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"The Strange Career of Religious Pluralism in the South"

by Samuel S. Hill, Jr.

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This article is based on a lecture, "The Establishment and the Dissenters: Main Lines and Trunk Lines in Southern Religion," which Dr. Hill presented at Auburn University on April 12, 1980.

In a recent symposium devoted to the topic, "Diverse Expressions of Religion in the South," I was asked to talk about the attitudes of the established denominations toward minority and fringe religious groups. Halfway through the preparation I realized that the assignment really amounted to a treatment of religious pluralism in the South – not a popular subject with students of regional culture. Religious diversity in the South has of course been examined, not exhaustively yet but much more of late. For example, within the past few years scholars investigating the sweep of that diversity have begun to include black expressions of Christianity; this development reflects a new level of serious inquiry.

Religious pluralism, however, has been understudied, to say the least. This effort on my part amounts to a preliminary excursion into a topic having enough significance to warrant much fuller treatment than can be given here. Doing this job well will take a small army of investigators: students of religion from such perspectives as the historical, sociological, and theological, to be sure; but also social historians, legal historians, people doing community studies, novelists, and others. Chances are that many feints in this direction have already been made without realization that pluralism was a subject being broached. However, since this is a quite real and specialized dimension of southern society, it requires careful

Included in This Issue: Laurin A. Wollan, Jr., asks "Questions from a Study of Cockfighting." Marlene Spencer writes on "The Sacred and the Profane in Flannery O'Connor's 'The Comforts of Home'" and presents a previously unpublished photograph of O'Connor. Robert L. Hall reviews *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith.* Center Notes.

scrutiny. This paper is dedicated to focusing on the topic and encouraging work on it.

"Diversity" is simply the existence or presence of a multiplicity of types, expressions, forms, or institutions. One reacts to diversity by acknowledging it as fact and proceeding to describe the several or many forms, each by each, and all together in pattern. "Pluralism," however, has a quite different connotation: it presupposes diversity and arises from problems generated within the pattern. Pluralism bespeaks attitudes, values, inter-group relations, and public behavior in the face of diversity. Diversity is simple; pluralism complex. Pluralism occurs when the diversity within a society and its people becomes large enough. It may be partially defined as the acknowledgment that other groups also are part of the social fabric. Pluralism issues in a policy of "live and let live"; it calls forth a moral recognition that other groups exist and have a right to exist; it even grants other positions than one's own the status of being theoretically entertainable. Among religious groups, a peculiar version of that social problem sometimes appears: the acceptance of others' legal and political right to exist in combination with a denial of their theological validity and legitimacy, or even integrity. Should a sect grant another group respect and tolerance when it is peddling error? We shall be saying more about that prickly paradox.

The Pattern of Religious Diversity

One of the characteristic features of the South historically has been the relative absence of diversity – ethnic, religious, ideological, political, and otherwise. Typically where diversity is limited or not prominent, there is little need for coming to terms with pluralism. Until very recently, the South has not developed an acutely pluralistic spirit, largely because of its historic capacity for relegating the out-groups, religious dissenters, aliens from Africa, and political gadflies, for example, to special categories. (As we shall be seeing, southern society has had more diversity than it has given credence to.) In other words, the South has not been a very democratic society, from its early seventeenth century beginnings until, perhaps, the social revolution which occurred in the 1960s.

The Cultural Mainstream

Among religious groups, the Baptist and Methodist denominations have certainly been the main line. In size, influence, compatibility with the culture, and demographic permeation, they constitute the ruling party. The die was cast by 1830 – not really very much earlier – that this would be so. For more than a century afterwards, their growth was vast, if not staggering, when compared with what was happening elsewhere in Christian lands, including the American North. They wrought a Protestant, in fact Evangelical Protestant, hegemony unmatched in the annals of disestablishmentarian societies. Their size and influence remain powerful to this day.

The Baptists and Methodists have hardly had the cultural mainstream to themselves, however. Since the Colonial Period when it was the established church, Episcopalianism has certainly had standing and acceptance (if also myriad problems). The Presbyterian church has always belonged there, as have the Lutheran, Congregational, and Christian traditions in the finite areas where they have had membership. As far as class-status is concerned, in fact, these last five constituencies have stood higher than the "big two," the very predominance of which has been related to their strength in ali social classes (making for a moderate mean). In the South in curious ways ethnicity has out-ranked class status for importance. Baptists and Methodists have been ethnic in the sense of being overwhelmingly English by descent, a background that hardly distinguishes them from Episcopalians and Congregationalists. A distinction does appear, however, in their undifferentiatedly English ethnicity, even though they have not historically been conscious of being anything in particular – not English, not middle class – just southern (and white, a crucial oblique point to which we shall return). The other denominations of the cultural mainstream have been ethnic or sub-regional bodies rather identifiably: Presbyterians, people of Scottish ancestry in the better classes; Episcopalians, English families with roots in the gentry class; Lutherans, solid citizens of German descent and residing in limited locales of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Texas; the Congregationalists of tidewater Virginia and piedmont North Carolina, middle-class folk from New (and Old) England; Christians, of hardy frontier stock.

Other groups are positioned within range of the cultural mainstream. Quaker strength is confined to piedmont North Carolina (when that state was a colony, the Quakers ranked second and were settled in the north-eastern area), but it is substantial. Although the Friends' tradition is too specific to blend with others very smoothly, its people belong to and make an impact on the culture. Nearby, in the Winston-Salem city limits and environs, the Moravian tradition fits and doesn't quite fit, in similar fashion. Its acceptance and impact are unquestioned, but its contours are scarcely collapsible into Baptist-Methodist shapes. Placement of the Churches of Christ in the classification of religious groups "within range of the cultural mainstream" will come as a surprise to some. It is true that this is a movement which has a high incidence of viscosity, being quite legalistic and exclusivist. Nevertheless, in many sections of Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, Churches of Christ people are leading citizens. Somehow their sectarian ecclesiology is offset by their civic character, the result being participation in mainstream circles and activities.

Trunk Lines and Special Cases

The width of the cultural mainstream and its eddies, then, is quite considerable. There are also numerous shallow creeks and rocky brooks. To change the metaphor, in addition to main lines, trunk lines and even some narrow-gauge heavenly railroads traverse the southern terrain. Out of sight (and even "outtasight") to mainline perceptions are the numerous and often not so small, conservative Protestant bodies, the sects, and the black denominations. The latter have usually been regarded as the expressions of Christianity which suit the capacities and traditions of a unique people who happen to be set in the midst of a civilization to which they were quite alien for at least two centuries. Black Methodism and Baptism are for "that kind of people," hence need not claim much attention from the cultural mainstream. It is more than mildly ironic – in certain ways tragic – that the force of this conclusion is not diminished by the words "Methodist" or "Baptist" in the names of the leading denominations of those people. As for the sects, they too have been treated as special organizations for special people, typically from the lower classes of society or from certain remote place-cultures such as the Ozark and Appalachian areas. Churches of God, Assemblies of God, pentecostal bodies, Seventh-Day Adventists, Holiness groups, and the others have been left alone and tolerated, in truth normally pigeonholed as the preserves of those for whom the churches of the cultural mainstream have no appeal.

Beyond the categories of main line, other churches in the cultural mainstream, and the "out of sight" bodies, there is another, that of special cases. Roman Catholics and Jews are indeed special cases. For the moment it is enough to observe that members of each community have been about since the Colonial Period, that numbers are usually small in both cases, and that strength is concentrated. Jews have contributed to southern life but not been much of a factor in regional issues. Catholics are indeed numerous in a few places in which, nevertheless, they have often been viewed as alien and their presence troublesome. Catholicism has been feared and opposed intermittently, but has enjoyed a status comparable to that of the black and sectarian churches, a preserve for those mildly deviant Southerners for whom it fits.

Religious Pluralism

Now, having considered brief definitions of diversity and pluralism and sketched the pattern of religious diversity in the South, we are ready to tackle the issue of religious pluralism. In reflecting on pervasive attitudes toward groups that are "different," I am assuming the perspective of a middle-of-the-road Southern Baptist whom we will characterize as provincial but not bigoted, convinced and maybe even opinionated but not ugly in spirit. There are millions of such people in the South.

Why is this topic worth pursuing? Is there any real need to explore religious pluralism in any part of an America renowned for that social condition? Surely this is an issue which twentieth century developments have laid to rest, a battle fought and won with only the occasional mopping-up operation remaining. It is the case, of course, that eternal vigilance is the price of religious liberty, just like every other kind, especially as it involves strange or allegedly devious religious groups. One might argue that pluralism expresses the law of the land and is by now a widely observed, indeed distinguishing, trait of American society. While all this is undeniably true of the entire society, the South not excluded, still the historic career of religious pluralism has been different in the South. Moreover it continues to be somewhat distinctive. We may summarize this difference historically in this way: religious pluralism was an accomplished cultural fact in other areas of the nation by the era of World War I with much advance notice; the South came to terms with that inevitability in the 1960s through an abrupt and wrenching social revolution.

This spring at the symposium on "Diverse Expressions of Religion in the South" at Auburn University, I posed the question: Can you imagine a fruitful conference on this topic as applied to other areas of the country? Plainly rhetorical, the question can only evoke a negative reply. That there might be some exceptions to this rule in small areas does not alter the fact that the great majority take religious diversity for granted, and the spirit of pluralism is an attendant value. That, I think, is the point: elsewhere in the United States people have fairly automatically adopted a pluralistic stance. Where diversity is taken for granted, a pluralistic spirit follows. On a slightly different tack, it is worth remarking that this feature of northeastern, midwestern, and western life may help explain why conservative forms of religion when they do appear in those places are very firm and serious, frequently prophetic or sectarian in the manner of "a choice not an echo." By the same token, in the South conservative forms are so much the rule that truly prophetic or sectarian – in a word, radical – expressions have difficulty gaining a foothold or being heard as that. Quite surprising to many observers is how demonstrably northern is today's neo-Evangelicalism; there its tenets stand as a distinct alternative. Southern Evangelicalism is evangelical in its own certain and peculiar ways (which are also historically identifiable and legitimate, it should be added).

Pluralism looms as an issue only in a homogeneous society. Not many collections of human beings confront the consequences of diversity until circumstances force them to, and southern society has been amazingly free of such circumstances. When they have appeared, as they have dramatically in the case of the massive black presence, they have been commandeered. In a homogeneous society,

usually one segment of the population — typically quite large — possesses enough standing and capacity for dominance that it acquires a normative role. In the South, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant people dominate. The religion of those people, southern Evangelicalism and its acceptable cousin movements, is the norm against which all other forms have been measured and judged deficient. Let us not overlook the common propensity to measure the extraneous forms. The inclination to measure at all is the really pungent factor here; naturally the results are going to be negative. Homogeneous societies are as conditioned to checking credentials as heterogeneous societies are to taking diversity for granted.

In the homogeneous society, which the American South has been, an identifiably "right way" emerged and was accorded general respect. A standard religious ideology arose in the South by 1830, was hardened into an orthodoxy in the late nineteenth century, and persists in strength to the present. The Southern Baptist outlook is dead center of that right way. Let us say a little more about our sample Southern Baptist through whose eyes this analysis is being carried out. He is provincial, convinced, and even opinionated on some subjects. But he is not a person of ill will, does not aggressively seek out and attack other Christian interpretations, has some real affinity for the classical Baptist commitment to religious liberty, and is not given to belligerent, petulant, or put-down treatment of those who differ. Culturally, our sample Southern Baptist has learned that his people are in the driver's seat, are 98.6, sea level, and par. In point of fact, this kind of attitude does not bespeak an egregious degree of pride; rather it is a perfectly natural development given the conditions of cultural homogeneity under which he has lived his entire life.

Homogeneity implies more than an assumed normativity, however, as this attitude is accompanied by a preoccupation with stability. Homogeneous societies not only are a certain way, they judge it necessary that they remain that way for the health of the society. This concern issues in such values as societal consensus, the preservation of an entire way of life, and, in the case of the American South (and Colonial New England before it), turning the society into a holy commonwealth, the kingdom of God on earth. Values like these are rarely expressed in any homogeneous society which operates as a political democracy; they certainly cannot be converted into official public policy, at least not for long on any broad scale. Those very facts may make their effective hold on the society even stronger, however.

To reiterate a point made earlier, the consensual values of a homogeneous society are simply taken for granted. When they are religious values, they acquire added status, being not only the way things empirically are but also how things are meant to be. In historical terms any such complex of attitudes and expectations is akin to a state-church mentality, an establishmentarian philosophy. A church-society-culture alliance is a predictable eventuation under such conditions. One practical consequence is that the normative traditions earnestly desire and work diligently to protect traditional values. Inevitably religious concerns spill over into and help generate others in the political, social, economic, and moral arenas. Any such situation comes close to being a textbook instance of social conservativism.

Attitudes toward Dissenters

How, specifically, does the issue of religious pluralism show up in the religious life of the South? One helpful way of seizing this issue is to discover who cares about the existence of dissenters: who is bothered that eccentric or exotic religious groups are about? Some have and do, but the particulars depend on time and circumstance. During the Colonial Period, when the Church of England was the Established Church, it cared; indeed it was legally obligated to concern itself with that matter. While its power to enforce policies relating to dissent and dissenters was quite limited in actual practice, it did seek to suppress dissent and keep dissenters out, often required that permits be issued before those infiltrators could hold services, and restricted the right to perform marriages and to hold teaching positions to members of the Established Church.

Since the demise of the neo-medieval society in the Colonial South, the Baptists appear to have cared the most. The reason is, as we have seen, that their size and influence have occasioned their expecting to be dominant — meaning, really, to be normative. An opposite example may be found within the Churches of Christ. Being ideological purists and radical sectarians, they have no positive social policy. Their tendency, like that of the sects generally, is to maintain their own purity, hopeful only that others — dissenters from the truth, all — may be brought to see the truth and join their company.

It may seem curious that the huge Methodist company in the South has not often made dissent and dissenters a focus of concern. Perhaps this is due to its being rather naturally connectional and ecumenical. Methodism's stress has been on piety more than on doctrine. History teaches us that doctrinal orientation readily gives rise to disputation and divisiveness, whereas piety is far more willing to share the fruits of experience without asking to see the other person's badge.

In summary, three types of manifestation of concern with dissent have been present in the South. The earliest was called for by the laws of the society. The most extreme example, that of the radical sects, has been a kind of non-example; these are groups whose theology points them toward enforcing uniformity — dominance by the party in exclusive possession of the truth — but are restrained by other aspects of the same theology that militate against any active social policy at all. The most familiar pattern is that

of the statistically and culturally dominant group which habitually explains to itself why other groups exist at all, without practicing an aggressive proselytization.

A Religious Spectrum

A typology of attitudes by religious groups toward other religious groups suggests itself. We must be clear throughout that this interest is most likely to appear in a homogeneous society such as the American South and that this particular classification has direct applicability only to that culture. As we are about to see, all of the "interesting," that is, distinctively southern types are left of center (meaning radical to a smaller or greater degree) when assessed by modern western standards. Also, we should note that Jews cannot be fitted into this construction because they are simply "playing a different game"; similarly Roman Catholicism probably shouldn't be included because of the peculiarity of its role in and relation to southern society.

On the right side of this spectrum is the cluster of traditionalist, "conservative" denominations, the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, and (usually) Methodist. These are "carrying on," doing what they have historically done, and concentrating so much on those commitments that they have little time for or concern with dissent. In fact "dissenters" are to them only "others" to whom they afford the right to be whatever they are (sometimes condescendingly). Near the center of our spectrum is the Baptist denomination which takes note of dissent, is mildly puzzled by it, is gently hopeful of winning over members from other groups, but, over all, lumbers ahead with its massive energy to accomplish a number of goals guided by a powerful momentum which keeps it on course. It would like to absorb others but is generally content to be the norm. Doubtless, one of the factors preventing it from working hard to absorb or proselytize is the classic Baptist commitment to the principle of religious liberty.

What might vie for the most radical position on the spectrum in another culture is only next left, just left of center, in the South. This is the party of social reform-minded Christians who crop up in small numbers from time to time. In this century, several tiny bands of Christians have sought to challenge and finally change regional practices in racial, economic, and political matters. In our own time Koinonia Farm (of Americus, Georgia) and the Committee of Southern Churchmen (led by Will Campbell) are famous examples of Christian phalanxes which work assiduously to build a more just, loving society – without being evangelistic, it is crucial to observe. Also, individuals, congregations, informal associations, and currents of thought rise up now and then to address a variety of problems and causes; for example, the southern landscape is dotted with pacifism, challenges to capitalist economics, organized efforts to alleviate the burdens of the poor and to improve working conditions, and so on.

Continuing left, we come upon the type represented by extremist, otherworldly sects such as the snake-handlers, pentecostalists, and millennialists. Diverse as this type's constituents are, they share a conviction that theirs is an alternative-model of Christianity. While they invite outsiders into membership, characteristically they are preoccupied with "just being." Their approach is so distinctive as to be its own end. Rather than fret over or contend with other groups, they are caught up with their own practices, confidently insisting that theirs is the "whole gospel." Similar to this alternative-model type is the counter-mainstream position associated especially with the Churches of Christ. This is authentic separatism. These are people whose psychology is that of the normative group who believe theirs is really the only way (hence are not cooperative) and whose position in society is secure enough to reinforce their convictions. Only the absence of an active social policy, a feature earlier noted, has deterred them from staking a public claim to normative status. This type is distinguished from the alternative-model type by its bolder aspirations and more expansive self-claims. Domination is not a possibility for the former but a beckoningly and nearly achievable aspiration by the latter.

The two most radical, left-wing types are the traditional fundamentalists and the politically-activist "New Right" fundamentalists. Both are grievously dissatisfied with the current state of the health of society. Conversion and transformation are their passion. The traditional fundamentalists express this passion by working with individuals and congregations and, indirectly, by their heavy stress on the imminent apocalyptic event. Their politically-activist first cousins go further, devoting impressive energies toward dominating the society by taking it over politically through electing their kind to political office and enacting their moral convictions into law. Incidentally, their emergence is a quite recent development which may or may not prove successful and therefore continue as a type.

The movement across this spectrum of types, then, is from quiet insinuation into the culture, to the comfortable status of being the norm, to various kinds of discontent with the *status quo* which these groups confront by appropriate devices for expunging evil and establishing good. Some consciousness of others characterizes all the positions from center to left, but the attitudes and consequent actions vary greatly from type to type. What makes the South, with its historically homogeneous culture so unusual on this point is the size and social significance of the company of Christians who adopt a program other than "live and let live," who do not work to change things with a rhythm which accords due respect to others. Religious pluralism has had formidable religious opposition in the South. Speculating, one may opine that

were all the left-leaning types to unite in a coalition they could wreak a good deal of havoc in the southern part of American constitutional society. They will not do so, however, as it is the nature of practically every one of them to assert its own ultimate authenticity.

The reality of each case, indeed of the whole situation, is that the South is so integrally a part of the *national* political and social system that one can scarcely imagine an all-enveloping take-over by any group – even in league with their spiritual-social kin groups in the rest of the country. Such religious communities are, thus, sectarian both by internal definition and design and through the limits set by American constitutional society. It is, of course, conceivable that religious pluralism, a posture of tolerance and respect for all, could be undermined. But all the odds are against any such eventuation. Only a small minority of the southern religious people who boggle at pluralism, on the occasions when they do get around to confronting it, actually envisage a society so deployed. Because they are not accustomed to thinking and operating in political terms, because they basically respect the American tradition here and generally, and because they embody the millennial spirit in declaring that only Christ's return can actually set the world right, they do not pose a threat to religious pluralism. The seeds may be there, but they are unlikely to germinate for these, and doubtless other, reasons. Even so, the issue of religious pluralism does concern southern observers from time to time; this may be comparable to conditions in the northeast and midwest in the last century when the immigration of so many Roman Catholics supplanted the old Protestant hegemony with a pluralism reluctantly consented to but, long since now, effectively secured. Peter Berger reminds us how astonishing is the common American phrase, "religious preference," in the context of traditional societies. That usage, long a commonplace elsewhere in America, has become standard in the South as well.

We have said that pluralism is an issue only in a homogeneous society and have seen that the South has been that kind of society, in its own peculiar ways of course. The Southern Baptist people and the Baptist style of Protestantism have indeed set the pace for regional religious understanding. Yet, just how tenuous that hold has been in a society really too diverse to be neatly homogeneous is illustrated by the role of that counter-mainstream tradition so symbolically significant for this kind of analysis, the Churches of Christ. Where this 2½ million brotherhood is strong, it is very strong. Furthermore its ideology and program diverge sharply from the normative religious patterns. Here is a movement constituting an exceedingly numerous and influential company in middle and western Tennessee, northern Alabama, and many communities in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. In these places there are indeed two mainstreams, Baptist (and Baptist-like) and Churches of Christ. Outsiders may have difficulty conceiving how different their approaches are to a shared conservative Protestantism. At one level what distinguishes them most clearly is the smooth continuity between Baptist ideology and the place of the Baptist people in society, and the awkward, troublesome disparity between the alien ideology of the Churches of Christ and the ease with which its members fit into conventional regional society. In many places mainstream and counter-mainstream live together, side by side. It is this anomalous social fact which renders so curious the Baptists' not being able to be sectarian – somehow over against the culture – either with their belief-system or as people, and the Churches of Christ which combine an alien belief-system with its people's widespread social acceptance. Awareness of the fascinating place held by the Churches of Christ in southern society, is one of the southern religious stories that needs to be told more fully. That story also helps to set in relief what religious normativity really means in the South, a graceful blending of a reigning ideology with a socially dominant people.

Homogeneity under Attack

The course of this discussion has been leading us toward concluding that the South has been only a homogeneous society, not a uniform or totalitarian one. There is diversity, and the fact that its range is narrower by quite a lot than the patterns in other sections of the country does not sabotage that important condition. Moreover there has been diversity since the Colonial Period – even during the Colonial Period when the presence of other groups was treated as an undesirable state of affairs and pluralism was officially a scandal. In point of fact, homogeneity's inning came rather late, beginning about 1830 to accompany the crystallization of a cultural South (as both cause and effect?). We may judge that it lasted down to World War II. The cultural impact of that hallmark event which contributed to the 1954 decision by the Supreme Court to declare illegal the public maintenance of a bi-racial social system and, in turn, to the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, was sufficiently great to topple homogeneity as a fact, if not totally as an aspiration. Things have changed a great deal, with the consequence that the South is no more than wistfully or residually a homogeneous society. (That new condition may help account for the emergence of the Fundamentalist New Right in regional politics.)

Alienism

In those eras when homogeneity has been the shape of southern society, what were (are now) the rubbing places? There is doubtless an intimate association of the religious friction points with the general social ones, but our focus here must be

restricted to the former. And the focus is, most basically, on alienism in any form. Any time a people with an unconventional religion have appeared, trouble has been in the offing, or at least a threat. Different innings have produced different offings; however, the general characteristic of alienism is always discernible: the presence of people who are "different," seemingly unassimilable into a homogeneous society laced with sacrosanct norms and criteria. Typically a foreign-appearing people and ideology in combination have occasioned resistance. Sometimes just an unfounded fear has ignited flames of hostility, which have led to violence in some cases, alas.

If we were to pre-judge the South by events in western civilization generally, we might suppose that Jews had been a *bête noir* to traditional Southerners. Not really. I suppose that Jews have been a potential threat to a culture saturated with the hauntings of Christ; however, because of their paucity, the grace with which they have made their lot in the society of Charleston, Richmond, Savannah, and, in this century, many other regional communities, and other more subtle factors, anti-Semitism has not been much of a factor. Perhaps one tragic note has played in Jewish-Christian relations. Religious and other cultural circumstances have driven Jews to be unusually circumspect in the practice of their tradition.

Theologically speaking, Christians have also co-opted Judaism. In other words, Christianity has never dealt with Judaism on its terms — hardly a peculiarity to the American South. Instead, Christian categories, questions, and issues have been imposed on Jews; Christians have done no listening to Jews. Two very brief examples will have to suffice: first, Christians have assumed that the Jewish position on the Bible is that of Christianity's two testaments minus the New, without insight into how different A is when it stands by itself as a norm for a unique historical community from what A would be if it were part of the equation $A = (A + B\,[=C]) - B$; and second, Christians have taken for granted that Messiah (or the concept of Messianism) is a central orientation of Judaism so that Jesus, by negation, is what differentiates the two faiths. Listening to Jews would have cleared up both of these points of confusion. We touch on the tragic note when we see the nature of the pluralistic complex involving Christians and Jews. By and large the Jewish presence has been tolerated; but an authentic pluralism would have generated some kind of dialogue. Also, a condescending spirit has been evident in the way in which the social majority has regarded Jews as quaint, as curiosities, as delightful intruders. One has the impression that the vision has not extended much beyond their being seen as a people who just are the way they are, who "just can't help it."

A far more overt rubbing place has existed in the dealings with Roman Catholics. This is strange, indeed ironic, in view of the meagre number of Catholics who have populated the South outside Maryland, southern Louisiana, Mobile, and the territory of and near Louisville, and St. Louis. One's perplexity over anti-Catholic bias is further strengthened by the recognition that the most intense period of hostility was 1900-1920, when the South's version of Know-Nothingism erupted, a period singularly notable for the absence of Catholic migration into the South or Catholic growth either by size or influence. But hostility there was in that period, and suspicion and rejection, sometimes culminating in open hostility. The activities of the Ku Klux Klan on the national scale have as often been directed against Catholicism as against Negroes, Jews, Communists, or any other unwelcome despoilers of American purity. In the South the overwhelming brunt of Klan attack has been the Negro people, but Catholicism has run a respectable second. If this were not so serious, it would be laughable since, even granting the propriety of the Klan's concerns, Catholicism has been so negligible a force in southern society.

We may unravel this puzzle a bit through seeing how Protestant sensibilities have misrepresented Catholic teachings by interpreting them in their own categories. This has occurred as often beyond the South as inside it, incidentally — and frequently among people of fundamental good will who harbored these opinions without giving public expression to them. Five areas of Catholic doctrine that have been viewed as causes for suspicion will illuminate the point. (1) *Saving Truth.* The Catholic Church teaches that the central claims of the Christian faith have a quality of definitiveness and exactitude. To Catholicism's detractors, this has been branded as dogmatism, an undesirable quality. (2) *The Church Militant.* For Catholicism, Jesus gave his authority to the visible, institutional Church in history, the People of God hierarchically organized. This translates as exclusivism. (3) *Sacraments.* There are seven of these spatializations of divinity serving as direct means of grace. This translates as magic or superstition. (4) *The Church Triumphant and Suffering.* This brace of very real and concrete concepts, the People of God in heaven and in purgatory, translates as escapism, prudentialism, and, in extreme reaction, "spookiness." (5) *Discipline.* Spiritual cultivation is not left to inner conviction and resolution alone; it, too, is given concrete form through such moral agencies as Lenten observance, celibacy, and confession. This translates as legalism and fear. Pointing to these five areas of doctrine should serve to remind us that the roots of anti-pluralism are ideological as well as social and ethnic.

In entertaining a suspicious attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church and its people on such central points as these, southern Protestantism shared a negative policy with American Protestantism generally. However, the region's performance is distinguished from that operating elsewhere by two factors: (1) how much less provocation there was for such a

reaction in the South; and (2) how much longer this attitude prevailed in the South, certainly through the 1940s. These factors correspond to the emplacement of homogeneity and its attendant values in the South, and to the duration of a traditionalist kind of society in the midst of a western world which had been facing up to pluralism for many decades. A survey of the strange career of religious pluralism is one of the more illuminating devices for disclosing how very recently the impact of modernization has reached Dixie.

The first rubbing-place or friction-point, then, has been alienism. Any persons, ideologies, or institutions deemed foreign, strange, not at home, off base, not "our kind of folks," have been subjected to treatment as suspect, sometimes worse. In terms of religious bodies, the target has been mainly Roman Catholicism, but also Judaism in minor ways.

Challenges

The second rubbing-place, related to the first, is the presence of any challenge to the "southern way of life," including: to prevailing social norms; to a class-structure taken for granted; to racial arrangements long ago fixed in place; to conventional politics; to values agreed upon by consensus. We should be aware that one of the reasons for the resistance to invasion by Catholics and Jews is their (respectively) deviant attitudes toward such rather minor matters as drinking, profane language, ways of celebrating momentous events, and sabbath behavior. Religiously speaking, challenges to custom, convention, and consensus have come from several directions: as we have just noted, from Roman Catholicism and Judaism; from the occasional radical reformer; from church-based programs for altering racial arrangements; or even from arch-conservatives.

Arch-Conservatives and Other Extremists

The third principal source of friction has, in fact, been arch-conservative religion. Americans from other regions are scarcely credulous that a Southern Baptist climate can regard fundamentalism, and even pentecostalism and faith-healing as extremist; but it does. Nor is the force of the point diminished by the recognition that these are extremist versions of a mainline tradition or positions. Fundamentalism truly is a trunk line in the southern religious network; indeed it is often different enough to qualify as narrow-gauge. Our sample Southern Baptist is vigorously anti-fundamentalist. He opposes two fundamentalist traits especially: exclusivism and propositionalism. Although not formally ecumenical, he is likely to be friendly toward the people of other denominations; as we said earlier, he is provincial but not bigoted — not exclusivist. His fundamentalist neighbor is a strident exclusivist. In place of the fundamentalist approach which turns the Bible into doctrinal propositions to which assent must be given, he relies chiefly on his personal experience of God. And, quite apart from any traits of character, our sample Southern Baptist belongs to mainstream culture, thus is not exercised by many of the strict moral exceptions taken to it by fundamentalists.

Recently another kind of "extremist version of the mainline position" has appeared: the company of radical experientialists who are charismatic or pentecostal. While only a few belong to a Southern Baptist church, they have made notable inroads into the Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian denominations. Furthermore, this group has attracted numbers into para-church fellowships which identify those gifts and practices as the hallmark of vital Christianity. For such persons, faith in God is more than basic trust in God, assurance of salvation, and a close walk with the Lord day by day; it is also the empowerment to be demonstrative in the expression of piety, to heal the sick of body or mind through prayer and the laying on of hands, to speak in tongues, to be divinely guided in every small detail of living, and the like. The number and intensity of these claims vary from group to group, of course, but our sample mainliner views them all from a distance.

Our mainliner has come to expect such extreme behavior from members of pentecostal and Holiness churches but is baffled by comparable manifestations of the Spirit among neo-pentecostals in the classical denominations. Thus, both fundamentalism and neo-pentecostalism, coming as they do from different quarters and being attractive to different strata of people, are beyond the range of his experience and whole-hearted approbation. He — and all of us — however, may be facing a new day in southern religious patterns in which the mainline widens somewhat to incorporate other forms of conservative Protestantism. Whether an actual widening will occur depends not only on how long and strong is the life of these movements but also who affiliates with them. That aside, our mainliner is growing more and more accustomed to aberrations on all sides and from all classes of people. Some of the more newly religious may have trouble with pluralism; he does less and less.

A miscellany of phrases frequently heard from the mainstream of southern religious culture in describing others may serve to summarize this discussion: concerning Roman Catholics, having the Bible and Christian theology as they do, "They should know better." Concerning the Jews, "They can't help it." Concerning the traditional sectarians, "That's what you expect from lower class people." Concerning a former mainliner who is dissenting and threatening to stray into another denomination, "Don't worry, Jimmy's all right" — such a pregnant southern expression that one should be able to understand it without commentary. Concerning defection of members to other denominations, "What can we do to stop losing members from the top and the bottom?"

Much of the preceding discussion describes the status of pluralism in the South from 1830 or so until the wake of the major social changes wrought in

the 1960s. By no means has this network of evaluations and positions disappeared. Nevertheless the incidence of its prevalence is far smaller now than even ten years ago, most certainly twenty. The "civil rights revolution" did make revolutionary impact, a truth well illustrated by any inquiry into the career of religious pluralism. On that front, too, things have changed quite a lot within the past fifteen years.

The New Right: Political Overtones

Just as the traditional forms of religious monism are weakening, a new form makes its appearance. History has a way of playing tricks like that. I refer to the congeries of conservative Protestant coalitions being called the New Right. (Of course, the New Right is a national phenomenon and its animations far from exclusively Christian.) As just noted, it is too soon to tell how pervasive and effective this movement will be and how long it will last. But the political organizations and platforms being promoted by leaders of the "Electronic Church" bear watching. The empires being built by the "Old Time Gospel Hour," the "PTL Club" (Praise the Lord or People That Love), and the "700 Club" are fraught with political potential. These television ministries and the organizations behind them are identifying or raising up candidates for office, then with characteristic vigor and skill promoting their campaigns.

Although the Electronic Church does not exist as an organized coalition, their moral passions and positions bring them toward each other. They tend to take a united stand against ERA, abortion, pornography, permissiveness, socialism and communism, and aid to foreign countries; they favor free enterprise capitalism, prayer in the public schools, capital punishment, stronger national defense, and the acknowledgment of God in the national life. This list of causes is hardly without precedent in American history. What is novel is that Christian television networks and programs are the promoters, and, on the subject of this paper, that Southern-based Evangelical Protestantism has made the political cause its own. The programming of Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker, and Pat Robertson all have a southern "feel" about them. This inference is reinforced by their being more accurately described as Evangelical than as fundamentalist, a sometimes glamorous and always well-heeled and technologically expert presentation of the benefits of personal faith.

Perhaps through the partial influence of the Electronic Church, conservative congregations around the South are beginning to see a righteous political cause as part of their ministry. Should they and the television ministries be successful to any great degree, the South will have entered a new stage in the strange career of religious pluralism. Many people are frightened by this development because of its commitment to legislating its moral convictions into a way of life obligatory for all the people. Personally I do not believe they will achieve widespread success. It is also important to register the clear distinction between virulent forms of Christian-inspired political behavior and these efforts which are far more in touch with the spirit of democratic politics. And finally we should note that the impact of the Electronic Church seems to be greater on individuals outside the South, where this variety of Christianity is less accessible, than in the South where related versions of it make up the mainstream. Politically, however, it may have a better chance of taking over in the South. We may be looking at a new kind of "southern strategy," religious rather than political at its source, which has making the national society righteous as its goal.

If in the South the logic of this new Christian conservativism in league with politically rightist values should prevail, we will have a reversal — with power — of the classic southern pattern. Hitherto the southern mainline has dominated, but not typically through organized political endeavor. Under these potentially new conditions, trunk-liners (verging on being narrow-gaugers in some cases) would wrest control and prescribe the moral policies of the society. Moreover, to repeat, they would do so for the whole nation. In so many respects this fledgling development mirrors the new day which has dawned in the history of religious pluralism in the South.

So, the southern story continues ever fascinating. Sometimes dull because of uniformity, sometimes tragic owing to oppression, sometimes colorful because quaint and distinct, sometimes novel as it responds to new conditions, it remains worthy of observation and analysis. Religious pluralism, which entails an attitude of respect for and a desire to have dialogue with other groups, had a difficult time budding to full flower. This is somewhat ironic in that its religious mainline possessed fundamentally democratic leanings. Now, under the impact of the South's profound integration into national society between 1940 and 1970, that flowering has largely occurred. Curiously, one trunk-line version of it bids to reinstate a quite limited pluralism for all of America. It is not likely to succeed. But its emergence causes one to wonder what will be next in the strange career of religious pluralism in the South?