asks the daring question: "Is not man, even in his biological organization, a part of the ultimate unconditioned essence, that is, of God?" A question foolish to the scientist and a stumbling block for the theologian. Yet he answers it in the positive and draws from it two further conclusions: "Man is finite and infinite at the same time and he is basically good and not primarily evil."

Staehelin clearly attempts to overcome the twofold dualism, the one in man himself and the other between God and man. This exposes him to the reproach of mysticism. Yet he states that there is a mystic hidden in every man if one probes deeply enough. Fifty years ago such a statement would have met with the greatest skepticism and would have been flatly refused by any serious-minded scientific community, while the theologians would have accused him of religious subjectivism, of pantheism, and of a misdirected anthropomorphism. Not so today. We are on our way to overcome the split between body and soul, mind and matter, even in physics. This trend also is influenced by a new understanding of Eastern metaphysics and the reappraisal of our own Jewish and Christian mystics. Staehelin's patients seem to have profited greatly from his explorations and interpretations. But be that as it may, what is that to us who do not consider ourselves as standing in need of the psychotherapist's couch?

Let us take stock: There is a widespread restlessness, uneasiness, and anguish all over the world. There have been and still are wars where human sacrifices have been and are being performed as never before in human history to the glory of dark, anonymous gods. The collective violence and the explosion of the atom bomb have spawned more and more acts of individual violence. Human life is becoming cheaper and cheaper. There is devastation all around, devastation of nature, of the human soul, disruption of family ties, of loyalty to the community, the nation, mankind. To cover an inner emptiness and a paralyzing boredom the mass media are called in, and, where they do not suffice, refuge is taken in drugs. License is not only condoned, it has been elevated to a cult. *Urvertrauen*, "basic faith," seems to have disintegrated or to be buried under the debris of atrocious and meaningless actions. One has compared this state of affairs to a universal neurosis, if not a psychosis, which has visited mankind. A similar condition seems to have prevailed at the turn of the fifteenth century as documented

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in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and other Dutch and Flemish masters, in which all hell is let loose.

Our time, so far, has not produced an artist of the caliber of Hieronymus Bosch to hold a mirror up to us, to shake our conscience; but on the television screen and in our magazines, we are presented regularly with corpses, the victims of war and violence, with mangled bodies, with fugitives leaving their destroyed homes and communities, traversing a scorched landscape, with faces staring hopelessly over the barbed wires of prison and refugee camps. Yet we turn away. We do not realize that it is ourselves at whom we look or should look. *Tat twam asi*. We turn away from or register callously without deeper emotional involvement what is presented to us. We do not recognize ourselves, we do not want to. Do we have an image at all of man? There are many attempts at work to present us with such an image, from the cynical description of man as the naked ape to man as the crowning product of evolution on the way to pure spiritualism. There are minor versions, like those as a member of Hitler's master race, as a representative of the proletariat in Marx's classless society, and as the glorification of the average man of this country, who attempts to make the world safe for democracy. Yet all these efforts lead to utter confusion and futility. They remain at the surface, they do not probe in depth.

What are we going to do about it? Who is going to do something about it? Can it be left to the politicians, to an occasional charismatic statesman, to democratic majorities, to a dictator, to an entrenched bureaucracy, to an all-powerful political party or an economic establishment?

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The problem has to be tackled at a deeper level, be it in a less dramatic and sensational way, at the roots from where anguish, uneasiness, and confusion primarily emanate, at the roots of moral and cultural life as represented by science, the humanities, and religion. There are at present severe tensions among them and in each of them.

In spite of all that science has done for man, it meets today increasingly with dissatisfaction, discrimination, and open hostility. It is likened to the sorcerer's apprentice who is unable to control the forces which he has called into being. It is accused of not having all the answers to man's woes and shortcomings. It is blamed for refusing to ask and tackle questions which seem to be vital for man's personal and social well-being and for his further development. It is taken to task for having crowded out of the mind of man the humanities and religion and having forced them to adopt its scientific methodology. The strongest reproach leveled against it is that it has dehumanized man, treats him as a mere object, and has paved the way for materialism and agnosticism. The dissatisfaction has spread to include reason, which is deemed to be a useful tool but a nefarious master.

Can the humanities prevent the dehumanization of man by science and technology? In part, they themselves have become dehumanized as is manifest in some trends of modern art and antiart and their flirtation with statistics and computers. But more important, they have not been able to offer a comprehensive image and ideal of man, now that the Renaissance man has fallen into eclipse and cultural life has become overly diversified and entrenched in specialization. Certain of the humanities make a futile attempt to emulate scientific methodology instead of developing their own method, which is that of dialogue based on imagination.

Religion and science have become antipodes in the course of the last three hundred years, with religion very much on the defensive, if not in full retreat. Secularization began with the Renaissance. Watching the soul of man being captured by science, religion tried desperately to emulate the method of the adversary and attempted to go scientific. Efforts have been made to demythologize it at the same moment when modern psychology is teaching us to understand the language of myths and the important role they play in the progress of human culture. Yet we also notice today, as a reaction against the encroachment of science, a widespread longing for religious experience, manifesting itself in various brands of revivalism, in the adoption of Eastern metaphysical practices, in the use of drugs, in the efforts of the traditional churches to reshape themselves and to adapt themselves to a changed mentality and a changing awareness of man and to advocate an ecumenical movement on the broadest basis. Yet the traditional churches have neglected to cultivate the basic virtues of all religions, those of awe, meditation, contemplation, and devotion as an everyday practice.

The psychotherapist cannot enclose himself with his patients in his consulting room as a recluse. He has to keep his eyes wide open for the realities of life; for ultimately he has to help his patients to reenter that reality and to integrate themselves into it as best as they can. That forces him to become a critic of everyday reality. Staehelin is, as are we all, dissatisfied with what meets the eye. And so he and responsible people drew together, not just to give vent to their criticism and their dissatisfaction and grief, but to do something about them. But what? A first step is to search and clarify one's own mind, which has not been immune to the confusion, the contradictions, errors and, yes, sins around. Scientists, humanists, and theologians have to take a good, hard look at themselves; they have to overcome open and hidden antagonism and find ways of mutual understanding.

THE WORK OF THE ENGADINER KOLLEGIUM

In such considerations Staehelin did not find himself alone. There were others. This prompted him to initiate and convoke the Engadiner Kollegium in 1969. Physicians, particularly those interested in psychotherapy, scientists (physicists, biologists, pharmacologists), theologians (of the Jewish, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant faiths), philosophers, mathematicians, writers, and artists followed his call. The Kollegium claims to be superdenominational, supernational, superracial and attempts to avoid one-sided overspecialization. Yet an outline of some faith may be discerned, as for example in the statement of the physicist Walter Heitler: "The image in which we see ourselves will be the sign under which our future will develop and under which we will remain alive or wither." It may also be assumed that the members of the Kollegium are willing to accept what Staehelin has called *Urvertrauen*, a primary religious quality in man preceding all theological systematizations of concrete formulations of creeds.

The Kollegium meets once a year in the Engadine in Switzerland for lectures, discussions, and personal exchange of views. The public is admitted to the sessions and may freely take part in the discussions. The transactions are published in book form. There prevails an atmosphere of mutual respect and of great cordiality. The topic of the first meeting was: "The Image of Man." This has become the overall theme for all future conferences. "Death and Leisure Time" was the subtitle of the second meeting, "The Finite and Infinite in Man" of this year's convocation.

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"The Image of Man"—what does that involve? When man is in search of an image of himself, he actually is in search of his identity. One finds one's identity at a first approach not in oneself; one has to constitute it by identifying oneself through projection of the unconscious contents of one's soul on other persons, on nature, on the environment at large. This is and always has been the way to come to the awareness of oneself. In order to proceed properly and successfully one has to train, to discipline oneself, to listen to others but as well to the voices of nature and to that which the humanities and the arts have to communicate to us. Yet one has not merely to register what reaches him, he has to enter into a dialogue, even when the dialogue is carried out from one side not coached in language. The spoken dialogue proceeds not merely by words and sentences but by sounds as well, by the rhythm of the sentences and the pauses in between them and by gestures. For this reason the spoken word is so much more powerful than the written word and the spoken word delivered in the immediate presence of the person so much more powerful than that which comes over the radio and even through television. In his dialogue with the environment one also apprehends and interprets shapes and colors, space and the sequence of time, evoking the esthetic quality in man. And words contain more than they seem to say; they are heavy with symbols of which each era creates its own brand.

In his search for identity, man may diversify himself over a smaller or larger part in the field of human cultural and moral endeavor. But then again and again he will strive for a unifying identity to which he may anchor his existence. This brings him to search for a unifying entity that transcends him. From visions of realities and powers that transcend human nature and power all religions take their origin, regardless of what prompts the search for transcendence—the experience of death, suffering, injustice, personal failure, shortcomings, feelings of guilt, or sin. The search for identity is not a mere play of the imagination, much as imagination has to do with it; it always entails self-searching and thereby an ethical and moral attitude and responsibility.

The particular theme of this year's conference was "The Finite and Infinite in Man." It was discussed in a brilliant lecture by Jago Galdston, chief of psychiatric training of Connecticut. He stated that from man's early beginnings death has been a puzzle to him. In the course of cultural development, injustice which did not find its retribution on earth became an added puzzle. Man could not accept death and injustice for they deprived his life of all meaning. This led him to conceive a life beyond death where everything would be set right with compensation for the just and retribution for the unjust. Man envisioned heaven and hell, which found their most grandiose representation in Dante's poem. Yet, with the turn of Western science initiated by Galileo and Descartes, the vision began to fade through—I would like to add—the self-assertion of the oncoming bourgeois class, as Pernhard Groethuysen has described it so impressively. For that reason the question "What is infinite in man?" has to be put anew today. The sciences have not abolished death nor eliminated injustice, yet they make it possible to look at immortality in a new way which does no violence to reason and does not surpass the experience of the individual. Man lives between two eternities, that of the past and that of the future. The two meet in him materially, for the matter which is contained in man's organism has preex-

isted for an endless time and will continue to do so. It is man in whom the two eternities meet and unite; they meet in him at a definite moment and in him as a definite finite being. Yet it is not only matter which is transmitted in man but a cultural heritage. This places on him the moral obligation to accept that heritage, to enrich it and to transmit it to the coming generations. This gives man his dignity; in this he demonstrates his infinity.

One will discern that there are parallels but also divergencies in the thoughts of Staehelin and Galdston. The Engadiner Kollegium is open and keen to face the dilemma of such divergencies. It does not strive to come upon a shortcut to an easy but superficial common pronouncement. It considers itself in a state of search, not in that of formulating final conclusions.

I cannot discuss here the other papers at the 1972 Engadiner Kollegium. A few may be mentioned to show the scope of the efforts: "Freedom and Responsibility of the Mass Media"; "The Understanding of Man in Marxism"; "The Significance of the Human Past for Today and Tomorrow"; "Chemical Manipulation of Man"; "The Increasing Crystallization of a New Image of Man Out of the Soil of Enlightenment, Materialism, and Religious Dogmatism"; "Basic Religion; Man and His Ego"; "The Way of Science from God to God"; "The Roots of Visual Expression"; "The Phenomenon of Art"; "Has Religion Any Future?"; "The Infinite in Man in the View of Jewish Tradition"; "Man—a Partner of God?"

Diversified as these lectures appear to be and much as the views of the various lecturers may have differed, not only in details but also in essential points, they were united to meet the requirement, made by Galdston, to accept and utilize the cultural tradition, not only of Western man, but of all mankind as well, to enrich it through personal efforts and to transmit it to the new generation.

The Engadiner Kollegium does not share in the denigration of reason. Reason has its place, a most important place, but it also has to be kept in place and in proportion to the two other efforts in man—that of the dialogue and that of the aspiration toward transcendence. As Staehelin put it, "We have to come to the realization and have to live up to the 'I am Thou and Thou art I.'" This means a mutual identification and the possibility of a dialogue. This attitude and only this attitude will help to resolve the present-day strife and discrepancies between men on this globe. Reinforced through meditation, this "I am Thou and Thou art I" will bring man to a wider, more cosmic level, and into touch with that which transcends him. It is the keystone for a new religious awakening and experience.

There was a strong religious and moral atmosphere at the conference caused not only by the presence of representatives of the various faiths but also by the willingness of most of the participants to acknowledge the reality of transcendence and the possibility for man to come in touch with it.