



OUTREACH

The Newsletter Of

The Fellowship For Spiritual Understanding

International

MARCUS BACH, Founder

No. 1

THE LETTER

Dear Friend,

My dream for many years has been the hope of sharing with interested individuals some of the exciting and meaningful aspects of my research among the various religions and cultures of the world.

This dream was partially realized with the establishment last year of The Foundation for Spiritual Understanding, and is further advanced with this first issue of OUTREACH.

OUTREACH is planned as a monthly newsletter prepared for those who have expressed an interest in current spiritual trends personal and transpersonal, who seek further interpretations of what is going on in our contemporary world and in the inner world of one's own convictions. It is an unbiased, open-ended, empathic response to you who wish to share a preview of things-to-come and an analysis of things already established.

OUTREACH is for you who have asked me about my recent areas of research, my interviews with contemporary leaders in various fields, my work with students on college campuses. Through this newsletter I want to comply with your requests, for, surely, spiritual understanding as it relates to our inner life and to the environmental world around us is one of the compelling issues of our time.

There are endless newsletters and publications dealing with the traditional religious fields. Every denomination and every religious movement has its printed voice. And well it should. Philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, theology and all the other avenues that run through Church Street have their grand and noble purpose in building a more comprehensive life and structuring a better world. Good for them!

But somewhere, somehow, there remains a vital need for the simple touch, the meeting of heart and mind, the sense of selflessness, the feeling of oneness with "the good, the beautiful, the true" which abides in each of us as a common ground of understanding. For, truly, the thing we hold in common is the quest, the pursuit of search and discovery, the realization that we are all trying to find our way, and wishing occasionally to point out the beauty of an encounter or the thrill of an experience to those who share the quest with us.

To whom is OUTREACH going? To some 10,000 individuals who, through the years, have expressed an interest in spiritual understanding by comment or letter and who have longed for a focal point such as the FSU and this newsletter will provide.

The names of these recipients range all the way from dedicated church-goers to dissident church-goers to logical positivists equally devout in their beliefs.

Included in our list is a college student who wrote me recently that she had taken LSD in the hope of finding a "spiritual experience" and did not find it. A copy is also going to a young man who reported to me that he took the drug and found the spiritual encounter he was seeking.

There is a blind man in Scott City, Kansas, who will get this copy of OUTREACH. Long ago he opened my eyes to a new sense of fortitude and strength.

A copy is going to a friend in Yamashima, Japan, who when we last said our Sayonaras reminded me that "there is no parting in spirit".

An electronics engineer in a Texas computer firm will remember, when he receives OUTREACH, how he wrote to me, saying, "The turning point in my life came when you told me that wherever my talent meets the need of the world, that is where God wants me to be."

OUTREACH will find its way to a young mother in Duluth, Minnesota, who during the critical illness of her child wrote to me, "I would like a little corner of the things you have found in your research. Will you help me?"

These and many more. Thousands more. Unseen but felt. Unrelated but bound together by the onward-going quest. Unidentified but linked to one another by the ties of consciousness in thought and experience, creating, as it were, a pool of spiritual communication, a point of view, an outreach into that good world which we so often touch through the veil of this phenomenal world and then let slip away.

It seems to me that this kind of spiritual understanding and spiritual interchange is a new and necessary orientation for contemporary living, and one which, in the sharing, constitutes a therapy of fellowship filling a certain void and function in the fundamental history of our time.

Would you like to share the dream?

Yours,



THE LESSON

Introducing the Over-Church

1.

In these days of a need and an enthusiasm for semantic analysis, a key word like "church" is subject to a great deal of historic and psychological study. More study than we have time for. We must come immediately to a point and a proposition. Perhaps we can agree that church, to most of us, means a certain collective body of believers. Such a definition at least represents a prevailing opinion. Of course, church may also refer to the clerical profession, or, in the Christian faith, to the "mystical body of Christ", and so on. I dare say that when we are asked, "To what church do you belong?" a vision of a church building flashes to mind, especially if it was there that we were catechized, confirmed, baptized or ceremonialized into our particular body of believers.

My church! The sentimental overtones surrounding the phrase are quite wonderful. Perhaps I was married in my church, or Mom requested that after her death a service be held for her there, or someone was converted there, or God was discovered there by someone in a special way. It is all very precious no matter what

our denomination or creed may happen to be. Village chapel or city cathedral, my church is a proud saying. And why not? After all, we talk about my doctor, my dentist, my club, my hometown, and these days particularly we boast about my psychiatrist, my hairdresser, my investment broker -- so why not my church?

But meantime, through all the recognizable wonder and meaning of my church, the concept of another church has been emerging. No one has watched this phenomenon more closely than I. No one has been more aware of it. From my earliest study of the religious scene, in the days when it was revolutionary for anyone in the institutionalized church to enter empathically into the worship of others whose practices seemed radical and different from one's own, I have seen the subtle metamorphosis of religious transition, the converging and crossing of denominational lines, the shift in thinking, the moving of the hands of time until they struck the hour of ecumenicity. I was a witness to all of this - - and so were you.

It was not only the history of religion that was unfolding, it was the history of all mankind. It was not only visible forces, visible movements, but invisible forces, too, that were at work, reminding us that life is a chain spun upon causal law whose links are forged by both conscious and unconscious influences.

What is important to our present purpose is that in and through it all a new awareness was taking form. My church was still there as a building, as a denomination, as a collective body of believers. We loved our church. We love it still. But we knew that, like the changing faces of our cities and the altering patterns of our world in both inner and outer space, another expression was emerging, another collective body of believers was being born. I call it the OVER-CHURCH.

Now that term, too, requires semantic analysis and scientific study, and more time and space than we can at the moment devote to it. But perhaps we can make a beginning by answering three questions: What is the OVER-CHURCH? How did it come about? Where is it going?

2.

What is the OVER-CHURCH? Well, it is first of all an expression of an expanding spiritual consciousness. It is not ecumenicity as this relates to religious institutions, creeds, or an attempt to correct mistakes in religion's past. It is, rather, spiritual ecumenicity, by which is meant man's total response to God or to those powers and impulses which motivate him and others like him to his highest good.

The OVER-CHURCH is a fundamental adventure in spiritual understanding, a recognition that we can have denominational roots and yet a genuine sense of religious give-and-take. It means also that you can have no denominational roots and still have an undeniable sense of spiritual awareness. Which is a way of saying that every person who has thought deeply and earnestly about life, who has looked at himself in the mirror of experience, knows that there is something in the universe that is in him, and something in him that is in the universe. Well, you know how it was with you. Or, let me tell you how it was with me. When I ventured out of the confining arc of what I had always defined and defended as the collective body of believers that was my church, when I traveled around the circumference of religion as it is practiced throughout the world, and when, even more, I got into the hub of the wheel of faith, then I realized what lay at the heart of the OVER-CHURCH: God-awareness is everyman's awareness!

We were a part of it. We were still oriented in our church, but a new orientation was taking place. We were still loyal to our parental faith, but new loyalties were demanded of us. We were in transition. We felt such a nearness to others that sometimes we had to pause and edit our feelings, check our logic, review our preconceptions. It was all amazing and wonderful. Something was happening to us. The same thing that was happening to America and to every country, for that matter, was happening to my church. The cultures of the world were closing in. God was closing

in, by which I mean that an awareness of the divinity in all people and in all faiths was becoming part of the awakened consciousness of contemporary life. Now we felt the cutting edge of growth, the stirring of a new creative thought. Now we caught a vision of a spiritually-conscious world, united within the seemingly divisive denominational expressions. It was the OVER-CHURCH.

3.

How did it all come about? What gave rise to it? There were many causes. One was sociological. The world had gotten smaller. War and the quest for peace had made it smaller. The crisis of convergences -- East meeting West -- Christian and non-Christian -- Negro and White -- New Morality and Old Morality -- had impinged upon my church, had taught me that other collective bodies of believers had the same drives and impulses, hopes and fears, that I once thought were specific only for me. The Ecumenical Conference was not a cause, it was an effect, an effect of the growing recognition of sociological change and our basic similarities in the field of contemporary life and faith.

Another reason for the rise of the OVER-CHURCH was scientific. Not only was there a breakthrough in man's relationship to man, there was a new approach to man's place in the universe. He was being made aware of spectacular new worlds, from the unseen world of atoms to the undiscovered world in outer space. I remember how, when I first encountered Pere de Chardin, he spoke of the Omega Point as a focus of the final convergence of the material and spiritual. He suggested that the noosphere was a thought-layer spreading over the surface of the earth, and when he emphasized the universality of unity, plurality and energy as the common elements of all life, I saw a new birth in spiritual understanding. It was the OVER-CHURCH, scientifically explained.

Another reason was philosophical. Ideologies were intermingling, changing, transforming, challenging us as never before. Existentialism, Subjectivism, Objectivism, Orthodoxy, Neo-orthodoxy, Zen, Yoga, Behavioral Sciences, all were demanding attention. My church could no longer stand apart, isolated, immune. The OVER-CHURCH had come. We were forced to do some thinking about things we had never thought about, at least not thought about in depth. The new collective body of believers, whether they had deep denominational roots or whether they were uprooted, knew that the search for truth was an onward-going quest and that the discovery of it was the common lot of everyman.

Youth, too, was on the march. Satisfied no longer with a symbolism of language out of which the meaning had gone, daring to ask not what religion taught but what religion did in the life of man, demanding to see evidences of what a spiritual fellowship amounted to, how it met a new world, how it demonstrated a new morality, how it solved or tried to solve problems in which youth was caught, the sound of a questioning, challenging, debunking, and thoughtfully imploring generation gave rise to a universal expression: the OVER-CHURCH.

Where is it going? Where is the concept of the OVER-CHURCH leading us? Into a new age and a new era. Religion, always a faithful reflection of man's environment, has been brought into contact with a new consciousness born of the mind and heart out of the matrix of a new world order, and this is what happens whenever doors are opened to a new inevitable chapter in human history.

What can we do about it? Well, now we will need deep convictions, but also an open mind. Now we will want to remember our ancient landmarks, as the Scripture says, but also catch hold of the forward shining light. Now we must rise to meet the challenge of our changing world.

You will find that the OVER-CHURCH is self-dictating, just as every new tomorrow dictates how you must meet the day. It is self-challenging, just as all great ideals

prompt us to live up to the level of our highest good. We are at a pivotal, transitional point in human history, for now, for the first time, the church -- my church, your church -- becomes a collective body of believers in spirit and in truth.

What can we do about it? Perhaps we will at least want to begin with an affirmative prayer which says: "Almighty God, help us with heart and mind to build the church universal, where there is place for all ancient wisdom and all honest modern thought. Which finds in all prophecies a harmony, in all scriptures a unity, and in all life a reflection of Thy will. Which rejects all that separates and divides and respects all that leads to brotherhood and peace. Which believes in freedom in the search for truth, love in the administration of justice, and individual discipline in the social order. Which shall make of all sects, classes, nations and races one fellowship and in which the spirit of man shall be united with Thy Spirit. Toward this ideal, O God, give us the vision and courage to earnestly strive! Amen."

The OVER-CHURCH has come -- an adventure in spiritual understanding.

Next month: Exploring the Over-Church

THE LEARNING

We understand people best when we understand what they believe, and we best understand what they believe when we put ourselves in their place.

An investigation of the other person's point of view inspires us with a new investigation of our own philosophical position.

Religion, like truth, is a circle. It has no beginning and no end. All denominational expressions and types of belief are arcs in the circle. No one can claim the whole circle, but each can rightly claim his part of it.

Living religions should be viewed as different dialects by which man speaks to God, and God to man.

Religion is what we theoretically expound; spirituality is what we demonstrate.

Spiritual understanding is by no means confined to or encompassed by any specific area of expression. It is a total experience involving the entire doctrine of mankind.

Religion could be taught in public schools or in any school if teachers could be found to teach it subjectively, that is, with the deepest respect for spiritual understanding; and objectively, with no aim of converting anyone to one's convictions or preconceptions.

Ever deeper and more realistically comes the warning that we must hold fast to the primacy of those qualities that made our nation great: the independence of belief and the interdependence of the freedom to believe it.

To say that we must learn to live together though we may not believe alike is not mere academic speculation. It is the only conclusion that one can draw from the critical nature of the world today.

PURPOSES OF *The Foundation For Spiritual Understanding*:

1. To assist individuals in the development of the things they believe, and to help in the practical application of these beliefs in daily living.
2. To contribute to interfaith and intercultural understanding through a sympathetic, personalized study of religion's impact in our daily living and in our personal relationships.
3. To serve as a research center for the interpretation of spiritual discoveries and trends as these relate constructively to the life of our time, and to make these discoveries and trends available to interested individuals and groups, religious and secular, through contemporary media of communication.

We welcome your inquiries and comments, and invite you to write for further information to FOUNDATION FOR SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING, Post Office Box 816, Palos Verdes Estates, California 90274.

OUTREACH, the monthly publication of THE FOUNDATION FOR SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING, offers you:

1. A new perspective on trends in religious thought;
2. An analysis of contemporary spiritual "techniques";
3. Answers to readers' questions;
4. Interpretations of the thoughts, ideas and discoveries in various fields of faith.

WHILE COPIES OF OUTREACH WILL BE SENT TO ANYONE UPON REQUEST, YOUR TAX DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS ARE INVITED. Additional copies of OUTREACH for use by organizations, study groups, etc. may be obtained by writing to OUTREACH, Post Office Box 816, Palos Verdes Estates, California 90274.



OUTREACH

The Newsletter Of
The Foundation For Spiritual Understanding

US BACH, DIRECTOR

NO. 3

THE LETTER

Dear Friend:

Someone once said, "Wise men are all of the same religion." When asked, "What religion is that?" he replied, "Wise men never tell." It occurs to me that perhaps wise men never even ask.

I say this because of the unusual response, attitude and insight you express in your letters and subscriptions to this Newsletter. These reflect a tremendous interest in the spirit of life, the spirit of what religion does in life, and the spirit that is needed to shape and make a wholesome, peaceful, meaningful attitude toward life. Over and above religion as a name is this religion of experience and expression.

Many of you are asking for additional copies of OUTREACH, and we are having more Newsletter #1 printed. The first 10,000 are gone. Several of you are using THE LESSON for study groups, young people's groups, Sunday School groups, knowing that OUTREACH brings you stimulating material every month. We share your enthusiasm. We send out good thoughts to you, just as you are sending out good thoughts to us and to all who have caught the feeling that something new and exciting is happening at FSU.

Because the person-to-person relationship means so very much to us, we want to keep it that way. We are planning a handbook, a manual which will supplement OUTREACH, and we are thinking about conferences at which new and meaningful approaches to spiritual understanding will be emphasized and explored.

Meantime, I also want to keep you informed about my personal activities. Space may be limited for this, but let me share with you the fact that recently I was invited to Honolulu for a series of

talks at Unity of Hawaii. It was a great experience in every way and an intensive, highly rewarding week. Honolulu, of course, is breaking out all over. Tourists are crowding the islands. Mainlanders are discovering how bright and sparkling is this 50th star in America's flag.

It is Aloha-land. Aloha is a warm and friendly word. You can hardly catch its spirit unless you hear it in Hawaii, it is so much a part of the islands and the people. Greeting, blessing, benediction, wrapped into one -- Aloha!

What impressed me most in my assignment was the emphasis on spiritual understanding. I found it in my meeting with the beloved pastor of Hawaii's oldest church, the Rev. Dr. Abraham Akaka. I heard about it from the minister of Hawaii's largest church, Dr. Thomas Crosby, an old friend of mine. I sensed it in the thrill of expectancy in the newest minister in Hawaii, the Rev. Stanwood Hampson.

Here on the islands, spiritual understanding has an outreach beyond the bounds of institutionalized religion. It touches the activities of most people by virtue of its intercultural, international, interspiritual approach and **THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT WE ARE INTERESTED IN, AIMING AT, AND PLANNING TO INTERPRET AND ENCOURAGE!** As far as Hawaii is concerned, this spiritual understanding is inherent in the history of the islands, in the land, and in a love for life. It is in the air, in the mind, and in the dreams of thinking people. And not only in Hawaii. Everywhere!

Wherever you go, whatever you do, keep an open heart and see whether you do not discover this, too, wherever you travel. Sometimes this old world may seem a bit rocky, but underneath it all we find ourselves on a most wonderful quest, at a most wonderful time, with a most wonderful opportunity to reach out and recapture and re-appreciate all that is good and beautiful and true!

Yours,



THE LESSON

Explaining the Overchurch

1.

In the beginning God made people, but it was not long before people began making gods. The reason for this was obvious. They wanted to portray their Maker as they imagined Him to be each according to his own expression. People saw Him not as life incarnated, but as life projected. As far as they were concerned, He had made each person different and unique, and that, in turn, is how they made their gods.

He made all people alike as to His essence, but they insisted on coloring Him according to their individuality. Soon His essence was lost in man's created multi-images of His manifestations, making Him not the One but the Many.

The OVERCHURCH is, first of all, a recognition that within the many is the One, and an awareness that the One does not mind being represented as the many, for He knows that ultimately His created beings will recognize His Spirit within the many forms of Him which they have made. This will take time, but time is always on God's side.

He knows this better than we do, we who feel so bound by time. He knows that within our narrow range of recorded history, a brief 6000 years -- a pinpoint within the millions of earth's geologically recorded years -- He knows there was a time when nations thought they could never live together side by side. Later world religions thought they could never live together side by side. Then local churches thought they could never live together side by side and now nations, religions, and churches are on the verge of living together -- side by side.

Is it any wonder that some people talk about an OVERCHURCH and speculate that eventually the spirit of man will live side by side with the spirit of other men, recognizing the totality of their spirit as the spirit of the one true God? When that happens, it will truly be a return to that first day when God made people.

2.

What we are talking about is the spiritual nature of man communicating with the spiritual nature of other men by way of an awareness which cannot be institutionalized.

Yet, obviously, this awareness exists in many institutionalized churches.

Visible churches are reflectors of man's spiritual quest. Visible churches are mirrors. The OVERCHURCH is the reality which these mirrors reflect. Occasionally mirrors are broken or mirrors are removed or mirrors are replaced but this does not affect the object which the mirrors reflected. The visible church, whose presence and power and function every thinking person recognizes, is a partial reflection of the whole; the whole is God's total and universal family of believers, churched and unchurched alike. The whole is the OVERCHURCH.

As the OVERCHURCH exists in spirit so it also functions in spirit. When you read these lines and think these thoughts and feel the fellowship and inspiration of others who read and think them, too, this fellowship is a truly real, truly effective spiritual bond which influences and changes your attitude toward others and your spiritual understanding of yourself and your world.

In this respect the "members" of the OVERCHURCH are walking at your side, working next to you on the job, riding with you in the traffic, traveling with you in the planes, waiting on you and being waited on in the stores, rubbing shoulders with you in the crowds, watching the realism and make-believe of life just as you are, dreaming your dreams, sensing the same joys, hurts, laughter and tears that are yours, wherever you may be.

This unseen fellowship is founded on perception, grows with sensitivity, and expands through the outreach of spiritual understanding.

We call it the OVERCHURCH.

Next month: Inside the Overchurch

THE LEARNING

"The invisible church is no merely human and secular institution. It is a real and superhuman organization. It includes and transcends every form of the visible church. It is the actual subject to which belong all the spiritual gifts which we can hope to enjoy. If your spiritual eyes were open, no diversity of human tongues,

no strangeness of rites or of customs or of other forms of service, no accidental quaintness of tradition or of symbols or of creeds, would hide from your vision its perfections."

----Josiah Royce
The Sources of Religious Insight

"I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue....I mean that in a world in which no religious feeling had ever existed, I doubt whether any philosophic theology could ever have been framed."

----William James
The Varieties of Religious Experience

"The immediate future of our race is indescribably hopeful. In contact with the flux of cosmic consciousness all religions known and named today will be melted down. The human soul will be revolutionized. Religion will absolutely dominate the race.... The evidence of immortality will live in every heart as sight in every eye. Doubt of God and of eternal life will be as impossible as is now doubt of existence; the evidence of each will be the same.... Each soul will feel and know itself to be immortal, will feel and know that the entire universe with all its good and with all its beauty is for it and belongs to it forever."

----Richard M. Bucke
Cosmic Consciousness

"To live, for a little while, in the orbit of the other person's deepest convictions means that we must momentarily leave the spot where years of stubborn indoctrination have rooted us. We must move into the spiritual habitue of another's mind and heart; we must become, for a time at least, one with those whose way of life and type of worship and even whose physical makeup we have viewed, up to now, only through the fixed focus of our own cherished points of view. To change, for one enchanted moment, the bent of our soul, the set of our mind, and, where necessary, even the color of our skin, is quite an assignment."

----Marcus Bach
Had You Been Born In Another Faith

THE OUTREACH OF OUTREACH

"Thank you very much for OUTREACH. Reading it, I felt an echo in me from each passage in it and that makes me very enthusiastic. I congratulate you on launching such a precious work and express my sincere respect."

Timothy Rhee, M.D.
Ullung-do, Korea

"I'm giving you my three daughters' addresses, because they too are doing things toward a Unity of Understanding among all races, creeds, colors, classes and cultures, and I believe that they would like OUTREACH."

Bertha L. Welles
New York City

"Yes, I will share your dream, but it is much more than a dream. It is so gratifying to me that you are going to accompany us on a path of spiritual understanding."

Mrs. Walter F. Grimm
Yankton, South Dakota

"OUTREACH, I feel, will definitely furnish a stepping stone for me in my spiritual evolution. This newsletter should help to break down a little further the barriers of race bigotry, religious intolerance, and the like . . . Aren't we all, as we become more consciously aware of ourselves and our relationship to the universe, searching for our particular life's adventure? Shouldn't this adventure entail our involvement with spirituality? Your writings have excited me."

Charles A. Clarke
El Cajon, California

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THE FOUNDATION

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OUTREACH

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IS BACH, DIRECTOR

NO. 4

THE LETTER

Dear Friend:

Your sincere, straight-forward response to OUTREACH and our FSU is truly remarkable. Not more than we expected, understand, but remarkable just the same. In return, I wish with all my heart that there were more time and space to share with you the weather-watch on the towers of a changing religious scene. From scholarly approaches like the recent seminar on Hinduism at Wooster College to the equally scholarly and popular Festival of Faith just held at Unity-by-the-Sea in Santa Monica, the restless winds of faith are creatively beating, the vision of man is being extended, the cross-pollinization of spiritual understanding is in the air.

It was said at Wooster, "Religion has an inner life which cannot be studied merely by a study of its external manifestations." At Santa Monica, a group of actors declared, "The heart of the spiritual equation is YOU and at the heart of you is God."

Oh, yes, and then there are the "Love-Ins" and the "Be-Ins". Are you reading about them? Have you been to one? In Elysian Park, Los Angeles, an estimated 5000 young people for the most part, bearded young men, costumed girls and women, "hippies and teeny-boppers" the newspapers said, forgetting to mention the serious-minded couples and the young parents with children, gathered on Easter morning. There were other Easter services, dignified and traditional: Hollywood Bowl, Mt. Robideaux, Oceanside. Elysian Park was different. It was "for real", they said.

What's a "Love-In" or a "Be-In"? It is a gathering where everyone, for once in his life, has an affection for everyone else in his life. Who can object to that? No one. It is an ideal that has been preached about and talked about and written about for a long time.

So here we are at a Love-In. Police are milling around for fear there may be trouble. Trouble at a Love-In? Well, you never know. After all, who is hiding behind the costumes and beards? The law takes a dim view of "Ins", whether it is a Sit-In, Kneel-In, or Be-In. One of the bearded boys, wearing dark glasses, carrying an armful of Easter lilies, pressed a flower into a policeman's hands. "Bless you, officer! A lily with love!"

The leathery officer looked miffed, smiled a skeptical thanks, and turned the white and fragrant flower over in his hands. Gifts of cakes, basket lunches, small groups huddled together in song, an oration by a "beat" poet for all who cared to listen, dancing on the Elysian green for all who cared to dance, invocations to the sun, the sky, and here and there a warm embrace between new friends. The LOVE-IN! A revolt? A burlesque? A parody on our time? A new approach to the quest? Anarchy? Heresy? Or in their hearts a prayer?

I came away, as you might well have, with emotions all the way from apprehension to a sense of loss. Apprehension about who and what might capture and consolidate this enthusiasm. Loss at the thought that once a Prophet in His day had wanted nothing more than to gather groups like this under His wings.

This much I know, here is a part of the ferment of our age and its basic bent is spiritual. New religious expressions will keep coming off the assembly line of human experiences just as they have in the past. And oddly enough, some which we felt were unsafe at any speed have turned out to be much smoother and safer than any of their severest critics predicted they would be. To remember Gamaliel: "If these things be of God they will prosper, and if they be of man they will destroy themselves." Which is to say, "Try to look at these situations in the light of spiritual understanding. The right of anyone to follow the dictates of his conscience is by no means giving any indication of fading out!

Yours,

Harold Back

THE LESSON

Inside the Overchurch

The time has come to speak in workable terms of the function of a concept in our daily life. The question is: What practical value has the concept of the OVERCHURCH?

We have previously stated that it has a value in reason or, if you wish, a reasonable value in identifying the spirit of spiritual ecumenicity. It has value as a new category of spiritual understanding and it has a mystical value. By this we mean that as there is power in the theory of an OVERCHURCH, there is dynamism in the knowledge that we are all involved in a church invisible. There is also a life-changing element in consolidating a contemporary climate of opinion under a new term. These viewpoints have by no means been exhausted and we shall hear more of them later, but the insistence that it is time to talk in terms of workability pure and simple prompts this lesson on implementation.

You see, we believe that spiritual understanding has already broken over and through the walls of today's emphasis on the need for mergers and ecumenicity. We believe that thinking people long ago refused to limit spiritual understanding to improved Protestant-Catholic or Christian-nonChristian relationships. These hyphenated combinations were foregone conclusions. Church leaders might still be struggling with them, but the people generally marched on and, on occasions, marched away from biased concepts, saying, in effect, "Gentlemen, if you must still settle your difference at theological levels, well and good, but we must continue on. Spiritual understanding is for us not a characteristic reflection of something, it is the something itself. It concerns the total relationship of mankind. Religion and religious experiences have all too long been walled in and walled out by their sectarian expressions. To talk about religion and to have one specific church or denomination in mind is like talking about love and confining it to one kind of personal affection. Love is love in many forms. Spirituality is spirituality in every form.

So, now, when we speak of spiritual understanding from inside the OVERCHURCH we are viewing the religious experience from beyond (or within) the institutionalized emphasis of religion. We are talking about life's experiences in such areas as: SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH OUR DAY-BY-DAY RELATIONSHIPS, SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH SCIENCE, SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH MUSIC AND THE ARTS, SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH TRAVEL, in fact, spiritual understanding as it relates

to the entire process and doctrine of mankind. Inside the OVERCHURCH we look upon all life as spiritual and part of the adventure is to bring together through depth participation the contemporary meaning of spiritual understanding with its historic content. Which is to say that we want to see how spiritual understanding or the lack of it has affected mankind and how it affects you and me in our fuller, richer, wider insight into total life.

As an example, consider the implications suggested by SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH OBSERVATION. Tuning in on this we immediately see all life as an expression of a basic creative force. We find ourselves part of both the mythological and the scientific attempt at explanation. We are no longer confused by this, but challenged in a deeper quest for meaning. Perception becomes a catalytic factor in a new spirit of orientation. Insight deepens our sensitivity. Awareness imparts a new dimension in our relationship with people, places and things. Through observation, unbiased, interested, adventurous, we come into a sense of true "reverence for life". We grow in grace of understanding. Intuition and knowledge are joined together. Faith and reason find their common ground. Think it through for yourself and look at SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH OBSERVATION from the standpoint of the concept of the OVERCHURCH.

Recently a restaurateur suggested a study of SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH FOOD. This, he insisted, is rather basic, for food, like faith, is universal, though it may differ in different cultures. In all countries, if you don't eat you won't live, he pointed out, and when hunger hits you there is nothing more vital than food, no matter what denominational hands prepared it, or what religion the chef de cuisine happened to be. When I suggested that some people would rather die of hunger than eat food that is taboo, he said this should make the study even more exciting and revealing.

Inside the OVERCHURCH is one way of saying we plan to explore the thought and spirit of man in the belief that the spiritual self cannot be fragmented. We know it cannot be fragmented denominationally. We now turn to its integration in social, intellectual, emotional, no less than in illusory and delusional categories. Inside the OVERCHURCH represents a new vantage from which we seek to come to a better understanding of what has sincerely, though perhaps presumptuously, been referred to as the "mind of God".

Next month: Spiritual Understanding Through Nature

THE LEARNING

There is a growing realization that the outward world is the result of an inner consciousness, and that the totality of national life is but the expression of the life of the individual. We are living in the kind of world that was in our minds yesterday, and tomorrow's world will be the one we are thinking today. We are beginning to realize that the world of scientific miracles is inadequate for our needs without an equal devotion to the miracle of faith. We feel that it is in our power to bring about this miracle. That it has to begin within ourselves is obvious, for how can we create a better world unless we first become better individuals?

The great hope for a new order and a new era lies in the new spiritual exchange which is growing in the hearts of people in every living faith. A vision of the universality of religion is moving among free people everywhere because they have common concerns, common needs, and common causes. These problems themselves will bring about the realization that whenever we investigate the other person's way of life, we reinvestigate our own. And whoever approaches religion in this way is not going to condemn anything, but is going to discover that religion's likenesses are greater than its differences.

The quest for understanding of the unknown forces of life has become a kind of universal gospel. It knows no denominational lines, asks no prescribed creed, seeks no institutionalized pattern, and wants only the earnest spirit of man as its credential for membership in this mystical fellowship.

It is time for religion to be taken out of ecclesiastical storage, dusted off and critically examined as to its practicality for constructive use in the complex life of modern man.

There is one God; He is known by many names. There is one faith; it is lived in many beliefs. There is one truth; it is seen through many minds. There is one worship; it is expressed in many forms.

Perhaps we of the old historic faiths have become too self-contained and modifiable. Once in our church we prayed on our knees, later we stood, then we sat, and now we sit on cushions. Yet none of the tendencies of practices in any religion can vitiate my feeling that everyone who truly seeks God has a solemn right to his own seeking.

Every person creates an image of God in his own heart. This is his most prized possession. How he creates this image differs from individual to individual, but it is always interesting and some aspect of the unknown is always present.

A new dimension in religion already exists, and a spiritual unity is seen beyond and above sectarian disunity. It includes the physicist whose thoughts have penetrated outer space, the historian whose study has followed the footprints of God through the rise and fall of civilizations, the scientist who has opened the secret doors of the inner mind, the philosopher who has revealed a harmony in the once inharmonious schools of thought, the educator who perceives a divine power beyond as well as within the intellectual process, the healer of bodies who knows that resources of health reside within the God-nature of every man, the industrialist and the laborer who have caught on to a workable ethic in their business dealings, the theologian who recognizes a divine power as the common ground of all beings -- in short, men and women of every walk of life who look upon religion as a quest and an adventure in search and discovery.

Religion is a mountain to be climbed, a sea to be crossed, a cave to be explored. It is also a life to be lived, if one can find the way.

THE OUTREACH OF OUTREACH

"We were thrilled to receive the first issue of OUTREACH, for it presents ideas which, as you must very well know, are very close to our hearts. You will be happy to know that we have already quoted some of the contents during a feature address to the Congress of Youth Clubs here in Port-of-Spain. We are certain that we shall find many occasions to help share your consciousness with others."

Bert and Eva Coffey, Unity of Trinidad
Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, West Indies

"Congratulations on your very exciting new undertaking. I found it a most stimulating and inspiring approach to religion in a 20th century world."

Mrs. Gilbert M. Grosvenor
Washington, D.C.

"I really think you are right on top of a wave that is rising and may well someday turn into the real "new reformation" so many people are expecting."

Alex Liepa
New York City

"As an old battle-hardened ecclesiast, I would have turned up my nose at the concept of an "Overchurch" had it been advanced by any other than so wise and experienced a man as Marcus Bach. There are already too many fly-by-night, grandiose and messianic notions abroad in our time, to think of adding another cult to the plethora now in existence. I note approvingly that you do not write off the local Church....At the same time, you recognize that there is religious reality beyond the local level. You are also quick and careful not to equate spiritual ecumenicity with organizational ecumenicity.... I am not clear just how, in practical terms, this collective body of believers you call the "Overchurch" would function, but I should be most interested to hear."

Dr. Harry R. Butman
Congregational Church of the Messiah
Los Angeles, California

"Your Foundation of Spiritual Understanding is so well based that when enough people listen to what it has to offer in its broad aspects, there is every reason why no people of any nation should ever have the desire to kill others to prove their point."

F. K. Conn
Tampa, Florida

"This is the kind of leaven which contemporary society needs."

Meredith J. Sprunger
Indiana Institute of Technology
Fort Wayne, Indiana

"A church differs from a religion as the cask differs from the wine. Church defines, confines, and I expect, refines the primitive urges and drives which motivate a person's need for love and protection. Church is mediator and administrator and adjudicator of each group's share of ancient fears, superstitions, and wisdoms. So, what is the "Overchurch"? I hope not an administrative over-reach! Doubter that I am, I never stop trying to understand. There are some phases of this 'Let's all sing together' business that I do not exactly go for. In all my research I always wonder who calls the tune!"

Myrl Bristol
Iowa City, Iowa

OUTREACH

The monthly publication of FSU offers you:

1. A new perspective on trends in religious thought;
2. An analysis of contemporary spiritual techniques;
3. Answers to readers' questions;
4. Interpretations of the thoughts, ideas and discoveries in various fields of faith.

While copies of OUTREACH will be sent to anyone upon request, your tax deductible contributions are invited. Additional Copies for use by organizations, study groups, etc., may be obtained by writing to FOUNDATION FOR SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING, P.O. Box 816, Palos Verdes Estates, California, 90274. Phone: (213) 373-2669

THE FOUNDATION

PURPOSES AND GOALS:

1. To assist individuals in the development of the things they believe, and to help in the practical application of these beliefs in daily living.
2. To contribute to interfaith and intercultural understanding through a sympathetic, personalized study of religion's impact in our daily living and in our personal relationships.
3. To serve as a research center for the interpretation of spiritual discoveries and trends as these relate constructively to the life of our time, and to make these discoveries and trends available to interested individuals and groups, religious and secular, through contemporary media of communication.