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SYMBOLISM IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL
" AND THE BLACK POWER MOVEMENT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. NATURE AND SCOPE OF DISSERTATION

We live in a world in which signs and symbols have come to occupy a place of paramount importance. The impressive phenomena today are the jet plane, the television set, the atom bomb and the space ships. But behind the actual production of these intricate mechanisms there lies a long process of learning, inventions, calculation and skilled technique. Within this process much of the work is done by the manipulation of a multitude of mysterious symbols. Although the symbols are mysterious, and the average layman cannot make sense out of them, he is quite prepared to believe that this constellation of symbols hold within it a whole world of potential meaning.¹

Why this great faith in symbols? It is only through symbols that man can find stability and satisfaction. Consequently, man produces many symbols. Man has this symbol-forming power, and this is what makes him a man. At the point in our history when we have finally recognized the importance of symbols, there has arisen a situation in which

¹ F. W. Dillistone, Christianity and Symbolism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 11.

the ordinary man either has no symbols at all or he fails to find any vital meaning in the symbols which are at his disposal. Old symbols have either decayed or been violently snatched away and no fresh and commanding symbols have taken their place. Susanne K. Langer writes:

In modern civilization there are two great threats to mental security: the new mode of living, which has made the old nature symbols alien to our minds, and the new mode of working; which makes personal activity meaningless, unacceptable to the hungry imagination. Most men never see the goods they produce, but stand by a travelling belt and turn a million identical passing wrappers in a succession of hours, days, years. This sort of activity is too poor, too empty, for even the most ingenious mind to invest it with symbolic content. Work is no longer a sphere of ritual; and so the nearest and surest source of mental satisfaction has dried up. At the same time, the displacement of the permanent homestead by the modern rented tenement—now here, now there—has cut another anchor-line of the human mind. Most people have no home that is a symbol of their childhood, not even a definite memory of one place to serve that purpose. Many no longer know the language that was once their mother tongue. All old symbols are gone and thousands of average lives offer no new materials to a creative imagination.²

Thus we are told on one hand that man is a symbol-making animal, and only through adequate symbols can he find stability and satisfaction. On the other hand we are told that old and time-honored symbols have disappeared; that it is useless to turn nostalgically to the past; that the very

²Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: Mentor, 1961), p. 245.

conditions of modern life make it impossible for the ordinary man to find meaning and security any longer in the familiar symbols of tradition and environment. The tension created by this situation has caused a crisis in our society; and it is this crisis that will be the underlying concern in this discourse.

Man's existence as a "whole person" depends a great deal on the extent of his awareness in three areas. First, he must be aware of his own uniqueness as an individual. Second, he must be aware of some sense of community with other individuals. Third, both individual and community must be aware of that which transcends individuality and community. Signs and symbols have played an important role in making man aware of these areas of human existence. Therefore, my task will be to show how and where, in history, we can see this process of symbol-making performing the task of making man aware of his "wholeness."

II. FORMAT FOR REMAINDER OF DISSERTATION

The background, environment, and the symbolism of the Fourth Gospel will be the focal point in history for this study. The period of the Fourth Gospel is being used because of its close analogy with the present period. There is much evidence that the Fourth Gospel was written

in a period of great transition. E. F. Scott has suggested that the Gospel "is a work of transition, in which primitive Christianity is carried over into a different world of thought."³ Scott further suggest that the Gospel of John helped to effect this transition in three ways:

The transition, in the first place, is from one age to another. The date which may assigned to the Gospel with a fair degree of certainty (the first or second decade of the second century) coincides with the most critical period in the history of the Church. In that third generation after Christ the new religion had become finally separated from its historical origins. The last representatives of the Apostolic age had passed away. The primitive hopes and impulses had spent themselves. The bonds with the mother religion of Judaism, which Paul has loosened had been definitely broken. If Christianity was to endure as a living faith, it had to embody itself in new forms and come to an understanding with the ideas and interest of the modern time. It was the work of the Fourth Evangelist to transplant the religion of Christ into the new soil before its roots had time to wither. 4

In order that the religion might naturalize itself in the larger Gentile world to which, since the days of Paul, it had chiefly appealed, it required to find expression in the Hellenic modes of thought. There were elements in the Gospel message, and these among the most valuable, which could not come to their own until they had received a new embodiment in Hellenic forms. 5

It carries over the revelation of Christ from the world of outward fact to that of inward religious experience. At the time when the Gospel was written, that critical time which followed the close of the Apostolic age, Christianity was

³E. F. Scott, The Fourth Gospel (Edinburgh: Clark, 1906), p. 4

⁴Ibid., pp. 4-5. ⁵Ibid., pp. 6-7.

threatened with two great dangers, either of which would have destroyed its power as a living religion. There was a tendency on the one hand to dissolve the historical fact of the life of Jesus into a vague speculation. His life had now receded into the past and the second generation, to which His personal influence had been mediated by His own disciples had likewise disappeared. The other tendency, opposite to this was equally destructive of vital faith. There were those who clung to the mere reminiscence, which was fading more and more into the distance. Their religion was wholly a matter of tradition and was destitute of inward impulse and spiritual reality. Christianity, once separated from its historical beginnings, seemed to have no choice but to proceed in one or another of these two directions - either to evaporate as a philosophy or to petrify as a mechanical tradition. That it was able to continue as a living faith was due mainly to the work of John.⁶

How John was able to effect this transition is of great importance to this study. It is certain that the writer had at his disposal a rich heritage of symbols to choose from. The creative genius of the writer, in using the symbolisms of his time in restating the Gospel message, account a great deal for his success. Such symbols as: Logos, light, life, truth, Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, Saviour, Lord, wine, water, and bread, are all part of the language of John. The basic symbols that John used were light and life. In the confusion of his time, it is significant that the writer would lift out these two symbols to

⁶Ibid., pp. 8-9.

clarify and point man toward a fuller life. It is in the context of this kind of understanding of the function of symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, that the basic thesis of this study is stated: Black Power is the symbol on the American horizon that has the potential to function as light and life did in the time of the writing of the Fourth Gospel. Black Power is primarily concern with making black people aware of their uniqueness as a people in order that they might enter into true community with other groups. Carmichael and Hamilton have stated the fundamental principle of Black Power well:

The concept of Black Power rest on a fundamental premise. Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks. By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society. Traditionally, each new ethnic group in this society has found the route to social and political viability through the organization of its own institutions with which to represent its needs within the larger society.⁷

This statement shows clearly that Black Power takes seriously the need for individuality, as well as community, if a particular group are to fulfill themselves. In the areas of individuality and communal awareness, Black Power is making its impact felt. What about the area of our common

⁷Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 44.

human condition? What does Black Power have to say to that? Nathan Wright has spelled out what this human condition is:

Black Power, in its simplest terms, speaks to nature of humanity. The greatest problem before the churches, and before every institution in our world; is some form of the human problem. What is the human goal? Toward what end should every aspect of human life be directed. The answer given by the current impetus toward Black Power is the one word fulfillment.

The black people of America want to fulfill their potential for their own good and for the larger enrichment of the common store of all Americans.⁸

Wright continues by stating the possibility of Black Power in focusing the attention of the Church and all institutions toward this higher humanity:

By clear implication, the Black Power concept may both chasten and challenge the churches of America to at least focus upon the realities which they are called both to see and be. American religion needs to be regenerated. Black Power, as a concept emphasizing the need to bring a different focus to bear upon life and its possibilities, may open a pathway toward the renewal of American religious life.⁹

III. JUSTIFICATION FOR STUDY

The justification for this study is grounded in the hope that I might be able to further clarify a very impor-

⁸Nathan Wright, Jr., Black Power and Urban Unrest (New York: Hawthorne, 1967), p. 135.

⁹Ibid., p. 143.

tant concept for our time. Confusion about Black Power is legion, and I do not intend to add to it. But if one new spark of light shines from this study, then my work has not been in vain.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND RESOURCES

Briefly, the methodology used in this study is a historical analogy between the symbolism of the Fourth Gospel and the symbolism of Black Power, and the function they serve for their respective ages.

The resources for this study have been primarily single volume books, and periodicals. Excerpts from tapes of speeches obtained while attending several black power conferences were also used in this study, along with several unpublished works.

In order that we might have some understanding of signs and symbols and the distinction between the two, the following chapter will deal with the meaning and function of signs, symbols, symbolization and how they relate to the categories of individual and communal living.

CHAPTER II

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Susanne Langer writes: "the process of symbolization is the key to a new conception of mentality...that may illumine questions of life and consciousness, instead of obscuring them as traditional scientific methods have done."¹ In this chapter we will analyze this process (symbolization) and its components, signs and symbols, in an effort to understand its importance for better human understanding. The nature and function of signs and symbols as they relate to man's individual, communal, and transcendent life will constitute the second half of this chapter.

I. SYMBOLIZATION

Symbolization is the way by which man takes the physical reality, punctuates, categorizes, shapes it; and then transforms it into the world of sensory perception and concepts. Language is a good example of symbolization. Language is a creative process, in which the individual has an agentive function. It contains the world of physical reality, the sensing and thinking individual and the experi-

¹Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy In A New Key (New York: Mentor, 1961), p. 32.

enced reality. Words are the basic tools man use to remember and communicate his experiences. The intellectual and emotional power of words is immense. One has only to note the furor caused by the recent use of "Black Power" to realize the power of words. Words are also our basic tools for thinking. Words are not just empty labels to be applied; they have meaning, not because meaning has been arbitrarily assigned to them, but because they contain the meaning of the concrete situations in which they participate or have participated, and which they have helped to create. It is obvious that words, which forms most languages, have their limitations. In order for a word to convey meaning it must be combined with other words with certain codes, syntactical rules, and certain agreed upon denotations for each word. The first limitation that is obvious is the necessity of knowing the specific denotation of each word before one can understand the language that has been formulated. The second limitation, is that one must know how to arrange the symbols in some syntactical order too convey meaning. This stringing symbols out in a line, Langer calls discursiveness;

As it is, however, all language has a form which requires us to string out our ideas even though their objects rest one within the other; as pieces

of clothing that are actually worn one over the other have to be strung side by side on the clothesline. This property of verbal symbolism is known as discursiveness; by reason of it, only thoughts which can be arranged in this peculiar order can be spoken at all, any idea which does not lend itself to this "projection" is ineffable, incommunicable by means of words. That is why the laws of reasoning, our clearest formulation of exact expression, are sometimes known as the "Laws of discursive thought."²

Discursive thought has been very helpful in philosophical and scientific work, where there is a need for preciseness. But a great deal of our experience is not capable of being expressed in discursive forms. Some feelings, attitudes, and ideas, are too complex to be expressed discursively. Language can express feeling but not in the shape that the feeling possesses. The non-discursive form that is most capable of doing this, says Langer, is music.³ Music is, in the words of Langer, "a significant form."

Music is significant form, and its significance is that of symbol, a highly articulated sensuous object, which by virtue of its dynamic structure can express the forms of vital experience which language is peculiarly unfit to convey. Feeling life, motion, and emotion, constitute its imports.⁴

It is significant that one of the most powerful sym-

²Ibid., p. 77.

³Susanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 27.

⁴Ibid., p. 32.

bols of the Black Power Movement is the music of black people. This significance will be explored in a later chapter.

In our quest for significant organization of our psychic life many things are involved: "The conscious and unconscious emotions and feelings from the past as well as the cumulative results of previous psychic activity."⁵ Also involved "are materials received directly from the psychic life of others."⁶ These materials are combined with each other in many ways, not necessarily for "practical usefulness in the adaptation to the environment, but intrinsic satisfaction."⁷ This process of psychic activity is called symbolization:

This basic need, which certainly is obvious only in man is the need of symbolization. The symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time. Sometimes we are aware of it, sometimes we merely find its results, and realize that certain experiences have passed through our brain and have been digested there. ⁸

This basic need for symbolization is what distinguishes man from animal. Symbolization; "...actuates all

⁵John B. Cobb Jr., The Structure of Christian Existence (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 39.

⁶Ibid. ⁷Ibid.

⁸Langer, Philosophy In A New Key, p. 45.

his apparent unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value, his utterly impractical enthusiasm, and his awareness of "Beyond filled with holiness."⁹ This need for non-discursive symbol-making can be seen early in man's history as he danced, made music, and formulated ritual to expressed these "unzoological aims."

If, therefore, symbolization is a basic need of man then, "any miscarriage of the symbolic process is an abrogation of his human freedom:....Therefore interference with acts that have ritual value (conscious or unconscious) is always felt as the most intolerable injury one man, or group of men, can do to another."¹⁰ To a great extent Black Power is a reaction on the part of black people, to the interference of white people with acts and events that have ritual value and vital meaning. White America gave blackness very negative meanings which emptied it of all value. The aim of Black Power is to restore the very positive meaning and ritual value that the black experience in America has for the black man.

Man's need, therefore, for the symbol making process is just as basic as his need for food, clothing, and shelter; and consequently just as harmful if aborted in

⁹Ibid. ¹⁰Ibid., p. 244.

any way. Man needs to react, not only to the physical realities of life, but he needs to experience what he alone is aware of, the hidden realities of life. This can only be done through symbol-making: the creation of something to represent these realities. The task now is to define what we mean by symbol and make a distinction between symbol and sign.

II. SIGN AND SYMBOL

Langer writes: "Psychologically, any item that is to have meaning must be employed as a sign or a symbol; that is to say it must be a sign or a symbol to someone."¹¹ At the same time, "logically it must be capable of conveying meaning, it must be the sort of item that can thus be employed."¹² The thing that distinguishes a sign from a symbol is the way in which they each conveys meaning:

Thus whereas the sign announces or directly indicates, the symbol suggests or indirectly represents. The symbol leads the hearer or the watcher to conceive or to imagine an object or an event. It is not concerned necessarily with direct action in the way the sign must always be. Rather it is concerned necessarily with thought and imagination. 13

¹¹Ibid., p. 55. ¹²Ibid.

¹³F. W. Dillistone, Christianity and Symbolism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 25.
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1955

Contrasted with signs, symbols are not made for immediate and direct use but are stored up for future use. Symbols go beyond signs by making it possible for man to conceive an object rather than react to it directly. The sign always has a one to one relationship with its object, which requires a third and neutral party to interpret the meaning. For instance, a wet street indicates rain. A red light indicates stop. For man, the third party, the interpreter, these signs would cause him to react immediately to the wet street by walking or driving slowly, and to the red light by stopping. The same signs would mean nothing, or something different to an animal. A dog will run to meet his master at the sound of his voice, without seeing him.

Symbols on the other hand are more complex forms of signals.¹⁴ A symbol can never have a one to one relationship to the object because all a symbol really conveys is a concept, a formulation of impressions and ideas about the object.

We have discussed the psychic activity, symbolization, and its components, signs and symbols. The task, now, is to explore how these components function both indi-

¹⁴Signal in this case is used as being an inclusive term for both sign and symbols.

vidually and collectively in guiding man through life. In doing this we will rely heavily on the categories of Dillistone. Another component will be added, namely, images. According to Dillistone images operate on the unconscious level of life; signs on the conscious level; and symbols carry man beyond the conscious to the unknown. These are not isolated functions, but rather, they interact, as we shall see later, to bring about a more organized life.

III. NATURE AND FUNCTION OF IMAGES, SIGNS, AND SYMBOLS

Images: Unconsciousness

Dillistone classifies the unconscious as the lowest layer of human life which consist of two aspects "...the sea of the collective unconscious and the innumerable vessels of the individual unconscious dancing as it were upon its waters."¹⁵ The collective unconscious "has certain well defined images that seem to occur universally in myths and dreams; These myths and dreams occur independently of any conscious determination of a single individ-

¹⁵Dillistone, Op. Cit., p. 29.

ual."¹⁶ On the other hand the "individual has within his own unconsciousness certain highly specialized images, from the past, that have been entirely forgotten by the conscious mind."¹⁷ This is what makes individuals behave in unusual even eccentric ways, because of certain forces acting in their own unconscious. Neither they nor their neighbours can interpret these particular actions in terms of purely conscious drives or motivations.

Thus on the level of the unconscious we may picture a great sea over which there travel waves possessing a recognizable pattern (archetypal images). These waves inevitably influence the motion of each individual ship upon the ocean though each still possesses some small differentiating characteristic of its own. It has some guiding star, some distinctive pattern of unusual behaviour, which constitutes its own identity and governs its particular expression of the archetypal images which are ever seeking individual representation. ¹⁸

In the collective unconscious the archetypal images, which are the result of numberless experiences of the same type, exist to maintain these similar experiences. At the same time, what Dillistone call the traumatic images, exist in the unconscious to help each person maintain his identity. It is this kind of tension, between the individual and cor-

¹⁶Ibid. ¹⁷Ibid. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 30.

porate identity, that Dillistone sees existing on each level of human life. Likewise, there are certain kinds of images, signs, and symbols, when emphasized in the right proportion, which help to bring about order in both individual and corporate living. It is only as the corporate and the individual interweave on each level, and as the levels are constantly interrelated that man can live a full life. We have said that images operate on the unconscious level. Let us move on to the conscious level in the realm of signs.

Signs: Consciousness

Dillistone accepts the basic classification of signs that Langer gives, natural and artificial. But immediately he extends this division, and connects natural signs to corporate life, and artificial signs to individual experiment and development. Further extension of these categories are made by assigning the quality of similarity to corporate life, and dissimilarity or distinctiveness to individual life. Dillistone sums it up in the following manner.

Some signs belong primarily to man's communal life: some depend rather upon individual experiment and development...In all matters which concern collective or the community the important quality is similarity: in matters which concerns the ultimate establishment of individuality the important quality is that of dissimilarity or distinctiveness.¹⁹

Dillistone hastily points out that these two qualities cannot be held in complete isolation from one another: They are interrelated at every point:

.....collective life becomes an impossibility unless certain patterns or similarity can be established:...Man's primary effort in relation to his natural environment is to discover similarities and reliabilities:....Within these patterns of similarities; if individuality is to develop, some scope must be allowed for difference. Thus man's primary effort in seeking to develop his own individuality is to discover some distinctive mode of behaviour or some differentiating mark which will distinguish him from his fellows.²⁰

One can readily see that tension will always exist between these two patterns. Community life, by necessity moves toward order and similarity; individual experiment and development moves toward distinctiveness. But these two divisions by necessity are interrelated. This interrelatedness can be seen if we relate these two patterns of life to man's emotional and intellectual life.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 31. ²⁰Ibid., p. 32.

Generally speaking, intellectual activities are based upon patterns of similarities. The intellectual try to work without letting his emotion become involved; as he moves toward building some system of order and proportion. But emotion always enters into man's activities. Even while he is building this orderly system, the other side of his nature, individuality, is rebelling against the orderliness. If we approach it from the other side, emotion, any attempt by an individual or a group of individuals, to do something contrary to the pattern of society would bring the wrath of society down on those persons involved. As Dillistone writes:

On the other hand, the individual who dares to do anything contrary to the accepted pattern of society in which he lives, passes thereby through a profound emotional experience. He is defying tradition, he is challenging convention, he is venturing into the realm of the novel and the unexplored. His emotional life is shaken to its foundations and the sign which comes to be associated with the new adventure or experience always carries with it an overtone of emotional stimulus. ²¹

This interrelatedness, in the realm of signs, makes clear that man cannot make an absolute division between signs of communal living and signs for individual

²¹Ibid., p. 32.

living, but he (man) must take into account both if he is to live a safe, practical, and harmonious life with his fellows.

So far we have said that archetypal and traumatic images interact in man's unconscious life to mediate the tension that exists between the two patterns of life, individual and corporate. In the realm of conscious life, signs of similarity and dissimilarity exist to provide the same function carried on in the unconscious by images. We move now to determine what performs this function as man moves beyond the conscious. We turn to Dillistone once more for our category which he calls "transcending immediate consciousness."

Beyond Consciousness: Symbols

According to Dillistone,²² symbols likewise can be divided into those connected with individual life, and those connected with communal life. The symbols associated with corporate life are called analogical symbols. The function of analogical symbols is to advance man steadily "toward wholeness through the correlation of likeness."²³

²²Ibid., p. 33. ²³Ibid., p. 153.

Analogy and economy are the two qualities involved in building symbols of similarity.

Analogy is the process by which we build upon the known in order that we might extend it, or even universalize it. Analogy is a very powerful process because "...it always bears within it the suggestion that the object or event to which it is applied is part of a greater whole."²⁴ Many people have used, and are still using, analogy as a tool to build systems that will embrace the whole of experience. Man is able to conceive of the whole universe in terms of analogies drawn from the common similarities of human experience. Analogy helps man to bring order out of chaos as it continues to help man advance toward wholeness.

Symbols, as has been stated before, are not for direct use, but are to be stored for future use. The principle which determines the appropriateness of a symbol is economy. Economy tries to reduce the number of symbols that are involved in building orderly systems. The more compact the better they are; this is the principle of economy. We can see that analogy and economy tend to keep

²⁴Ibid., p. 152.

each other in check. Each of these principles are important for human existence and thought, but they should be held in check less they impose themselves upon the whole of experience.

.....economy can be used to the point at which a closed system of abstract formulae becomes the ideal if not the actuality and at this point the symbols reverts to the sign and the idea of similarity becomes irrelevant. The excessive use of the principle of analogy leads to the weaning of elaborate patterns of fantasy and allegory. The excessive use of the principle of economy leads to the formulation of precise and exact systems of logic, mathematics and science. 25

Analogy and economy, therefore, interact to build appropriate symbols for communal life.

The principles that interact to form symbols for individual life are intensity and metaphorical tension. They are classified as metaphorical symbols, according to Dillistone, and deal with contrast and novelty. There is usually a strong emotional experience behind these types of symbols, and they tend to leap toward the beyond and the unknown, therefore, causing tension. Again the excessive use of either principle is dangerous. Dillistone writes:

²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

The symbols which expresses the new emotion, however may be so intense so enigmatic, so highly individualized the principle of metaphorical tension is at stake; or the principle of tension can be applied with such violence that the two contrasting parts tend to break asunder and all concentration of meaning is lost. Thus the excessive use of the principle of intensity leads to the production of esoteric forms such as the riddle, the apocalypse, the mystery story; the excessive use of the principle of intensity leads to the creation of the fraudulent, the grotesque, the absurd. Even these forms may have a temporary and severly limited part to play in times of extremity, but in the hands of fanatics they become utterly destructive. 26

It is the nature of the metaphorical symbol to force itself upon a situation to which it does not belong. The metaphorical symbol points out dissimilarity between two realities and at the same time hold them together tentatively, not resolving them altogether but creating tension. This creative tension, says Dillistone, assumes the character of a prophecy of the final reconciliation of all things in the kingdom of God. Through metaphorical symbols:

.....the prophet leaps outside the circle of present experience the realm of the factual and the commonsense, the typical and the regular. He parts company with those who are travelling the surer and steadier road of analogical comparison. By one act of daring he brings into creative relationship the apparently opposite and contrary and, if his metaphorical adventure proves successful, gains new treasure both for language and for life. 27

²⁶Ibid., p. 35. ²⁷Ibid., p. 161.

We can conclude from this whole discussion, therefore, that analogical symbols are important for the communal life of man because they help to bring: "order and proportion into his experience and gains a vision of a world which is not chaotic and insecure but which possesses stabilities and regularities which make an ordered existence possible."²⁸ The metaphorical symbols are important for individual life because "By means of this expression of emotion man gains freshness of vision and renewal of energy and sees his world as a place of unlimited possibility and never-ending surprise."²⁹

The discussion in this chapter can be summarized best, by depicting in a diagrammatical way the conclusions:

	Corporate	Individual
Transcending immediate consciousness	The Analogical Symbol	The Metaphorical Symbol
Conscious	The Natural Sign	The Artificial Sign
Sub-Conscious	The Archetypal Image	The Traumatic Image

²⁸Ibid., p. 36. ²⁹Ibid.

The repression of any of these levels of experience, or the lack of constant inter-relationship between them, keeps man from moving "...towards the fullness of his destiny in relation to God, nature, and fellowman."³⁰

From this point we push on to the task of analyzing the symbolism of the Fourth Gospel to discover whether or not it aided people in its period of history in moving toward fulfillment as whole persons. In order to do that we must first look at the environment and background of John before turning to the Gospel itself. Our concern will turn primarily to religious symbols, and what has been the nature and function of religious symbols as they passed from one religion or age to the other. It is my contention that the major symbols that evolved and became a part of the Christian Faith had one underlying purpose: to move man toward a fuller Life.

³⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE FOURTH GOSPEL

I. ENVIRONMENT

Before we proceed to talk about the function of symbolism in The Fourth Gospel we must first look at the environment and background of the Gospel. The climate of the time in which the writer wrote influenced his use and choice of symbols. As was noted in the introduction, the time in which the Gospel was written was a time of transition. E. F. Scott characterizes the period in the following manner:

The first century had just ended, and the new religion was passing through the most critical years of its history. Hitherto it had been proclaimed by Apostles or Comrades of the Apostles, - men who were in immediate contact with the personal ministry of Jesus. It had centered its message on the enthusiastic hope of an imminent return of the Lord to judgement. While extending its mission through the cities of the Gentile world, it had found its chief support in Jews and Jewish proselytes, to whom the original teaching was directly intelligible. But towards the turn of the century all the conditions which had secured the initial success of Christianity underwent a change. The high enthusiasm of the early days had ebbed away. The last links with the Apostolic Age were on the point of severing and the life of Jesus had faded into a historical memory. The hope of the Lord's coming which had sustained Paul and his fellow labourers had apparently proved vain. Judaism and Christianity had come to open

quarrel; and the younger religion had to seek its future in the great Gentile world, to which its beliefs and ideals and traditions were all strange. It was evident that if the church was to survive and to maintain itself as a living power, its whole message had to be re-interpreted. 1

This was the challenge that faced the writer: to re-interpret the message of Jesus in order to keep it alive. The challenge was even more serious when we realize that several developments of far-reaching consequence had occurred just after the close of the first century:

1. The Christian movement had now identified itself fully with the Gentile world.
2. The conception of a Catholic Church had now taken root.
3. The heresies which were already springing up in the later days of Paul had made alarming progress, and were all included in what is known as the Gnostic Movement.
4. Christian thought had now become Hellenized - that is to say it worked with Greek, instead of Jewish ideas. 2

The period seems to be clearly characterized by two things. First the emergence of many new interest that tended to push the message of Jesus into the background and make it just another speculative philosophy. Second, the mode of conceiving the Christian message had changed

¹E. F. Scott, The Historical and Religious Value of The Fourth Gospel (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1909), p. 29.

²E. F. Scott, The Literature of The New Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 249.

so radically that those who held on to the old modes did so only for traditional reasons and not because the mode mediated the message as a living faith.

The period we have been discussing is commonly known as Hellenism, which might be defined simply, as the invasion of Greek ideas and thought patterns into another culture. It is generally believed that the Fourth Gospel was written somewhere between 95-115 B.C. or sometime during the first two decades of the second century. The arguments over the date of composition are too numerous and complex to deal with in this paper, and they have little bearing on the subject at hand. The point is, we can say with some assurance that the rich symbolism of the Hellenistic period was alive and available to the evangelist at the time of his writing the Gospel.

The question we must turn to now is the background and development of symbols in Judaism, and the Hellenistic religions such as, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, and Hellenistic Judaism as represented by Philo. We will conclude this chapter by exploring the Fourth Gospel, its appropriation and use of the symbolism of its time, particularly the symbols of light and life.

II. BACKGROUND

Judaism

Popular Judaism. E. R. Goodenough, in his study of Jewish symbols³ discusses the importance of Jewish symbols found in archeological remains of the Greco-Roman period for the understanding of the Jewish religion. Goodenough's argument centers around whether or not the symbols, some of them were borrowed from pagan religions, were used just for decorations or were used to express some deep religious feelings or attitudes by the Jews. Goodenough thinks they expressed deep religious attitudes and feelings, primarily because of where the symbols were used.

What is especially important to remember is that the decorations are found not as isolated expressions of individuals but in synagogues and burying places, and thus can be taken to represent the religious attitudes of Jews as communal groups.

Sporadic individual syncretism has appeared in the charms and amulets clearly enough yet even here the majority of the pieces which we have felt to be "probably Jewish" seem to use predominately and repeatedly certain common adapted motif..... Furthermore, while we have found some very simple and unadorned sites, it has become overwhelmingly obvious that Jews everywhere borrowed in much the same way, appropriated much the same symbols, and that, from East to West, they intermingled these

³E. R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in The Greco Roman Period, (New York: Pantheon, 1954)I, 3.

pagan devices with much the same selection of symbols from their own cult. ⁴

These symbols, therefore, become very important for the history of the Jewish religion, because they are found in the synagogues and cemeteries, the public places where Jews in Palestine and the diaspora alike, expressed their piety.

Goodenough, then, looks at the symbols that are found in the synagogues and cemeteries and asked the question: Why were certain symbols chosen by the Jews and others rejected. Goodenough, in tracing the development and meaning of certain symbols, particularly fish, bread and wine, concludes, that all of these religious symbols, and indeed others not discussed, have one underlying purpose: to gratify man's deepest longing for a greater life. Goodenough writes:

It is to this common foundation that our quest has been leading us and will lead us in the volumes to follow. For the roots of the symbols of form and language which we have been discussing go so deep that food, drink, nature, the fertility of the earth, the paths of the stars, birth, death, water, wine, sex (even the blending of the sexes in the hermaphrodite) all come to mean the greater security we seek now and in the future, a security which can be found only in greater life. When Jesus was made to say, "I have come that ye may have life, and that ye may have it more abundantly," he was made to announce that he was gratifying man's deepest longing. In this all religious symbols have

⁴Ibid.

blended and always will blend: the very movement of the spirit through which we may be reborn.

In adopting the rites and symbols used by their neighbors to express the gratification of this longing, in turning the Jewish Festivals into eucharist, in putting the wine and the cup upon their synagogues and graves, along with bread symbols, I cannot think that the Jews were so incredibly shallow they observed the rites as mere forms, and used for "mere ornament" symbols which meant the deepest hope of life to their neighbors. 5

From Goodenough's conclusions we can try to state more clearly and precisely what he is saying. First of all, man's deepest longing is for a more secure and greater life now and in the future. He chooses those symbols that points him toward that greater life and helps to gratify his deepest longing. This is the function of all religious symbols that have meaning for any particular group. When symbols cease to point toward a greater life here and for the future they are rejected and replaced with other symbols which take on the same function. There are, however, some symbols that are found in all religious groups and in all ages because they have the ability to function as pointers toward a greater life. Fish, bread, wine, and light are just four of the more prominent symbols that have lasted throughout the ages. As we continue we will pay

⁵Ibid., IV, 222.

special attention to the importance of light as a basic symbol for a higher life.

Rabbinic Judaism. The most important word in Jewish religious language is Torah. It has many meanings:

Its original sense is 'direction', 'instruction', 'teaching'. It is used to cover (a) 'commandments, statutes and judgements', delivered by judges, kings or lawgivers - what we should call law'; (b) oracular responses delivered by priests at the local or national shrines; and (c) religious teaching given by prophets upon the nature and character of God. His dealings in history, His purposes for His people. ⁶

The Pentateuch, prophetic teaching and commentary upon the Torah proper gave Torah even a wider connotation until it came to stand for the whole of religion regarded as divine revelation.⁷ As we look at Torah more closely it is quite obvious that its more than just a book of instructions, teachings, commandments, statutes, or laws. But, Torah is, rather, life itself.

Torah is closely connected with bread, wine, and light insofar as they symbolize the Torah. The words of Torah are life of this age and the age to come because the words of Torah are eternal.

⁶C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 75-76.

⁷Ibid., p. 76.

Although it does not appear that the manna or bread given by Moses in the Old Testament are used as symbols of Torah, some scholars have so connected the two. C. H. Dodd states in his interpretation of Exodus 15:25:

God spoke: What caused you to eat of the manna and to drink of the well? It was because you accepted the statutes and ordinances; as it is written. There He made for them a statute and an ordinance (Exod. XV. 25) Thus by merit of my bread (i.e. the bread of Torah) you ate the bread of manna, and by merit of the wine that I mixed (i.e. the wine of Torah) you drank of the water of the well, as it is written, and drink of the wine that I have mingled. ⁸

Wine, in this instance, is also a symbol of Torah. The above passage contrasts the acceptance of the statutes and ordinance with the acceptance of the Torah. The acceptance of the statutes and ordinances is not itself the taking of God's bread and wine, but it is the acceptance of the Torah which enables the Jews thus to eat and drink. In other words it is obedience to the Torah that is prerequisite to the eating of bread and wine. The Torah, therefore, becomes life and light for men in Rabbinic Judaism. "As oil is life for the world, so the words of Torah are life for the world. As oil is light for the world, so also are the words of Torah light for the world."⁹ The question concerning the origin of the liturgical formula light and life

⁸Ibid., p. 84. ⁹Ibid., pp. 84-85.

does not seem to have a clear answer. It is possible, however that the use of both symbols in the Hebrew scripture contributed to its emergence as a liturgical formula, combining life with light. We find this combination used quite frequently when we look at the Hellenistic world as we shall do now.

Hellenism

Hermeticism. The conception of God as life and light is entirely in place in the Hermetic Literature. The Hermetic Literature is very extensive and appeared under the name of Hermes Trismegistus an Ancient Egyptian sage. It is the consensus among scholars that these writings were produced in Egypt around the second and third centuries A.D.¹⁰ Much of the literature deals with astrology, magic or alchemy, but it is that group of religious writings that appears under the name of Hermes Trismegistus that concerns us in this paper.

Although it is believed that the writings did not have a consistent philosophy they did share common outlooks and a common religious spirit. The Hermetists as a whole had their minds set upon God and the eternal world. The ethical demand of religion for the Hermetists was

¹⁰Ibid., p. 11.

purification and detachment from material things. The only way of salvation for man is knowledge of God.¹¹ If there is any unity in the Hermetic writings it is in their religious attitude toward God.

The conception of God as Light and Life is an absorbing interest in some of the Hermetic writings. In the tractate called Poimandres the conception of the divine as life and light receives special emphasis. C. H. Dodd examines this tractate closely at certain points and concludes basically that the purpose of the myth in the tractate was to help the reader to realize that "The secret of immortality in fact is the knowledge that God is life and light and we are his offspring."¹² The important things about the myth for our purpose is its use of Logos and light. Instead of citing the entire myth, we will cite only the interpretation:

The light is not a real visible light, but a symbol of nous of God. Similarly the Logos may not be a real audible word...That light, say Poimandres, is I, your God, who existed before the moist nature which appeared out of darkness; and the luminous word...Out of Mind is the Son of God. The light therefore is not a real visible light, but a symbol for divine Mind; and the word is not a real audible word, but a symbol for the Son of God. 13

Dodd concludes:

¹¹Ibid., p. 14. ¹²Ibid., p. 36. ¹³Ibid., p. 38.

That could only mean that the Logos, in man is the faculty of seeing and hearing, and it is the offspring of God...that the Logos of the Poimandres is not simply a word; it is the thought of God which imposed differentiation upon undifferentiated chaos, and it is virtually, equated with the immanent reason of the universe. 14

In this myth it seems clear that the Son of Man is God's Son and He (God's Son) is the light of the world. This language recalls the language of the Fourth Gospel concerning Christ. Dodd sums it up thus:

The Son of Man is God's Son, beloved by His Father, and like Him; He is the light of the world and the life of men; He descends into chaos,¹⁵ and takes on a material body. He ascends again to His Father, and those who are united with Him have knowledge of God and enter into life and light. 16

The concepts of life and light in the Hermetic writings have some affinity with the Fourth Gospel but there are obvious differences which will be discussed when we turn to the Fourth Gospel. Now we must move on and investigate another likely influence on the Fourth Gospel, Gnosticism.

Gnosticism. Gnosticism was not a movement as much as it was a group of religious systems described by reli-

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 39-40.

¹⁵My translation of Greek words.

¹⁶Dodd, Op. Cit., p. 43.

gious thinkers, such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Basilides, and Valentinus. "All gnostic systems rest upon a metaphysical dualism. The authors of these systems are haunted by a sense of the misery and futility of human life in this world."¹⁷ This situation exists, according to the Gnostic writers, because we are imprisoned in a material body which is a part of the material world. "The idea is that this material world, of which we are a part, is separated off from a higher world above it, superior to it in all respects."¹⁸ Despite the separation between that higher and this lower world, men still desire to rise to the higher, and that would indicate that there is some kind of aboriginal relation between this world and the other.¹⁹ The various systems, therefore, attempt to give an account of the way in which this relation is to be conceived. Thus, according to Basilides:

In the beginning there were light and darkness....When each of these came to recognition of the other, and the darkness contemplated the light, the darkness as if seized with desire of the better thing pursued after it, and desired to be mingled with it and to participate in it. But while the darkness did this, the light by no means received anything of the darkness 'into itself, nor desired anything of it, albeit it too suffered the desire to behold. So it beheld the darkness as if in a mirror. Thus a certain colour of light alone came to the darkness....Hence there is no perfect good in this world, and what there

¹⁷Ibid., p. 103. ¹⁸Ibid. ¹⁹Ibid.

is of good at all is very little...Nevertheless by reason of this little bit of light, or rather of this sort of appearance of light, the creatures had power to generate a likeness tending towards that admixture which they had conceived from the light. 20

This little bit of light Basilides talks about is hidden in the darkness of the material body. The only way one can escape the darkness of this world is through knowledge of the higher world. An angel of the higher world will come down and bring that knowledge to those who have that small spark of life. According to the myth, all do not have the light, only a chosen few. All Gnostic systems are based upon this sharp contrast of higher and lower, light and darkness. While it might be true that the author of the Fourth Gospel knew of the Gnostic systems and possibly borrowed this dualistic concept of higher and lower, he did not describe the relationship between the two in the same way. Although John, no doubt, borrowed the dualistic concept of higher and lower, light and darkness from many sources, he used it to describe a different type of relationship. There is not the sharp contrast between this world and the world above in John, although, there is a distinction made. The total rejection of the world as the way to salvation does not appear in the Gospel as it does in the Gnostic systems. For John, the dualism of light

²⁰Ibid., pp. 103-4.

and darkness means something more than it did to ancient man and the Hellenistic world. This something more we will explore later, but first we must look at the last influence on the Fourth Gospel we are to deal with in this paper, Hellenistic Judaism, represented primarily by Philo of Alexandria.

Hellenistic Judaism. Philo of Alexandria is perhaps the best known figure of the Hellenistic world. He was a prolific writer, so we cannot deal with all of the subjects he wrote on in this short paper. The most important subject for our purpose is the Logos doctrine which he dealt with extensively.

Greek philosophy was chiefly represented in the first and second centuries by Stoicism; and the central doctrine of Stoicism was that of the Logos, or immanent Reason of the World. Philo, a Jewish thinker of Alexandria, attempted to reconcile Greek philosophy with the Old Testament on the ground of this Stoic doctrine.

The Greek term "Logos" signifies "word" as well as "reason"; and Philo had availed himself of this double meaning. Into the Old Testament allusions to the Creative and revealing word of God he had read the Philosophical conception of the Logos; and had thus evolved that theory that within the being of God there was a secondary divine principle, the Word or Logos, which was

His agent in the creation and government of the world. 21

Philo's use of the Logos and its parallel use in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel, is a key argument used by some to show a wider dependence of John on Philo. This argument becomes weak when realized that the title Logos plays a minor role in the total Gospel. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus becomes the Logos and also the Light and Life of the world. It is this use of light and life that we find, not a dependence of John on Philo. But we find evidence that points toward a common background.

There is a real affinity between Philo's use of the light symbolism and John's use. Philo says "God is light", but He is not only light, He is the archetype of every other light. Philo is speaking of the eternal idea of light, of which all empirical lights are transient copies. For John and for Philo, the eternal, the Father to whom the Logos is Son, is prior to all archetypes.²² In John 1:5 - we learn that the archetypal light shone in the darkness. It enlightens every man, because in every man dwells that essential humanity which springs from the Father who is light and life. From the prologue of the

²¹Scott, The Historical and Religious Value...., p. 34.

²²Dodd, Op. Cit., p. 55.

Fourth Gospel, one might conclude that the evangelist intended to indicate a metaphysic of this kind as the presupposition of his theology. Beyond this point John has no interest in metaphysic. The doctrine of the archetypal light is not the substance of what John means by light. John's meaning of light will be taken up in the next section.

Whatever other elements of thought may enter into the background of the Fourth Gospel, it seems clear that there is evidence of common background for both Philo and John. The striking difference is found in their treatment of that common background. This difference can be seen in their treatment of the Logos. Dodd sums up the difference in the following manner:

....the evangelist conceives of the Logos as incarnate, and of the true Man as not merely dwelling as mind in all men, but as actually living and dying on earth as a man. This means that the Logos, which in Philo is never personal, except in a fluctuating series of metaphors, is in the Gospel fully personal, standing in personal relations both with God and with men, and having a place in history. As a result, those elements of personal piety, faith, and love, which are present in Philo's religion but not fully integrated into his philosophy, come to their own in the Gospel. 23

Let us move on to the Fourth Gospel and explore more in depth its use of the rich symbolism and thought

²³Ibid., p. 73.

that was available to its writer. We will try to discern the task that was before the writer of the Fourth Gospel and how he approached that task.

III. TASK AND METHODOLOGY

The Task

We have noted in a previous chapter that the writer of the Fourth Gospel wrote during an age of transition. The age was characterized, religiously, by the rise of many religious movements primarily under two heading: the mystery religions and the Gnostic movement. The Christian movement had identified itself fully with the Gentile world. And Christian thought had become Hellenized - that is to say, it worked with Greek, as well as with Jewish ideas.

Colwell²⁴ has suggested that John rendered invaluable service to two distinct Christian groups, "One of these groups was the small local church to which he belonged; the other was the Christian church of the entire Graeco-Roman world as it existed in the second century."²⁵ The primary task for the evangelist, says Colwell, was to

²⁴Ernest C. Colwell, John Defends The Gospel (Chicago: Clark, 1936), p. 142.

²⁵Ibid.

meet the needs of this small group. Colwell described them as being:

A Gentile group with some degree of prestige. The members of the group were not typical Christians of the second century. In the possession of a little money and a little culture, and in the extent of their interest in gnosis, they stood apart from the main stream of Christian development that led to the formation of the Catholic Church. They were more anti-Semitic than the majority of the Christians; they were less interested in the human Jesus; they were more concerned with a contemplative mysticism and less interested in ritual than was the case with the majority of the followers of Jesus in the second century. 26

These were the first readers of the Gospel, this was the audience that John wrote for. They were

...members of a social group that possessed enough culture to be conscious of the fact. They were an Anti-Semitic group, patriotic citizens of the Roman Empire. Deeply religious and interested in the attainment of individual salvation (i.e., immortality), they turned away from the crude myths and rites and extravagant ecstasy of the mysteries to a more "learned" path to salvation. Knowledge, Life, Light and Truth were the goals toward which they turned their eyes; contemplation of a divine revelation was the technique by which they achieved salvation. 27

The polemic against the Jews in John 7:1-52; 8:12-59, and the relocating of incidents to make Jesus' life more worthy and dignified are examples of the evangelist trying to bring the Gospel into closer accord with the interest and prejudices of the well-to-do Christians of the second cen-

²⁶Ibid., p. 143. ²⁷Ibid., p. 151.

ture. The most notably attempt to make Jesus' life more worthy is the evangelist's view of the origin of Jesus. The real origin of Jesus is from above, according to the Fourth evangelist. There is a continuous controversy throughout the gospel concerning Jesus' origin. This controversy is seen in the following passage:

The Jews then murmured at him because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." They said, "is not this Jesus the Son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say "I have come down from heaven?" (John 6:41-42).

Although John's main task was the service he rendered to the small group, his task was much broader whether he was conscious of it or not. His much broader task was to make Christianity more palatable for the Gentile Christian community as well as for other religious movements of that day. The movement of Christianity from Judaism to the Gentiles created a need for a Gospel more Gentile and less Jewish. This John produced by retelling the gospel story in language that was less Jewish, and in the type of religious experience it portrayed. Colwell says: "An important part of the achievement was the definite and unmistakable presentation of Jesus as a divine being, a God. No less a definition could ever have won

Christianity an important place in the highly competitive religious life of the Graeco-Roman world."²⁸ In John, Jesus is divine-not in some mysterious fashion, as in the case of Mark, but openly, consistently and gloriously divine. The pages of the Fourth Gospel are filled with Jesus proclaiming his divinity. Every action by Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is done that He may show forth his divineness. A man is born blind in order that Jesus by healing him might show himself as the light of the world (John 9:1-10). Jesus lets Lazarus die, and stays away from the sisters for four days so that the resurrection of Lazarus may demonstrate that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:1-44).

It has been recognized for a long time that John rendered a valuable service to the broader world of his time. More and more scholars have come to recognize that John rendered his completest service (using the words of Colwell) to the small congregation to which he belonged. The task of writing a gospel for this group was carried out very skillfully by the writer:

He conserved the framework and outline of the familiar gospel story; but by a skillful use of the allegorical method of interpretation he gave it a new meaning - a meaning that was

²⁸Ibid., p. 143.

vital and significant to the members of his own Christian group. The Gospel has never been more boldly or more efficiently modernized than it was at the hands of the beloved disciple. His religious insight was equalled by his courage; to the modernist of this trembling generation he is not only the beloved disciple but also the brave disciple. He dared to say that Jesus' disciples would surpass their Master in religious works; he promised to the future a fuller message than Jesus' own. He laid a strong hand upon the church's stories about its Lord and reshaped them closer to the needs of his own group. He was a successful apologist in that he defended the faith by making it meaningful to his own community. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them completely." 29

Although his "completest service" was to this minority group, the more lasting service was to the wider group. The service to the minority group was transitory, brief, and necessary. But out of the concern for a minority group came an instrument that preserved the framework of the Gospel message and aided immeasurably in the expansion of the Christian Church among the Gentiles. This instrument is the Fourth Gospel: the Gospel of Light and Life.

One important point must be noted from the above discussion. Although the evangelist of the Fourth Gospel was primarily interested in serving an individual minority group it was through necessity that he also had to interact with the world around him. There had to be that inter-relatedness between the individual group and the larger

²⁹Ibid., p. 151.

community if either were to be served adequately.

John follows in a sort of biblical tradition in his concern for a particular group of people. If we can accept the words of James Cone, this concern for a certain group has a biblical foundation. The Christian God, who is the God of Israel, is not a God of all people but is the God of the oppressed, the poor, the unwanted in our society. According to Cone, this all started with the God of the Israelites, concerned for the nation Israel who were held in captivity and slavery by Egypt. God's concern for the poor, within the nation Israel is evident in the prophetic movement. The continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament is seen in Jesus' concern for the poor, the outcast, the unwanted. The universal note of the Christian faith comes in the resurrection, says Cone, when God declares himself the God of all the poor and unwanted regardless of nation or race.³⁰ The point is that it is a fact of history that much of universal value has come from a focus in history on a particular group of people. This is especially true when the focus is on the essential humanity of a people. The desire, on the part of all people,

³⁰From the forthcoming book: James Cone "A Black Theology of Revolution" (September 1970).

to be as fully human as their potential will allow is a universal desire. It is to the credit of the Fourth Gospel that it points man toward a higher humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Unlike the other religious movement we have discussed, light and life is now centered in a person, Jesus.

Methodology

Basically, the evangelist method for glorifying Jesus as Light and Life is seen in his use of signs. This is accomplished by taking apparently barren and insignificant incidents, and through the use of symbols, such as light, life, bread, and wine, allegorical interpretation, and discourse, make them significant events. The feeding of the five thousand is a notable example. This event remains just another meal that a group of hungry people partook of until the reference is made to the loaves: "You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (6:26). The reference to the loaves led to several steps in the progression from an ordinary event to a significant event. First, it led to the idea of the heavenly bread, not yet equated with Jesus, but placed more in the category of the manna in the wilder-

ness. This, in turn, led to the eager request: "Give us this bread always" (6:34). A second step is taken when Jesus explicitly states: "I am the bread of life" (6:48). "I have come down from heaven." (6:50) This led to a discussion concerning the origin of Jesus. Jesus tries to clarify the situation by stating: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (6:51). The Jews, being physically oriented, ask the question: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (6:52). Jesus answered, saying: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you" (6:53). Being offended by this eating of flesh and drinking of blood the Jews responded by saying: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (6:60). Jesus responds with the clinching statement: "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (6:63)

This statement throws light on all that has gone before. Now we can see that Jesus was leading them from a lower level of humanity to a higher level, from the physical to the spiritual. We can see the same thing happening

as John appropriates the symbol light in his portrayal of Jesus. If we look at the dualistic concept, light and darkness we can see that light means something more than it did to ancient man and the Hellenistic world.

Light and Darkness.

We have mentioned before that the doctrine of the archetypal light was not the substance of John's Gospel but a metaphysical presupposition for his theology. The determining fact of the Gospel is that the archetypal light was manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the light in which we see light; that is, He is truth, reality revealed. He mediates to man that knowledge of God which is eternal life. Thus when John speaks of the light coming into the world he is always thinking of the appearance of Jesus Christ in history. In John the world (cosmos) means primarily the world of men. The essence of the world of men is darkness - darkness not as a shadow lying upon the world but as its own peculiar nature in which it is at ease and at home. John 3:19 expresses it well: the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light. It is the very nature of man to appropriate the darkness rather than light. Men are blind, without knowing

it and without wanting to acknowledge it. The cosmos in essence is living in falsehood, existing in bondage, being under the sway of death. Thus the dualistic concept of light and darkness, truth and falsehood, freedom and bondage, life and death, appear in John as contrasting ways of existence. Darkness, falsehood, sin and death are enemies of light and truth, freedom and life.

However, we have not dealt adequately with the meaning of light in Johannine context. Naturally, in John it means the same as in religious language everywhere, that which is beneficial. The true light which John talks about is not just the daylight in which man is able not only to orient himself about objects but also to understand himself in his world and find his way in it. But the true light illumines one's existence, and illumination in and by which a man understands himself, achieves a self-understanding which opens up his way to him, guides all his conduct, and gives him clarity and assurance. Since creation is a revelation of God, and the word is at work as the light in the world, then man has the possibility of understanding himself as God's creature. Darkness, then means that man does not seize this possibility, that he shuts himself up

against the God revealed in the creation. Darkness is illusory self-understanding; light is genuine self-understanding. Darkness is the turning away from the origin of one's existence, away from that which alone offers the possibility of illumining one's existence.

The world still remains the creation of God even though man rebels against God, against the truth. Man produces his own reality which seems to be real but is actually a lie, a nothing. The world, therefore, is in bondage because it has disowned God the creator as its origin, and consequently have fallen into the hands of nothing. But freedom comes when the world acknowledges the truth and opens itself to the reality from which alone it can live. Thus the concepts light, truth, life and freedom explain each other: so do the concepts darkness, falsehood, death and bondage in the contrasting group. They all derive their meaning from the search for human existence, and denote the double possibility of human existence: to exist either from God or from man himself. It is only through the knowledge of his creaturehood can man achieve freedom from darkness, falsehood, bondage, and death. An only in such freedom does man have light (life), for in that freedom he is living out of and by his true origin.

The one striking difference we can see between John and other movements such as Gnosticism and Hermeticism is the lack of the ascetic note. The Johannine message lacks altogether the ascetic note so frequently sounded in Gnosticism. The candidate for the Hermetic initiation went through an ascetic preparation for he had to learn to hate the world of sense before he could gain spiritual birth. In John the story of Jesus replaces the initiation rite. Belief becomes the central path to salvation. The struggle between good and evil, light and darkness takes place outside the believer, and in the process Jesus is the triumphant one. "The believer enters into the triumph by believing in Jesus who brought life from the divine upper world to this human world."³¹

All of the symbolism in John, in the final analysis, points toward Jesus who is Light and Life. Jesus is the light that illumines all life and existence. The function of symbolism in John, as in all other religious symbols, is to illumine this life and point man toward a higher life. In the religious thinking of John's day this higher life was seen in initiation rites and salvation myths. In the Fourth Gospel this higher life is seen in a

³¹Colwell, Op. Cit., p. 140.

personality, Jesus.

IV. SUMMARY

Before we move on to the next chapter on "Black Power," we must summarize what has been said at this point. We started with three things that must happen if man is to live a full life. First he must be aware of his own uniqueness as an individual. Second, he must be aware of some sense of community with other individuals. Third, both individual and community must be aware of that higher life that transcends individuality and community. Using the categories of Dillistone, unconsciousness, consciousness, and transcending consciousness, we discussed the qualities that operate on each level in making man aware in the three areas mentioned, and at the same time integrating each level of awareness to bring about a "whole person." We concluded that man can live a full life only when he operates fully on each level of experience; and, at the same time there is constant inter-relationship between the three levels of experience. The Fourth Gospel, its background, environment, and symbolism, was chosen as a historical background to show how symbolism has functioned to

to bring about this "wholeness" in life. It was stated that all religious symbols try to point man toward a higher life. In order to prove this we traced the use of symbolism in certain religious movements that influenced the writer of the Fourth Gospel. The symbols light and life were singled out as being common symbols for all of these religious movements. Turning to the Fourth Gospel we found that the evangelist also used the symbols light and life and centered them in a person, Jesus. Finally we concluded that the function of symbolism in the Fourth Gospel, was, to illumine this life and point man to that higher and fuller life in Jesus.

We turn now to the "Black Power Movement." Whatever other function the symbolism of the Black Power Movement serves, it is basically a religious symbol, for it serves not only to illumine this life, but to point man toward a higher life. This we will show in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

BLACK POWER

Nathan Wright, in his book Black Power and Urban Unrest recalls the following incident:

Not long ago I sat with a group of men who to me were as great as they were serious and perplexed. They were alarmed at the recent turn of events, in which people long working together apparently in unity for the good of all in America, had turned their backs or retreated in the area of civil rights. Some of these men spoke in terms of gloom and of dismay. We all listened attentively, and then one clergyman present suggested that there was at least one person in the room who did not accept the spirit of the conversation. He was asked the reason why. His answer came in a way that should give our hearts cause for rejoicing.

He said that for years he had hoped that somehow and in some way the issues in the area of civil rights and of race relations and of every form of inequity for any and all people could be made far more clear than they had been. People with so many mixed and different motives were working together for apparently good and noble purposes in an effectively neutralizing way. Yet there were no sharp and plain criteria for finding out just exactly where the battle lines could be clearly drawn. Then came the issue of power, and for him light came suddenly out of darkness. These he said, who worked for the immediate and equitable extension of power were on the side of God who sought to be revealed in the here and now as a God of Power, of majesty and of might. Those who would withhold or make light of the need for the equitable extension of power were, whatever their verbal protestations, fundamentally on the other side.

He went on to explain that whether the backlash grew or diminished, from the day of that revelation, it mattered very little. For to him, nothing short of the long-awaited day of the Lord had come, where the sheep might be separated from the goats. If those who are for more equitable power, he said, were only few in number, as they might appear at this hour to be, then with the battle lines clearly and unmistakably drawn we might-with the prophet Elisha-at last look up into heavens and recognize as we see the host of heaven and the chariots of fire "They that are with us are more than they who are against us. ¹

This incident, related by Wright, is important for our study for two reasons. First of all it points out the need for clarification in the area of race relations. Second, it designates power as that symbol that brought light out of darkness. At last a symbol emerged that pointed to the real issue: "life." For we finally came to realize that there is no life without power, power to affirm one's personhood, power to determine one's life style. Power and Life becomes the new religious symbols that points man toward a higher humanity. More specifically, Black Power and Life speaks to a particular people, who find themselves in a state of powerlessness. Black Power says: unless blacks are given the power to determine not only their economic, social and political life, but also the power to define who

¹Nathan Wright, Jr., Black Power and Urban Unrest (New York: Hawthorne, 1957), pp. 67-68.

they are, unless this is done black people can never live life in its fullness. Although the emphasis in the Black Power Movement has been on economic, social and political power, ultimately the aim is for that inner power that one discovers when he realizes his worth and dignity as a human being. It is not my intention to minimize the need for power in the economic, social and political life of black people, for power is most important in these areas. But without the power to define who you are, a human being, one finds life not worth living. To state it another way: without knowing who you are you are not likely to care where you are going and how you are going to get there. Black Power, then, speaks basically to the nature of humanity and raise these questions for all humanity: What is the human goal? Toward what end should every aspect of human life be directed? Black Power's answer to these questions is fulfillment. The opportunity for all people and particularly black people to fulfill their potential as human beings and lift man to a higher life. Black Power, then, becomes a religious symbol by our definition, insofar as it points man toward a higher life.

It seems very clear that Black Power has clarified the issue in this period of change and transition. A peri-

od characterized by challenge to the values of all of our basic institutions. A period that has been termed the post-Christian era, where the traditional Christian values of honesty, hard work, loyalty, etc. have faded into the background. Christians have pronounced God dead, and traditional symbols that had meaning for man in the past have been discarded and have not been replaced. It was in a similar situation that the writer of the Fourth Gospel boldly reinterpreted the Christian message by using the symbolism of his time and giving it new meaning. If Christianity is to survive in the present situation, the same type of boldness exhibited by the writer of the Fourth Gospel must manifest itself in an individual or a group. It is this kind of task that I envision Black Power maintaining, and those who advocate it, performing. Black people in America have an opportunity, perhaps the last opportunity, to keep Christianity alive for all mankind. In order to do this, we must be willing to reinterpret radically the Christian message for black people in the light of their unique history. In doing this we might be able to point all mankind toward a higher life than we now enjoy.

In the pages before us, our concern will turn to trace that unique history of black people to the present

time, and then, to show why Black Power has this potential of pointing man toward a higher life.

Three periods of the black man's history in America stand out. First, the period of slavery and segregation. Second, the period of integration. Third, the present period of the Black Power Movement. There are certain images, signs and symbols that seem to be operating during these periods. These will be explored along with the periods aforementioned.

I. TOWARD INTEGRATION

Slavery

The system of slavery was built on the basic assumption that there were inherent differences between the white and black populations. This assumption led to the careful separation of the races. Subsequently this led to the creation of "The Negro's World." From the very beginning, the system of slavery denied the basic humanity, dignity, and worth of the black man. What white people were by virtue of being alive became a goal to be achieved for black people in America. To be human was something in the future for black people in America. They were taken from their homeland, Africa, and stripped bare both psychological and physically, and placed in a strange land. They

occupied the position of slave which ranked somewhere between cattle and men, according to the laws of the land.

John Hope Franklin writes:

Slaves were a special kind of property, not quite like houses or beast of burden yet not quite like people. As property they required special laws for their owner's protection. As potential threats to the peace they required special laws for the protection of all whites. A slave could not be a party to a suit of law. He could not offer legal testimony except against another slave or a free Negro. He could not make a contract and his marriage was, consequently, not legal and his children were not legitimate. The ownership of property was generally forbidden, although some states permitted slaves to possess certain kinds of property. A slave could not strike any white person in self defense; and any white person could challenge any slave found to be away from his owner to discover the slave had permission to absent himself. ²

These and many other restrictions grew and grew, until slaves were trapped in a complicated maze from which there was almost no escape. The elaborate and inhumane laws were supposedly created for the good of black people but this was only a rationalization to justify imposing the laws on black people. For certainly one cannot recognize anything good for black people in such an elaborate system of restrictions. The uniqueness and humanity of black people were completely ignored.

² John Hope Franklin, "Slavery", Life, LXV (November 22, 1968), 110.

Thus, we can see the rise of symbols and signs of distinctiveness which were allowed to spread and dominate the American scene. Dignity, worth, and humanity were symbolized by the culture of White Anglo Saxons. The white female symbolized all that was pure and virtuous; the white male symbolized all that was manly and potent. White symbolized that which was pure and good; black symbolized that which was bad and evil. This emphasis on distinctiveness, promoted by a certain group, had far reaching implications for America as it developed into a powerful nation. It has created numerous problems of a political, social, and economic nature that have confounded both Negroes and Caucasians who have sought solutions to them. The emphasis on distinctiveness left little room for communal life. The only communal life possible was based on common culture, common standards, and non-recognition of pluralism.

The core of the matter, however, is found in the basic assumption on which the distinction is made in the first place. That assumption is, that one group, namely, black people are not human beings; whereas the other group, namely, white people are the epitome of what it means to be human. It is this basic assumption which underlies the problem of race relation in this country,

and which has not been dealt with adequately. All attempts to deal with the problem served to further degrade the humanity of black people.

Segregation

By 1863, when slavery was abolished, black people had been stripped of their culture and placed within a white, racist, hostile world. In order to insure that distance between the races were maintained, white people developed the system of segregation. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, and the early part of the nineteenth century, much propaganda fell from the lips of white racist as they harangued about the inferiority of black people. Made in the image of white people, black people became animals with a violence to murder, ravaging, sexual impulses. Black people were stupid, lazy, dity, happy-go lucky and irresponsible. Blackness was made the symbol of evil and no good, whiteness became the symbol of right and good. The mass media aided in this whitewashing by disseminating, with vigor, these images on radio, in magazines, newspaper, and movies. Through this mass propaganda machine, aided not only by whites but by blacks as well who came to hate themselves, through this intense degrad-

ing, black people became very unacceptable. They were disenfranchised, terrorized, mutilated and lynched.

But the worst part of the whole system is seen in what it did and is still doing to the basic humanity of black and white people. The more white people degraded the humanity of black people the more their basic humanity diminished. Another way of saying it is through the language of Reuel Howe. "I" cannot reach fulfillment without "thou." If we try to encounter a "thou" or person on any other level than his personhood, his resistance will force us either to take him seriously as a person or find some way to escape the encounter. If we choose to escape, we may build an image of him that meets our need and then relate to him as if he were that image rather than himself. Or we may choose to escape by surrendering our own ego integrity to his and pretend a compatibility that cannot possibly exist.³ In either case the basic humanity of the I of myself and the thou of the other person is diminished. The first of these two means of escape can be seen operating in the development of segregation. The white man constructed an image of black people, that not only met his psychological need for feeling superior, but also

³Reuel L. Howe, Miracle of Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), pp. 64-65.

to justify his treatment of black people for economic, social and political reasons.

Segregation, therefore, as a solution to the problem of race relations failed miserably, mainly because it completely ignored the underlying assumption of the problem. In fact, the basic assumption that black people were less than human, was fast becoming institutionalized. The caste system, produced by segregation and discrimination, also produced institutionalized symbols of caste inferiority such as segregated schools, churches, neighborhoods, etc. The caste system has done irreparable damage to the psyche of black people in America. The damage to the white psyche is just beginning to rear its ugly head, manifesting itself in today's generation of white youth. Admittedly, very few people really thought segregation was the answer to the racial problem, but a lot of people hoped it would be.

The inevitable resistance that emerged from oppressed black people forced the white society to look for other solutions. The solution finally agreed upon is popularly known as "integration."

II. INTEGRATION

The Niagara Movement

The real push for integration began with the Niagara Movement which later grew into the National Association For The Advancement of Colored People. The Niagara Movement, under the leadership of W. E. B. Dubois, was composed of a group of young men determined to organize for aggressive action in order to secure full citizenship for black people. In June, 1905, they met in Niagara Falls, Canada, and drew up a platform for aggressive action:

Among other things they demanded freedom of speech and criticism, manhood suffrage, the abolition of all distinctions based on race, the recognition of the basic principles of human brotherhood, and respect for the working man.⁴

They incorporated themselves as the Niagara Movement in 1905 and the following year met at Harpers Ferry where many resolutions were written by Dubois. The resolution called basically for consideration on the basis of the common humanity of all men. In part the resolution says:

In the past year the work of the Negro hater has flourished in the land. Step by step the defenders of the rights of American citizens have retreated. The work of stealing the black man's ballot has progressed and the fifty and more

⁴John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 445.

representatives of stolen votes still sit in the nation's capital...Never before in the modern age has a great and civilized folk threatened to adopt so cowardly a creed in the treatment of its fellow-citizens, born and bred on its soil. Stripped of verbose subterfuge and in its naked nastiness, the new American creed says: fear to let black men even try to rise lest they become the equals of the white. And this in the land that professes to follow Jesus Christ. The blasphemy of such a course is only matched by its cowardice. ⁵

Although the Niagara Movement lasted a very short time, it was significant for two reasons. First, it was the initial organized attempt to protest the white reaction by whites after the Reconstruction. Second, it seemingly, sensed the basic underlying cause of the problem: the denial of the basic humanity of people, particularly black people. The Niagara Movement however was absorbed by another organization that came to be known as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The N.A.A.C.P.

On February 12, 1909, a group of white people, their sensibility shocked by the evils of racism, decided to call a conference to voice their protest against the humiliation heaped upon black people through the system of

⁵Ibid.

forced segregation. The young men from the Niagara Movement were invited to attend the conference but some declined the invitation because they were suspicious of the motives of white people. Most of the men, however, attended the conference out of which plans came to establish the organization that is known worldwide today as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It was formally organized in May, 1910.

The organization pledged itself to work for the abolition of all forced segregation, equal education for Negro and white children, the complete enfranchisement of the Negro, and the enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. ⁶

It was out of a deep concern, therefore, on the part of some whites, and blacks, for the plight of black people in America, that the concept of integration arose. The N.A.A.C.P. concentrated mainly on destroying lynching, securing the franchise for black people, and putting an end to all forms of segregation. The main emphasis was on getting black people into the mainstream of white society. As Carmichael puts it: "According to its advocates, social justice will be accomplished by integrating black people into the mainstream institutions of the society from which

⁶Ibid., pp. 446-47.

he had been traditionally excluded." 7

The question of equality became in the scheme of integration a principle to be deliberately applied, a legalistic model. Dorothy Lee, however, gives a more interesting view on the principle of equality. She says:

....that the principle of equality is adequate to democracy only when it derives naturally from the tenet of the dignity of man, only when it is a by product of the absolute and permeating respect for human worth. In the Western World, at any rate in recent years, the roles of these two principles have been reversed to a certain extent; equality has not been viewed as incidental to respect for individual worth, but has been considered instead as a measure to bring about respect for human worth. To this extent it has been for the West not an inalienable aspect of the respect for man, not necessary to the definition of democracy but rather something additive and external, something to be applied, or a means to achieve a desired end. 8

In spite of the good intention and deep concern that the black and white advocates of integration had (and I do feel they were deeply concerned) integration became a technique by which black people were to be assimilated into a white hostile culture if black people rejected their own culture. Black people were to be assimilated into a symbolic system that left no room for differences. A system that had been carefully built through the excessive use of

⁷Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 53.

⁸Dorothy Lee, Freedom and Culture (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 39.

similar symbols based upon the principles of analogy and economy. Economy which restricts the type and amount of symbols; analogy that create fantasies, obscuring the truth. This symbolic arrangement created a closed system in American society. A society that, in reality, could not tolerate differences in whites or blacks. However, it was more devastating for blacks, because nothing that reminded them of their uniqueness as black people was tolerated or allowed into the mainstream of American society. American society became anti-black and all American institutions symbolized this anti-black feeling. Black people, therefore, in order to enter the mainstream of American society used the second way suggested earlier in this chapter, for escaping encounter with people as "thou's."

Black people surrendered their ego integrity, their opportunity to be brought into being, to white people, deceiving themselves that everything would be compatible. The history of this kind of an arrangement, that emerged in the integration process, has shown very clearly, that there can be no compatibility unless we meet as person to person. We need the courage to take all people seriously as persons, and meet them on that level. It is only when we do this that we can be pointed and lifted toward a

higher life.

Nonviolent Movement

Nonviolence as a solution to the inhumane condition in American society grew out of the philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr. Combining Gandhi's method of passive resistance with the ethics of Christian love, King led massive nonviolent marches against the system of injustice in American society. It might be interesting, at this point, to outline the characteristics of nonviolent resistance as King saw them:

First, it must be emphasized that nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards; it does resist. If one uses this method because he is afraid or merely because he lacks the instruments of violence, he is not truly nonviolent....A second basic fact that characterizes nonviolence is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding....A third characteristic of this method is that the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil....A fourth point that characterizes nonviolent resistance is a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back....A fifth point concerning nonviolent resistance is that it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him....A sixth basic fact about nonviolent resistance is that it is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of

justice. Consequently, the believer in nonviolence has deep faith in the future. This faith is another reason why the nonviolent resister can accept suffering without retaliation.⁹

With the kind of conditions outlined above, the nonviolent resistance movement proceeded to accomplish basically two things. First, it called the nation's and world's attention to the inhumane system that existed in America, in a way that had never been done before. Second, although the focus was on black people, other groups began to recognize that their plight had some affinity with black peoples' plight in America. Some whites, Indians, Latins and other groups began to join the nonviolent resistant movement.

Despite this great breakthrough in the recognition of common humanity among some groups, the nonviolent movement was never a widespread, popular movement, not even in the South where it was concentrated. The reason for this is perhaps twofold. First, it seem somewhat unrealistic to expect a people that have been exploited by violence to go out voluntarily asking for more of the same without retaliating. This is hard to expect even with the promise of better lives for those who participate. The second reason

⁹Martin Luther King, Jr., Stride Toward Freedom (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 83-88.

the movement was never very widespread was because most of the people in it were never committed to it as a way of life. King and perhaps a few others adopted nonviolence as their life-style. Most of the people were middle class whites and blacks trying to soothe their consciences.

The nonviolent movement, despite all its accomplishments, perpetuated white violence upon black people which had always been a part of the system. Despite the love and admiration that most black people had for Dr. King, to be asked to suffer violence for nonviolence's sake was asking to much. For in the final analysis we were still doing violence to the personhood of each other for the sake of maintaining an inhumane system. We were, and still are denying the humanity of each other because we are not, yet, able to meet as equals, as "I's" and "Thou's". Nonviolence, therefore, does not qualify as that basic symbol to move us from where we are to where we desire to be and should be. It is my contention that "Black Power" is that basic symbol. We will explore that assertion in the final section of this chapter.

I must, first of all, clear up a misunderstanding that is bound to ensue from the preceding discussion of the movements that sought a solution to the "American Di-

lemma." I was not saying that these movements failed and have no further right to exist. Quite the contrary, they more than succeeded if one considers the circumstances under which they laboured. What I am saying is, that they were never quite clear as to what they were all about. They were never quite clear what the issue, or issues, were. The battle always remained on the conscious level of signs without any attempt to relate to the unconscious or the realm beyond consciousness. It is recognition of the "whole person", not just part, that Black Power points us toward. This can only take place when all three levels are functioning independently and at the same time are interrelated. We will try to show in our next section how Black Power points us toward the integration of the whole person and community, and at the same time transcends both.

III. BLACK POWER: A MOVEMENT

It should be obvious by now that black power has been discussed on two levels. First, as a movement which seeks to instill pride in people of their heritage and the insistence that that heritage be allowed to permeate all areas of American life: economic, educational, political, religious and cultural. The Black Power Movement seeks to

define for itself what the needs of black people are in these areas.

Economic

Economically black people started at the bottom of the ladder and have remained there ever since. Blacks have not enjoyed the fruit of the American economic enterprise, although they have provided the labor to produce the fruit. Blacks continue to be exploited for their labor. As long as blacks are not able to benefit from the abundance which they helped to create, there will be black anger. This anger is already manifested in the destructive acts that have taken place all over our nation in the past few years. White-owned properties which symbolize oppression and exploitation, have been destroyed. Black Power demands that black people be allowed to participate in the abundance which they helped to create. Furthermore, black people must be allowed to define the way in which they are to participate.

Through casual observance we might conclude that black people are better off economically than they ever were. But when we look at the statistics¹⁰ we find that

¹⁰Wright, Op. Cit., pp. 48-49.

black people are worse off economically than they ever were. This, of course, is speaking in proportion to the rate of growth that has occurred in American society.

The overriding fact that Black Power speaks to in the economic sphere is that of preparing people to live a life instead of just earning a livelihood or being given a livelihood. This means in practical terms empowering people to help themselves. As Nathan Wright explains:

The economics of our current race relations point to the need for some approach to progress. Such an approach must give to black Americans the power needed to enter into the mainstream of American economic life. The thrust toward Black Power suggests that Negroes themselves hold the key to their own future. The turning of the key, however, may call for the resources of all. Thus the massive placing of the resources of our nation as a whole and of all its communities on the side of empowering for creative change may open the door of hope. ¹¹

Educational

The movement in education, is not only toward separate black study programs but toward what I feel to be a more realistic and beneficial goal, the inclusion of "blackness" throughout all areas of our educational system, and the enhancement of educational excellence for all people. Reaching these goals will entail not only the in-

¹¹Ibid., p. 57.

clusion of the "black experience" in all of our textbooks but a massive attack on all the problems that are short-changing those who are confined to the ghetto of the central city. The increasing number of dropouts, low reading scores, old and worn out facilities, the high teacher turnover rate, the lack of qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, the problem of discipline, and many other problems, have added to the inferior education that the masses of black people in our central cities are receiving. Again we turn to Nathan Wright who offers a general insight into what must be done in our educational system.

Our education must cease to be remedial and become generative, however attractive remediation and so-called training monies and programs may seem to be. Our education must begin at the beginning and continue through the changing circumstances of our individual and corporate life to help or enable every individual to realize his full productive potential and become what he should be....Education in the larger sense has not fulfilled its task until the last able-bodied relief recipient has been productively set to work according to his reasonable potential and until all men's talents are developed and set free to enrich and brighten in the best way humanly possible our communities and our world. 12

Black Power, again points out the limitations of our educational system, in that, it fails to empower for life as well as for livelihood. Black Power is interested

¹²Ibid., p. 85.

in the growth of the whole person as well as the growth of the whole society. Primarily, Black Power pushes for the development and the utilization of the full resources of black people. It is only when this is done that some of the problems and conflicts in our urban schools can be resolved.

Political

Despite voting rights laws, black people have been disenfranchised, particularly in the South, through economic and physical violence. In some cases, in the North, and South, white people have developed ways to remove black voters from the roll once they are there, thus weakening the potential voting strength of the black community.

The question of black voting strength is closely related to the problems of electing black candidates, who are capable and qualified, to political office. Black people cannot depend on white people to elect a black candidate alone without some strength from the black community.

Another important consideration in the area of politics is a more significant participation of black people in the active running of the major political parties in America, both national and local. It is here that the

big decisions, about who will be a candidate and what will be the program of the party that will shape the lives of black people, as well as white, will be made.

Black Power is interested not only in voting right bills for black people, but Black Power is also interested in having black people in a position to insure the enforcement of the rights spelled out in the bill, and also to have black people at the decision making level to determine what the bill should say about black people's voting rights. Again, Black Power calls for a "wholistic" approach to the problem, instead of a piece-meal approach.

Religio-Cultural

The religious and cultural aspects have been linked together, because, for black people that is the way it has always been. It is within this area that more and more people are beginning to see the real salvation of black people. For in its most fundamental sense Black Power calls for the freedom of black people to define who they are, and to determine what they must be about in their struggle for liberation.

The Black Church is the keeper of who we are and the launching pad from which we must launch our fight for

black liberation. Black music, preaching, praying, and literature, embody the memory of who we are. It is black music that expresses the individual and collective experience of black people more than any other art form:

It is the memory of Africa that we hear in the churning energy of the Gospels. The memory of the Motherland that lingers behind the Christian references to Moses, Jesus and Daniel. The Black Holy Ghost roaring into some shack of a church in the South, seizing the congregation with an ancient energy and power....The Black Church is the keeper of that Memory the spiritual bank of our almost forgotten vision of the Homeland. 13

When the Black Church broke away from its heritage and took on white religious values and outlook it ceased to be relevant to the experience of black people and, as Larry Neal, Vincent Harding, and others have said, black people started singing the blues: "They Call It Stormy Monday, but Tuesday's just as bad; call it stormy Monday, but Tuesday's just as bad. Wednesday's worse, but Thursday's also sad."¹⁴ The blues preserved the memory of the past when the Black Church, in its efforts to become white, relinquished the responsibility. Much of the black past still remain in some black churches but it is dormant.

¹³Larry Neal, "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation," Ebony, XXIV (August 1969), 55.

¹⁴Ibid.

But, as Neal says: "The blues don't jive. They reach way down into the maw of the individual collective experiences."¹⁵ Black Power points to these experiences where all the pain, aspirations, joys, values, and wisdom of black people are expressed. The blues singer, says Neal:

....is the voice of the community, its historian and one of the shapers of its morality. He may claim to speak for himself only, but his ideas and values are, in fact, merely expressions of the general psychology of his people. He is the bearer of the groups working myths, aspirations and values, and like the preacher, he has been called on by the Spirit to rap about life in the sharpest, the harshest terms possible. Also like the preacher, he may have gotten the calling early in life. He may have even sung in the church like Ray Charles and James Brown.¹⁶

Aretha Franklin, Dinah Washington, Lil Green, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding and many others are not only expressing the experience of black people in the past, they are also expressing their yearning and aspirations for the future: Aretha with her demand for respect and freedom, James Brown affirming blackness by singing: "I'm Black and I'm Proud." Black Power insists that we look at the contemporary black music very seriously and critically, so that its value for black people will not be lost. Black Church people, particularly, should look at black music, both "secular" and "religious," for despite the other-

¹⁵Ibid. ¹⁶Ibid.

worldly aspect of black religion, it never separated its secular life from its religious life. Likewise, the blues, the gospels, and the spirituals were always inter-related.

The most obvious manifestation of Black Power in the cultural sphere is in the slogan "black is beautiful." Black Power says: the black man cannot wait until the white man decides that black is beautiful; he must decide for himself that black is beautiful. He must honestly and sincerely believe it. It is very important that black people go through this process, because for hundreds of years they have been told that black was no good and many black people believe it. Psychologically, therefore, it is absolutely necessary that black people affirm their blackness. This affirmation has taken many obvious forms. The African dress, the Afro hair style, the effort on the part of many to learn more about African culture and language, particularly Swahili. Some blacks, and whites, decry the trend and see it as just another fad that will fade into the background. For some it might be just another fad, but for many, it is a significant form for expressing their blackness and human worth. Any mode of dress, and hair style that will enhance the beauty of blackness black

people should be able to wear without feeling ashamed.

From my description of Black Power as it functions in the different areas stated above, it is obvious that there are some who do not share my understanding of black power. My interpretation is a positive one, whereas others would interpret it negatively. The negative interpretations usually fall under two headings. First, there are those who say Black Power is racism in reverse. Second, others say that Black Power advocates separatism. These interpretations stem primarily from a misunderstanding of what racism means, and from faith in integration as a panacea for our racial problems in America. Racism is based upon the denial of the basic humanity of people. Black Power affirms the humanity of all people. Integration, American style, calls for assimilation of black people into a white, racist, culture. Black Power emerged in 1965 to counteract racism and integration as it existed in America at that time.

Black Power is interpreted by some as being a movement against white people in an attempt to destroy them. There is no doubt that there are those who are using this time of unrest to hurt and destroy white peo-

ple but this is not Black Power. Black Power, is primarily, a shifting of emphasis from the white community to the black community. The emphasis is on being black, beautiful, and proud. Black Power demands that the plantation relationship end:

....the days of the plantation were days of utter dependence for the black man; economic dependence, to be sure, psychological and spiritual dependence as well. The black man's entire life was devoted to the white man's world. He served the white man, he entertained him, soothed, and gave him an object upon which to vent his anger. In return the white man gave food, clothing, shelter, and sometimes praise for a job well done. In the fragmented, transitory black society of the time, this was what mattered. Black praise, black blame, black anything, were of very little importance; it was the white man who would always be there to give or to withhold. The black man might be gone tomorrow. To the free black man of the 20th century, this psychological legacy was devastating. It became more so as the stakes grew higher, for the Civil Rights Movement asked, then demanded more of the white man - always of the white. Black Power is the first significant break in this pattern. 17

Black Power demands that a new relationship be established whereby blacks can be empowered to help themselves. This does not mean that whites are not to contribute to the empowerment of black people, but it does mean that they must learn to contribute without controlling. They must learn to contribute in such a way, their contri-

¹⁷Ernest Boynton, "Black Power: No More Plantations," Christian Advocate, XII (December 12, 1968), 9-10.

bution does not elicit dependence from those whom they help.

Black Power as a movement has already had its impact in breaking the pattern of relationship that has existed for over three hundred years. A relationship that has brought our society to a point of animalistic existence. The question now arises: can Black Power lift us from this animalistic level of human existence to a higher level? This question we turn to now.

IV. BLACK POWER: A RELIGIOUS SYMBOL

As may be recalled, I defined a religious symbol as one that not only illumines the present situation of man's existence but points man toward a higher level of existence. We have tried to show how Black Power is functioning, in order that man's present situation might be clarified. Black Power has taken on the form of the metaphorical symbol and has leaped beyond the present conditions. Unlike the other solutions to the problems of our society, Black Power refuses to go along with the rules of the game. Black Power insists that new values and goals be set forth, and that life be reorganized around them. Black Power demands that a new focus be brought to bear on

human life. Nathan Wright sees a resolution of our predicament in the glorification aspect of Black Power:

The glorification of blackness implicit in the term Black Power is a conscious or unconscious effort to stake a claim for the worth of those in our nation who are termed non-white. Essentially it is a clarification. The root meaning of the term "glorify" is to clarify, to make clear and plain and straight.

All of life must be clarified in this sense. It must be given and seen in that dimension which sets it forth in terms of glory-now and forever. To see life as it truly is means to see it as God sees it, in its eternal dimension, in the glory appropriate to its involvement with and in the life of God. Is not another way of looking at the purpose of fulfillment is to see as the end of all life its transfiguration, its glorification, its clarification for what it is in the mind and vision and will of the agency of its creation? 18

Black Power as a religious symbol, with its emphasis on bringing a new focus to bear on life points man toward the eternal dimension which clarifies not only the here-and-now but also the life to come. Black Power, in its refusal to become a part of the present values and goals of American society, stands outside and challenges the society to rise above the present situation to a higher humanity.

There are some who are very skeptical about the possibilities of Black Power doing anything except taking the place of white power and making life more miserable

18 Wright, Op. Cit., pp. 139-140.

than before. C. Eric Lincoln gave a hint of this skepticism in a speech made in Boston at the "Consultation On The Black Church" November 7, 1968. Lincoln in speaking about Thomas Hobbes attempt to rationalize the existence of human society says:

....that Hobbes deduced that man organized into social entities for mutual protection and for the very enhancement of those qualities of human existence which they as individuals and collectively find to be gratifying and to have value.

The alternative to the organized society is a state of nature, a dismal and unrewarding existence characterized by unlimited aggression and counter aggression. An existence where every individual is a law unto himself and which there is no definition of morality and which force and fraud are respective instruments for the realization of self interest which becomes the sole factor for human motivation. Men organize themselves into society because, in the state of nature, in the words of Thomas Hobbes: "life was solitary, nasty, mean, brutish, and short." 19

In ending his speech Lincoln posed this question for Black Power:

....and to those of you who are committed to the ideology of Black Power when we get Black Power, as inevitably we must, I have to ask you when we get Black Power; what then? Shall we go on to a greater more human civilization. Or will life once again become solitary, nasty, mean, brutish, and short. 20

¹⁹C. Eric Lincoln, "Social Uses of Power," Paper read at the Consultation on The Black Church, Boston, November 7, 1968.

²⁰Ibid.

The question that Lincoln poses is one that should concern all mankind and especially those blacks and whites who place their hope in Black Power. Black Power must become the symbol of that light that shines in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it. If Black Power is not the answer, then those of us who see it as the answer must pose the question that the messenger from John Baptist posed to Jesus: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3 R.S.V.)

CHAPTER V

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND BLACK POWER

Recently, while browsing through a magazine, I came across a confessional statement by a white minister. In the statement he confessed that "he was about ready to leave the ministry because it no longer offered a challenge." "Suddenly", he said, "Black Power came upon the scene" and the Gospel took on new meaning for him. Many ministers, both black and white, have rediscovered the true meaning of the Gospel through the concept of Black Power. This use of the Black Power concept is particularly evident among the black clergy. An organization known as the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC) has wholeheartedly endorsed the concept of Black Power. Many churchmen, black and white, clergy and lay, feel that the church, particularly the Christian Church, has much to gain by embracing Black Power. It is no secret that America's religious institutions need reviving, and many solutions are being sought for church renewal. In this final chapter I would like to outline the hope for Church renewal that I see in Black Power.

The Oppressed and The Whole Man

For many decades the Church's concern has been primarily for the middle class and upper middle class in our society. This state of affairs demonstrates a complete rejection of what Jesus saw as his primary task. This task is expressed in these words that Jesus is alleged to have read from the scripture at the beginning of his ministry:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19).

Certainly Black Power has much to offer the Christian Church in terms of helping it to recover its primary reason for being: to serve and minister to the "sinners" and those who are oppressed. Black Power calls us back to that task in a very challenging and shocking manner. Black Power calls for the healing of humanity through the creative use of power. Power that redeems, power that reconciles, instead of destroying and fragmenting. Black Power calls the church to be concerned about those things, in our society, that tend to abort human growth. The church has concerned itself primarily with budget and building in the past. The real crime of American religious life is summed

up in these words of Nathan Wright:

So often in religious life in America we have tended to settle for less than ultimate goals. We have courted the illusory separate but equal despoiler of human growth. We have sought to do our level and most conscientious best within the frameworks of class and pseudocaste which forbade the fulfillment of God's design for His creation. We have fed men lavishly, where a sense of the divine purpose of human growth should have prompted our teaching of men to feed themselves and our affording them the sustained and equitable opportunity for self-provision. Power is essential to life. Men may kill and destroy as wantonly by smothering, by too much uncritically-thought-out of kindness, as by neglect. ¹

Black Power demand that we stop settling for anything less than ultimate goals. Black Power insists that we stop dealing with just part of man and deal with the whole man.

The Christian Church, therefore, has much to gain through this new emphasis on the oppressed and the whole man which is evident in Black Power.

"That We May All Be One"

The cry for one church, "Holy and Apostolic," has grown louder during the decade of the sixties. A church, united under God for a more effective ministry of Jesus Christ. An inclusive church, open to all persons who con-

¹Nathan Wright, Jr., Black Power and Urban Unrest (New York: Hawthorne, 1967), pp. 136-7.

fesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, regardless of race creed or color.

Although this one church is far from being realized, Black Power reminds us that it will never be realized unless we rid the church of its racism that is prevalent, particularly in our Protestant denominations. Just as the United Methodist Church can never be truly "United Methodist" until all black Methodist denominations are included; the Protestant Christian Churches can never be one universal church unless blacks as well as all other races are included as equals and not as second class Christians. The concept of a universal church is congruent with Black Power, because the purpose of a universal church, as I see it, is not to rob any particular group of its identity, but to strengthen and support each other more in a mutual cause: the ministry of the Church of Jesus the Christ. Black Power, likewise, seeks the freedom of every ethnic group, particularly black people, to retain its identity while at the same time to enjoy the strength and benefit of the wider community. The problem of identity will be a major problem in bringing about a world church, as it is a problem in bringing about racial harmony in America. Black Power calls the church's attention to this problem and

calls on the church to give it top priority.

No one has been more universal-minded than black people, particularly when it comes to the church. Black people have always believed that "we are all God's children"; therefore, we should all be one in Christ. There should be no difference in people insofar as their basic humanity is concerned. So the idea of one church is inherent in the black religious tradition. It seems ironic, therefore, that the demand for retaining separate identity should come from black people. But the simple truth is that there can be no unity among the churches without allowance for diversity, just as there can be no true integration without the freedom to be ones' self within that integrated situation.

The church, therefore, can gain some insight from Black Power as it struggles for the right of all people to retain their identity as they share in the riches and fellowship of the wider community.

The Vertical Dimension

Finally Black Power may help us to see and live life not only in its horizontal dimension but in its vertical dimension. Black Power's call for a new focus on

life is pointing us toward the vertical dimension of life where we look for a higher life than we enjoy on the horizontal level. Black Power's emphasis on a "new thing" calls to mind the New Testament emphasis on the new man in Christ, and the new Jerusalem. What this "new thing" will be nobody knows, but man's continuous yearning for it give us hope that there is a higher life. Now and then we get a glimpse of that "new thing" through worship, both individually and corporate. Through such art forms as music, poetry, and sermons God reveals the higher life to us. The more relevant forms we have to express our yearning for the "new thing," the greater opportunity God has to reveal it to us. Thus, Black Power's emphasis on allowing the rich heritage of black people to become a part of the wider community's symbolic structure is a call for more rich and relevant forms. This rich heritage, with its symbols, myths, music, and poetry, may give God an opportunity to reveal more of that higher life to us. God speaks to us in many different forms. If we economize on the type of forms we will use, we limit God's ability to speak to us. Black Power demands that more freedom be allowed for black forms to flourish whereby allowing God to speak more relevantly to black people and, in the end,

hopefully, to the wider community. The church has much to gain from this insight of Black Power, for the church has always utilized symbols that would help to lift its people to a higher level of humanity. I think it is appropriate to end this chapter and thus the entire discourse with this insight from Nathan Wright concerning the worship of the church. Wright says:

The worship of the early church brought a new sense of focus or of clarification in that its essential act of thanksgiving, or of Eucharist as it was called, involved the transfiguration or the lifting of life onto a plane where it befitted the purpose of God. Utilizing the earthly symbols of bread, water and wine, every aspect of life was symbolically reunited with its Originator, Sustainer and End. Life was glorified. Indeed, it always was and is so on the level of the eternal....and so the church simply had to make Eucharist or give thanks for the clarification or for the glory of life which is forever constant in the mind, experience and sight of God. What will be on an eternal plane is now for those who, with thankfulness for God's doings, enter into the realities which are yet to be revealed. The ancients may be said to have sensed that "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with Him in Glory, for we shall see Him as He is. 2

It does not yet appear how far Black Power can lead us closer to that time when we might see life as it truly is, but it does appear that Black Power has much to offer the Christian Church, particular in America in its struggle for renewal.

²Ibid., p. 143.

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