

WORKING PAPER SERIES

PERSPECTIVES
ON SOCIAL
INCLUSION

Ethical Reflections on Social Inclusion

Dow Marmur



MAY 2002

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National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Marmur, Dow, 1935-
Ethical reflections on social inclusion / Dow Marmur.

(Perspectives on social inclusion working paper series)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-9730740-3-5

1. Social integration--Moral and ethical aspects. 2. Inclusive education. I. Laidlaw Foundation II. Title. III. Series.

BJ1451.M37 2002

170

C2002-902201-0

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This paper is part of the Laidlaw Foundation's Working Paper Series, Perspectives on Social Inclusion. The full papers in English and summaries in English and French can be downloaded from the Foundation's web site at www.laidlawfdn.org (under Children's Agenda programme). Limited paper copies are available from workingpapers@laidlawfdn.org.

PERSPECTIVES
ON SOCIAL
INCLUSION

Ethical Reflections on Social Inclusion

Dow Marmur



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About the Laidlaw Foundation

The Laidlaw Foundation is a private, public-interest foundation that uses its human and financial resources in innovative ways to strengthen civic engagement and social cohesion. The Foundation uses its capital to better the environments and fulfill the capacities of children and youth, to enhance the opportunities for human development and creativity and to sustain healthy communities and ecosystems.

The Foundation supports a diverse portfolio of innovative and often unconventional projects in three program areas: in the arts, in the environment and improving the life prospects for children, youth and families.

Working for social inclusion is a theme that underlies much of the Foundation's activities. The key words in the Foundation's mission — human development, sustainable communities and ecosystems — imply that achievement will rely on the enhancement of capacity and capability. Not only is social inclusion being developed as an emerging funding stream, it is an embedded Laidlaw Foundation value, both structurally and programmatically.

Nathan Gilbert
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Foreword:

The Laidlaw Foundation's Perspective on Social Inclusion

The context for social inclusion

Children have risen to the top of government agendas at various times over the past decade, only to fall again whenever there is an economic downturn, a budget deficit, a federal-provincial relations crisis or, most recently, a concern over terrorism and national security. While there have been important achievements in public policy in the past 5 to 10 years, there has not been a sustained government commitment to children nor a significant improvement in the well-being of children and families. In fact, in many areas, children and families have lost ground and social exclusion is emerging as a major issue in Canada. Examples abound and include these facts.

- the over-representation of racial minority families and children among those living in poverty in large cities, and the denial of access to many services by immigrant and refugee families;
- the 43% increase in the number of children in poverty in Canada since 1989, the 130% increase in the number of children in homeless shelters in Toronto, as well as the persistence of one of the highest youth incarceration rates among Commonwealth countries;
- the exclusion of children with disabilities from public policy frameworks (e.g. the National Children's Agenda), from definitions of 'healthy' child development and, all too often, from community life.

These situations provide the context for the Laidlaw Foundation's interest in social inclusion. The Foundation's Children's Agenda program first began exploring social inclusion in 2000 as a way to re-focus child and family policy by:

- re-framing the debate about poverty, vulnerability and the well-being of children in order to highlight the social dimensions of poverty (i.e. the inability to participate fully in the community)
- linking poverty and economic vulnerability with other sources of exclusion such as racism, disability, rejection of difference and historic oppression
- finding common ground among those concerned about the well-being of families with children to help generate greater public and political will to act.

The Foundation commissioned a series of working papers to examine social inclusion from a number of perspectives. Although the authors approach the topic from different starting points and emphasize different aspects of exclusion and inclusion, there are important common threads and conclusions. The working papers draw attention to the new realities and new understandings that must be brought to bear on the development of social policy and the creation of a just and healthy society.

These are:

- Whether the source of exclusion is poverty, racism, fear of differences or lack of political clout, the consequences are the same: a lack of recognition and acceptance; powerlessness and 'voicelessness'; economic vulnerability; and, diminished life experiences and limited life prospects. For society as a whole, the social exclusion of individuals and groups can become a major threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity.
 - A rights-based approach is inadequate to address the personal and systemic exclusions experienced by children and adults. People with disabilities are leading the way in calling for approaches based on social inclusion and valued recognition to deliver what human rights claims alone cannot.
 - Diversity and difference, whether on the basis of race, disability, religion, culture or gender, must be recognized and valued.
- The 'one size fits all approach' is no longer acceptable and has never been effective in advancing the well-being of children and families.
- Public policy must be more closely linked to the lived experiences of children and families, both in terms of the actual programs and in terms of the process for arriving at those policies and programs. This is one of the reasons for the growing focus on cities and communities, as places where inclusion and exclusion happen.
 - Universal programs and policies that serve all children and families generally provide a stronger foundation for improving well-being than residual, targeted or segregated approaches. The research and anecdotal evidence for this claim is mounting from the education, child development and population health sectors.

Understanding social inclusion

Social exclusion emerged as an important policy concept in Europe in the 1980s in response to the growing social divides that resulted from new labour market conditions and the inadequacy of existing social welfare provisions to meet the changing needs of more diverse populations. Social inclusion is not, however, just a response to exclusion.

Although many of the working papers use social exclusion as the starting point for their discussions, they share with us the view that social inclusion has value on its own as both a process and a goal. Social inclusion is about making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and

contributing members of society. It is, therefore, a normative (value based) concept - a way of raising the bar and understanding where we want to be and how to get there.

Social inclusion reflects a proactive, human development approach to social well-being that calls for more than the removal of barriers or risks. It requires investments and action to bring about the conditions for inclusion, as the population health and international human development movements have taught us.

Recognizing the importance of difference and diversity has become central to new under-

standings of identity at both a national and community level. Social inclusion goes one step further: it calls for a validation and recognition of diversity as well as a recognition of the commonality of lived experiences and the shared aspirations among people, particularly evident among families with children.

This strongly suggests that social inclusion extends beyond bringing the ‘outsiders’ in, or notions of the periphery versus the centre. It is about closing physical, social and economic distances separating people, rather than only about eliminating boundaries or barriers between *us* and *them*.

The cornerstones of social inclusion

The working papers process revealed that social inclusion is a complex and challenging concept that cannot be reduced to only one dimension or meaning. The working papers, together with several other initiatives the Foundation sponsored as part of its exploration of social inclusion, have helped us to identify five critical dimensions, or cornerstones, of social inclusion:

Valued recognition – Conferring recognition and respect on individuals and groups. This includes recognizing the differences in children’s development and, therefore, not equating disability with pathology; supporting community schools that are sensitive to cultural and gender differences; and extending the notion to recognizing common worth through universal programs such as health care.

Human development – Nurturing the talents, skills, capacities and choices of children and adults to live a life they value and to make a contribution both they and others find worthwhile. Examples include: learning and developmental opportunities for all children and adults; community child care and recreation programs for children that are growth-promoting and challenging rather than merely custodial.

Involvement and engagement – Having the right and the necessary support to make/be involved in decisions affecting oneself, family and community, and to be engaged in community life. Examples include: youth engagement and control of services for youth; parental input into school curriculum or placement decisions affecting their child; citizen engagement in municipal policy decisions; and political participation.

Proximity – Sharing physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, if desired, and to reduce social distances between people. This includes shared public spaces such as parks and libraries; mixed income neighbourhoods and housing; and integrated schools and classrooms.

Material well being – Having the material resources to allow children and their parents to participate fully in community life. This includes being safely and securely housed and having an adequate income.

Next steps: Building inclusive cities and communities

Over the next three years, the Children's Agenda program of the Laidlaw Foundation will focus on *Building inclusive cities and communities*. The importance of cities and communities is becoming increasingly recognized because the well-being of children and families is closely tied to where they live, the quality of their neighbourhoods and cities, and the 'social commons' where people interact and share experiences.

Christa Freiler
Children's Agenda Program Coordinator
Laidlaw Foundation

The Laidlaw Foundation's vision of a socially inclusive society is grounded in an international movement that aims to advance the well-being of people by improving the health of cities and communities. Realizing this vision is a long-term project to ensure that all members of society participate as equally valued and respected citizens. It is an agenda based on the premise that for our society to be just, healthy and secure, it requires the inclusion of all.

Paul Zarnke
Chair, Children's Agenda Advisory Committee
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Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following for their contribution and commitment to the working papers series on social inclusion: the authors, without whom there would be no working papers; Karen Swift, Frank Stark, Nancy Matthews, Jennifer Keck, Daniel Drache and the forty external reviewers of papers, all of whom provided critical feedback and expert advice at various stages during the editorial process; the members of the Advisory Committee, Children's Agenda Program, Nathan Gilbert, Executive Director, and the Board of Directors, Laidlaw Foundation for their support, interest and critical comments; and Larisa Farafontova, Eva-Marie Dolhai, and Richard Wazana, for their perseverance and skillful assistance at critical stages in the process.

Ethical Reflections on Social Inclusion

Ethical Reflections on Social Inclusion

Personal: Autobiographic Fragments

I was about nine years old. Like most displaced persons seeking shelter from the Nazis in Uzbekistan during World War II, I was always hungry. The mother of my playmate Richard was a doctor. They had plenty of food. They ate meat and had a housekeeper. I can still see and smell the piece of meat on the frying pan that day. My craving must have been obvious to Richard, for he offered to help me steal the meat. But we were caught by the housekeeper before I could consummate the act. The sense of shame is with me to this very day.

It was not my first experience of exclusion and not the last. But, for some reason, I have never forgotten the incident, whereas most others have receded from memory. I relive it each time I see a hungry child. I cannot think of a more tangible manifestation of being an outsider than being hungry when others are not. Perhaps there is no more total exclusion than not being allowed to break bread in community. Hence there is the primacy of hospitality in biblical tradition, the Sabbath and Festival meal for Jews as a way of celebration, the Eucharist for Christians as a way of communion. These are manifestations of inclusion, of being at one with everybody else and with God.

An almost equally powerful memory of exclusion is my first day in a school in Gothenburg, Sweden, some four years after my abortive attempt at stealing a piece of meat in Uzbekistan. We had just arrived in a country

that, even in the Europe of 1948, was a land of plenty. I was no longer hungry, but I was a stranger – to myself and to others.

Without knowing a word of Swedish I was sent to school. I had to go on my own because my parents were at work. I can still see myself on that first day standing in the playground surrounded by children many years younger than myself. (Exaggerating more than a little, my parents had told the authorities that I had had two years' prior schooling, so I was sent to Grade 3 at age 13.) I must have fascinated my soon-to-be classmates, as I was standing there almost motionless, a hybrid between a child and an adult. In the characteristic lilt of Gothenburg Swedish they asked again and again – and I can still hear it – *Vad heter du?* I did not understand, so I did not answer. They walked away in dismay and left me standing alone. It took a few days before I understood their question: What's your name? When I told them, they were still puzzled: It was, for Swedish ears, a most peculiar name.

Whereas the memory of being hungry marked me as an outsider for good, Sweden helped me to live comfortably with having been once excluded – without having to change my name. For the Swedes were determined to create a society of equals. Despite their then relative ignorance of foreigners, and their innate suspicion of strangers, and notwithstanding a perennial propensity for anti-Semitism by many of its citizens, Sweden was a consciously egalitarian country. As long

as I could answer the questions, I was given opportunities to be included, even when I said things people found strange.

Though I have not lived in Sweden for more than four decades, I remain deeply indebted to the country and its people, because it gave me intimations of inclusion without forcing me to change my identity. School carried the promise of integration. My roots in Sweden may be tenuous, yet Swedish is the closest to a mother tongue I have ever had. Like eating together, speaking to each other makes for inclusion.

When, not long after my arrival in Sweden, I was exposed to secular history and to the teachings of Judaism, I realized that exclusion seems to be as old as civilization. There must have always been us – claiming to be strong and integrated - and them – identified as the weak and the downtrodden. Among the latter were always widows and orphans, the perennial victims of society. The Hebrew Bible added strangers to the category of the excluded and often mentions the three together. According to Scripture, exclusion not only affects children and single parents but also everyone not of the clan.

Though Sweden made life easy for immigrants and I quickly learnt the language, I never ceased to be a social outsider in the eyes of individuals and groups. I tried to reflect my desire to belong as an equal through the biblical verse each of us had to choose for the inscription in the book we would receive on the occasion of our confirmation in the Gothenburg Synagogue. I chose the Swedish version of, “Rich man and poor man meet; the Lord made them both” (Proverbs 22:2). The rabbi, who had bought me my first suit for the occasion out of his discretionary fund, tried to talk me out of my choice of biblical reference, but I insisted in the vain hope that the verse would manifest my desire to be included. The

rabbi knew better, for when my fellow-confirmation class saw what I had chosen, they distanced themselves from me, now no longer subliminally but openly. My attempt at full inclusion – integration - had the opposite effect. Quoting texts, however true and powerful, does not make for inclusion.

Even though, as Jews, the members of my confirmation class must themselves have felt a little outside the mainstream of Swedish life, like so many outsiders, they created hierarchies of exclusion, which presumably made them feel more like insiders. For several reasons I was at the bottom rung. Jewish immigrants in every country, including Israel, have complained that as newcomers – “greeners” – they were kept down by many of the Jews who had arrived earlier and were now more settled.

It must have been the prevalence of exclusion that prompted the repeated references in Scripture to how God’s law forbids it. Thus the Book of Deuteronomy commands not only to feed “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (14:29), but also to include them in all Israelite celebrations (16:11&14). The rights of the weak are not to be subverted (24:17) and their dignity must be upheld (24:19 & 26:12). When the prophet Jeremiah advocates equality before the law for all, he states specifically: “Do not wrong the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (22:3). [The prophet Zechariah singles them out as the most likely victims when he warns the people against fraud (7:10). When the Psalmist speaks of the enemies of God, we are told that “they kill the widow and stranger; they murder the fatherless, thinking ‘The Lord does not see it, the God of Jacob does not pay heed’” (94:6&7).]

In his Torah commentary, W. Gunther Plaut (b. 1912) confirms that the frequent biblical admonitions suggest that “aliens had a difficult time and that instead of finding acceptance and friendship (let alone love) they experi-

enced rejection.”¹ Reflecting biblical and rabbinic teachings, Moses Maimonides (d. 1104), the greatest Jewish thinker of all time, spells out what this means for his community, which in the Middle Ages was no longer in a position to receive strangers but had to deal with widows and orphans:

A man ought to be especially heedful of his behavior toward widows and orphans, for their souls are exceedingly depressed and their spirits low. Even if they are wealthy, even if they are the widow and orphans of a king, we are specifically enjoined concerning them, as it is said, “you shall not afflict any widow or orphan” (Exodus (22:21)). How are we to conduct ourselves toward them? One may not speak to them otherwise than tenderly. One must show them unvarying courtesy; not hurt them physically with hard toil, nor wound their feelings with hard speech. One must take greater care of their property than of their own. Whoever irritates them, provokes them to anger, pains them, tyrannizes over them, or

*causes them loss of money, is guilty of a transgression, and all the more if one beats them or curses them.*²

The lesson to be learnt from slavery in Egypt is fundamental to the Hebrew Bible: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, *for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*” (Exodus 22:20; italics added). Non-compliance has severe consequences to which Maimonides refers above: “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans” (ibid., 21-23). Inclusion was not to be a matter of discretion or charity, but a sacred duty, a religious act. Exclusion would be punished. The words condemning it suggest, of course, that the propensity to exclude the weak was very strong. Even those who advocated full inclusion could not avoid being a little patronizing, which is perhaps also reflected in the Maimonides statement.

Pariahs and Parvenus: The Jewish Experience

Even if biblical threats had some impact on the ancient Israelites, they did not seem to frighten Christians and Muslims in whose midst Jews came to live. Though Israel’s daughter religions, especially Christianity, professed allegiance to the ethical teachings of the Hebrew Bible, these religions did not seem to apply their commitment when dealing with adherents to the mother faith. As a result, the history of the Jewish people is largely the history of pariahs. Whether or not Jews tried to live up to biblical injunctions and integrate the disadvantaged into their own society, they themselves were kept outside the mainstream of the Christian and Muslim

worlds which many Jews inhabited. They would have settled for being patronized, but they had to endure being the victims of contempt and worse.

Using the concept of pariah Hannah Arendt (d. 1975) tried to understand not only Jews and Judaism but society in general. Following the French-Jewish writer Barnard Lazare (d. 1903), she advocated the notion of the “conscious pariah,” i.e., the need for Jews to organize themselves from within and “from below” to fight for their rights. She suspected the dominant population and despised parvenus, Jews who tried to ingratiate themselves

with powerful establishments through assimilation and imitation in the vain hope of being accepted as equals. Richard Bernstein, in his book, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, writes: “The conscious pariah is to be sharply distinguished from the Jewish parvenu, who desperately seeks to escape his pariah status and to be accepted by, and assimilated to, a society that treats the Jew as an outcast.”³ As a child, I gladly settled for being a parvenu in Sweden, as did many other Jews there. The possibility of being a conscious pariah did not occur to me before I became an adult and a Zionist.

Conscious pariahs retain their dignity and may be able to improve their conditions, even if they stay outside the mainstream. By contrast, parvenus are pathetic and doomed to fail, even when they give a semblance of being integrated, for imitation does not prevent exclusion. [Sander Gilman has written about them:

The more one attempts to identify with those who have labeled one as different, the more one accepts the values, social structures, and attitudes of this determining group, the farther away from true acceptability one seems to be. For as one approaches the norms set by the reference group, the approbation of the group recedes. In one's own eyes one becomes identical with the definition of acceptability and yet one is still not accepted. For the ideal state is never to have been the Other, a state that cannot be achieved.⁴]

Like Arendt and Lazare, [Sander] Gilman speaks about his own people: “As Jews react to the world by altering their sense of identity, what they wish themselves to be, so they become what the group labeling them as Other had determined them to be.”⁵ However, the reflections on the Jewish condition are applicable to all conditions of exclusion. The response to exclusion can never be imitation of the included, but a struggle by the excluded for

dignity and equality. Ideally, as in the biblical teachings, the advocacy should be on the part of those in power, the included. In reality, however, that is not likely to happen. As implied above, the automatically included may tolerate some parvenus in their midst, but they are not likely to regard them as social equals, even when they grant them civil rights.

Though political acceptance can never lead to social integration, as long as there is political integration with all the equal opportunities for employment, education and personal dignity, the primary objectives of the enterprise will have been achieved. My experience in Sweden corroborates this. Political integration made life bearable, even if social integration eluded my parents and, to a lesser extent, myself.

Survival and success inevitably depend on unity among the pariahs, which is by no means a given. On the contrary. It seems that, in their efforts to imitate the included, the excluded create their own hierarchies of exclusion. My experience in the confirmation class is a manifestation of this. In Jewish tradition, part of the tendency to keep others out comes from a perversion of the idea of holiness. The Hebrew word “kadosh, holy,” really means “set apart.” Every manifestation of the sacred seems to involve setting boundaries that keep some in and others out. A tool in the service of misguided holiness, of distinguishing between outsiders and insiders - between “holy” and “profane,” between “clean” and “unclean” - is often Jewish law. As it is heavily weighted in favour of males, women are excluded from many religious functions, as are the disabled and, more understandably, minors who do not yet have a mind of their own. In this scheme of things, pariahs create their own pariahs in their desire to be, literally, “holier than thou.”

One of the challenges of modern Judaism has been to affirm its uniqueness through the

practice of holiness without barring anybody from full participation. Holiness was understood to mean dedication to God and open to all, not a club for the privileged few. The aim has been to remain committed to Jewish law while removing its barriers. In consequence of the tensions partly created by the application of Jewish law, the question of inclusion has become central in the contemporary internal Jewish debate. Instead of focusing on the exclusion in law many prefer to stress the inclusion in holiness.

Hence, for example, the emphasis on the injunction, cited above, “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Jewish statehood in the last 50 years, and its international political con-

sequences, has meant that Israel has been perceived to exclude Jews whom Jewish law does not accept and to oppress strangers, even those who once had been neighbours. Hence this demand by Irving Greenberg (b. 1933), a contemporary exponent of traditional Judaism: “Exercise of power must be accompanied by strong models and constant evocation of the memory of historic Jewish suffering and powerlessness. It is so easy to forget slavery’s lessons once one is given power, but such forgetfulness leads to the unfeeling infliction of pain on others.” He concludes: “Memory is the key to morality.”⁶ We are called upon to remember our past in order to act ethically in the present, irrespective of what the letter of the law may be saying.

Philosophy: Responsibility for the Other

One who sought to formulate morality by way of memory was Emmanuel Levinas. He was a product of the contemporary Jewish world, the world of pariahs and parvenus, even when he frequented the world of prominence and power. He remained one of the excluded. Born in 1905 in Lithuania, he went to France at age 18, and later to Germany, to study philosophy with some of the best teachers of the time. As a conscript in the French army at the outbreak of World War II, he was captured by the Germans; the heroic eluded him. Despite his enormous erudition in Jewish and secular learning, originality of thought and seminal influence on many French intellectuals of the “new philosophy” school, Levinas had to wait many years before being given a commensurate academic post in his adopted country. He died in 1995. In the last years of his life, and particularly after his death, his reputation has soared. The world often finds it easier to celebrate a

dead pariah than a live one.

Though here is not the place for a systematic account of Levinas’ philosophy, its central thesis seems to be essential to our understanding of exclusion and inclusion in their many ramifications, and in translating the particular Jewish experience into a universal human program.

Leaning heavily on Jewish sources, Levinas sought to make a fundamental distinction between traditional Western philosophy (“Greek”) and Jewish thought (“Hebrew”). The former, according to Levinas, is primarily concerned with ontology; the foremost preoccupation of the latter is ethics or ethical metaphysics. Whereas abstract ontology centers on being and specifically on the I, concrete ethics focus on the Other. With his teacher Edmund Husserl (d. 1938), the exponent of phenomenology, Levinas describes Western thought as “egology.” His aim was to break out of this

self-centred pattern in order to make room for the one the Bible calls “your neighbour.” He wanted to move from dialectics to dialogue, from subject to object, from the abstract to the concrete. He wrote: “Moses and the prophets preoccupied themselves not with the immortality of the soul but with the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger.”⁷

Edith Wyschogrod explicates: “It is critical for an understanding of Levinas’s thought to realize that the Other is always posited as the poor and the stranger. It is in and through our relation with the Other thus understood that our relation with the divine begins.”⁸

That is why those whom Moses addressed as chosen were burdened with laws – not laws that exclude but laws that include the excluded and sanctify the men and women usually barred from coming close to the sacred. “This election is made up not of privileges but of responsibilities.”⁹ And responsibility is always, first and foremost, to the Other. It is not a matter of my benevolence or discretion but of duty with transcendental overtones. “The man who must be defended,” Levinas wrote, “is in the first place the other man; it is not initially myself. It is not the concept ‘man’ which is the basis of this humanism; it is the other man.”¹⁰ He quoted with approval an earlier Jewish teacher that “the material needs of my neighbour are my spiritual needs,”¹¹ because “everything begins with the right of the other man and with my infinite obligation toward him.”¹² In a similar vein, a Hasidic tale quotes a master telling a disciple: “Always care for your own soul and another’s body, not your own body and another’s soul.”

The basis for this philosophy of inclusion, according to Levinas, was the experience of the biblical Exodus, the epitome of exclusion: “The traumatic experience of my slavery in Egypt constitutes my very humanity, a fact that immediately allies me to the workers, the

wretched, and the persecuted peoples of the world. My uniqueness lies in the responsibility I display for the Other. I cannot fail in my duty toward any man, any more than I can have someone else stand in for my death. This leads to a conception of a creature who can be saved without falling into the egotism of grace.”¹³

The person who puts the Other first is a creature without power; the practice of inclusion is ethics without power. In his introduction to a series of conversations between Levinas and Philippe Nemo - one of France’s “new philosophers” who was influenced by Levinas - Richard Cohen writes: “Ethics is forceful not because it opposes power with more power, on the same plane, with a bigger army, more guns, a finer microscope or a grander space program, but rather because it opposes power with what appears to be weakness and vulnerability but is responsibility and sincerity. To the calculations of power, ethics opposes *less* than power can conquer.”¹⁴ As in the Exodus, when it was God who compensated for Israel’s weakness, so in the future, too, in the words of the Prophet, “the Lord will ransom Jacob, redeem him from one too strong for him” (Jeremiah 31:11).

Levinas maintained that Judaism has always believed that “it survived in order to preserve the teaching of the prophets in all its purity.” He continued: “In a world where, like material goods, spiritual values were offered to whoever wished to grow rich, morality meant it was worth remaining a poor Jew, even when one ceased to be a Jew who was poor.”¹⁵

At a time when society has grown rich in material things and when spiritual values are offered - in true “Greek” fashion - for the betterment of the self, it seems important to go back to the affirmation of “Hebrew” weakness and poverty as a way of making room for all, not only for the strong and the successful. Not

knowing the answers and not having the power may be the beginning of addressing the problem, even if it cannot be solved. Here, philosophy moves into theology. As Wyschogrod paraphrases Levinas, the observant Jew: “There can

be no relation with God apart from the relation with men. Levinas cannot emphasize sufficiently the social origin of the human encounter with God.”¹⁶

Theology: Justice with Care

Miroslav Volf, professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, is a native of Croatia. He seems to have been traumatized by the recent events in what was once Yugoslavia. His book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, is a document of theology rooted in autobiography. “The book is personal,” he writes, “in the sense that I struggle intellectually with the issues that cut close to the heart of my identity.”¹⁷ For him, “segregation,’ ‘holocaust,’ and ‘apartheid’ are Western equivalents of the Balkan ‘ethnic cleansing’.”¹⁸ Having been excluded and having witnessed exclusion, he is in search of a theological formula of inclusion. What Levinas taught out of his Jewish experience, Volf seeks to impart in the context of his Christian faith.

Though by its very nature, Volf’s book speaks about politics, the issues it raises have much wider implications. That is particularly so when he discusses justice and repudiates, along the lines of Levinas’ rejection of traditional Western philosophy, the idea of a universal, abstract notion called justice that will lead to the final, “messianic” solution to all human problems. Such a solution, Volf argues, is beyond the human realm because, in the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition that is rooted in covenant, complete justice belongs to God and we will always experience it as partial - in both senses of the word:

When God looks at a sojourner, God does not simply see a human being, but a stranger, cut off from the network of rela-

*tions, subject to prejudice and scapegoating. How does the God who “executes justice for the oppressed” act toward widows and strangers? Just as God acts toward any other human being? No. God is partial to them. God “watches over the strangers” and upholds the orphan and the widow” (Psalm 146:7-9) in a way that God does not watch over and uphold the powerful.*¹⁹

For Volf “the justice which equalizes and abstracts is an unjust justice!”²⁰ Therefore, “if you want justice without injustice, you must want love.”²¹ Which brings us to the notion of embrace of the Other, rather than an abstract formula for All, as the only wholesome response to exclusion. Embrace is justice tampered with love. [Volf is echoing here the rabbinic idea of the two principal names of God in the Hebrew Bible (Yahweh and Elohim) denoting the two attributes of God: the attribute of justice (din) and the attribute of love (rachamim, sometimes translated as “mercy” though its literal meaning is linked to rechem, the Hebrew for “womb”). God “the father” responds to human affairs with justice that is tampered by God “the mother” who acts in love. True justice is only possible when the two act together and at the same time.]

Embrace is a powerful biblical image. When Joseph finally discloses himself to his brothers and they stand before him in speechless fear that justice may have caught up with them, he assures them that it is not their machinations but God’s will that determined

the course of events. “With that he embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him” (Genesis 45:14-15).

An even more dramatic embrace comes earlier in the Genesis story. After many years’ absence and mutual exclusion the brothers Jacob and Esau met again. It was a very tense moment. Jacob “went ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother. Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling in his neck, he kissed him; and they wept” (33:3-4). [The Masoretic text finds this too much and suggest that the Hebrew “vayishakehu, he kissed him” should be read, “vayishakhehu, he bit him.”

But the text itself is unequivocal:] Esau kissed his brother. Reconciliation in the concrete superseded justice in the abstract. And Esau embraced Jacob, again not as an abstrac-

tion but as a physical act. [The Hebrew “vayikhabkehu, he embraced him” goes back to the three-letter root kh-b-k. Whenever two of the three radicals in different Hebrew words are the same, there is a strong connection between the words. Kh-b-k (embrace) is related to kh-b-b (love) and kh-b-r which gives rise to the word for “friend,” khaver. Embrace and love and friendship are all manifestations of the] Reconciliation that goes beyond justice and makes for inclusion. Referring to Carol Gilligan’s assertion that the “ethics of justice” must be supplemented with the “ethics of care,” Volf writes:

*If our identities are shaped in the interaction with others, and if we are called ultimately to belong together, then we need to shift the concept of justice away from an exclusive stress on making detached judgments and toward sustaining relationships, away from blind impartiality and toward sensibility for differences.*²²

Dialogue: I-Thou and I-It

Levinas’ dependence on Martin Buber (d. 1965) is in evidence in much of his writings, even though he differs from Buber in many ways. Though Volf’s book does not refer to Buber, the evidence of Buber’s influence on him is equally obvious. Both the philosopher and the theologian are the disciples of a man who insisted that he was neither a philosopher, nor a theologian, but a teacher.

For Buber teaching is encounter; reality is in the in-between, which manifests itself in two ways: subjective and personal – *I-thou* – or objective and impersonal – *I-it*. The *I-thou* encounter is between two subjects who address each other in total mutuality that affirms each of them. The *I-it* encounter is between subject

and object. When I meet you as a person, both of us are affirmed as individuals through the encounter; it is *I-thou*, true dialogue. When I relate to you the way we relate to things, I use and manipulate you; it is *I-it*. *I-thou* makes for inclusion, *I-it* for exclusion. *I-thou* makes for ethics, *I-it* for technology, perhaps even philosophy.

[In light of the above, Hannah Arendt might have said that the pariah and the parvenu are treated in the *I-it* mould by the majority culture; they are manipulated, not encountered. Sander Gilman could have suggested that people treated as objects, not subjects, by others will come to regard themselves as objects and thus lose all identity. Unless I

encounter the Other in true dialogue, I don't know who I am. Emmanuel Levinas affirms the primacy of the Other as a variant on the *I-thou* model. He shuns the "Greek" way of doing philosophy because such, ostensibly objective, philosophy reduces reality to an *it* that can never be more than ideology. By contrast, the Hebrew Prophets in their passion and pathos were exponents of *I-thou*. Hence Buber's interest in the Bible and in Hasidism – the popular mystical movement in Judaism – as reflections of authentic dialogue without ideology. Similarly, Miroslav Volf's rejection of abstractions that result in "unjust justice" – and lead to exclusion – in favour of the kind of justice that comes with mercy – and makes for embrace – is in the same vein.]

Exclusion can be lethal, whether or not it is deliberate. Buber tells a moving anecdote about unintentional exclusion that he experienced when he put himself and his own "spirituality" (which he calls "religion") before the needs of the Other:

What happened was no more than that one forenoon, after a morning of "religious" enthusiasm, I had a visit from an unknown young man, without being there in spirit. I certainly did not fail to let the meeting be friendly, I did not treat him any more remissly than all his contemporaries who were in the habit of seeking me out about this time of day as an oracle that is ready to listen to reason. I conversed attentively and openly with him – only I omitted to guess the question which he did not put. Later, not long after, I learned from one of his friends – he himself was no longer alive – the essential content of these questions; I learned that he had come to me not casually, but borne by destiny, not for a chat but for a decision. He had come to me, he had come in this hour. What do we expect when we are in despair and yet go to a man?

*Surely a presence by means of which we are told that nevertheless there is meaning.*²³

Buber was a teacher who believed that education (*I-thou*), as opposed to training (*I-it*), could be the great medium for inclusion and for encountering the Other. This would be achieved not just by being attentive and civil, but by being able to hear even that which was not said, to meet the Other by responding to the Other's real needs. To do so both teacher and student must not be preoccupied with themselves but enter into an *I-thou* relationship. "Since then," Buber continued, "I have given up the 'religious' which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken."²⁴ Life is meeting in the everyday; the extraordinary is rarely anything but a mirage.

Maurice Friedman, arguably the foremost exponent of the thought of Martin Buber has written:

What is most essential in the teacher's meeting with the pupil is that he experiences the pupil from the other side. If this experiencing is quite real and concrete, it removes the danger that the teacher's will to educate will degenerate into arbitrariness. This 'inclusiveness' is of the essence of dialogical relation, for the teacher sees the position of the other in his concrete actuality yet does not lose sight of his own.

Friedman concludes: "Inclusiveness must return again and again in the teaching situation, for it not only regulates but constitutes it."²⁵ The hungry child cannot learn integrity unless he is fed as much as the next person. The hapless immigrant will not become part of the community until he is taught the way others are taught. Pariahs will be doomed if they are not addressed as persons but viewed as representatives of the outsider class, whether

patronized or ostracized. The way to act ethically is not to formulate systems but to turn to the Other. Justice can never be true unless it is

accompanied by embrace. Coexistence is not possible without the I addressing the *thou* and not manipulating an *it*.

Education: Six Signposts

The biographic and ethical reflections that form the first part of this paper constitute the basis for some practical considerations in response to the challenge to include all members of our society, especially children who cannot speak for themselves. I would like to follow Volf's advice when he suggests that "we lower our sights in conflicts over the issues of justice" and "instead of seeking overall victory, we should look for piecemeal convergences and agreements."²⁶ In line with Volf's argument against a total, all-embracing formula for justice, which by definition is likely to be false, what follows is an attempt to point at some signposts in our endeavour to turn ethical concerns into practical possibilities. Instead of attempting a single, all-embracing formula, the above general reflections must suffice. Instead of presenting an overall solution to the problem of exclusion, all that is being offered here are a number of steps that may contribute to the inclusion of individuals and groups: from autobiography, through history, philosophy and theology to a life of dialogue. The stress is on positive action that would make for greater justice, not on negative reaction that would expose the opposite. Much of what I have to say here is rooted in my own tradition in the same way as much of what Volf brings to the discussion is rooted in Christian thought.

As the emphasis is on the inclusion of children and because many of the general reflections above are based on the thought of Martin Buber, the teacher, my focus is education. The insights that stem from Jewish histo-

ry, as well as the fragments of my own biography – perhaps also the biography of other Jews cited in this paper – suggest that education in all its manifestations is the most effective vehicle for inclusion. It even seems to override much of the pariah-parvenu dichotomy and provides true opportunities to turn to the Other in justice as a starting point for love. When educational institutions recognize effort, not lineage, they become agents of such inclusion.

1. Eating together.

There is much to suggest that poor performance and unruly behaviour in the classroom and on the playground has a lot to do with children's diet. As indicated at the beginning of this paper, the most persistent memories of my life between the ages of six and eleven, spent in the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, are about being hungry. I cannot recall that anything else mattered very much, definitely not school. Not only the episode that led me to theft, cited above, but many other childhood memories suggest that hunger came to colour my moral outlook, as well as the outlook of the adults among whom I lived. The Swedes may have known it better than others. Perhaps that is why they provided free nutritious lunches for all students in their schools, irrespective of parents' income. No child would go hungry and all children would eat together, because eating together made for community; bringing our own food would have made for separation, inequality, exclusion.

As soon as Jethro, the outsider, came to

reunite the biblical Moses with his wife - Jethro's daughter - and their children, "Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law" (Exodus 18:12). Most Jewish celebrations include sitting down to a meal at which strangers are expected to be honoured guests; Abraham's hospitality turned into an ethical norm. As suggested above, Christian communion is of the same ilk. Being at the same table removes barriers between people and opens them up to God.

2. Learning together.

The universality implied in eating together is writ large in the universality of learning together. One of the great battles of rabbinic Judaism was between elitist Sadducees and democratic Pharisees. Even though learning inevitably brings out inequalities in students, because not all have the same facility to learn, the opportunity to study and the encouragement for students to work to their utmost ability creates communality. It is this that prompted the statement in early rabbinic teachings: "If the offspring of an illegitimate union [the quintessential outsider] was a disciple of a sage and a high priest was an ignorant man, the former takes precedence."²⁷

Equalization that comes with education has been such a strong principle in Jewish life that when Jews, after their emancipation, gained access to secular education, they found it easy to adapt themselves, even excel, in their effort to be included. The remarkable integration of Jews in all the countries of the West is undoubtedly the result. The emphasis on learning in other immigrant communities in Canada and elsewhere is having similar consequences.

My own inclusion into Swedish life was entirely due to education. While my parents and I lived in the slums of Gothenburg, I was

able to do well at school and to participate in the whole range of school activities. Even when I became the president of the school council, nobody asked me where I lived and what my parents did. Learning made for inclusion that, to a considerable extent, even compensated for the inescapable social exclusion.

3. Learning from others.

Much of Levinas' philosophy has been expressed in his interpretations of rabbinic texts. In true postmodern fashion, he turned to the written sources for guidance and entered into dialogue with them. It is "textual reasoning" at its most impressive. Buber's ideas about education are made on the assumption of a master-disciple relationship, usually based on their joint reading of sacred texts. Both Levinas and Buber, steeped in Jewish sources, seem to believe that the past can only be understood with the help of Scripture, subject to continuous interpretation. The body of teaching is so rich and complex that it requires proper guidance. Teachers should be there to provide it. Under their tutelage, students can dedicate themselves to what the texts teach.

The Hebrew word for "education" – *khinukh* – is the same word as "dedication" (as in the Feast of Dedication, *Khanukka*). The term stands in sharp contrast to the English "education," based on the Socratic idea that a teacher "draws" out the knowledge the students already possess. Socratic education is internal exploration, not revelation that is knowledge that comes from outside. Dedication, on the other hand, is founded on revelation and the teacher is seen as the conduit of revelation. The Hebrew for "teacher" – *moreh* (masc.), *morah* (fem.) – is the same as for Israel's supreme document of revelation, Torah. It is the universal validity of Torah that prompts the Book of Deuteronomy to proclaim in the name of Moses: "I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those

who are standing here with us this day before the Lord our God and with those who are not with us here this day” (29:14). By placing all students of Scripture at the foot of Mount Sinai, as it were, we can facilitate their dedication to God.

In view of our legitimate fear of religious coercion, the above is open to deep suspicion. This is largely because many of those who today speak the language of religion expect uniformity in thought and deed, coupled with a hierarchical political structure, and they are prepared to use coercive measures to achieve both. That is not how education should be viewed. Martin Buber, the most persistent of Jewish anticlerical religious thinkers of the last century, has written about the two dimensions of education: First, “the realization that youthful spontaneity must not be suppressed but must be allowed to give what it can.” Second, “this the almost imperceptible, most delicate approach, the raising of a finger, perhaps, or a questioning glance, is the other half of what happens in education.”

Torah education at its best is about that. Buber continues: “Modern educational theory, which is characterized by tendencies to freedom, misunderstands the meaning of this other half, just as the old theory, which was characterized by the habit of authority, misunderstood the meaning of the first half.”²⁸ If pre-modern education erred on the side of authority and modern on the side of liberty, postmodern education attempts to fuse the two without compromising with either. This will make for learning through dialogue, between student and teacher as well as between students, teachers and the text. “The relation in education is one of pure dialogue,” writes Buber. “Trust, trust in the world, because this human being exists – that is the most inward achievement of the relation in education.”²⁹

The first on Buber’s list of “three chief

forms of dialogical relation” is “an abstract but mutual experience of inclusion.”³⁰ The purpose is not to place the student in a straitjacket of dogma or ideology. The aim is: “Nothing but the image of God. That is the indefinable, only factual, direction of the responsible modern educator.”³¹ Education that is dedication is aimed at opening our eyes to our interdependence on each other in dialogue and on our collective dependence on that which is beyond us. True dialogue is both immanent and transcendent. The teacher’s task is to facilitate it without reference to a specific religion and without challenging the traditions in which students are being reared. So-called value-free education is, indeed, education without value.

A way of transmitting values without indoctrination is to open students and teachers alike to what the sociologist of religion Peter Berger (b.1929) has called “signals of transcendence.” He defines these as “phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our ‘natural’ reality but that appear to point beyond that reality.”³² Berger lists a number of areas, many of them related to education, that bring us these signals: the ordering of reality that teaches human existence through trust; play as a way of tasting reality, which in later life “brings about a beatific reiteration of childhood;”³³ the orientation toward the future manifest in hope; humour as a way of helping individuals to bridge the gap between the *is* and the *ought to be*; even damnation as a way of experiencing and dealing with despair. All these are forms of revelation that do not require prior theological commitment, only a readiness to be surprised by life and to transmit that surprise to disciples.

4. Languages.

The vehicle of learning and of revelation is language. The word as *davar* is central to Hebrew Bible and, as *logos*, to the New Testament. George Steiner (b.1929), the literary critic, is

not religious in the usual sense of the word, and decidedly not fundamentalist. On the opening page of a book characteristically called, *Real Presences*, he defines its purpose: "It proposes that any coherent understanding of what language performs, that any coherent account of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence."³⁴

Language not only enables us to "stand at Sinai," but, above all, it makes it possible for humans to communicate with each other. The shape of our language determines the nature and the quality of our thinking. Not knowing what to say usually means not knowing what to think. In such situations one tends to resort to clichés and slogans which impoverish the soul. Referring to Nazi Germany, Steiner has shown "what political bestiality and falsehood can make of language when the latter has been severed from the roots of moral and emotional life, when it has become ossified with clichés, unexamined definitions, and left-over words." He reminds us that "what has happened to German is, however, happening less dramatically elsewhere."³⁵

There is hardly a society that has not sought to disguise the truth through the abuse of language. Steiner again states:

*Moreover, the planned falsification and dehumanization of language carried out by totalitarian regimes have had effects and counterparts beyond their borders. These are reflected, though in a less murderous way, in the idiom of advertisement, wish-fulfillment and consensus-propaganda of consumer technocracies.*³⁶

Our daily dose of television viewing provides the evidence. Only a thorough and careful education in language can safeguard the freedom of the viewer and enable an individual

to turn to the Other as a *thou*, not an *it*, a being distorted by misinformation.

Virtually all thinkers cited above have been at home in several languages. Hannah Arendt wrote in English as well as in her native German. Levinas wrote in French but taught in the language of the Talmud (Hebrew and Aramaic) and spoke the language of his home, Yiddish. Miroslav Volf knew Serbo-Croat before he learnt English. The first published essay by Martin Buber, the master of German prose who for many years taught in Hebrew, was in Polish. George Steiner is equally at home in English, German and French. If personal freedom and rootedness in the world demand a thorough knowledge of one's own language, the ability to reach out to others and include them requires the learning of other tongues. "To learn a language beside one's native idiom, to penetrate its syntax," Steiner writes, "is to open for oneself a second window on the landscape of being."³⁷ To be included, command of the language of the land is essential; to include others, the knowledge of foreign languages is equally important.

Because language is so important in the effort to include, it can, of course, also have the opposite effect. Volf observes: "Most of the exclusionary practices would either not work at all or would work much less smoothly if it were not for the fact that they are supported by exclusionary language and cognition. Before excluding others from our social world we drive them out, as it were, from our symbolic world."³⁸ Nazi terminology in the extermination process of the Jews is the most telling example. Current acts of persecution offer equally telling illustrations.

However, abuse of language should in no way dissuade us from learning languages. For an element of language teaching must be the development of a critical ear in every student for language manipulated in the service of

power and ideology. The opportunities to include those whom we understand, even if they are strangers, greatly outweighs the danger of obfuscation.

5. Community.

To have a common language with the Other is to include the Other. If the mutual relationship shapes the character of the I and the thou, their education will make for community. "Genuine education of character," Buber wrote, "is genuine education for community."³⁹ Jewish tradition is suspicious of self-study. It promotes learning together as a corollary to eating together, because both make for community, and it expects students to be teachers, because learning, like eating, is, at its best, sharing. Hence the importance of schools as places where not only knowledge is acquired, but where character is shaped.

Abraham Joshua Heschel (d. 1972), a Jewish thinker who wrote in four languages and whose character was shaped by the study of Jewish sources, has written that ideal educational institutions are not to be judged by examination results but by the attitude of those who attend them: "Man is not asked how much he knows, but how much he learns. The unique attitude of the Jew is not the love of knowledge but the love of studying." Knowledge may be acquired in solitude by reading books, but studying needs people, fellow students and, even more important, teachers: "What we need more than anything else is not *textbooks* but *textpeople*. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that pupils read; the text that they will never forget."⁴⁰ Most of us do not remember much of what we learnt at school, but we all remember teachers who influenced us, perhaps even changed our lives.

6. Identity.

The ideal learning community fosters study and judges its participants by effort more than by result. It is shaped by teachers who, whether religious or not, consciously or otherwise, come to be servants of God, instruments of dedication. The distorted community, on the other hand, insists on result rather than effort and fosters competition in place of cooperation. The emphasis there is on Me, not on the Other. The task of the one described as teacher is to train students to conform and to foster individuals who want to learn.

One way of preventing educational institutions from becoming boot camps is to foster the individuality of each student. Inclusion is neither the promotion of the status of pariah nor the dubious achievement of becoming a parvenu, but to value a person for being the Other, yet an integral member of the Whole. This means setting boundaries that enable individuals to participate in community without being swallowed up by it. "The absence of boundaries," writes Volf, "creates nonorder, and nonorder is not the end of exclusion but the end of life."⁴¹ He states that "differentiation consists in 'separating-*and*-binding'."⁴² He asserts that "identity is a result of the distinction from the other and the internalization of the relationship to the other."⁴³

This is important for all, especially for members of minority groups of all ages. To belong must not mean to erase one's past but to bring it into the present. To be part of a group cannot possibly mean to cease to be oneself. The alternative to the pariah is not the parvenu.

Politics: Affirmative Action

Though the above, even in its practical application, is deliberately non-specific, I cannot conclude these reflections without making the obvious point that the stance presented here has political implications. Since politics is inextricably bound up with funding, the remarks that follow may be relevant in making financial resources available for projects that seek to make inclusion possible.

“To think of man’s hunger,” writes Levinas, “is the first function of politics.”⁴⁴ In a critical analysis of Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue, Levinas articulates his politics as a concrete application of Buber’s lofty principles. He wants to move from Buber’s words to our deeds, from the speech to the teacher to the actions of the disciples:

One may wonder whether clothing the naked and feeding the hungry do not bring us closer to the neighbour than the rarified atmosphere in which Buber’s Meeting sometimes takes place. Saying “Thou” thus passes through my body to the hands that give, beyond the speech organs. Before the face of God one must not go with empty hands.⁴⁵ It is also consistent with the talmudic texts that proclaim that “to give food” is a very great thing, and to love God with all one’s heart and with all one’s life is yet surpassed when one loves Him with all one’s money. Ah! Jewish materialism.”⁴⁶

The force of the last three words should not escape us. The accusation that Judaism is materialistic, “this-worldly,” and thus devoid of “spirituality” is seen here as a manifestation of religious commitment manifest in economic and political terms.

Or to put it differently: “to deserve the help of God, it is necessary to want to do what must be done without his help.”⁴⁷ For Levinas,

“the work of economic justice does not serve as a prelude to spiritual existence, but already achieves it.”⁴⁸ His economic spirituality/spiritual economics brings him to the conclusion that “the only absolute value is the human possibility of giving the other priority over oneself.”⁴⁹

Those who may wish to support the measures proposed in this paper are likely to take up political positions that will often conflict with the prevailing political mood in most modern states, Canada included. For modern politics, almost irrespective of which party is in power, seems to base itself on the maxim, “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours.” The result is great disparity in income and opportunities and the ensuing growing gap between haves and have-nots in everything that matters, education no less than money.

The Mishnah Tractate *Avot* (5:13), known as “The Ethics of the Fathers,” offers two evaluations of the one who says, “Mine is mine and yours is yours.” Such a person, we read, “is of average character.” However, “others say this is the characteristic of Sodom.” The reference here is not to the sexual proclivities of the biblical Sodomites but to the verse in the Book of Ezekiel, “Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy” (16:49). The ethical climate of capitalist society swings between the two views expressed in the rabbinic dictum: The majority view is that the formula “Mine is mine and yours is yours” is normative. Others, on the other hand, see it as a manifestation of arrogance that leaves behind the disadvantaged and makes for their exclusion. Children are often its principal victims, because they have little that is theirs, yet need much from others to grow and to develop.

Recognizing that each political system has its flaws, this paper does not attempt to advocate a party line. However, the reflections articulated here suggest a course of action that would seek to improve the lot of those who do not have much they can call “mine” by promoting projects outlined in the previous section:

1. To support school meals for all as a way of feeding those in need and providing community.
2. To encourage curriculum development that stresses learning before achievement and encourages the quality of effort before the quantity of knowledge.
3. To provide opportunities for imaginative teacher training and to promote the status of teachers in the community to imbue them with the sense of responsibility of being role models to the young and thus helping them to see further than their perceptions allow; attuning them to Berger’s “signals of transcendence.”
4. To affirm that, even in our day and age, language comes before technology and that promoting the teaching of languages other than the mother tongue makes for inclusion.
5. In a similar vein, to promote activities that will enhance community and make for inclusion.
6. To celebrate individuality by enabling children to be proud of their own heritage and to have adequate knowledge of it.

The course of action proposed in this paper is partisan in that it favours the excluded and the poor. Neutrality encourages inactivity and can be “positively harmful,” writes

Miroslav Volf: “For one, it gives tacit support to the stronger party, independently of whether that party is right or wrong. Second, neutrality shields the perpetrators and frees their hands precisely by the failure to name them as perpetrators. Third, neutrality encourages the worst behavior of perpetrator and victim alike.” He continues: “The Jewish prophets – and indeed the whole of Scriptures – are biased toward the powerless.” Referring to the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, Volf asserts that “such a preferential option for the powerless implies a privileged hearing for those whose voices are excluded.”⁵⁰

Affirmative action is inherent in the covenantal teachings of Judaism and Christianity alike. It is manifest in the way the Hebrew Prophets reacted to the Kings of Israel. Emmanuel Levinas summed up their position when asked in an interview, “Would a form of speech such as prophetic speech be contrary to the state?” He said:

It is an extremely bold, audacious speech, since the prophet always speaks before the king; the prophet is not hiding, he is not preparing an underground revelation. In the Bible – it’s amazing – the king accepts this direct opposition. He’s an odd kind of king! Isaiah and Jeremiah submit to violence. Let us not forget the perennial false prophets who flattered kings. Only the true prophet addresses the king and the people without truckling, and reminds them of ethics. In the Old Testament, there is certainly no denunciation of the state as such. There is a protest against the pure and simple assimilation of the state into the politics of the world.⁵¹

The ethics of inclusion finds here its model. The state is not to be denounced but, because humanity is under a higher obligation than to the power of the state – namely, to the covenant with God – humans who assume

responsibility for the Other must address power, whatever the consequences, and take the side of the powerless, irrespective of repercussions. Volf asserts that, for all its conventional religious overtones, the notion of covenant is relevant in our context: “Covenant could become a useful political category because it was first a moral category, and it

became a moral category because it was at its core a theological category.”⁵²

This paper is an attempt to make some connections between theology, ethics and politics in an effort to point to some possibilities to diminish exclusion in our society, even if we may never be able to eradicate it.

Endnotes

- ¹ *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1409.
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- ³ Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), 16f.
- ⁴ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 2f.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁶ Irving Greenberg, *The Third Great Cycle in Jewish History* (New York: National Jewish Resource Center, 1981), 25.
- ⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 19f.
- ⁸ Edith Wyschogrod, *Emanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 104f.
- ⁹ *Op. cit.*, 21.
- ¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 98.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 100.
- ¹³ *Difficult Freedom*, 26.
- ¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, translated and introduced by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 13.
- ¹⁵ *Difficult Freedom*, 4.
- ¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, 105.

- ¹⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 10.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 222. His italics.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 223.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 225.
- ²³ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Collins Fontana Library, 1961), 31.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31f.
- ²⁵ Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber – The Life of Dialogue* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), 177.
- ²⁶ *Op. cit.*, 207.
- ²⁷ Mishnah Horayot 3:8.
- ²⁸ Buber, *op. cit.*, 114f.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 130.
- ³² Peter L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971), 70.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ³⁴ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), 3.
- ³⁵ George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1969), 47.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ³⁷ George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on the Literature and the Language Revolution* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Peregrine Books, 1975), 89.
- ³⁸ Volf, *op. cit.*, 75.
- ³⁹ Buber, *op. cit.*, 146.
- ⁴⁰ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966), 237.
- ⁴¹ Volf, *op. cit.*, 63.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 65.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 66.

- ⁴⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 18.
- ⁴⁵ Reference to *Deuteronomy* 16:16f: “Three times a year – on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths – all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed, but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you.” What for many interpreters of Scripture is a regulation about bringing sacrifices to the sanctuary becomes for Levinas an injunction to provide for God’s creatures wherever they are. Ritual practice is thus transformed into political action.
- ⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 18f.
- ⁴⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 109.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 109
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.
- ⁵¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 106.
- ⁵² *Op. cit.*, 151.

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