

Appendix B

Selected Writings

Sermon Talk

July 15, 1966

Temple Sinai, New Orleans

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Thank you Rabbi Feibelman, and shabbat shalom to you all.

When it was first suggested that I address you, I was hesitant. What right did I have to assume such a responsibility - a stranger in your midst and a musician to boot (to make me even stranger)? But then I thought: why not? After all, I have been here in New Orleans, at the invitation of Loyola, to impart, among other things, concepts of Jewish music to Catholic students. Would it not be of interest to share my reactions to this rather unusual circumstance with you good people?

Actually, when I originally received the request to journey southward, I had similar misgivings. It was a most intriguing proposal, but I felt, nevertheless, wary. Never had I so much as expressed a "how-d'ye-do" to a priest or to a nun in my entire life until this June. And these members of the religious communities were to make up the bulk of my students! How was I going to act as a teacher, entering into this exotic, foreign world? Would I have to weigh every word, every nuance, gesture and opinion? I was in a rather anxious

state when summer session opened - so why did I ever accept the offer in the first place? I have a comfortable job in New York - it was not a question of money; nor was it a question of idle curiosity or something like Mount Everest: that just because it was there, it had to be climbed.

I could not pinpoint the "why" of it all until several weeks had passed. I now realize, peculiarly enough, that I came to Loyola in the tradition of common Jewish practice, without having been consciously aware of it before. In other words, I wanted to inquire, to seek out through love of learning - if that doesn't sound too conceited of me. It is, perhaps, the oldest lesson of Judaism, that: only through knowledge comes understanding. There it is: a simple, even hackneyed, phrase, but one at which I can marvel, having had this intensely personal experience.

You may be wondering: just how did it work out in the classroom? Well, I won't insult your intelligence with the platitude that an individual is a human being before all else. But, equally obvious is the truism that the world is based on the principle of similarities and not on one of identities. Thank God for that! How dull a place it would be if all of us thought alike, row upon row of that Mad Magazine character, smiling Alfred E. Newman.

I'm sure you can deduce the outcome of my quasi-dilemma

very easily: familiarity has in this case bred respect and affection. In a short while, I was no longer aware of how a person was dressed, for example. I soon discovered that the first ones to poke fun at the Sisters were they themselves. Some of the best jokes I've heard in a long time were bandied about that great leveler of all men: the institution of the meal table; and the Scrabble table was further cause for merriment.

But there were the serious moments too, such as the different kinds of Masses I attended - something I had never done before, and the heated debates about the relative merits of this or that kind of music, and the eagerness to share our respective views, no matter how far apart. In this attempt to cross over the bridge that link our two sacred shores, I have had a most fascinating trip. What's more, it was all accomplished without recourse to those words: Brotherhood, Togetherness, and Tolerance - so-called ideals that have always frankly embarrassed me. ("Togetherness," for example, invariably reminds me of McCall's Magazine.) These words seem so "preachy," and rarely do they have any basis in reality, as we all know.

Still another word that has made me fidget up until now is the one that starts "ecumenic" and concludes with various suffixes: "ecumenicism," "ecumenalism," "ecumenicity,"

"ecumenism," and "ecumenics." It is a word that no longer makes me squirm. For one thing, it is a practical point of view, all told, coming from the Greek: oikein, meaning "to live in" or "to inhabit the world." Related to it is that other most practical word: "economics." So it is not, like "Togetherness," an empty or passive idea. On the contrary, it signifies action, a spirit of all-embracing. But that does not mean it is a synonym for proselytizing. I can assure you that no one at Loyola has pursued me with missionary zeal, nor have I been out to lure anyone back into the fold of the Tribes of Israel.

I think I can best describe the ecumenical idea as it might have worked out in terms of my own personal history. When I was in grammar school there was a Holy Name Church nearby that was most forbidding to me. It seemed to be a place of secrets and taboos. I was taunted - as one of the few Jews in the neighborhood - by my schoolmates who belonged to this church. They would "nyah, nyah" at me (as children do so well) with this brilliant couplet:

"Matza, matza two for five;
That's what keeps the Jews alive!"

Perhaps they might have acted more kindly if they had known that it was that very matza (or unleavened bread) that they ate every week, in the form of a wafer, as part of the Communion ritual

in the Mass; that is, if we trace it back to its historical origin. And why hadn't my Hebrew School teachers so enlightened me? Perhaps such teaching is standard these days (I do not know), but 25 years ago we barely knew in Hebrew School that there was such a thing as the New Testament! Believe me, I suffered (as perhaps some of you may have) because of such ignorance on both sides of elementary education.

It is only in the last few years that I have learned, willy-nilly, the definitions of liturgical acclamations in the church, such as Alleluia, Hosanna, Selah, and Amen itself - all coming from the Hebrew. Now I am conscious of the derivation of "The Lord's Prayer" from the Kaddish, the Sanctus from the Kedushah, the Bar'chu like the Invitatorium, the relation between the Te Deum and the Alenu, the Jewish origin of Pax vobiscum, the connection between the "Tuba Mirum" of Dies Irae and the Shofar. And I wonder further about the similarity of some words in the so-called Little Doxology: "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be" with the words from the ancient Hebrew hymn: Adon Olom (Lord of the World): "V'Hu ~~Hayah~~ v'Hu hoveh V'Hu yih'yeh b'tifarah:" He was, He is, He shall remain in everlasting glory." I have lectured on the fact that a great percentage of Gregorian Chant seems to have imbedded within it the motives of Hebrew

Cantillation; and we have found out that the actual letters of the Hebrew alphabet are intoned in the church when "Lamentations" is recited, in order to make a semblance of the original acrostic construction. New to me has been the discovery that the Psalms of David are the backbone of the Propers of the Mass - i.e. the variable parts.

All this and much more. How profitable it has been for me to uncover these mutualities, on musical and liturgic grounds, so that I can really now begin to appreciate our exclusivities. Indeed, through knowledge has come understanding.

And this ecumenical pursuit does not apply only to matters of religion, for it is at the heart of civil rights problems, of East-West ideological clashes - at the core of any struggle; and, if I may bring it closer to home, to that of the contemporary composer as well. So many of us have been conditioned to regard music as a kind of emotional sitzbad or mudbath, wherein we immerse ourselves in order to get a thrill. This is mere delusion and self-indulgence. For music can never be understood as something outside of itself; associations should not be read into it. The meaning of an E-flat emerges only in relationship to other E-flats or C-sharps. I am convinced that those who claim a dislike for contemporary music are not listening to it - or to any music for that matter - qua music, purely as music.

If they did they would find that emotional states would and should

be evoked through intellectual comprehension. With knowledge comes feeling. Although it is no guarantee of love, it is (at least) the gateway to self-awareness.

In 1959 I was in Russia, on tour with the New York Philharmonic. I was fortunate to attend the American Exhibition in Moscow (that same year, you'll recall, the Russians had sent an exhibition of their own to New York). I walked into a cycloramic movie theater - perhaps you know the kind I mean: where the screen is wrapped around the audience in a complete circle. It started off with a breathtaking scene of New York harbor which engulfed the viewer, and gradually it passed over the skyscrapers of Manhattan going uptown in very sharp detail. Suddenly I saw (or thought I saw) my own building - right there in Gorki Park: West 80th. St., no less! - and I must have gotten rather excited for with tears in my eyes I grabbed the sleeve of a Russian man standing next to me and exclaimed: "Look, there's my house!" (He must have thought I was some kind of lunatic, since he couldn't understand me.) My own environment never had meant so much to me until I finally saw it in the context of the other guy's backyard. What love I suddenly felt for dirty, sad, old West 80th. St.! It still helps me today to think of that 1959 Happening whenever my surroundings become oppressive and depressing.

But it is with joy that I now can say to you from this pulpit: Dear friends, "look there's my house! I see it so

clearly now." That, more than anything else, is the reward, the lesson, of my Loyola visit. Because of it I know that if any of you are ever given the opportunity to spend some time in the other guy's backyard - grab hold of it. Why? For selfish reasons, strangely enough. I can guarantee that you will learn so much more about your own faith by exposing yourself to the other one. You will want to know why is this, and how is that, and where-do-I stand in relation to it. You will start asking questions, and you'll come up with answers that never before occurred to you. You will find yourselves irresistably drawn to investigating original sources. Not only will you gain a clearer understanding of the other music and liturgy, but you will, more significantly, achieve a clearer insight into your own.

You know, I am a dreamer (you have to be something of a nut anyhow to be a composer). I keep dreaming of how wonderful it would be if a place like Loyola (or a Jewish-sponsored University like Brandeis) were to institute a School of Sacred Music for all faiths. Jewish students would come to learn about their own liturgy, but they would also have to write music for the Mass; and Catholic students would find out more about themselves, while composing hymns for Protestant services. Or, Hindus might explore the orientalisms of the Yemenite Jews. The possibilities and combinations are so exciting - and all

for the primary purpose of revitalizing the music of their own groups. How rewarding it could be! I suspect that Rabbi Feibelman and Rabbi Bergman, for example, would like to participate in such a program, that the community would want to be involved in some way, that a joint program with Tulane University might be in order.

Just thinking about it makes me drool at the mouth.

But for my own part, to be more specific, I can tell you that I am brimming with ideas for a new Jewish Service, all stimulated by what I have learned here. I envision an antiphonal service with 2 choirs, 2 cantors, with tape-recorded voices coming from various parts of the sanctuary, and with genuine participation of the Congregation.

In Yiddish we have an expression which we sigh in great relief, after having satisfactorily completed a job; we say: what a "m'chayeh" it's been! - which means "pleasure-and-then-some." Most heartfully I thank my students and colleagues at Loyola for having given me such a magnificent "m'chayeh" these last four weeks.

And now some of us would like to express our gratitude to Temple Sinai by singing for you - once in Hebrew and once in English - the Sabbath hymn: Shabbat Hamalka: "Sabbath the Queen" - the poem by Chayim Nachman Bialik and the music by Minkowsky.

(Sung by Loyola students and faculty)