
A BELIEVING
HUMANISM:

My Testament, 1902-1965

BY

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Humanity
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whom we know until now," "all one in you" (*ibid.*), in "the God of gods" (first version), who uttered and heard them have dialogue with the gods, the messengers to whom he is God.

Additional Comment

This indication of the meaning of a verse of Hölderlin's I set down in October 1952 for a presentation composed of the handwritten utterances of friends for the sixtieth birthday of Ludwig Strauss (d. 1953). The "Friedensfeier" ("Peace celebration") that has become known since then has altered nothing in my view. The new version "but soon we are song" shows, however, how in the poet the ontic vision to which I pointed has become clear. To be "a choir" means to bring forth song together; but now Hölderlin promises men that out of their being as dialogue will come a being as song. To the dialogue indeed belongs the persevering in the tension during the nearing; in song all tensions are melted down. Only when those whose dialogue we are sing us are we We.

COMMENTS ON THE IDEA OF COMMUNITY

THE AMBIGUITY of the concept that is employed is greater here than anywhere else. One says, for example, that socialism is the passing of the control over the means of production from the hands of the entrepreneur into that of the collective; but everything depends on what one understands by collective. If it is what we are accustomed to call the state, *i.e.*, an institution in which an essentially unstructured mass lets its business be conducted by a so-called representation, then in a socialist society essentially this will have changed, that the workers will feel themselves to be represented by the possessors of the power of the disposal of the means of production. But what is representation? Is it not in the all too far-reaching allowing-oneself-to-be-represented that the worst defect of modern society lies? And in a socialist society will not the economic letting-oneself-be-represented be added to the political so that only then for the first time the almost unlimited being-represented and thereby the almost unlimited central accumulation of power will predominate? But the more a human group lets itself be represented in the determination of its common affairs and the more from outside, so much the less community life exists in it, so much the poorer in community does it become. For community—not the primitive but that which is possible and suitable for us men of today—proclaims itself above all in the common active handling of the common and cannot endure without it.

The primal hope of all history depends upon a genuine, hence thoroughly *communally disposed* community of the human race. Fictitious, counterfeit, a planet-size lie would

be the unity that was not established out of real communal living of smaller and larger groups that dwell or work together and out of their reciprocal relationships. Everything depends therefore upon the collective, into whose hands the control over the means of production will pass, making possible and demanding by its structure and its institutions real communal living of manifold groups, indeed that these groups themselves become the true subjects of the process of production; thus that the mass be as articulated and in its articulations (the various communes) be as powerful as the common economy of mankind affords; thus that the centralistic letting-oneself-be-represented only extend so far as the new order absolutely demands. The inner question of destiny does not take the form of a fundamental Either-Or: it is the question of the legitimating, ever-newly-drawn demarcation line, the thousandfold system of demarcation lines between the realms that it is necessary to centralize and those that it is necessary to liberate, between the law of unity and the claim of community. The unremitting testing of the current state of things from the standpoint of the claim of the community as that which is always liable to oppression by the central power, the vigilance concerning the *truth of the boundary*, ever changing according to the changing historical conditions, would be the task of the spiritual conscience of mankind, a high court of an unheard-of kind, the reliable representation of the living idea. The Platonic "guardians" await here a new form of manifestation.

The representative of the idea, I say, not a rigid principle but the living form [*Gestalt*] that now wants to become malleable to be shaped in the material of just this earth day. Community too may not become principle; it too, when it appears, shall satisfy not a concept but a situation. Realization of the idea of community, like the realization of any idea, does not exist once for all and generally valid but always only as the moment's answer to a moment's question.

For the sake of this, its life meaning, all sentimentality, all

exaggeration and overenthusiasm must be kept far from our thinking about community. Community is never mood, and even where it is feeling, it is always the feeling of a *state of existence*. Community is the inner constitution of a common life that knows and embraces the parsimonious "account," the opposing "accident," the suddenly invading "care." It is commonness of need and only from this commonness of spirit, commonness of trouble and only from this commonness of salvation. Even that community that calls the spirit its master and salvation its promise, the "religious," is only community when it serves its master in the unselective, unexalted simple reality that it has not chosen for itself, that rather, just thus, has been sent; only when it prepares the way for its promise through the brambles of this pathless hour. Certainly, "works" are not required, but the work of faith is required. It is only truly a community of faith when it is a community of work.

The real essence of community is undoubtedly to be found in the—manifest or hidden—fact that it has a center. The real origin of community is undoubtedly only to be understood by the fact that its members have a common relationship to the center superior to all other relations: the circle is drawn from the radii, not from the points of the periphery. And undoubtedly the primal reality of the center cannot be known if it is not known as transparent into the divine. But the more earthly, the more creaturely, the more bound a character the circle takes, so much the truer, the more transparent it is. The "social" belongs to it. Not as a subdivision but as the world of authentication: in which the truth of the center proves itself. The early Christians were not satisfied with the communes that were next to or above the world, and they went into the desert so as to have no community except that with God and no more disturbing world. But it was shown to them that God does not will that man be alone with him, and above the holy impotence of solitude grew the

brotherly order. Finally, overstepping the realm of Benedict, Francis established the bond with the creatures.

Yet a community does not need to be founded. When historical destiny had put a human band in a common nature- and life-space, there was space for the development of a genuine commune; and no altar of a city god was necessary in the center if the inhabitants knew themselves united for the sake of and through the Unnamable. A living and ever-renewed togetherness was given and needed only to be developed in the immediacy of all relationships. The common concerns were deliberated and decided in common—in the most favorable cases not through representatives but in the gathering in the marketplace, and the unification experienced in public radiated out into each personal contact. The danger of seclusion might threaten: the spirit expelled it, which thrived here as nowhere else and broke its great window into the narrow walls for the sake of a vision of people, humanity, cosmos.

But, objectors tell me, that is now quite irrecoverable. The modern city has no agora, and modern man has no time for the transactions of which he can be relieved by his chosen representatives. A concrete togetherness is already destroyed by the compulsion of quantity and the form of organization. Work joins one to other persons than leisure does, sport to others than politics; day and soul are tidily divided. But the ties are just factual, one pursues together the common interests and tendencies and has no use for "immediacy." Collectivity is no intimate crouching down together but a great economic or political union of forces, unproductive for romantic play of the imagination but comprehensible as numbers, expressing itself in actions and effects to which the individual may belong without intimacies but in consciousness of his energetic contribution. Those "bonds" that resist the inevitable development must dissolve. There is still the family, to be sure, which as a house-community appears to demand and to guarantee a measure of living life together, but it too

will emerge out of the crisis into which it has entered as a union for a purpose, or it will disappear.

In opposition to this mixture of correct evidence and distorted conclusions, I espouse the rebirth of the commune. Rebirth, not restoration. It cannot be restored in fact, although it seems to me that each breath of neighborliness in the apartment building, each wave of a warmer comradeship during the rest period in the highly rationalized factory means a growth of communal-mindedness of the world, and although at times an upright village commune pleases me more than a parliament. It cannot be restored. But whether a rebirth of the commune takes place out of the waters and the spirit of the approaching transformation of society—by this, it seems to me, the lot of the human species will be determined. An organic communal being—and only such is suitable for a formed and articulated mankind—will never be erected out of individuals, only out of small and the smallest communities: a people is community to the extent that it is communally disposed.

If the family does not emerge from the crisis, which today appears like ruin, purified and renewed, then the form of statehood will end up by being only a furnace which will be fueled with the bodies of the generations. The commune which can be renewed in such a manner exists only as a residue. If I speak of a rebirth, I do not think of a continuing, but of a changed world situation. By the new communes—one could also call them the new fellowships—I mean the subject of the transformed economy, the collective into whose hands the control over the means of production shall pass. Once again: everything depends upon whether they will be made ready, whether they will be ready.

How much of economic and political autonomy will be accorded them—for they will necessarily be economic and political unities at the same time—is a technical question that one has to pose and to answer ever anew, but to pose and to answer from the standpoint of the more than technical

knowledge that the inner might of a community is also conditional upon its outer strength. The relation of centralism and decentralization is a problem that, as has been said, is to be dealt with not fundamentally but, like everything that concerns the traffic of the idea with reality, with the great tact of the spirit, with the untiring weighing of the legitimate How Much. Centralization, yes, but only so much as must be centralized according to the conditions of the time and the place; if the high court that is summoned to the drawing and new drawing of the line of demarcation remains awake in its conscience, then the division between base and apex of the power pyramid will be entirely different from today's, even in states that call themselves communist, which certainly still means striving for community. A system of representation must also exist in the form of society that I have in mind; but it will not present itself, like those of today, in the seeming representation of amorphous masses of voters but in the work-tested representatives of economic communities. The represented will not be bound with their representatives in empty abstractions, through the phraseology of a party program, as today, but concretely, through common activity and common experience.

But the most essential must be that the process of the formation of community must continue into the relations of the communities to each other. Only a community of communities may be called a communal being.

The picture that I have hastily sketched will be put on the shelf of "utopian socialism" until the storm turns over the leaves again. Just as I do not believe in Marx's "gestation" of the new form of society, so I do not believe in Bakunin's virgin birth out of the womb of the revolution. But I believe in the meeting of image and destiny in the plastic hour.

COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT

IF ONE SEEKS to transport the great social question from its sublime dialectical abstractness into the concrete language of the reality in which we live, it turns out that the various formulations of this question without exception have an essentially quantitative character; for example, "What is, with the greatest possible productivity of the total economy, the maximum share of the working man in the fruits of his labor, and what measures shall be taken in order to let him have this maximum?" Through the intellectual and material power which this kind of question and its consequences have assumed in our age, a series of fully concrete "little" questions have been pushed aside or suppressed, questions of an eminently qualitative character, such as, "How does the worker work at present in a factory highly developed in the techniques of work? As a man or as an external part of a machine? And how in the future can technique be set the task of including man as man in its calculations?" For him who is concerned that man live in the whole context of his existence as man, these "little" questions—which will continue to exist however those others are solved—are great ones, and he is concerned, each in his own sphere, to point out the direction and to guard it.

One such question goes: "How are the men of the modern civilization housed and how must they be housed in order to live as men?" There is no more concrete and current question.

I remember having read more than forty years ago in a book of Chesterton's (not word for word but approximately) that the solution of the social question is to be found in each

having a house of his own. These days I read in the newspaper that the prime minister of Burma has promised his people a welfare state in which each citizen shall have his own house. This sort of statement rings in our ears like a romantic utopia, hence like a utopia which lacks the most precious quality of a utopia: to be unromantic. But it is not so romantic and also not so utopian as it sounds; for it is bound up with one of those primal demands of the human heart which at any moment, overnight, will break through to actualization and become self-evident. Man not only *must* have a dwelling, he also *wants* it. And he wants to dwell in a house. But in the imperishable primal language of the human heart house means my house, your house, a man's own house. The house is the winning throw of the dice* which man has wrested from the uncanniness of universe; it is his defense against the chaos that threatens to invade him. Therefore his deeper wish is that it be his own house, that he not have to share with anyone other than his own family.

All this, nonetheless, is still only the presupposition for what is most important, when we finally attain to the knowledge that the essential human reality is no longer to be regarded as one of the individual life (even as little as one of the collective life), but as something that takes place between man and man, between I and Thou. For the house of man about which he is concerned no longer stands just anywhere, no matter where, in a splendid isolation for example, as long as he can easily get from there to his place of work, where he must perhaps for so and so many hours share a space with "strange" men, in order then quickly and completely to leave them and to go home [*nach Hause*]. Rather the house of man about which he is concerned now stands

* The German original—*der feste Würfel*—contains a pun. The word for dice also means cube, while *feste* means both winning throw and firm. Hence "winning throw of the dice" equals "a firm cube" equals "a house"—M.F.

between houses, between neighboring houses, between the houses of his neighbors.

The unavowed secret of man is that he wants to be confirmed in his being and his existence by his fellow men and that he wishes them to make it possible for him to confirm them, and, to be sure, the former and the latter not merely in the family, in the party assembly or in the public house, but also in the course of neighborly encounters, perhaps when he or the other steps out of the door of his house or to the window of his house and the greeting with which they greet each other will be accompanied by a glance of well-wishing, a glance in which curiosity, mistrust, and routine will have been overcome by a mutual sympathy: the one gives the other to understand that he affirms his presence. This is the indispensable minimum of humanity. If the world of man is to become a human world, then immediacy must rule between men, and thus also between human house and human house. And as in everything else, so also here the institutional and the educational influence must supplement each other. The secret longing of man for a life in reciprocal mutual confirmation must be developed through education, but the external conditions it needs in order to find its fulfillment must also be created. The architects must be set the task of also building for human contact, building surroundings that invite meeting and centers that shape meeting.

This book wishes to serve the rebirth of the human dialogue from the standpoint of architecture. Therein lies its importance.