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INTRODUCTION

Emerging from Multiple Rifts

Our time is beset by numerous problems, dilemmas, and upheavals. Some of these dilemmas are routine and the normal feature of social life in every historical period. However, other dilemmas go deeper and affect the basic structure of social existence; in that case, one speaks of paradigmatic changes or "paradigm shifts." Our period is an epoch marked profoundly by such shifts. An age of deep changes necessarily is accompanied by intense agonies and traumatic experiences, but the same traumas also stir up fresh hopes and unregimented expectations. People wedded to the past are likely to deplore ongoing changes as a basic threat to their familiar way of life (and even to human life as such). On the other hand, people disillusioned with past arrangements are likely to embrace the future, despite the risks of untested adventures.[1]

The present book explores three kinds of paradigm shifts—or rather three dimensions of one overarching shift. The overarching shift is from separation or division to mutuality and correlation. Couched in broad historical terms (neglecting subtle details), the basic change is from "modernity" to an age which is usually called "post-modernity" or "post-modernism." By common consent, the "modern" period signaled a break from the preceding medieval age marked by holistic unity or uniformity. What was initiated by modernity is a dualistic rupture or division along several axes. One such axis is the division between the "sacred" and the "secular"—a rupture which is also expressed as the antinomy between "transcendence" and "immanence" or else between religious faith and human reason. Compared with this

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vertical kind of division, another axis is located on a more horizontal level: the division between the "self" and the "other"—which also finds expression in the gulf between "self-interest" and community, between the "private" and the "public" domains (and also between ethnocentric nationalism and cross-cultural globalism). A third kind of rift has a more ontological character and involves the relation or nonrelation between nature and humanity or human designs. While at the height of modernity nature was entirely subject to human control, the paradigm change brings into view the prospect of closer collaboration and symbiosis. As one can see, the overall shift has a triadic character, corresponding to the triadic nature of reality or real-life experience.

The outcome of the contemporary paradigm shift is not the endorsement of one or the other side of the modern division, but rather the prospect of genuine mutuality or correlation—despite the recognition of a limited otherness or "difference."[2] Thus, with regard to the first axis mentioned before, we encounter the correction of the modern accent on worldly secularity—an accent accompanied by a limited role of religious faith in private life. In this correction, secularity or the importance of secular life is not abandoned, but rather transformed. The term commonly used for this transformed perspective is "post-secularity," or "post-secular faith." What happens in this new dispensation is that faith becomes relevant again for social and political life—but not in the mode of domination or mastery. Although rejecting the role of an ideological prop, faith in this new mode joins secular or worldly democracy whose ideal of the "good life" it shares. In traditional terminology, post-secular faith can be seen to hover at the cusp or boundary of immanence and transcendence. While transgressing purely worldly strategies or power plays, it simultaneously supports the secular struggle for democracy, equality, and peace, thus combining world and spirit.[3]

One of the chief proponents of post-secularity was the French religious philosopher Jacques Maritain, well known for his defense of an "integral humanism" located on the other side of a restrictive selfhood. As he wrote already in 1936: "It seems that the dualism of the preceding [modern] age is at an end. For the Christian, separation and dualism have had their day, because an important process of integration is taking place in our time, . . . a return to a vital synthesis."[4] In the present book, the first three chapters are devoted to the discussion of a number of other proponents of the idea, including Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, William Connelly, and myself. In the third chapter I uphold an important change in the meaning of religion: the change from mental cognition to praxis, from

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the celebration of dogmas or dogmatic beliefs to the practical enactment of a "religion of service." I embrace at this point a statement written by Ricoeur half a century ago: "After several centuries during which Christians had been preoccupied chiefly with inner life and personal salvation, we are discovering afresh what is meant by 'you are the salt of the earth' (Matthew 5:13). We are discovering that the salt is made for salting, the light for illuminating, and that the church exists for the sake of those outside itself." In Ricoeur's view, Christ (and any religious figure) cannot or should not be invoked as an imperial potentate but only as a source of inspiration able "to give light once more to all people," that is, no longer "as a power, but as a prophetic message."[5]

With these words, a new "post-secular" correlation of faith and democracy was inaugurated, in a way which deserves the widest possible attention. Unfortunately, such attention is too often lacking today, being overshadowed or pushed aside by doctrines of religious mastery or imperialism. Examples of this backward-looking tendency can be found in many seemingly progressive countries, including the United States. A notorious example emerged in Germany during the past century when the so-called "German Christians" supported the policies of Adolf Hitler for "religious" reasons. In the words of Reverend Guthrie (speaking for "Faithful America"): "These appalling actions may have been taken in Jesus's name, but they do not speak for him. As Christians and other people of genuine faith, we are called to stand for justice, dignity and the common good—which means not putting up with arrogant and ultimately deadly leadership."[6]

Similar sentiments can be found in some of my own writings—as recorded for instance in chapter 4 of the present book. The chapter refers specifically to the cross-cultural religious thinker Raimon Panikkar. In his book *The Rhythm of Being*, Panikkar shows himself troubled by the conception of monotheistic "transcendence," because it agrees too readily with political despotism. As he writes: "The titles of King and Lord fit the monotheistic God quite well, and conversely, the human king could easily be the representative of God, and his retinue a copy of the heavenly hierarchies." In lieu of traditional transcendence, Panikkar boldly champions a radical relationality where "everything is permeated by everything else." Together with critiquing traditional monotheism his work also endorses a new trinitarian conception whose constituent elements (the Divine, humanity, and the natural world) interact with each other in a transformative rhythm or embrace: "Man is 'more' than just an individual being, the Divine different from a supreme Lord, and 'world' other than raw material to be plundered for utility or

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profit."[7] Views similar to these can also be found in my own *Small Wonder*, a text written roughly at the same time. Attentive to the arguments of both Panikkar and the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy, that text stated:

> For too long in human history the divine has been nailed to the cross of worldly power. However, in recent times, there are signs that the old alliance may be ending and that religious faith may begin to liberate itself from the chains of worldly manipulation. Exiting from the palaces and mansions of the powerful, faith—joined by philosophers' wisdom—is beginning to take shelter in inconspicuous smallness, in the recession of ordinary life unavailable to co-optation.[8]

These comments clearly point to the second dimension of the ongoing paradigm shift: the relation between "self" and "other," differently stated, between individual self-interest and community concerns or between "private" and "public" domains of life. In this respect, modernity has introduced a sharp division by accentuating the pursuit of self-interest, and by elevating the more powerful or selfish individuals as rulers over the multitude. This divisive tendency has been gaining momentum during the past two centuries, and today has reached its zenith (at least in the West). A good analysis is provided by Jean Bethke Elshtain in her book *Democracy on Trial* (1995) which, focusing mainly on American democracy, pinpoints as its central concern "the danger of losing democratic civil society" under the onslaught of rampant fragmentation and self-aggrandizement. In Elshtain's view, although a properly construed democracy is not "boundlessly subjectivist" or individualistic, the worry is that "it has, over time, become so." Once this happens, the spirit of democracy—especially the love of equality—vanishes, making room instead for "other more fearful and self-enclosed, more suspicious and cynical habits and dispositions."[9] What her book clearly anticipated was the rise of (what is called) "neo-liberalism" and "laissez-faire" politics, whose result is the inevitable undercutting of democracy as a shared political regime. Similar views have been expressed by the philosopher Ronald Dworkin in a text titled *Is Democracy Possible Here?* (2006), a question which he answered at best ambivalently. In his words: "American politics is in an appalling state. We are no longer partners in [democratic] self-government; our politics are rather a form of war."[10]

The present study devotes three chapters to the progressive decline of modern politics into neo-liberalism or divisive "libertarianism." In this

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decline individual ambition is progressively glorified, while the public realm of the "state" or community is reduced to a machine controlled by experts. As chapter 5 shows, this development can be found in "utilitarianism," which located the engine of human conduct in the "pleasure and pain" calculus, and also in biological evolutionism or "Social Darwinism" with its stress on physical ability or power. An early culmination of these trends was reached in the work of Herbert Spencer, especially his book *The Man versus the State* (1884), where the "state" was largely identified with a big bureaucratic structure, while "man" was equated with a presocial individual. In Spencer's words: "There are no phenomena which a society presents but that have their origin in the phenomena of individual life, which again have their roots in vital [natural] phenomena at large."[11] The character of the relation between individual and the "state" for Spencer was basically a nonrelation ("versus") which could not be bridged because of the technical apparatus of the state. What this dualist view neglected is the possible cultivation of shared concerns in the midst of social conflict, that is, the possibility of "civil disobedience" as resistance to or critique of perceived public abuses. Whereas, in Spencer's case, anti-public conduct was rooted in sheer self-interest, the point of genuine civil disobedience is precisely to restore public well-being and justice. To illustrate the character of the second possibility I turn to Henry David Thoreau, a contemporary of Spencer, and later to Albert Camus and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (in the context of Nazi Germany).

The lure of neo-liberalism has not come to an end. Under such labels as "rational choice theory" or "minimal democracy," the neo-liberal agenda has been promoted by a number of prominent American intellectuals. Chapter 6 in this study draws attention to such scholars as Robert Dahl, Giovanni Sartori, and William Riker, scholars concerned mainly with the compatibility of a "minimal democracy" with capitalist economics. In Riker's words: "No government that has eliminated economic freedom has been able to attain or keep democracy"; seen in this light, "economic liberty is an end in itself because capitalism is the driving force."[12] Chapter 6 contrasts this outlook with the tradition of "Jacksonian democracy" and, more importantly, with John Dewey's defense of "radical" democracy as an antidote to minimalist or "laissez-faire" democracy. As one of his students has pointed out: For Dewey "democracy as an ideal for community life is not a mere provision for a minimal state which simply leaves citizens alone. Such an individualistic ideal is inimical to the kind of *associated* [correlated] living which is democratic."[13]

The chapter also draws attention to some global or cross-cultural voices critical of American minimalism. In the South Asian contexts the main voice

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is that of Mahatma Gandhi as expressed in his *Hind Swaraj* (*Indian Home Rule*) of 1909. For Gandhi, home rule or self-rule (*swaraj*) does not mean selfish rule or the promotion of private ambitions, but rather the ability to channel such ambitions in the direction of the common or societal good. As he wrote in *Hind Swaraj*: "Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to human beings the path of duty (*dharma*). Performance of ethical duty means to attain mastery over our mind and our passions." The clear implication of this view is a new understanding of democracy: not as the pursuit of individual or collective self-interest but in the service of a transformative public self-rule.[14] In the East Asian context, the main antipode to minimalism is Confucianism as interpreted chiefly by Tu Weiming. For the Chinese thinker, Confucianism opposes both negative and positive liberty, that is, the construal of freedom in terms of either private withdrawal from society or public domination. In his words: it rejects both the affirmation of the self as "an isolable, complacent ego" and its total immersion in the world for the sake of "manipulative power." In lieu of these alternatives, the Confucian "way" (*tao*) demands an "unceasing process of self-transformation as a communal act."[15]

The culmination of the modern stress on antisocial selfishness can be seen in the rise of what one may call "autistic politics," that is, the ascent of self-love or narcissism to a form of public conduct. Chapter 7 discusses this novel blending of psychoanalysis and public discourse. Already in 1979, Christopher Lasch had sounded the alarm by claiming that, in our time, narcissism is no longer just a private ailment but has gained the status of a social pathology and even a "public culture."[16] The chapter discusses first of all the portrayal of this startling phenomenon by Zygmunt Bauman. As he writes in *Liquid Modernity* (2000): "The whole of modernity stands out from preceding epochs by its compulsive and obsessive modernizing—and modernizing means liquefaction," which in turns means disengagement and dissolution. The chief accent of modernity, he notes, is on private freedom, which clashes with civic obligations to the point that the individual becomes "the citizen's worst enemy."[17] In *The Individualized Society* (2001) Bauman—following Lasch—speaks of a "culture" of egotism and disengagement, a condition which has as a corollary the breakdown of civic solidarity.[18]

Adopting a cross-cultural perspective, the chapter turns to the prominent Indian psychologist Ashis Nandy, especially his study *Regimes of Narcissism, Regimes of Despair* (2013). In Nandy's view, a "clenched-teeth pursuit of happiness" has become a major feature of our time—but a feature which boomerangs, yielding instead the rise of death wishes, suicide epidemics,

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and psychic disorders.[19] In recent times, social atomism has been intensified worldwide by the spreading of the pandemic (COVID-19) and its corollaries of face masking and social distancing. To find a counterweight to disaggregation I lift up the work of Hannah Arendt, whose writings bridge the gulf between ego and society by celebrating the notions of "common sense," shared world experience, and the cultivation of public civility.

The present study does not concentrate on the third dimension of the paradigm shift of our time: the relation or nonrelation between "man" and nature. As we know, an aspect of this dimension has lately thrust itself into the foreground of life, everywhere, under the impact of the pandemic, of coronavirus. Although not specifically dwelling on man-nature issues here, I definitely consider its role as paradigmatic, as it calls for a reformulation of constitutive elements (away from exploitation to symbiosis). On other occasions I have commented on this crucial dimension, paying attention—apart from horrible diseases—to aspects of climate change and ecological mutations.[20] I am particularly fond of a statement by Thomas Berry, a Passionate Priest, to the effect that "there is no such thing as a 'human community' without the earth and the soil and the air and the water and all the living forms. Without these, humans do not exist. Humans are woven into this larger community which is a sacred community."[21]

In the present context I prefer to return to the broad picture of paradigm shift. The words of Berry would certainly have been applauded by his fellow priest, the eco-sophist and post-modern nondualist Raimon Panikkar. Chapter 8 focuses on a central issue of modernity: the stress on human freedom which finds expression in the notion of "human rights." Together with other "post-secularists" Panikkar fully accepts the importance of rights as a cornerstone of modern social and political life. But the basic question for him concerns a communal and holistic background: Do rights necessarily have to be construed in a dualistic or antagonistic sense, where the rights of some individuals or groups inevitably trump or negate the rights of others? He finds a possible solution or remedy in the Indian notion of *dharma* as recorded in the Dharmashastras, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the great epics.

As he notes in a pertinent text, the term *dharma* is perhaps "the most fundamental word" in the entire Indian tradition, a term seeking to provide "cohesion and thus strength to any given thing" and ultimately to the "three worlds" (*triloka*) of the cosmos. Yet given his post-modern perspective, Panikkar—bypassing an extreme holism or collectivism—recognizes the difference of rights in particular circumstances and perspectives. This means that the difference between claims and counterclaims, between

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rights and duties, has to be carefully negotiated in a civil manner; above all the pursuit of particular rights has to be tallied with civic responsibilities, especially the task of world-maintenance (*lokasamgraha*). Thus, what for Panikkar is needed is the "mutual fecundation" of cultures and discourses, above all a "diatopial dialogue" involving the movement between different contexts or places (*topoi*).[22]

The Catalan Indian priest passed away in 2010, thus being spared the experience of recent secular turmoil and rifts. His legacy, however, is profound and far-reaching.[23] Some of the main thrusts of his work have been continued by the Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, whose work is the topic of chapter 9. Rohr is the founding director of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, whose name already signals its "post-secular" aim: namely, the combination of worldly/secular engagement with reflection on the spiritual/religious roots of engaged life. The same balance is evident in Rohr's endorsement of freedom and human rights, which is coupled with his simultaneous stress on nonaggressive or nondualist symbiosis. The closest affinity with Panikkar emerges in his conception of religion or religious faith—where faith is not or no longer tied to an imperial "monotheism" but manifests itself in the practice of mutual love and solidarity.

Importantly, this nonimperial faith is not limited to a particular church or doctrine but has a universal or cross-cultural significance (deriving from the universality of "Christ" as divine source of all beings).[24] Together with the Catalan Indian, Rohr also champions a new kind of trinitarianism whose components are not fixed or static entities but rather partners in a rhythmic or dancelike process of ongoing revelation and transformation.[25] One of the most important and innovative contributions of the Franciscan is his correlation of downfall or transgression with the promise of spiritual rescue or uplift. As a student of St. Bonaventure, he endorses the "coincidence of opposites," thus arguing that human lapse or fall into darkness can trigger a divinely ordained "falling upward" toward the light—which can also have a communal and political significance.[26] The concluding remarks shift attention to the recent secular turmoil manifest in attacks on public civility and democratic equality. As a timely remedy or antidote, I invoke the work of Martin Luther King Jr., especially his book pitting contemporary chaos against the promise of a spiritual democratic community.[27] At this point, I also recall the poem "The Hill We Climb" by Amanda Gorman, the "inaugural poet," uplifting the hopeful promise of a new civility and the prospect of a Great Community among people in the world.

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