

The Religious Ethics of Howard Thurman*

Howard Thurman (November 18, 1900—April 10, 1981) was truly a magnificent universal spirit whose vitality and vision touched the lives of countless persons of all ethnic, faith, and culture groups. Spell-binding preacher, theologian, educator, campus pastor, lecturer, and artist, he is considered by many to be a mentor to an entire generation of leaders that would include notables such as Whitney M. Young, Jesse L. Jackson, Vernon E. Jordan, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Small wonder, therefore, that he was selected by Life Magazine as early as 1953 as one of the twelve "Great Preachers" of this century. He is the author of some twenty-three books, including his powerful autobiography, *With Head and Heart*. In addition, there are innumerable pamphlets, recordings, sermons, speeches that bear his name. Presently there are Howard Thurman listening and reading rooms throughout the United States and in at least seventeen foreign countries.

Born in Daytona Beach, Florida, Thurman remained in that city until the absence of educational opportunities for Blacks forced him to go to Jacksonville, Florida for a high school education at the Florida Baptist Academy. He entered Morehouse College in 1919 and was graduated in 1923 with the B.A. degree with honors in Economics. Inspired at Morehouse by President John Hope and Dean Samuel H. Archer, Thurman undertook the study for the ministry at Rochester Theological Seminary during which time he was Assistant to the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia. It was at this church that he was ordained for the ministry.

After graduation from Rochester in 1926, Thurman accepted a pastorate in Oberlin, Ohio, resigning after two years in order to study at Haverford College with the Quaker philosopher, Rufus Jones. His pilgrimage then took him to Morehouse and Spelman Colleges in a joint appointment as Director of Religious Life. In 1932, he accepted the call

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from Howard University to become its first Dean of Rankin Chapel, and to join the Howard faculty as Assistant Professor of Christian Theology. In 1935, he and his spouse (Sue Bailey Thurman) led a national YMCA and YWCA Afro-American delegation to India, Burman, and Ceylon. One of the highlights of that trip was a person-to-person meeting with Rabinduranath Tagore and with Mahatma Ghandi, both of whom strongly influenced his thinking (the latter much more than the former, however).

A vision of what religion and the Church could be, led the Thurmans to San Francisco where, in 1944, he joined with the Dr. Alfred Fisk, professor and clergyman (Presbyterian) in founding the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples—the first Church in American life that was inter-racial in both its membership and ministry. After nine years in San Francisco, Thurman journeyed to Boston, accepting the post of Dean of Marsh Chapel and Professor of Spiritual Resources and Disciplines at Boston University. His becoming the first Black to hold such a position at a predominantly white university was, in the words of the then Dean of the Boston University School of Theology, “worth a thousand sermons.”

In 1964, after serving 12 years as Dean of the Chapel, he retired to San Francisco. There he founded the Howard Thurman Educational Trust, which provides scholarships for college students, supports inter-cultural community and school activities, and disseminates his recorded and written works. The remainder of his life on earth was spent primarily in the development and work of the Trust.

The Nature of Religion and the Religious Experience

Howard Thurman was a mystic. As such, his orientation to religion and the religious life falls within the classification of religious thought by Ernest Troeltsch into church-type, sect-type, and mysticism. Mysticism, according to Troeltsch, means

“that the world of ideas which has hardened into formal worship and doctrine is transformed into a purely personal and inward experience; this leads to the formation of groups on a purely personal basis, with no permanent form, which also tend to weaken the significance of forms of worship, doctrine, and the historical element.”¹

Adoption of this religious orientation, furthermore, leads to the view that

the truth of salvation is inward and relative, a personal possession which is unutterable, and lies unspoken beneath all literal forms. The merely relatively significance of the Biblical, dogmatic, or ritual form in which Truth is expressed makes mysticism independent of all historic forms, and the inner Unity of the Spirit quite naturally

¹ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), vol. II, p. 993.

unites all souls in the common truth which is purely spiritual, and impossible to formulate. From this point of view, and from it alone, are toleration and freedom of conscience also possible within the religious community, since the organization becomes merely a method of ecclesiastical administration, while the religious life itself can move freely under various forms of expression which are relatively justified.²

As we shall see, this statement of mysticism by Troeltsch aptly characterizes, generally speaking, the outlook of Howard Thurman.

Accordingly, the fundamental unit of religion for Thurman is the religious *experience*. In *The Creative Encounter*, he defines the religious experience as "the conscious and direct exposure of the individual to God." Such an experience, he states, "seems to the individual to be inclusive of all the meaning of his life—there is nothing that is not involved."³ The central fact of religious experience, therefore, is the awareness of meeting God in a personal and private way. Thurman goes on to identify and describe two common or universal dimensions involved in these "personal and private encounters."

First of all, God is encountered as being "all-inclusive, all-comprehending, and in a profound sense universal."⁴ This means that God is not merely the Creator of creatures and all objects animate and inanimate, but also and more importantly, God is the Creator of life itself. Existence is the creation of God; life is the creation of God. In seeing God as holding within His context all that there is, including existence itself, the individual is exposed to the kind of experience that is capable of providing an ultimate clue to all levels of reality, to all dimensions of time, and to all aspects of faith. Thus the individual is assured and has the confidence of ultimate security.

Secondly, God is encountered as "Someone who is capable of dealing *personally and privately* with the individual."⁵ It is never sufficient for the individual to have a clue merely to ultimate significance in general. The human spirit cannot tolerate only impersonal assurance even though it is metaphysical in character. The God-person encounter, therefore, is experienced as providing a sense of the ultimate worth of the individual as a private person. Hence no matter how demeaning one is treated in life by one's fellow human beings, the individual retains the dignity that is experienced with God and that cannot be diminished or taken away.

Of course, human beings do not continually stand in the divine presence. What then is the motivation, or impetus that pushes the individual to prepare, through prayer and spiritual disciplines, for the "creator en-

² *Ibid.*, pp. 998-99.

³ Howard Thurman, *The Creative Encounter* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p.20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31. Emphasis mine.

counter" with God and to seek it out? It would appear that Thurman's one theological presupposition is that all human beings share a "hunger of the heart" for God. It can be thought of as our essential emptiness without God, what Pascal called "mankind's misery."⁶ Thurman speaks of this deep restlessness as belonging to the very structure of personality. "Always roaming with a hungry heart," this is the individual in his essential nature.⁷ Thurman believed that this characteristic has been and always will be a primary concern of religion. Sometimes it is referred to as the "divine discontent" in the heart. Certain mystics call it the "homing instinct" in the human spirit. The classic expression of it in Christianity is the oft-quoted neo-platonic overtone from Augustine, "Thou has made us for thyself and our souls are restless till they find their rest in Thee." The positive side of this restlessness, tension, and dissatisfaction that accompanies the "hunger of the Heart" is the movement of the heart of man toward God—God in the heart sharing its life with God the Creator of all life."⁸ Therefore, to the person who has found their rest in God, there comes the strength to reduce all ill-at-easeness to manageable units of control, making for tranquility in the midst of change and upheaval.

For Thurman, then, the religious experience in its profoundest dimension is the finding of the individual by God and the finding of God by the individual. It involves morality, self-awareness, and rebirth as qualitative aspects of the experience. He summarizes:

The moral quality is mandatory because the individual must be genuine in his preparation and in his motivation and in his response. His faith must be active and dynamic . . . the individual enters the experience and/or the preparation for it with the smell of life heavy upon him. He has in him all the errors and blindness, his raw conscience and his scar tissue, all his loves and hates . . . It is in his religious experience that he sees himself from another point of view. In a very real sense he is stripped of everything and he stands with no possible protection from the countenance of the Other. The things of which he is stripped are not thrown away. They are merely laid aside and with infinite patience they are seen for what they are. It is here that the great decision is made as to what will be kept and what will be discarded. The new center is found, and it is often like giving birth to a new self. It is small wonder that so much is made in the Christian religion of the necessity of rebirths. There need not be only one single rebirth, but again and again a man may be reborn until at last there is nothing that remains between him and God.⁹

⁶ Cf. Edward K. Kaplan, "Howard Thurman: Meditation, Mysticism, and Life's Contradictions". *Debate and Understanding* (Spring, 1982), 19. This special issue is entirely devoted to the life and thought of Thurman and is titled "Simmering on the Calm Presence and Profound Wisdom of Howard Thurman."

⁷ Howard Thurman, *Deep Is The Hunger* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 5.

⁸ Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 87.

⁹ *The Creative Encounter*, pp. 39-40.

Knowledge of self is one fruit of the religious experience; knowledge of God is the other. Such knowledge helps us to understand God's nature and activity. The most important of God's activity that we can discern is loving—God caring for the individual and the community of persons, giving them worth, purpose, power, and a sense of infinite relationship. God's love also gives one a clearer picture of his nature as Creator, Immanent, Personal, and Universal. Love becomes the key to understanding how God's nature acts upon and through the world, making unity out of division, harmony out of discord, order out of chaos, meaning out of meaninglessness, and hope out of despair. God can only be known through love, and the fullest meaning of love can only be known through religious experience.¹⁰

Thus the experience of God in love gives life a new focus, a new sense of meaning, a new sense of commitment. The subject realizes that only a life fully surrendered to God can experience security, meaning, and hope. God, the only absolute, becomes the only absolute to which the life is given. This new life orientation and commitment (rebirth) changes the character and habits of the person. No longer restless, empty, and floundering, the individual experiences more power—emotionally, spiritually, and physically—to respond to the demands of living. The release of this power gives to individuals an acute awareness of their potential for fulfillment, for wholeness, for love, and for community.

The Vision of Community

In *The Search for Common Ground*, Thurman identifies "community" as the single most important quest of his life.¹¹ He states that this idea has consumed his thoughts and activities since childhood. "Defining community (its meaning, characteristics, and worth) is the end purpose of his theology; establishing community was the commitment and labor of his ministry."¹² Obviously, this interest was fed by the fact that Howard Thurman, a black man, lived in American society.

His tenaciousness with regard to community sprang also from his firm conviction that the literal fact of the underlying unity of life seems to be established beyond doubt. He believed that this harmonious unity in life can be discerned wherever life is found, from the smallest of creatures to the entire universe. The inter-dependence of creation extends in his thought even to nature in the ecological sense:

¹⁰ Cf. Luther E. Smith, Jr., *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet* (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1981), p. 64.

¹¹ Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground: An Inquiry into the Basis of Man's Experience of Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), passim.

¹² Smith, *Howard Thurman*, p. 45.

Our atmosphere is polluted, our streams are poisoned, our hills are denuded, wild life is increasingly exterminated, while more and more man becomes an alien on the earth and a fouler of his own nest. The price that is being exacted for this is a deep sense of isolation, of being rootless and a vagabond. Often I have surmised that this condition is more responsible for what seems to be the phenomenal increase in mental and emotional disturbances in modern life than the pressures—economic, social, and political—that abound on every hand. The collective psyche shrieks with the agony that it feels as a part of the death cry of a pillaged nature.¹³

Thurman's belief in the underlying unity of all creation, however, did not blind him to the ever-present forces of destruction and division. Although these forces exist, they are not in harmony with the ultimate intent of life. They are against life and therefore will not be supported by it. If life is on the side of unity and those activities which promote unity, then the contradictions can never be final.

If community is to be established, love must be the prevailing ethos of relationships. Unity-in-love is characterized by its ability to allow both persons and nature to realize their potential. Love (or its synonym, reconciliation) Thurman defines as "the intelligent, kindly but stern expression of kinship of one individual for another, having as its purpose the maintenance and furtherance of life at its highest level."¹⁴ Love therefore creates community and community is the teleology of life. Because the vision of community give value, structure, and purpose to life, it is salvation of life at its highest level.

Thurman also believed that community can be actualized in fact. His vision was not to be relegated to either another dimension, like heaven, or to the realm of utopian dreams. Community is an historical possibility! It can be both an inner individual experience of becoming aware within oneself of the unity and oneness of life, as well as an interpersonal and intergroup outward reality of isolated and apathetic lives transformed into related and caring ones. Community, finally, is the only destiny that can bring fulfillment to the creative spirit that permeates the whole world.

We turn now to the question of the means by which community-potential can become community-actual.

Religion and Social Change

Thurman approached the problem of social change out of the particularity of his experiences as a Black man and as those experiences reflected the plight of Black people in general. He felt, however, that the rectification and reconciliation in Black-white relations could constitute a paradigm for the more encompassing problem of the unity of the entire

¹³ Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁴ Thurman, *Deep Is The Hunger*, p. 109.

human family.

By and large, Thurman believed that social change was fundamentally a problem of the *inner* life of individuals. Though he acknowledges the power of social structures to determining the quality of existence in material terms, the individual spirit is still perceived as the key to remaking the individual. The major problem is the "poverty of the Spirit." This is an affliction of both the poor and the wealthy. One can offer bread without offering the bread of life. Without the latter, the nourished body houses an impoverished spirit. Thurman used the occasion of his eulogy at the funeral services for Whitney M. Young to highlight this insight. After a stirring rendition of Thomas Dorsey's "When I've Done My Best (Well Done)" by Leontyne Price, Thurman spoke in supporting voice of a central insight that informed the life of Young:

Whitney Young understood that the Black poor are not only poor, but also they live in an intimate climate of poverty. The climate of poverty is an inner atmosphere of the spirit. It dries up the springs of self-esteem and often renders impotent confidence in the meaning and the significance of the private life.¹⁵

Indeed, this was the central teaching and lasting importance of the Jesus of history. The religion *of* Jesus—as opposed to the religion *about* Jesus which has been exclusive, divisive, and shameful—encompasses an identification with the disinherited and a challenge to them to overcome the poverty of the spirit that dogs the heels of the disinherited at all points in history. Fear, deception, and hate are the sure symptoms of such poverty. They promote cowardice, hypocrisy, and isolation. Jesus substituted love for all of these. Love expresses the fruit of the presence of God, a unity and power that overcomes the enmity among persons and establishes the integrity of self-worth and equality of all before God. Love presupposes that all individuals are within what may be called the ethical field and that even the oppressor possesses a common humanity.¹⁶ For Thurman, the authentic moral statute of a person is determined finally by his choice of weapons. Of all weapons, love is the most deadly, especially for the disinherited if they would dare to trust their fate in its hands.

As early as 1935, Thurman was searching for some means by which the love-ethic could be operationalized in the struggle for wholeness and community. He began then his own pilgrimage to non-violence. Luther Smith states that "the development of a philosophy of non-violent protest for the Black struggle is a foremost achievement of his social witness. Here Thurman makes a signal contribution to providing a method for

¹⁵ Tape recording of the funeral services for Whitney M. Young at Riverside Church, New York City, March 16, 1971.

¹⁶ See Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1949), p. 102.

change in American race relations. He has done more than any other person to articulate the *ethical* and *spiritual* necessity for Blacks' civil liberties struggle to be grounded in the principles of non-violence."¹⁷ Indeed, Walter G. Muelder correctly observes that there is a profound affinity between Thurman and his younger contemporary, Martin Luther King, Jr., with regard to the explication of nonviolence. He identifies five common points:

1. That nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards, for it does resist evil.
2. That it does not seek to humiliate the opponent, but to win understanding and friendship.
3. That the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons doing the evil.
4. That it willingly accepts suffering without retaliation, including violence.
5. That it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of the spirit.¹⁸

Thurman saw, as did King, that these principles would tend to introduce new possibilities for reconciliation between oppressed and powerful. They would permit love to enter conflict creatively and thus to address the real problem—the *spiritual* ills of separation, fear, hate, and deception.

On the subject of King and Thurman, it is interesting to note that there is a good deal of speculation regarding the probable influence of Thurman on King. Such speculation stems in part from the report by historian/journalist Lerone Bennett, Jr. that while interviewing King during the 1956 Montgomery bus boycott, he noticed a copy of Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* in King's briefcase. This report makes even more curious the fact that King does not refer explicitly to Thurman in any of his speeches or writings.

Another writer suggests that Thurman might have been the first person to sow the seed of "nonviolent suffering" in the mind of Black Americans. S. P. Fullwinder goes so far as to credit Thurman with indirect responsibility for introducing King to the nonviolent ethic.¹⁹ That scenario goes something like this. As we noted earlier, Thurman, while Dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University, went to India and met with Ghandi who strongly influenced his thinking. Upon his return to Howard University, Thurman urged President Mordecai Johnson of Howard to make the pilgrimage to India in order to hear also Ghandi's views on nonviolence. When President Johnson returned from India, he lectured at Fellowship House in Philadelphia on the Ghandian ethic of love and

¹⁷ *Howard Thurman*, pp. 113-14.

¹⁸ "The Structure of Howard Thurman's Religious Social Ethics", *Debate and Understanding* (Spring, 1982), 9.

¹⁹ *The Mind and Mood of Black America* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 239.

nonviolence. Martin Luther King, Jr. was in the congregation on that occasion and wrote later in his account of his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" that he began to study seriously the usefulness of the nonviolent ethic after hearing Johnson's lecture on Ghandi.²⁰ For his part however, Thurman, in his autobiography *With Head and Heart*, never mentions any serious conversation with King about the nonviolent ethic even though both were at Boston University in the mid 1950s, King as a doctoral student and Thurman as Dean of the Chapel.

Unquestionably both Thurman and King held quite similar views regarding nonviolence and the love ethic. Both dedicated their ministries to revealing the possibilities for community. Both tried to practice the love ethic within their respective arenas of ministry and both with the same designation of the same goal—the beloved community.

Whatever the case may be, Thurman believed, like Ghandi, that truth has to be experienced; and where the appropriate setting is absent, one must create the setting for an experience that either verifies or negates the truths that one holds. It is for this reason that the motifs of experimentation and model-building continually emerge in the ministry of Thurman. Fellowship Church, his boldest experiment, was perhaps the principal context for testing his religious convictions, the most fundamental of which was his assurance of God's love which expresses itself as affirmation for the individual and reconciliation in community. Fellowship Church, therefore, was a religious and not just a social experiment. However, the adequacy of the Fellowship experience would have to be verified by more than just the *feelings* of the members. There would have to be, in Thurman's thought, an alteration in the social relations of the members that reflected spiritual growth and development. This occurred in two basic ways: 1) the members began to have significant exchanges of fellowship and caring with and for one another despite their great heterogeneity, and 2) the Church affected the larger society through the social transformation activities of its individual members.²¹

Thurman's vision did not call for the direct involvement of Fellowship Church, as an institution, in the politics of Society; rather, his aim was to empower *individuals* to address economic, political, and social needs. He states:

The core of my preaching has always concerned itself with the development of the *inner* resources needed for the creation of a friendly word of friendly persons. I felt that the church program itself and the problems inherent in the effort to extend the

²⁰ See the Chapter, "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" in Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958).

²¹ An account of this is given in Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), pp. 139-162.

Fellowship community into the larger environment would provide the testing of the practical efficacy of the religious experience . . . It was my conviction and determination that the church would be a resource for activists—a mission fundamentally perceived. To me it was important that individuals who were in the thick of the struggle for social change would be able to find renewal and fresh courage in the spiritual resources of the church. There must be provided a place, a moment, when a person could declare, "I choose!"²²

For Thurman, therefore, the relationship between the religious life and social action is intimate. Especially is this true when the possibility of religious experience is threatened by conditions in the social order which prevent the God/human encounter. Thus, said Thurman,

the mystic's concern with the imperative of social action is not merely to improve the condition of society. It is not merely to feed the hungry, not merely to relieve human suffering and misery. If this were all, in and of itself, it would be important surely. But this is not all. The basic consideration has to do with the removal of all that prevents God from coming to himself in the life of the individual. Whatever there is that blocks this, calls for action.²³

In sum, for Thurman society is not inherently evil; nor is it necessarily a barrier to creative living. It is indeed the primary context for the nurturing of the individual and the making of community. This does not mean, however, that one should not critically assess society's goods and evils or his prohibitive and instrumental structures. Social action then becomes a natural consequence of personal piety. It is for this reason, Thurman felt, that in our confusion and frustration, it may be easier to worship Jesus than to walk in his steps.

Conclusion

Perhaps the single most important feature in the life of Howard Thurman was his efforts to create a community of diverse people committed to the oneness of faith within the context of a divided society that uses religion as simply another excuse for dividing the human family. As all who have become more than casually acquainted with Thurman know, the watershed experience in this lifelong work was the event at Khyber Pass. It could be considered the key to understanding the central thrust and essence of his life. In *Footprints of a Dream*, he provides a glimpse of that experience and its meaning for him:

Near the end of our journey we spent a day in Khyber Pass on the border of the northwest frontier. It was an experience of vision. We stood looking at the distance into Afghanistan, while to our right, and close at hand, passed a long camel train bringing goods and ideas to the bazaars of North India. Here was the gateway through which Roman and Mogul conquerors had come in other days bringing with

²² *Ibid.*, p. 160. Emphasis supplied.

²³ Smith, *Howard Thurman*, p. 10.

them goods, new concepts, and the violence of armed might. All that we had seen and felt in India seemed to be brought miraculously into focus. We saw clearly what we must do somehow when we returned to America. We know that we must test whether a religious fellowship could be developed in America that was capable of cutting across all racial barriers, with a carryover into the common life, a fellowship that would alter the behavior patterns of those involved. It became imperative now to find out if experiences of Spiritual unity among people could be more compelling than the experiences which divide them.²⁴

From this experience, Thurman was to test what he called the major concern of his life: Is the worship of God the central and most significant act of the human spirit? It is really true that in the presence of God there is neither male nor female, child nor adult, rich nor poor, nor any classification by which mankind defines itself in categories, however meaningful? It is only in the religious experience that the individual discovers what, ultimately, he amounts to? The keystone of the entire structure of his ministry, therefore, became the experience of worship. All things flow into and out of this fundamental act of the religious life. The primary purpose of worship is exposure to God. He labored to make worship, therefore, a time when people of whatever cultural and religious backgrounds could come together and experience their sense of common struggle and the common source of hope.

For Thurman, then, the process which begins with religious experience and develops into moral community reflects the movement from *potentiality* to *actuality* in both personal and communitarian forms. As we noted earlier, in the religious experience the individual has the sense that he or she is being encountered and loved in a personal and private way. Thus, the individual is provided with a sense of confidence and ultimate security growing out of the affirmation in the religious experience that one has ultimate worth as a Child of God—that God cares about *me*. Armed with this sense of ultimate worth, the individual life is given a new focus, a new center, a new sense of commitment. The subject realizes that only a life fully surrendered to God can experience meaning, security, and hope. God becomes, therefore, the Absolute to which the life is given.

This new life commitment and centering (conversion) changes one's habits and character. Emotionally, spiritually, and physically the individual experiences more power to respond to the demands and vicissitudes of life. The realization of this power both releases the person from any self or societally imposed limitations on one's potentiality for fulfillment and love, and propels the self in the direction of being more Godlike in the sense of expressing deeper and fuller meanings of love. In expressing

²⁴ Howard Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 24. This book tells the story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples.

love at these levels, the individual is more sensitive to the needs of others and the necessity to change the social order so that love's work is not thwarted by unloving social arrangements. Particularly is the individual sensitive and responsive to the kind of human need in which the sufferers are victims of circumstances over which, as individual, they have no control, circumstances that are not responsive to the exercise of an individual will however good.

The transformation of the self and the social order, for Thurman, is the point at which community is disclosed and salvation in its true relational sense is achieved. He felt that a life which responds to the vision of God (religious experience) will establish the kind of relationships where God is experienced more and more; where the underlying unity of reality becomes the (immediate) environment in which society finds itself. The ethic of Thurman is thus relational, grounded in a radically ethical monotheism and expressed in the form of "person-in-community. At bottom, therefore, all moral problems are fundamentally religious and questions of morality are *authentically* framed and/or answered only in the context of the religious life.

Religion, thus, is a part of the given of human experience. It has to do with how the person feels and thinks about the self and the meaning of the self in whatever era the self lives, works, suffers, and dies. It has to do with a person's *total* reaction and response to life. It concerns itself with a way of life that is worth living, it yields to the individual a faith that can be honestly and intelligently held and it is the constant threat to despair and futility. It faces persons with a demand that gives structure to all the facets of their lives. It makes little difference as to the character of the facets—the task remains constant. Therefore, concludes Thurman in one of his most characteristic statements,

What is true in any religion is to be found in that religion because it is true; it is not true because it is found in that religion. The ethical insight which makes for the most healthy and creative human relation is not the unique possession of any religion, however inspired it may be. . . . It has been at work informing the quality of life and human relations longer than the records and memories of mankind. . . . Persons are made for one another There is a meaning in life greater than, but informing, all the immediate meanings—and the name given to this meaning is religion, because it embodies, however faintly, a sense of the ultimate and the divine. . . . It is a spirit that makes for wholeness and for community It is the voice of God and the voice of mankind; it is the meaning of all the striving of the whole human race toward a world of friendly persons underneath a friendly sky.²⁵

In conclusion, Thurman's emphasis on theonomy allows for a combination in his thought of both the ethics of ends and the ethics of diety, the teleological and the deontological. We find self realization combined

²⁵ Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, p. 222.

with the demands of duty, integrity, and universal community in such a manner as to prevent a clash between purpose and responsibility. Moreover, both the ethics of purpose and of duty (the horizontal and the vertical) are transcended and included in an ethic of *relation*. Love, the key ingredient, is a relationship as well as a goal and an obligation. It is experienced even as it is perfected.