RELIGION FOR A DISLOCATED GENERATION

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It is always harder for the observer of society than for a family to mark the exact point of transition from one generation to another. When we try to speak of generations, we usually ignore the time frame of biological reproduction, seeking instead those periods of history when social events of particular power in people's lives occur, shaping the experience of those who lived through them. It is particularly important to take notice of those people who are young when such events occur, for it is the events of our youth that tend to define for us the natural order of things, by which we will then assess all later experiences. The way we understand generations historically also applies only to a portion of the age group, those on whom the seminal events of their time have the greatest effect, or whose reactions have caught the imagination of the society. They will come to be the ones by which all members of their age group will be identified by others, and the model by which their peers are likely to test their own participation in their times.

The generation of which I would like to speak, then, is a rather narrow—though populous—age cohort composed of those who are now young adults, who were the post-world War II baby boom, who experienced the crush of the population explosion in overcrowded classrooms, who found themselves targets of the draft for the Viet Nam war, and who entered the years of adult responsibility just in time for the national agony of Watergate.

To describe them in this way is already to give some content to their designation as "dislocated," but I would like us to look in a somewhat more systematic way at the sources and consequences of their dislocation. To do so, we must go back and take a brief look at the families into which they were born, for the real basis of their dislocation is World War II and what it did to the society that was to become their taken-for-granted universe. The size of the land and the variety of cultural roots of its population has made America a very diverse nation. But until World War II, most people did not experience the diversity of the population directly. People, be they rural or urban, tended to occupy their own little niches in society, bounded by neighborhood, ethnic group, economic class, or racial designation, crossing those boundaries usually only in well-established

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paths of social mobility. Everyone was expected to "get ahead," but the particular paths were pretty well lined out according to where one stood at the beginning. Parents and neighbors might not be able to model directly the skills and behavior to be expected of the young as they grew up, since "getting ahead" might mean moving into new jobs requiring somewhat new styles of life. But they knew enough of what might be ahead to be able to supply the young with values and social outlooks that would serve them in new circumstances—what David Riesman called the "inner gyroscope" of the "inner directed" person.[1]

World War II changed all that. Unlike other wars faced by the United States, this one required an almost universal draft, at least of men. Not only that, the new technology of war often advanced through the ranks men of lower social classes, leaving many in the lower echelons whose classical, though fine, education had proved irrelevant. As a result, men found themselves in close contact with comrades from a great variety of backgrounds, whose values and expectations were often very different. The war was too long for those associations to remain shallow, and as men came to work and fight together, often depending on one another for their very lives, they came to re-evaluate many of the goals and standards they had been taught. The easy taken-for-grantedness of their former lives was gone for good. This change was made more permanent when they came home and in great numbers flocked to universities under the GI Bill, often studing for occupations unheard of before the great technological breakthroughs of the war years.

Meantime, the war had also disrupted the lives of many who were not in the service, particularly those who moved from rural areas to cities that were centers of defense industry. Living in crowded conditions, these people also found themselves thrown in with neighbors and co-workers whose backgrounds were very different from one another. Patterns of life that they had learned back home no longer worked in these new surroundings. And yet the move, first considered a temporary response to the war effort, stretched into permanence as the postwar economy began to florish.

When the war was over and resources were freed for home-building, both the industrial workers and the GI graduates flocked to the new suburbs that seemed to come into being overnight. It was here that they were faced with developing a life style that might both meet their new perceptions of life and prove satisfying. Since neighbors often had little shared background upon which to con-

[1]See David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

struct a common life, they often turned to pictures of the good life purveyed by the new national media, and made them their models. It was into this setting that the generation was born that was to come of age during the Viet Nam war, a setting where parents were as likely to learn their patterns of child-rearing from shows like "Leave It to Beaver" and "Father Knows Best" as from the children's grandparents or old friends.

But child-rearing was very important in those new suburbs. The numbers of children continued to grow as families tried to reappropriate the lost years of home life. And if parents might always have some trouble reconciling the vision of life and the values they had been taught in the more sheltered and stable prewar years of *their* youth with the new forms of suburban life, it was important that the children appropriate fully this rich inheritance. Also, in new neighborhoods where people were trying to prove themselves to their neighbors, the quality of life for their children became an important measure of worth. They should all be talented, deserving of special lessons and activities, capable of using to the fullest all the opportunities of life in a new age. They should fit into all the activities now available. The two highest commendations of the time were "well-rounded" and "well-adjusted." These parents had read enough of modern psychology to be worried lest they repress important drives of their children, yet they also were concerned that they have all the qualities of the successful. Their ambivalence often gave the appearance of placing high value on conformity to external pressures rather than valuing their children for what each one uniquely was.

Meanwhile, the schools that became the center of existence for these children were also undergoing their own kind of metamorphosis. Like the children, the schools were very important in the new suburbs, but they were problematic. They could no longer be expected to be the natural expression of a homogeneous neighborhood, but had somehow to reconcile the diversity of the families who were their patrons—or to ignore it. Schools, as neighborhoods kept growing, changed from being the pride of the area to overcrowded systems threatened with split-shift schedules of half-day education. And in the midst of this, in 1957, came the news that the Russians had launched the first space vehicle. The thought that they might be developing better scientists and technologists than we were led to immediate demands for excellence in education, particularly in the areas of science and technology. Government subsidies for scientific research transformed the universities, and the entire school system was geared up to produce researchers who could carry on those projects. Schools that were

already losing their neighborhood identification because of population shifts now became identified with the university system in ways that almost excluded community influence. The educational system became more and more a thing apart, with its own values, its own system of rewards. Young people whose lives were dominated by the schools were separated more and more from the lives of their parents and grandparents, from the nearby workplace, and from other aspects of the mainstream of the society.

The separation was mirrored in much of the rest of their lives as well. Suburban living had separated home life from the workplace by greater distances, and also by a form of compartmentalization in which people were essentially different persons at work than at home. Young people saw their parents and friends only in the role of parents, or at play. The only adults they regularly saw doing the work by which they were primarily identified in the society were their teachers, teachers who were being more and more trained in the skills of critical analysis, less and less as representatives of the local community. They were their primary role models, and from them the young learned to be critical of their environment, to value the viewpoints of an educational institution over those of any other portion of the society. Schooling became a process of alienating them from adult society rather than preparing them for it. Yet the schools, overcrowded as they were, pushed to serve as a feeder system for a meritocracy dominated by scientific and technological achievement, became alienating institutions, too. There also young people felt constrained to a kind of conformity that had little to do with their own innate talents or desires.

Meantime, churches, traditionally another institution that assists people in appropriating their culture, developed their own styles in the new suburbs, reflecting the life styles of the times. As people tried to forge some kind of community out of the disparate elements of the subdivisions, and some kind of morality appropriate to a life of affluence, diversity, and fluidity, they sought out churches that might help them in the task. These congregations could not be the common religious expression of natural communities, as many had been for previous generations. Rather, they were attempts to *find* community, in which any forms of teaching or preaching that were too explicit in their theology might fragment the already tenuous fellowship. Theological depth was often traded for congregational busyness. Classrooms in the church schools were crowded, as they were in the schools, by this populous cohort of children whose parents hoped that religious education would provide a good moral base for

the society which their children would inherit. The style of the churches was often what Orr and Nichelson in *The Radical Suburb* called "expansive."[2] Comparing it with earlier types—the "savage," which had been the style of churches that expected a strong ideological or ethnic loyalty, and the "conscientious," that emphasized firm moral codes and personal responsibility—they found in the "expansive" style a tendency to take things lightly, to be free to move from one commitment to another, to experiment and grow. The mobility of the society encouraged such a life style, and suburban congregations developed programs that could accomodate a great amount of turnover and yet be there for the involvement of people at any time they might choose to participate. The churches were full, busy, and shallow. To the young they were primarily an extension of the many voluntary associations, lessons, and activities that shaped their lives as they learned to become "well-adjusted" and well-rounded."

In these ways and many others, the lives of the young seemed to be governed by forces and patterns that were more external than natural expressions of their families and communities. As they reached adolescence and started questioning things, they were concerned about the shallow conformity that seemed to be required of them. At the same time, many of their mentors were sharing with them the conviction that this generation, born into a world of instant communication, of an information explosion, of easy cross-cultural contact and new forms of learning, were the first inhabitants of a world so changed that older generations could not provide appropriate guidance. It would be up to them, they learned, to bring in a new age, to create a culture worthy of a future that would far outstrip anything that we had ever known.

Given that vision, the demands for conformity that they felt all around them became even more intolerable. Not only were they not taught how to be integrated into adult society, they came to feel that it was the farthest thing from what they desired that they should be so integrated.

Yet all that would probably have been outgrown with little residue, a passing phase of their student years, if this generation had not found proof of the enmity of the rest of the society in the Viet Nam war. Already tenuous in their commitment to the society, they were being asked to risk their lives for it in an adventure concerning which even the adult world was seriously divided. It seemed evident that the schools had, as they had suspected, served first as holding

[2]John B. Orr and F. Patrick Nichelson, *The Radical Suburb* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).

pens to keep youth out of a job market where their competition was not wanted, and now to supply a war machine with expendable fodder. Instead of being free to bring in a new age, they were being asked to die for the worst aspects of the old one.

Small wonder, then, that they rebelled! Small wonder, as well, really, that the rebellion took two channels, the one seeking to do away with repressive social institutions, by violence if necessary, the other seeking a separate existence with its own forms and values, seeking new visions even if it took drugs to free the mind for them. They claimed the characteristics of a new age, as told by the prophets:

> . . . your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
> and your young men shall see visions,
> and your old men shall dream dreams . . ."[3]

But seldom did they find a way to those dreams in the churches that stood for the heritage of the prophets. Rather, a more accruate description of the feeling out of which a counterculture arose, and one often quoted by its apologists, was Yeats' "The Second Coming:"

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.
>
> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
> The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
> When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
> Troubles my sight: Somewhere in the sands of the desert
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
> Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

[3]Joel 2:28

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?[4]

And what was the "rough beast" that seemed to be stirring to life? What were the religious as well as political shapes it was taking? Surely never was there a beast with more heads! Many of those who rebelled found one object of their rebellion the "single vision" of science as they had taught it, the reduction of the world to objective dimensions, taking as real only that which could be counted and measured. And so they turned to the supposed opposite of science, religion—but not to the mainline churches that now affirmed a scientfic worldview. Their religion, at least at first, was formless, perhaps primitive, as expressed in the answers of the young people—over a sixth of them—who on our questionaire on belief in God, checked the choice, "The word 'God' makes me uncomfortable, but I do believe in something 'more' or 'beyond.'"

As they moved further into a quest for the mystery that underlies vision and hope, they sought special powers in ancient occult practices, a picture of the future in practices of divination, special power to influence the alien environment through magic and witchcraft. Concerned about the harm to the ecology emanating from modern technology, they sought to return to arcane nature religions, or to the religious experience of Indians whose culture had left the continent more whole. They sought godhood inside themselves, taking up versions of Eastern religions, learning techniques of meditation and chanting in order to get in tune with the infinite. If they stayed within the symbol system of Christianity, it tended to be the pre-scientific forms of American Fundamentalism, or the experiential style of the charismatic movement.

In most of these forms, in addition to a more satisfactory vision of the meaning of life and power to live it according to the vision, they also sought community, an expressive community of shared resources and shared vision. And later, as things seemed more and more to fall apart, those communities became more central, more necessary to wall off the chaos on the outside.

There is not time here to talk about other expressions of the counterculture, the way they sought alternatives to ordinary family structure, new ways of dealing with economic reality, new styles of politics, new ways of educating. Suffice it to say now that while there remain individuals and groups of that generation still isolated from the mainstream of the society, still living in cultures that offer an

[4]William Butler Yeats. *The Second Coming* (New York: Macmillan, 1924)

alternative, for the most part that generation has achieved re-entry. Streets once filled with rioters are now filled with joggers. Former "Jesus freaks" are now in our seminaries. "Normalcy" seems to have prevailed.

Yet I believe that we have not really returned to the *status quo ante,* that there are some crucial differences, Some of the differences remain in the generation that came of age in the Viet Nam era, now young adults. Some of the differences are in the society itself. And one of the most crucial changes involves the intersection of those two.

There may be a genuine difference in the young adults of this generation and earlier ones in their commitment to the society as a whole. Whether one thinks of the self-centeredness of the "me generation," the "culture of narcissism," or the kind of single issue politics that mounts as this generation enters the political arena, there is evidence of a weakness in coming to terms with the dimensions of public responsibility, of willingness to look at and work for the general welfare. Robbed of the common pattern of gradual assumption of adult responsibility, they seem to have gaps in their understanding of it, gaps that infect the rest of the society.

Whatever else the counterculture may have done to change the society, it seems to have speeded up a process that was beginning before, a process of isolation of youth that tends to continue the erosion of learning and accepting adult responsibility. It is as if the society has acted like an oyster with a grain of sand under its shell. We have so surrounded our youth with a glittering array of consumer products, entertainment, and recreation that they are shut out of the adult world. If the educational system continues to remain in its own kind of isolation, that too will fail to give them smooth entry into adult responsibility. There are also problems with their entry into ordinary church life, and it is to that that we must now turn, since it is our responsibility. The alienation of the young from the churches began in the Viet Nam generation, in a number of ways. A common pattern of religious commitments has been for young people to drift away from active congregational involvement, to return after marriage, particularly after having children, for whom they look to the church to provide basic religious education and a supportive community.

One of the alterations in the common pattern developed by the Viet Nam generation came out of their alienation from the institution of the family. They tended, first of all, to postpone marriage. Suspicious of long-term commitments that might force them into lives that would cramp their newfound—or still avidly sought—identities, they chose instead to exercise the sexual freedom proclaimed by the

counterculture. They lived together as couples without marital commitments, or as mixed groups, or in homosexual liaisons. Or they kept free of all involvements, drifting from place to place, from person to person, moving on whenever they felt threatened by a growing sense of obligation to anyone. Children represented many problems. First, of course, they did imply those lasting obligations that could impair the sacred pursuit of personal identity. Second, it seemed to many of these young people that it would be cruel to bring children into such a hostile world. The general apocalyptic mood contributed to such an evaluation; an investment in the future—which children are—is inappropriate among those who perceive themselves to be at the end of an age, with the future a real question. And of course, one of the apocalyptic visions was that of a world overpopulated and overcrowded, inspiring among these young people movements for zero population growth and more reason not to establish families.

All this has created problems for the churches, which have long functioned on a model that takes the nuclear family as the basic unit of the congregation. They have had a tendency to acquiesce to a pattern that assures temporary defection of youth while they work through the process of gaining an adult identity over against such units of childhood formation as the local church. At best, they have hoped to keep them in contact with the church through youth groups and campus ministries only tenuously related to the central programs of a congregation. As many of those broke down following the activist period, there were few channels of involvement for those who would act out adult commitments in social service through the church. Few local congregations have provided activities for adults who are unmarried, and church teachings have not given much aid and comfort to those living together without benefit of clergy, even less if the liaisons are homosexual rather than heterosexual. So as the period of separation from nuclear family units has grown in length, the loss of contact between the churches and this age cohort has become an apparently permanent pattern. There has been a tendency in recent years for many of these young adults to return to patterns of marriage and child-rearing, though at a later age. It may be hard for them now to break long-standing habits that made no place in their lives for church participation, nor in their meaning systems for the use of religious language to interpret their actions or goals.

There are also other barriers to the pattern of easy return. In the politics of the Viet Nam war, many church people continued to reflect the national chauvinism of the civil religion of the 1950's, even though others—particularly church professionals—were deeply involved in anti-

war movements out of their religious convictions. The experience of many young people in local congregations did not give them assurance of a warm welcome should they return to church still holding to a political view that had been unpopular there.

A particularly important factor is the lack of fit in patterns of living between this generation and most church congregations. While young adults have for the most part returned to the economic system to do the kinds of work ordinarily expected of people with their background and training, their alienation may be seen in their attitudes toward work. There are few in this age group who resonate to the world-view of the so-called Protestant Ethic, who find fulfillment and self-expression in their work. Those who do find such satisfastion tend to be the ones who have opted for lives at the margin of the economy, who make a minimal living through handicrafts or similar personal endeavors. For many, economic marginality has also implied remaining on the margin of social institutions such as the church. Most of those who are at work in the mainstream of the economy simply do the work required of them as something necessary to provide funds for activities that are the real focus of their lives—primarily forms of recreation. This means, among other things, that weekends are likely to be spent away from home, or Saturday night celebrations are likely to presuppose a Sunday to sleep late and be quiet. Such a life style has little relevance to a pattern of church programming focused on Sunday morning. Returning to active involvement in the church may mean for many of today's young adults a major reversal of their style of life—small wonder that the churches most successful in inducing that return have been those that stress a conversion experience!

It is of particular importance to the churches that the influence of this large cohort of young adults has spread to much of the rest of the society, particularly their attitudes toward work and toward leisure, for it seems to fly in the face of an ethic traditionally honored by the churches, at least in this country. The contrast may be shown in the following excerpt from a recent magazine article on travel in the 1980s:

> most of us had grown up with a sense of self-denial.... Spending money on one's self was against the ethic of the time. One's job and one's home were the important aspects of one's life, and travel played a marginal role. But new values were born in the Sixties and they spread in the Seventies to the rest of the population. We shifted away from self-denial and began to enrich

ourselves by expanding our horizons. Travel has ceased to be marginal. It is no longer a luxury, but part of a life plan. We may need to make some cutbacks—pare a week in the sun or the snow to a long weekend. Those are economic adjustments. There is an accepted need to escape, a right to escape in the face of stress. The shift from self-denial to spending on oneself may well be what life will be all about for that dauntless dasher, the 80s Traveler.[6]

In essence, the life style described here rejects the "inner-worldly asceticism" that Max Weber found characteristic of Protestantism in particular. There is evidence that some churches, at least, are willing also to reject the ascetic worldview, though they may not have dliberately set out to do so.

It is apparent in the offerings of some of the more popular forms of religion or our time that this need to escape, to enjoy time off, has come to be accepted and catered to. Beginning with the "electronic church," which inhabits the entertainment media and often has the polished style of show business, we may also move out to observe congregations whose worship services offer colorful pageantry, messages not far removed from commercial "hype," music that has the flair of the stage. These tend to be the churches that are growing. These are those that have responded to the religious mood of the times, where people are likely to shop around for religious services as they do for other kinds of weekend entertainment. Those "shoppers" do not just represent the young adults in the age group we have been discussing, though they may have been influenced by them. This is a widespread phenomenon, a pattern of the "Christ of culture" that reveals the extent to which modern definitions of worth have been influenced by such devices as television's ratings system and other popularity polls.

Here we find the most obvious example of what Wuthnow has called "religious populism." He defines populism as including:

> (1) a primary belief in the "intrinsic and immediate validity of the popular will," (2) fluid standards subject to fads and crazes, (3) diversity in ideas and organization..., (4) resentment of elites and elite intellectuals, and (5) organizations that treat people as members of a mass audience or market.[6]

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[6]Robert Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) p. 196. The direct quote within his words is from William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (New York: Free Press, 1959) p. 104.

[5]Horace Sutton, "80s Traveler: His Life and Future Times," *Saturday Review* Jan. 5, 1980, 24.

It is not hard to find such populism in current society. The contrast of the "popular will" with the "will" of big government, big education, big business, and the like, is a common theme. Rebellions within the ranks of most social institutions in the name of the people are common. Union locals rebel against the national organization. Voters petition to have put on the ballot laws that will limit the power and scope of government. The big corporation has become the whipping boy of consumers, workers, and regulators. People have become suspicious of national media, seeking out local systems of information, or news channels of interest groups with which they identify.

All too often the mainline churches, in contrast to those movements, have had the appearance of representing the elites and elite intellectuals resented by populist movements. They have often fallen into another way of mirroring the culture, this time that part of it that comprises the "new class" of people whose work is with ideas and information. Based firmly in the secular humanism of the academic background of this class, these churches offer programs less in the genre of show business than that of popular psychological movements. They pick up on the countercultural emphases on personal involvement, self-discovery, expressing one's feelings, and the like. They may well also affirm elements of "high culture" in sophisticated esthetic expressions in their music and ritual.

Against both forms of Christianity, and yet still within its tradition, are the direct inheritors of some of the political movements of the counterculture. These groups, in the tradition of early anabaptist sects, proclaim a clearly delineated stance that puts them in direct opposition to the culture. They reflect that opposition in their life style, where they live simply, often communally, rejecting all the blandishments of a consumer society. Their politics flow directly from the counterculture's opposition to "big government," where they stand also in opposition to most of the economic policies of the society, are ardently pacifist, and are advocates for the poor and those suffering from violation of human rights in this country as well as outside it. As they oppose the centralized systems of the society, these groups may be, politically at least, the most populist of all.

Populism has had—and deserved—a respected place in the history of American society. As a reflection of popular will made evident in specific movements, it has forced power holders of the society to be more sensitive to a wider constituency. As a protest movement, populism has called to account many aspects of the society that may have been developing in directions unacceptable to the majority,

possibly even unintended by those responsible for them. Populism in American churches has kept them from being priest-ridden or irrelevant, pulling the teeth of trends toward anti-clericalism or cynical acceptance of religion as a tool of the establishment.

However, populism works best in a dialectical process, as a movement against certain abuses that may result in reform, but not in a complete takeover by the movement. Popular movements are commonly based on a few specific issues rather than a total vision of the way things should be done. Few people can stand firmly in the grassroots and see the "big picture." In religious institutions in particular, where there is an assumption that some vision of the Kingdom underlies the interests and causes of the present, it is never enough to have the churches reflect the will of the people. There is an underlying expectation of religious institutions that they will assist people in reaching beyond their current sensibilities and understandings. Populist rebellions in the church may properly question the direction in which the people are being led, but they lose their religious charter if they assume that the only duty of the churches is to affirm opinions where they currently stand.

Troeltsch, in his massive recapitulation of the way in which the Christian churches have through time related to the societies in which they have been found, has pointed up a peculiar strength of the medieval Catholic Church, which incorporated its sectarian movements into the larger organizations, making of them sectarian orders, each with its own charter.[7] Since the Protestant Reformation, sectarian movements have tended to keep their own separate organization, and yet in America the acceptance of the plural model of a denominational society has amounted to an informal cooptation of sectarian movements into the religious institution of the nation. Sects—the churches of the disinherited—have in the long run helped their people to an appropriation of their inheritance as members of the society.

The religious populism of the Viet Nam generation may have been the expression of another kind of disinheritance, where the young were pushed toward the future by an older generation that was too unsure of itself to lead them, where there were all too few visionaries from the churches equal to the task of equipping them for the journey, much less of accompanying them. Those most willing to involve themselves with youth who tried to create a new culture tended to be the least supportive of—or supported by—the churches. The need for sectarian religion could be expected to arise.

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[7]Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches,* translated by Olive Wyon (New York: Harper, 1960) Chapter II.

Religious movements, of course, are not the only possibility in this situation. They would probably not have been the recourse at this time if there had been other social insitutions in which their push to the future could have been supported. For several generations the colleges and universities had served this purpose for many, but now they were severely divided and distraught. To many of the young they were simply one more organ of a repressive system, all the more repellent because of their familiarity. Graduate students and some faculty, supported by a few administrators, had attempted to institute changes of all kinds—new courses, new grading systems, new admissions policies, new administrative and decision-making systems, new forms of supervision for student housing and student life. Already overburdened by too rapid growth, academic organizations creaked, shuddered, and threatened to break down. They were hardly in a position to nurture the movement toward cultural innovation that they had helped to midwife. It was no time, either, to look to the political institution for steady assistance. Even if it had not seemed a primary enemy after Viet Nam, the final blows given the system by Watergate ensured that it would not be easy to find resources there for the construction of a new order.

In other words, the final understanding of this as a "dislocated" generation has to come from the loss of any clear routes into the social order as it is now, or as it might become. There remains a conviction that there is a basic need for change, for reordering, for dealing with the processes and systems of the society in some way. The conditions of society are still present that led older generations to pin their hopes for the future on the first generation to have as their birthright the cultural realities of post-World-War II civilization. The particular response that came to be known as the counterculture has dissipated without affecting the change that its apostles expected of it. But the problem of finding appropriate cultural adjustments to a future dominated by modern technology and rapid change remains a necessity. The task of cultural reconstruction was inappropriately laid on the shoulders of a single age cohort, but as adults in today's society they can hardly escape bearing part of the burden. It is essential that pathways to responsible participation in the society be opened and strengthened for this cohort, as well as for those who follow after them and have also suffered dislocation because of disruptions in the process of social integration of the young. The search for identity must not only deal with the internal dimensions of the self or responses within an isolated group, but also with an exploration of the public

aspects of the person—concepts poorly developed in the lives of today's youth and young adults.

The definition of democracy in this nation that has caught the moral imagination of humankind is that of a general and responsible participation in the public process. The many movements of the recent and historic past, as well as the present, can be described as attempts of groups previously left out to enter into that kind of participation. Blacks, ethnic minorities, youth, women, others whose styles of life has been treated as a disqualification for participation, have been the protagonists in the past couple of decades. *Access* to the process has in many cases been achieved, but that is only part of what is required. It must be complemented by the development of skills and points of view that make it possible for persons to identify with the public process as participants, to seek the public good as an extension of private interest, rather than as something exterior and potentially inimical to the individual.

Social critics properly point out that this process has always been imperfect, and has been particularly ineffective in recent years. But there have been recognized patterns, channels through which the formation of a public identity has been achieved. For people already in the mainstream, educational institutions, public and private, have complemented the teaching of families about the nature of public morality for persons in their particular niche in the society. The nature of the workplace has dictated some of the specifics of that morality, with a greater emphasis on personal behavior for those at lower rungs of the ladder, and on community responsibility for those actions and decisions have direct consequences in the lives of others. But there has also been an assumption that one may move from the one place, from the one morality to another. Americans have been particularly understanding of the parable of the good steward—"You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much."[8] The churches, by and large, have helped with the formation of moral character by reinforcing the same models, according to the dominant social characteristics of their members and their aspirations. The mechanics for getting into the system were also often the province of religious groups, as various sects set standards of behavior as evidence of sanctification that resulted in the development of a pattern of reliability and responsibility. Such styles of life tended to open doors to occupations that allowed a family to enter the economic and social mainstream where the other social institutions could function effectively for them. In recent years we have depended upon social welfare

[8]Matthew 25:23

programs to provide this function, but since they have little access to the roots of motivation the way religious groups do, they have generally been less effective.

The question now at hand, however, is no longer only that of providing access to the system for those kept out by poverty and lack of economic skills. Rather we are faced with a generation that has lost fruitful contact with the institutions of the society because of the speed of upward mobility of their families. The kind of morality taught in their childhood may have become inappropriate in a new age with a choice of new life styles and a new set of responsibilities. The notion of public responsibility at a level commensurate with their current status has not taken root. Where are the mechanisms of the formation of public character by which these dislocated people may be brought into the processes by which the society is maintained and renewed? Are new religious groups of our day a potential source of reintegration, as historic sects have been? Have mainline religious denominations any stake in the process?

There is strong evidence that the Jesus movement of recent decades provided a route from the counterculture back into that portion of mainstream society represented by evangelical churches, the most direct inheritors of historic sects. There is some doubt, however, as to whether those churches, in their current affirmation of most of the elements of the culture, define salvation in such a way as to have any social significance. The sanctification of the individual convert seems removed from any larger social context.

Some young adults are giving evidence that they are beginning to feel the need for broader applications of their faith. We are now discovering alumni of the Jesus movement in the more liberal seminaries, seeking ways of putting to work the religious convictions formed in the passage in the reconstruction of the culture that was part of the legacy of their generation. Dissatisfied with the easy affirmation of the culture and the individualistic emphasis in many of the evangelical churches, they seek the roots of Christian reform among churches that are the inheritors of the Social Gospel, while still holding to a theology that allows them to affirm transcendent legitimation for their efforts. They challenge the humanistic theology of the liberal churches, citing the failure of secular humanism to provide vision or motive for the creation of the future society that we have told them is their task.

On the other hand, those whose experiences in the counterculture led them into Eastern religions or psychological movements of personal development have offered a new definition of sanctification in

the name of enlightenment or self-actualization. Again, the question arises as to the way such salvation may be translated into socially relevant forms. Alumni of these movements are also coming to the churches and the seminaries in search of ways to tie their new insights into social processes that can make them applicable to more persons than themselves.

Finally, those who found primary meaning in the establishment of caring communities are showing signs of having discovered the limits of community within a single age group, and seek churches where they can relate across the generations in the kind of loving care they had not found in the neighborhoods of their mobile childhood.

Some of the historic sects offered all three functions that are now being sought. Those that claimed a transcendent God who ruled history, who was the author of personal salvation, were most able to develop over time into mainline denominations, accepting social responsibility as institutions. They offered specific training in spirituality that contributed to the development of relatively secure and positive personalities. They did this in the context of a community of believers that offered support, admonition, and structure to their members. Out of such communities and such forms of personal development they were able to send forth people who had motivation to spend their lives in the pursuit of the public good, and who had a grounded hope that their efforts would not be in vain.

Mainline churches, whether or not their roots were in sectarian groups, have been able to move beyond the simple motivation of individuals to be responsible for their fellow human beings, to providing channels through which that responsibility could be exercised. Their works or corporate charity, community betterment, their activities as a conscience of the society, should not be forgotten. But in recent years these have become muted in the dual streams of pluralism and special interest, that have made the churches suspect. Do they indeed represent universal values and general interests? It is in that question that we find the impulse of cultural reconstruction coming out of the ashes of the counterculture. In this age, churches may or may not be instruments of reform. They have a vested interest in things as they are, which makes it more difficult for them to envision a different society. For this, they surely are the *subjects* of reform. Perhaps if religious reform is successful it can indeed be the channel of a wider reconstruction of the culture, which is the task given to the Veit Nam generation, but really is the responsibility of all of us. Can we learn a lesson from those earlier sects which participated in

the formation of the society in those earlier areas of dislocation on the frontier?

One thing we have noted, and which seems to have been a demand of the countercultural experiment, has to do with a theology that takes seriously a sense of the divine, of a transcendent or ultimate dimension of human life, that recognizes mystery and takes seriously the limits of human reason. A society that dwells on the edge of a space age where quantum physics, concepts of anti-matter and black holes, the ramifications of Einsteinian physics, all defying ordinary logic, are part of our conceptual world, must be willing to free its consciousness from rigid definitions of rationality. A culture that recognizes the importance of the nonrational in the human psyche and in social processes need not reject religious traditions on the bases of their apparent lack of rationality. There may be new bases of reason out there to explore. How strange if the social institution most identified with the ineffable experience of the holy should be the last to recognize this! Surely we need to bring all the insights of a long tradition of religious experience to a society that has no idea how to handle the dimensions of awe and mystery, else they may become new prisons we make for ourselves in belief structures that try to contain the uncontainable. Certainly at a time when we are stepping out into unfamiliar ground in so many aspects of life, that portion of our culture that contains all the best insights of our heritage about the ultimate nature and destiny of ourselves and our world needs to be made visible and accessible. Without hope, the new is a paralyzing threat. For those grounded in a worldview that posits an ultimate purpose to human activity, the new is an exhilarating challenge. So it would seem that the times demand of the churches a theology unafraid to project beyond the known, to speak of the ultimate in more explicit language than may have been popular in recent years, but also to do so in responsible ways, rescuing religious experience from the realm of experiment and thrill.

At the same time, the interest in Eastern and other religions unfamiliar to our society reminds us that a world made small by modern communications and travel cannot long tolerate a vision of divine purpose limited to one particular class or nation. The rise of a chauvinistic Islam may indeed tempt us to respond in kind, yet our dismay at this manifestation of nationalistic religion should serve as a reminder of its inappropriateness for ourselves as well. The new world we declared to be the inheritance of the Viet Nam generation cannot survive in a welter of particularistic visions of its nature. In fact, this recent movement is only an explicit example of that baptism by re-

ligious groups of single issue politics that must be transcended by responsible public participation.

That sense of responsibility can only be created among people whose vision includes not only a hopeful future but one in which they have a part. This implies a sense of personal competence and wholeness that must include not only reasonable social and economic skills but a way of coming to understand oneself as present on the sacred landscape. It is the task of religious groups to provide training in what has traditionally been called "spirituality"—an introduction to the history and traditions of the faith, but also explicit direction in practices of meditation or prayer, study, and contemplation, in which a person may stand back from everyday pursuits and practice a different perspective in which those activities do not encompass all of ultimate reality. Spiritual disciplines, if they accomplish this, are modes of personal freedom, moving beyond the present into higher possibiliies. Only a person who is free to think beyond the daily tasks of life can have anything to offer others. It is here that we find the sources of hope and motivation that tie the individual into the larger vision of a better society.

But the larger picture is never meaningful if it is only visionary. It must also be experiential. The individual learns to make use of insights gained through spiritual disciplines only in a community of others who can take those insights seriously. Shared visions are the sources of cultural revitalization. Part of the grounding of such visions in human community rests in the sense of direction that comes from contact with the past. Only when we know where we have come from are we able to judge where it is we are heading. In human society we get that perspective from those who are older, who have lived through earlier manifestations of the culture and so have some idea of the trajectories of social change. One reason for the failure of the counterculture may well have been its lack of a sense of direction which came from having no contact with older generations. In modern society we have tended to isolate the old almost as much as the young, in patterns of housing, of work, and of recreation. One of the few places where three or more generations are in contact is in the churches, though the opportunity for creative dialogue among the generations is rarely exploited.

Ideally, then, the churches are the institutions of modern society most capable both of bringing the dislocated generation back into contact with the rest of society and of making that contact fruitful in a mutual acceptance of the task of adapting our culture to its times. In the intergenerational community of the church it is possible

to put a human face on our understanding of where we have been and where we seem to be heading, so that it becomes more clear how much adjustment in our direction is necessary, what out of the past is worth keeping or restoring, how much of the present can remain within a positive trajectory. In the religious fellowship we live among those who have faith in the future, the hope that it may more nearly reflect a great design that they believe in. In this fellowship the work of change becomes less desperate, more joyful, more a labor of love. In the teaching and practice of the church it should be possible to learn patterns of thinking and behaving that are not dependent on forms that we suspect are insecure, on their way out.

Ideally, within the fellowship of the church there can be modeled a new definition of the good life, more appropriate for our time, less grounded in those social forms that have proved inadequate and alienating. We can trace this in the history of the church. We may argue whether the early church accepted or tolerated slavery in the society in which it was imbedded. But in those persecuted cells of early Christians who were both masters and slaves, rich and poor, there was born a quality of fellowship that would eventually make slavery intolerable. It was the compassion of Christian communities that initiated hospitals, orphanages, settlement houses, and other types of social service that eventually became programs of the secular society. The prophetic witness of the fellowship of concern that is the Christian church at its best has made real the visions of a better society held by people in all ages. It has done so by modeling new and better social relationships, and by guiding people who have experienced life in that model to project it outward to the structures of the whole society.

The time is upon us to make that kind of witness to the present age. A wide range of questions could be asked as to how we might go about this, and it is time to frame and try to answer them. The answers may be crucial, for if we cannot find a way for meaningful incorporation of the younger generations, both that of the original dislocation and the younger age cohorts suffering from the second wave of dislocation, we will have lost our future. Not only that, it may be the churches that, at this point in history, have a unique ability to save those generations for a society that cannot be maintained without them.

In the future, churches may be able to survive while simply catering to their present members and a view from the inside that ignores movements that have not touched them directly. But they may be the only source of healing for the society as a whole. Perhaps

we should take to heart the words of Mordecai to Queen Esther, who was also faced with a unique and frightening responsibility:

> . . . if you keep silence at such a time as this,
> relief and deliverance will arise from another quarter,
> but you and your father's house will perish.
> And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom
> for such a time as this?[9]

[9]Esther 4:14