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SCHOOL

The question under investigation here, the question of the origin and influence of Church-generated powers, has a history in my own life. I became aware of it as a mystery that I wanted to try to penetrate a little in the late 1950s. At that time I was acting as rector of the Catholic University at Ponce in Puerto Rico. And it happened that the man who two years later would be the U.S. State Department's chief organizer of John Kennedy's Alliance for Progress in Latin America was then the president of the island's Council of Education.[1] He was away somewhere. I was acting as his substitute. And I came to feel increasingly uncomfortable with the administrative and advisory power that this gave. Power had always been something that worried me, not because I rejected it, but because of its ambiguous taste. And so, possessing this power in educational matters on that little island of Puerto Rico, I had to ask myself, What is it that I'm involved in here?

At the time, so far as I know, the procedure of schooling had never been made an object of study in history, anthropology, or the social sciences generally. No one had thought it worthwhile to explore the origin of the strange assumption that people are born with the need for schooling. But, in conversation with a friend and colleague named Everett Reimer,[2] this question came up, and we were led to ask, What is schooling? So we tried to look at the institution in purely formal terms, leaving out people's intentions with regard to

education. We defined as a school any established agency which gathers together, for a minimum period of four years, groups of more than fifteen and less than fifty people, of roughly the same age, around a person who has participated in such assemblies for many more years than they. And we observed that wherever we looked in the world, schooling seemed to involve a succession of four such periods, each one designed to eliminate more and more people. Four times around this circle and you achieve social privilege.

At the time I was asking, What is this? I was deeply involved in reading the anthropologist Max Gluckman, who wrote on African ritual.[3] And I began to wonder what would happen if, instead of speaking about this as a social institution, or a service agency, I viewed it as a ritual. Gluckman defines a ritual as any well-established form of behaviour which leads those who participate in it to a certain belief. It's a procedure whose imagined purpose allows the participants to overlook what they are actually doing, that is, the idea that the rain dance will bring rain eclipses the social cost of organizing the rain dance and makes the dancers feel that if rain doesn't come then they ought to dance all the harder. Rituals, in other words, have an ability to generate in their practitioners a deep adherence to convictions which may be, internally, highly contradictory, so that somehow, the adherence to the belief is stronger than most people's capacity to question what they believe.

But, as a ritual, schooling is something very new. Rain dances are known among some people in the Southwest of the United States and among some of the tribal peoples of India, and I don't know where else; but I don't know of any rain dance which is worldwide. Schooling has been brought by missionaries during the last few generations to every corner of the world, and its procedures are followed among Inuit as much as among people in Holland, or in Westchester, the ritzy section of New York. So I suddenly had to ask myself, Is there any precedent for the successful spread of this ritual around the world? A ritual which has come to be taken for granted and which has generated a belief, a myth, which has become a matter of faith in spite of the stark contrast presented by its obviously deleterious effects.

Schooling was being promoted during this time, the pre-Kennedy years, as a way of providing equality within nations, and equality among nations — an impossible hope as the balance sheet of any country shows — but attachment to this hope was tenacious. When I later told my friend and neighbour Erich Fromm about my idea of schooling as a ritual, a myth-making ritual, he was so shocked he didn't want to see me for two weeks or three. The great psychoanalyst and social analyst, who as an old man still wore a red carnation to show his socialism, would not allow anyone to profane this sacred institution.

My attempt to speak about modern institutions in terms of rituals coincided in the early 1960s with the increasing awareness among social scientists studying development that institutions have both positive and negative effects, and that introducing schools or modern medicine into places seen as in need of development produced unavoidable negative effects. These people thought of schooling as a technique whose effectiveness ought to be assessed. I proposed that it be analyzed as a ritual because only then did it become evident that the major effect of these institutions was to make people believe in the necessity and goodness of what they were supposed to achieve. This cannot be seen from inside. Nor can it be seen when the present is examined "in the shadow of the future," as Zygmunt Baumann so beautifully says.[4] A firm stance in the past is helpful. Imagine trying to talk to a friend in the seventeenth century, or the twelfth century, or in antiquity, about contemporary institutions, and it becomes easier to perceive how intensely ritualized they are. Ritual generates belief, so I speak of *mythopoesis*, *poesis* being the Greek word for "making": myth-making ritual.

Now, in getting to this strange, idiosyncratic, questionable view which sustained me through the first twenty years of my intense reflection on the effects of development, I was aided by something more than the studies of Max Gluckman. When I became the president of the board governing all education in Puerto Rico, it wasn't as a social scientist, or even as an evil kibitzer into the social sciences. I came there as a man who, besides history and philosophy, had also studied theology, Roman Catholic theology of the most traditional

and, if you want, somewhat obscurantist type, which, however, if you studied it properly, demanded from you an extraordinary foundation in the classics and in the Christian classics: the Fathers of the Church, the Scholastics, and the spiritual masters.

And in the study of theology, which is the attempt to penetrate the message of the Gospel intellectually, one field interested me particularly. You will have noticed the traces of it during our conversation. It is called ecclesiology, which is the theological study of the entity called the "Church." One can study the Church as an historical phenomenon. That is what, again and again, we have been doing. But one can also study it from the perspective of faith as someone who believes in the new possibility of facing each other indicated in the story of the Samaritan. One can look at the Church as a mystery of faith, and ecclesiology as the task of studying the object of faith which calls itself Church and considers itself to be the mystical body of Christ, with "mystical" meaning communal.

One branch of ecclesiology is the study of liturgy. Liturgy can be studied in terms of the history of rituals, folk processions, and blessings, or the aesthetics of altar implements; and, in that sense, it belongs within the history of mentalities and of performing arts. But it is not in that sense that liturgy is part of ecclesiology. Liturgy becomes part of ecclesiology when you understand the ritual as the womb out of which and within which the Church comes to be in the present. It is an unquestionable belief of Christian communities of the most different kinds that the Church as a community comes into existence in a *symposium*, in a drinking and eating together in memory of the Last Supper, which Christ celebrated and to which he gave an eschatological meaning, that is, a meaning related to time. When he celebrated that dinner, he called to the attention of his apostles that they were doing something which, in a sense, stands outside of time, which he intends to do with them in the home of the Father, meaning in the beyond, after not only the Resurrection and the Ascension into heaven but after *apocalypsis*, the end of the world as it is now. It is, therefore, the belief of Christians — and this is pretty widely shared, though differently interpreted by different sects — that the Christian community comes into existence by sharing

the same bread. This is a *mythopoesis*, a belief-generating ritual. The ritual does more than merely remember a faith which we already have. When we celebrate that faith by sharing bread and sharing the spirit through the kiss of peace, the *conspiratio* of which we spoke, the social entity comes into existence. This idea has been present in ecclesiological thought since the second century. One could, therefore, jokingly say that ecclesiology is a social science twenty times older than sociology, if I put the beginning of sociology at the time of Durkheim [1858–1917] and Weber [1864–1920].

So my theological and ecclesiastical background led to suppose that this worldwide institution must have something to do with the Church, but at first I thought that I had stumbled on nothing more than a very vague analogy. But over the years of trying to understand how the idea arose that man needs magisterial revelations in order to know anything about any side of reality and that these are best administered in a strictly organized ritual, I came to think that the connection might be closer and more deeply determined. Why believe that human beings are born requiring institutional initiation into the concrete reality in which they have to fulfill their duties as citizens? Since the middle of the last century it has often been claimed that our word for education comes from the Latin *educare*, to lead out. But when I went back to classical Latin dictionaries, I found a sentence of Cicero's in which he uses the verb *educare* in connection with the suckling of infants. *Nutrix educat*, the wet-nurse educates, he says. For teaching he uses the verbs *docere* or *instruere*. So then I looked to see when *educare* was first connected with a male subject. And what did I find? For two hundred years after Christ, its subject was always a female with juicy breasts. Then came Tertullian, a Christian bishop in North Africa, who is the first ever to declare, according to my huge Latin dictionary, that men educate because bishops have breasts, to which Christians come to suck the milk of Christ: faith.

I had never thought much about education until destiny threw me into the situation I've already described in Puerto Rico. But the more I looked into what was happening, the more I felt sick to my stomach. Everyone was so certain that they acted for the good of these

impressionable young Puerto Ricans. Therefore, I couldn't help asking the question, How should I interpret the belief that people need ritual of this kind, not just to grow up into competent persons, but also to be capable of what they then called "citizenship" — that is, the fundamental, ethical, and moral sense which is necessary to form a community. And I was driven to the suspicion that I was standing in front of a secularization of Catholic ritual. The Church made attendance at various rituals compulsory. It set out schedules of specific days when attendance was required and defined the violation of such prescriptions as sin. For the clergy the *breviarium*, the shortened form of monastic prayers, was made obligatory by the Council of Trent [1545–1563]. For the simple Christian there was the requirement of going to Mass every Sunday — otherwise you go to hell — or of going to confession once a year. The elaboration of this legal organization, and this legal imposition, which defined missing out on services as a sin, immediately preceded the epoch in which the state, the new Church-like state, as I called it earlier, began to introduce its own rituals. And the easiest one to follow is education. It begins with the idea that man is born in need of revelation about the world into which he comes, revelation which can be handed down only by recognized catechists called teachers. And it goes on to take the unbelievable form of four-years elementary, four-years middle, four-years upper, and four-years college attendance. What the modern college asks is attendance, the physical act of being there, just as you have to be there for Mass, which gets us used to an intensity of ritual behaviour for which I don't find precedents or comparable examples in other cultures.

I don't want to speak further about education here but only to show how I personally proceeded in trying to discover the origin of this belief, unknown to other societies, that you need an organized institution to make people competent to understand what is good for them and their community, that knowledge does not come from living but from *educatio*, the milk of wisdom flowing from the breasts of an institution.

In earlier talks I tried to make it plausible that the Christian message explosively expands the scope of love by inviting us to love

whomever we choose. There is a new freedom involved, and a new confidence in one's freedom. I also tried to establish that this new freedom makes a new type of betrayal possible. The way I was led to frame this hypothesis was by observing the modern mania for education and then concluding that the only way it can be explained is as the fruit of a 2,000-year institutionalization of the catechetical, or instructional, function of the Christian community, which has led us to believe that only through explicit teaching and through rituals in which teaching has a major part can we become fit for the community in which we ought to live.

I had begun, by the way, as a believer, a rabid fighter for the implementation of the law which said every Puerto Rican had to have at least five years of schooling. And I had carried my support to the point where I had opposed any further public money flowing into the university before enough money was in the public education system to implement that law. So I changed from a believer in schools into a man for whom social rituals, and the myths they generate, must be studied historically. But I want to warn, despite my earlier reference to Max Gluckman, that these modern myths should not be too easily identified or too quickly made analogous to the myths and rituals, past or present, which we know through ethnology. School is not just another rain dance. It's a rain dance whose universalization Erich Fromm took so seriously that he would break with one of the closest friends of his old age. Standing in front of this altogether strange and mysterious phenomenon in the 1950s, I did not yet have the terms for it. Foucault had not yet written of epistemic breaks.[5] But I would say now that I was contemplating an historical watershed which was of a deeper nature than most contemporary historians intend when they use the now common language of watersheds, breaks, and breakthroughs. And I believe that its origin lies in the Church's attempt to take what had begun as a personal vocation — a call to each one — and to try to control and guarantee it by giving it this worldly solidity and permanence.