

AMERICAN YOUTH AND THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH: A PASTORAL REFLECTION

INTRODUCTION

"Youth today is not looking to church or organized religion. The deepest division of the time is the one existing between the older and younger generations. Youth today is more frank and sophisticated than ever before."¹ Thus did Prof. Max Otto of the University of Wisconsin describe the relationship between American youth and the institutional church—over thirty years ago. Few knowledgeable observers disagreed with him then. Few would do so today. The tensions between youth and institutions of all kinds is an accepted ingredient of social life and a requirement for social change. As a more-or-less objective statement of the way things are and have always been, Otto's comment seems, to say the least, unspectacular.

However we examine the generational conflict in a different time. When Otto spoke the collapse of Western values was not as evident as it is today, three major wars and several dozen revolutions later. Four decades of human experience and scientific research that would expose the extent to which institutionalized Christianity failed to transcend its several nationalistic and cultural milieus had yet to pass.² So also did the arrogance of an academicism that blamed religion for keeping mankind from utopia by deflecting toward the here-after energies that could achieve a scientific utopia in the here-and-now. Today science is "one of the most destructive instruments—destructive of that freedom from fear which it once promised"—while religious "illusions" that preserve "uncompromised aspirations

¹ From a newspaper clipping, c. 1928, in *Scrapbook #5, Henry C. Hengell Papers*, St. Paul's Chapel, Madison, Wisconsin.

² This audience is familiar enough with the experience and writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to preclude extensive citation here. For some examples of sociological research see Milton Rokeach, "Faith, Hope and Bigotry," *Psychology Today*, 3 (April, 1970), 33-37, 58; or Jeffery K. Hadden, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1969).

for peace and happiness" still contain "a higher truth value than the science which works for their elimination."³

In other words, if we are correctly to examine the impact of American culture and experience on theology, we must take into account not only the extent to which recent developments have engulfed and co-opted the churches, but also the degree to which this present time remains open to the power and vision of theology to help renew men and their institutions. Since you have been promised a "pastoral reflection" and not a "rap session," a middle-aged ex-Newman Chaplain, and not some young person, is here to talk with you about these things.

I do not pretend to be a spokesman *for* youth. I do hope to be able to talk *about* them with some degree of knowledge, insight, and sympathy. I encourage each of you on your own to seek out and hear out youngsters. Since you will approach them as an outside inquirer interested in the things that interest them, they will give you direct, open answers. And once they see that you are not offended by their candor, they will get to like you and may even stop talking long enough to ask you a question. Meanwhile, let me convey what I have learned from about a decade of work on campuses, from several hearings in which young persons in high school, college, and the working force were asked to ventilate on the very topic of this session, and from a daily reading of surveys, studies, and other sources treating what the media like to call "The Now Generation." With this descriptive section completed, I will attempt to explore how the Church can minister to the members of this generation.

YOUTH NOW

Wrestling with our topic shakes out a lot of words that seem to cluster about the central concepts defining this new generation. Such words are: "affluent," "numerous," "musical," "sexually liberated," "non-violent," "guiltless," "bewildered," "celebrative," "communal," and "honest." To these we might add "vocal," "spoiled," "overweening," "ungrateful," "presumptuous," "long-haired," "dirty,"

³ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 65-66.

"promiscuous," "noisy," "dope fiends," "rebellious," "chicken," and "Communist." In some way each of these descriptions is correct, for dealing with young people the ambiguity of the human condition is especially evident. But let us put these impressionistic tags aside for a while so we can push through some hard data and challenging speculation about what constitutes the condition of being a youth today.

The statistics of the young present a relatively comprehensible picture. Today the age group, 14-24 numbers about forty million and comprises one-fifth of the national population. About 90 per cent of boys and girls 14-17 years old are in high school, from 30 to 50 per cent of those 18-21 are in college and from 10 to 20 per cent of those 22-24 years old are in graduate school.⁴ Biologically and physiologically the young today are further along than their predecessors a generation or two earlier. Richer diets, better doctoring, vitamins, and other advantages have been lowering the threshold of maturation at the rate of approximately six months per decade since 1880. In practical terms this means that a young person entering college in 1971 is physically about three and one half years older than his grandfather was when he enrolled for the fall term of 1900.⁵ Psychologically, this generation of the young, or a good proportion of it, is also different. It has grown up in homes where a democratic family structure has replaced an authoritarian one, where such motherly values as creativity, enjoyment, and interpersonal relations have supplanted such older fatherly values as productivity, discipline, and achievement, and where fear-oriented discipline has yielded to love-oriented methods of control. In practical terms this means that the young person today has incorporated two very American beliefs: that the individual is indeed unique and that he has a potential which nothing must frustrate.⁶ Culturally the contemporary

⁴ "Profile of American Youth," *Statistical Bulletin*, 51 (November, 1967), 6.

⁵ From a study cited in Franklin H. Littell, "Students in Search of Soul," *The Journal*, 6 (September, 1968), 3. See also J. M. Tanner, "Earlier Maturation in Man," *Scientific American*, 218 (January, 1968), 19, 21-27.

⁶ See discussions in Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 22, 56-65, 105-06; and Luther S. Distler, "The Ado-

young person is also endowed in ways his parents and grandparents—or you and I—were not. Throughout his conscious life electronic media have captured his eyes with scenes and his ears with sounds that effect different ways of perceiving time and distance, create new expectations, and package, mediate, and interpret life experiences from beyond the family, class, or national circle and “ahead of schedule.” It is probably not an exaggeration to say that the generation coming to maturity between 1960 and 1970 experienced in one decade what their forerunners experienced over a span of twenty-five to one hundred years. It is the first generation in history to have been told by reputable authorities in scientific and political circles that this planet will be uninhabitable in thirty years. Meanwhile, affluence and leisure have permitted the young not merely to consume adult-managed products like TV, soft drinks, or used cars, but more significantly to support the youthful creators and leaders of their own symbolically important music, art, language, and social movements. In practical terms these conditions establish the young in a kind of sub-culture which has the potential of becoming a counter-culture.⁷

Our overview indicates that young persons today, compared with those of the same ages thirty or sixty years ago, tend to be physically more developed (though not necessarily stronger), psychologically more self-accepting and self-satisfied, and culturally more set apart as a sub-group. Does this encourage us to conclude that all young persons have been so shaped by post-World War II events that they “everywhere share a kind of experience that none of the elders ever had or will have,” and thus are growing up on the other side of a break between the generations that “is wholly new?”⁸

The generational gap is real and there has always been some kind of tension between “fathers and sons.”⁹ But this cleavage is not at

lescent ‘Hippie’ and the Emergence of a Matristic Culture,” *Psychiatry*, 33 (August, 1970), 362-71.

⁷ See Milton J. Yinger, “Contraculture and Subculture,” *American Sociological Review*, 25 (October, 1960), 627-29; and Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Anchor Book, 1968), pp. 42ff.

⁸ Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1970), p. 50.

⁹ See the comprehensive treatment of “the universal theme of generational

all as extensive as popular writing and commentary suggest. Young persons tend to accept and live by the values their parents have transmitted to them. The young will discover new values and adapt inherited ones. But so long as in the first place *some values have been given to them*, they will usually live these out in their own lives and pass them on to their own progeny. This is precisely why we have witnessed in recent years an outburst of student activism. Researcher after researcher, including those who admit their hostility to various types of student political behavior, agree that activism is not a revolt but a result. Activist youth are not in rebellion against the older generation as such. Rather, like their own parents (and grandparents!) they are uneasy with the discrepancy between the proclaimed ideals of society and the performance of its institutions. At times this uneasiness becomes a crusade. Indeed, it is not the radical activist but rather the "hippies," "crazies," "cop-outs," or "nihilists" who manifest rejection not only of society but of parental values as well.¹⁰

Accordingly, when we look at young people we have to take into account "intra-generational gaps" as well as that between the 14-24 year old and the over 30 groups. In any given age range, except for that minority of creative, autonomous, and complex persons who have dropped out of college because it is too constricting for them, those not in school will tend to be more conservative than those in school, and the married will tend to be more conservative than the unmarried.¹¹ Among those in school, high school students will tend to be more conservative than college students and college freshmen more conservative than graduate students. Although among college students as a group liberalism is more widespread than conservatism, in nearly every category, young persons who subscribe to traditional

revolt" by Lewis S. Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

¹⁰ See Richard Flacks, "Student Activists: Result, Not Revolt," *Psychology Today*, 1 (October, 1967), 18-23, 61; Kenneth Keniston, "Notes on Young Radicals" *Change*, 1 (November-December, 1969), 25-33; and *Generations Apart: A Study of the Generation Gap* (New York: Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., 1969).

¹¹ See Arthur W. Chickering, "The Best Colleges Have the Least Effect," *Saturday Review*, 54 (January 16, 1971), 51 and 54; and Norman Hill ed., *Free Sex: A Delusion* (New York: Popular Library, 1971), pp. 10-11.

outlooks and values outnumber those who espouse radical social change or total revolution.¹²

Yet gaps between age-groups and within them are more evident today than ever before. The minority is now large enough to be noticed. "A few years ago, the new left might fairly have been characterized as a lunatic fringe on the campuses. It is a long way from having a majority now, but . . . it seems reasonable to suppose that something like 750,000 students now identify with the movement."¹³ What is more, just as the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath upset the generational equilibrium of Europe in the nineteenth century and Mao's "Long March" became the unifying event for young Chinese Communists in the 1930s, the Vietnam War may very well emerge for our time as the "generational event" that has crystallized North American youthful forces of alienation and rebellion.¹⁴ Finally, the very presence of affluence and numbers among young persons has produced "the emergence on a mass scale of a previously unrecognized stage of life, a stage that intervenes between adolescence and adulthood . . . youth." In the past isolated individuals and groups have had a "youth," but "what is 'new' is that this stage of life is today being entered not by tiny minorities of unusually creative or unusually disturbed young men and women, but by millions of young people in the advanced nations of the world." Thus does Kenneth Keniston introduce his probing essay on *youth* as a new stage of human development.¹⁵ In previous decades young persons have moved straightaway from adolescence into adulthood and today most still do so. But we are now witnessing the appearance of an interesting period.

¹² James A. Foley and Robert K. Foley, *The College Scene: College Students Tell It Like It Is* (New York: Cowles Book Co., 1969), *passim*; and the report on student extremism by the Gallup Poll published in the *Washington Post*, February 17, 1971.

¹³ Daniel Seligman, "A Special Kind of Rebellion," *Fortune*, 74 (January, 1969), 175.

¹⁴ See Feuer, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 33, 412ff. And adult opinion as well. According to a Gallup Poll published in January, 1971, 73 per cent of adults favored the withdrawal of all U.S. troops before December 31, 1971; according to a Harris Poll published in March, 1971, 51 per cent of the nation's households felt it was morally wrong for the U.S. to be fighting in Vietnam.

¹⁵ "Youth: A 'New' Stage of Life," *American Scholar*, 39 (Autumn, 1970), 631-54. The citations in this section are from this source.

What traits distinguish this new stage from that which unfolds into it and that which flows from it?

First, "what characterizes youth is not a definitive rejection of the existing 'system,' but *an ambivalent tension over the relationship between self and society.*" As a matter of fact, "anyone who has more or less definitively defined himself as a . . . revolutionary has moved beyond youthful probing into an 'adult' commitment" to a position with respect to society.¹⁶

Second, youth is *not a social group but a psychological stage.* "Those who are in this stage do not necessarily join together in identifiable groups, nor do they share a common social position . . . role, class, organization, or position in society." Rather, they are engaged in a "wary probing" of experience within a rich and complex context. They are aware of tension between the sharpening perception of the emergent self and the surrounding society. They alternate between estrangement from self and euphoric self-mastery. They pass from alienation from family, neighbor, and institutions back into a feeling of sympathy or even omnipotentiality over the social and natural environment. They refuse to fall into traditional patterns of conduct and social ways, lest they "sell out" or frustrate their personal potentials. They value movement and identify stability (and therefore adulthood) with death or non-being.¹⁷

Third, youth involves the *development of intellectual and moral capacities beyond limits generally attainable by the majority of persons or acceptable to society.* Intellectually this requires a growth beyond the acceptance of "epistemological dualism" (a thing is either right or wrong, good or bad, true or false) into "an awareness of multiplicity" and the "realization of relativism" which in turn opens upon a "more 'existential' sense of truth" and culminates in "commitment within relativism." Thus, in youth we expect to see a passage beyond simple perceptions and conceptualizations of life toward a more complex, situational, nuanced outlook in which one's commitments rest upon no intellectual or philosophical absolutes.¹⁸ Morally this transition seems to follow the pattern projected by Lawrence Kohlberg, who posits three major stages in moral reason-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 649.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 636-40, 648-49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 647.

ing: *pre-conventional*, in which the individual egocentrically determines what is right and wrong in terms of what pleases him; *conventional*, in which the individual adopts accepted community norms, a general concept of law and order, or whatever he finds identifies him as a "good person"; and *post-conventional*, in which the individual identifies as right or wrong that which conforms to some generalized personal principle as "The Golden Rule," or "the sanctity of life," or to some ideal such as the long-range good of the community. Children are required to emerge from the self-centered *pre-conventional* stage into the *conventional* one and this, says Kohlberg, is about as far as the majority of human beings gets. Those who are in the stage of youth, however, experiment with *post-conventionality* and may even adopt its requirements more or less totally or permanently. Thus a youth "may find himself in conflict with existing concepts of law and order" and may even reject "democratically-arrived-at laws . . . because they lead to consequences or enjoin behaviors that violate his own personal principles."¹⁹

Finally, youth is *not permanent*. Like all phases in the unfolding of human life, it is "a preface for further transformations that may (or may not) occur in later life." Though some lines of development, "such as moral development, may be 'completed' during youth, many others continue throughout adulthood."²⁰

Many persons working among young people may conclude that Keniston has only described "adolescence" in a sharper way than previous scholars: "youth" is not really a "new stage," just one of many manifestations of maturation within the more accepted understanding of how children grow up into adults. But if we reject "youth" as a special period or new "developmental task" we still face the reality that there are today many more young persons than previously, and that among this population we encounter many more who conduct their lives as Keniston describes. So his concluding questions retain their force. He asks:

What . . . would it mean if our particular era were producing millions of postconventional, nondualistic, postrelativistic

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 646-47.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 648.

youth? What would happen if millions of young men and women developed to the point that they 'made up their own minds' about most value, ideological, social and philosophical questions, often rejecting the conventional and traditional answers? Would they not threaten the stability of their societies?²¹

We can focus these questions on institutionalized religion. Do the churches have a future with this generation? Specifically, are Catholic young persons, whether conventionally restless adolescents and young adults or some-time post-conventional youths, any longer within reach of Pope, Bishop, Priest, or Sacrament?

Churchmen may take some small comfort from the fact that such historically non-religious groups as the Society for Ethical Culture and the American Rationalist Federation are experiencing an even more serious loss of interest among youth and internal disintegration than are the churches.²² Indeed, "from one point of view the situation in which we now find ourselves can be described as a crisis of faith in which men, having lost their faith not only in religion but also in political ideology and in science, feel they have been deprived of every kind of security."²³ With Western Civilization in decline the time is ripe for the Church to exercise her historic mission: "We are not civilization," Pope Paul VI has said, "but we are promoters of it."²⁴ So once again, the question: how well is the Church influencing the carriers of the future?

SOME PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

A considerable body of evidence today suggests that young persons are giving up on the churches. One recent study of national trends in campus piety over the past forty years concluded that by 2010 A.D. no students will be going to church.²⁵ Another study,

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 652-53.

²² N. J. Demerath, III, "Irreligion, A-Religion, and the Rise of the Religion-less Church: Two Case Studies in Organizational Convergence," *Sociological Analysis*, 30 (Winter, 1969), 191-203.

²³ Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

²⁴ Quoted in Peter Nichols, *The Politics of the Vatican* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), p. 26.

²⁵ Dean R. Hoge, "College Students' Religion: A Study of Trends in At-

which followed freshmen through four years at a Midwestern state university, found that although as sophomores and juniors they dropped out of religion at an expected rate, as graduating seniors they did not return to religious membership and practice as studies of earlier college generations suggested they would. The investigator could not correlate this trend with any factors within the campus situation and suggested that perhaps contemporary social trends account for it.²⁶ Conversations with Catholic high school students suggest that most of their Catholic friends do not attend Church regularly because of laziness, poor sermons, impersonal parishes, or unimaginative and unconvincing liturgies. On the campus sixty per cent of college students claim "organized religion is not a relevant part of their lives,"²⁷ and one study concluded that "Catholicism is the most rapidly changing tradition and the one most in danger of losing support."²⁸ Alienation among young Catholics in the working force seems, at times, to be even greater. Some recent studies suggest that the trend against formal religion during the last half of the 1960s may be reversing itself among high school students. Only 9.8 per cent of 1970-71 entering freshmen claimed to have no religious preference, a figure down from 13.2 in 1969-70, and back to the 1966 level.²⁹ Yet other studies suggest that students holding the "most religious world views" tend to go to church the least,³⁰ and the appearance of such phenomena as "The Jesus Freaks," the followers of Hare Krishna or Buddha, pentecostalism, "God Squads," and the emergence of such national movements as

titudes and Behavior" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Department of Social Relations, Harvard University, 1969), p. 116.

²⁶ Waldo R. Burchard, "Effects of College Education on Religious Beliefs and Behavior: A Preliminary Report," (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Catholic Sociological Society, Chicago, Illinois, August 27-29, 1965), pp. 7-8.

²⁷ Gallup Poll, *Watertown Public Opinion* (South Dakota), April 12, 1971. See also Judy Prusnek, "Students Reject Institutional Church," *NC News Service*, February 13, 1969.

²⁸ Hoge, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-29.

²⁹ Reported annually in *National Norms for Entering Freshmen*, American Council on Education, (Washington, D.C.).

³⁰ Parker Palmer, "A Typology of World Views," in Kenneth Underwood, *The Church, The University, and Social Policy* (two vols.; Middletown, Conn.: The Wesleyan University Press, 1969), II, 50-55.

"Key, 1973," and the Intervarsity Campus Christian Fellowship—all of which tend to be non-denominational in character—testify to a lingering desire among the young for religious experience without the intrusion of institutionalized religious forms.

Yet the modern age is essentially an institutionalized age. What is needed is not de-structuring but re-structuring. This suggests that a church large enough and historic enough to maintain the respect of those who rely more upon tradition than innovation in shaping private and social life and yet flexible enough to earn the loyalty of the members of the emergent new styles of life is destined to remain somewhere near the mainsprings of human and social development. As a matter of fact, such a church may very well win at least the admiration of administrators seeking the overhaul of such gigantic secular institutions as the automotive industry or the military establishment. Surely the boards of directors that meet annually in Detroit and the Joint Chiefs who draw up budgets in the Pentagon have exhibited far less awareness of the thrusts of history and the needs of humanity than have the bishops of the Roman Church assembled in Vatican II! What, then, are some of the institutional forms of Catholicism which can take on a pastorally positive function?

We can begin by looking at one element in the current youth culture which embraces all its adherents, whether they are in school or out, in high school or college, among the activists, drop-outs, or "straights." This is the element summed up in two of the words we earlier set aside for the moment: "musical" and "celebrative." The Catholic tradition on the relationship between "nature" and "grace" gives the Church an inside track with young persons at this point. In the words of a non-Catholic historian commenting upon these characteristics of the "now generation, Celebration implies

. . . a self-acceptance that rejects the self as grasping, aggressive, seeking to define itself by some exterior that it fashions. It is a very un-Protestant experience if one takes Protestantism in its classical form. For unlike Roman Catholicism in which, as Thomas Aquinas put it, grace perfects nature, for the Protestant Reformers grace *annulled* nature, declared itself in total conflict with nature, pronounced a "no" to nature and pointed instead to a "new creation" that

was something wholly different from nature. . . . Grace did not lead in the Protestant experience to harmony with the world but to conflict with it, a will to conquer it. It should therefore not be surprising that many of the more sensitive among the predominantly Protestant youth of this nation instinctively (i.e., without conscious awareness) turn away from the Protestant consciousness. It should also not be surprising to find these same youth turning to traditions in which the harmony between man and nature is much more clearly apparent, in particular to the mystical traditions of the East and to Western—largely Roman Catholic—modes of thinking congenial to this stance.³¹

Without doubt the primary contact and image that the young have of the Church is that which the eucharistic liturgy provides, and where else should the sense of a "new creation" already partially accomplished fire hearts, imaginations, and minds to ecstatic expressions? Yet one of the greatest sources of division between the majority of clergy and older Catholics, on the one hand, and thousands of young Catholics on the other, is the nature of religious celebration in general and the use of popular musical forms at Mass in particular. This is what the young mean when they say over and over again, "We don't get anything out of Mass." To the elders they seem to be saying that the eucharistic liturgy is to be evaluated much the same way as a rock concert, a good classroom lecture, or a winning baseball team. These analogies may be crude to ears and minds refined by artistic taste or dulled by decades of incredibly pedestrian rituals. Yet they harbor a germ of truth, the very germ from which has sprung the living worship of the past. When the young are pressed to explain what they mean by not "getting anything out of Mass," they continue that they desire a ceremony that says something about their lives and interests in a way that engages their attention and invites their participation. These are norms which the Church itself proposes as appropriate for liturgical celebration.

³¹ Albert Rabil, Jr., "Historical Study and Contemporary Moods," *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register*, 60 (May, 1970), 16. See also Ellis C. Nelson, "Can Protestantism Make It With The 'Now' Generation?" *Religious Education*, 64 (September/October, 1969), 376-83, and Leo A. Pignet, "The Change in Catholic Piety," *U.S. Catholic*, 34 (May, 1968), 22-25.

In the first place Mass is meant to be an esthetic experience precisely because such an experience involves those present and transforms them from onlookers into participants. In succeeding historical epochs Gregorian chant, polyphony, and baroque music did this. Now, at least for the young, it takes folk and rock music. Only these styles generate that indefinable sense of solidarity, that withdrawal from the trivialities of daily living, and that feeling of vital communication which can turn an assembly into a community. Good hymns sung with gusto can also do this, but few as yet have the power to galvanize a young congregation in quite the same way as rock. We might agree that the esthetics of rock are, indeed, minimal. But that is not the point. Missioners have customarily adapted ritual to meet the needs of tribesmen. So long as the young regard themselves as members of "The Woodstock Nation," or "The Mayday Tribe" and "swing" to the pulses and lyrics of "Hair," or "Jesus Christ, Superstar," pastoral practice must follow a conservative line and imitate the successful missioners of the past.

Secondly, liturgy is meant to transmit the word of God in meaningful and challenging ways. Thus, to draw upon our second analogy, if a classroom lecture can summon the admiration and fire the motivation of the young, should not the way the Scriptures are read and the homily delivered have a similar result? Or, to take the opposite side of this analogy, if the young are surfeited with TV salesmen hawking deodorants and bored by routine lecturers in school, then the so-called "dialogue homily" seems best calculated to wake them up and draw them out.

Finally, the liturgy is always the celebration of Christ's triumph over all those obstacles to the development of human potential and progress summed up in moral and physical death. While an athletic triumph may not seem to be an appropriate point of reference, the young seek a similar kind of exhilaration. Christ is a champion putting down all opposition and outstripping all foes, a giant who strides the skyscrapers the way the sun leaps the mountains or a jet vaults a continent. The young appear to manifest a healthy instinct in wanting the liturgy not merely to "represent" the victory of their reputed Savior in a ritual way but to celebrate his win in a convincing way. Unfortunately, for many of the contemporary

young, Romano Guardini's criticism of Catholic ritual in the 1930s and 1940s still appears to be valid: ". . . as far as living involvement in the sacred activities is concerned, one of the first results of liturgical work has been to turn the participating community into mere observers."³² The young want liturgies that will welcome them, open them up, invite them to donate their talents and destinies to Christ and the community. To combine terminology from psychology and standard theology, they want Masses that will "reinforce" their readiness to "make an offering."

To be sure, not all young Catholics appear to want a modernized liturgy. Some black high school students have complained that the ritual of the Church is changing too fast or that "folk-Masses" represent a kind of middle-class chumminess that the poor in the ghettos cannot equate with their experience of oppression, restriction, or rejection. Young Catholics in the working force, expressing a need for stability in their lives, sometimes agree that the Church should not change so fast: or even change at all! Others from this group join with some college students in saying that the stress on communal participation in the eucharistic liturgy has driven the sense of mystery from its celebration. Some of these claim to "find community" at Mass and "experience God" in pentecostal meetings (where they sometimes "offer Mass" themselves without the leadership of ordained ministerial priests). Yet college students on Catholic campuses or in Newman Communities seem to agree that new liturgical forms open them up to "the basic mystery": awareness of Christ in one another. Some as-yet-unpublished research suggests that they attend Mass, in order of reasons, to worship God, to grow spiritually, to form a community, and, finally, to fulfill an obligation. Furthermore, among the members of one Newman Community, twice as many persons surveyed said they never attend Mass in their home parish as said they never attend Mass on campus.³³

Perhaps some disagreements over the mode of liturgical cele-

³² Quoted in Hubert Halbfas, *Theory of Catechetics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), p. 31.

³³ The writer thanks Rev. Robert Barger, Newman Chaplain at the University of Illinois, for permission to cite these findings of a study conducted in May, 1971. Father Barger's research will be published in a number of journals in coming months.

bration would disappear if young persons were permitted on given occasions to join adults and priests in determining the content and style of liturgical celebration. The very fact that this generation is physically and socially older than previous ones and has such a high opinion of itself argues in favor of distributing responsibility among its members. This will result in two gains: at times the young have something of definite value or importance to contribute; and, in any case, they would have to test reality, something which their generally sheltered existence has not permitted them to do and which they, as does any group of young people, want to do. But we must not overlook a definite problem. More than one priest working with the young—and I am here citing the experience of priests who are regarded and regard themselves as “moderately progressive”—believe that the present guidelines for liturgical celebration are still too narrow. At least as presently interpreted, what the Second Vatican Council taught on liturgical celebration remains unsatisfactory for the generation the Council sought most to attract and form.

Pastoral adaptations of liturgical practice appear to represent one of the “liberalized forms” which, according to research into campus piety, keep the young identified with a church even though they may reject some of its doctrines.³⁴ If such adaptations in ritual and sharing in decisions about it recognize the earlier maturity of today’s young, what pastoral practices will meet the specific intellectual and moral sophistication of their more precocious numbers, whom Keniston has described as “postconventional, nondualistic, and post-relativistic” or, who, at least, tend that way?

Pope John XXIII who, I am afraid, is now but a dim if happy memory to most of today’s young, pointed the way toward illuminating with religious truth the intellectual condition of this new generation. “Authentic doctrine,” he said in his address opening the Second Vatican Council, “should be explained and elucidated in accordance with the methods of research and literary formulation familiar to modern thought.”³⁵ Of course we must not think that students or other young persons are breathlessly awaiting answers

³⁴ Hoge, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-96.

³⁵ Quoted in Carlo Falconi, *The Popes in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1967), p. 337.

to the religious questions they have formulated. Few generations in the history of youth in the twentieth century have had the time, interest, or ability to ask such questions in a readily recognized way. But this should not discourage us. Erik Erikson has recently remarked that as no other generation in history the present one seeks the "resacralization" of life.³⁶ If the young are not in so many words asking "God-questions" they are, nevertheless, directly challenging traditional formulations of the meaning of life under God by developing life-styles that run counter to conventional expressions, but not necessarily counter to primitive understandings.

Research in religious education offers some encouragement here. In 1969 a study at the University of California, Santa Barbara, found Lutheran students, who were more conservative than students in general, to be lower than their parents on measures of ritual involvement but higher than their parents on measures of religious experience. After analyzing the language that students preferred for expressing their beliefs, the researcher concluded that their experience "may not always be described as another generation might have described it, but the openness to the continued awareness of God's presence should not be cut short by rigid requirements for the language of description."³⁷ But of itself reformulation may result only in a new, "relevant" verbal superstructure. How does one not only "reformulate" but also "re-perceive" the essential religious truths? Geoffrey Wood has argued that the 1960s "have conditioned Catholics to experience a religious controversion toward a point or opening that rests dynamically at the base of our psyche." He calls for the exploration of "modern cosmic and psychological systems" where they "touch upon or are apt to convey radical self-understanding . . . , for the dogma and data of religion have to

³⁶ "Memorandum on Youth," *Daedalus*, 96 (Summer, 1967), 862. For a statement of a member of the older generation seeking the same thing see Harvey Wheeler, "The Phenomenon of God," *The Center Magazine*, 4 (March-April, 1971), 7-12. However, Wheeler seems to want a "resacralization" that runs quite counter to the concept of "secularization" advanced by Gogarten and his disciples.

³⁷ Otto A. Bremer, "A Study of the Beliefs and Values of Lutheran Students at the University of California, Santa Barbara in Comparison with their Parents and Pastors and in Relation to Some Contemporary Theology, Especially Bonhoeffer and Moltmann" (unpublished master's dissertation, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1969), pp. 65, 75-76.

do with the ground of the cosmos and psyche, whether ancient or modern."³⁸ And what method should be used? Many practitioners would agree with Pierre Babin when he writes: "We must accompany our young people on their quest for meaning and be truly open to the varied ways in which different ages and religions have answered the question of faith. . . . By confronting with young people the contradictions and richnesses of diverse perspectives, we shall bring Emmanuel, 'God with us,' into this historical and cultural environment."³⁹ Interestingly, the method of not only seeking answers together, but preferably raising questions together appears to be precisely what Margaret Mead recommends as the only viable method in a time when "nowhere in the world are there elders who know what the children know" and when no adult can "invoke his own youth to understand the youth before him."⁴⁰

If the life-style of the young in fact poses questions calling for theological answers it also, and to a greater degree, poses conundrums demanding moral responses. Since the young are more concerned with the quality of their ethical character than they are with the correctness of doctrinal formulations not touching their moral persons, the contribution of theological thinking to pastoral practice is vitally important. And here we face a serious issue, one which our earlier listing of words suggested was "guiltlessness." We are all familiar with the periodic shift in human religious sensibility from transcendence to immanence, from realism to romanticism, and from stress on personal goodness to concern for social justice. Thus did Archbishop Helder Camara single out the "seven deadly sins of the modern world which young people have identified and repudiated, one might say by divine inspiration—racism, colonialism, war, paternalism, pharisaism, estrangement, and fear."⁴¹

Yet the problem of personal guilt remains. One graduate stu-

³⁸ "The Catholic Religious Experience and the Students of the Seventies," in George Devine ed., *New Dimensions in Religious Experience* (Staten Island, N.Y.: The Society of St. Paul, 1971), pp. 276-78.

³⁹ *Adolescents in Search of a New Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 60. See also the suggestion of Marcia McDermott in Devine, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-56, and Halbfas, *op. cit.*, pp. 52ff.

⁴⁰ Mead, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-63, 68-69, 72-75.

⁴¹ Quoted in *NC News Service*, April 22, 1969.

dent summed this up in conversation by saying: "After all, everybody does what he thinks is right and so even though the Vietnam War is a moral abomination, the policy makers are not personally guilty of any wrong." And what about his own personal condition? "Well, I can feel shame when I know I have failed myself." To subjectivize morality totally or to equate the *feeling* of "shame" with the conviction of "guilt" may represent either a rejection of dualism or a pygmy-morality. But where some of the young seem unable to articulate their guilt, others have developed a high level of rationalization. "One of the striking characteristics of contemporary youth is a kind of diffuse moral absolutism," writes Philip Slater, "as if every act must have not merely a practical or pleasurable but also a moral foundation. . . . [The young] cannot assume the responsibility of committing an act that they define as immoral but too pleasurable to forego," he continues, so they "make an ideological issue out of it." Slater concludes that "the radicalism of contemporary youth thus derives its emotional energy from guilt more than anger."⁴²

The presence of guilt that has been transferred to perhaps adequate but not totally appropriate objects may explain the attraction that fundamentalism has for so many of the young. A preacher who "tells it like it is" in the matter of what is "clearly" right and wrong is able to activate early mechanisms of recognition and contrition as well as supply the kind of moral absolutism that many young persons still want to measure themselves against. Here we may want to invoke that very useful pastoral rule: be conservative in public, be understanding in private, and in all things receive the sinner in mercy while censuring the sin.

Two areas of morality especially close to the lives of young persons these days suggest ways in which Catholic theology may have an impact on American culture and experience. I am referring to drug use and warfare. Catholic traditions of mysticism underline the essential difference between a chemically induced state of euphoria and one in which the subject experiences transcendence in theistic and specifically Christian ways. And the Catholic doctrine

⁴² Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

on the just war is precisely the vehicle which will help to secure a place in the body of American law for selective conscientious objection. Perhaps our traditions also contain principles important for explaining and coping with such things as militant civil disobedience, violent disruption, and other methods for social change which seem so popular with many of the young while so foreign to churchly traditions. As one who does not read as much professional theological literature as he should, I leave these matters to your better information and abilities.

A third area of morality close to the young, however, may prove that American culture outstrips Catholic moral and pastoral traditions. I am referring to sexualism. Some components of the problem appear to be constant. We can generalize that those not in school will tend to engage in pre-marital sex earlier and more often than those in school, that the male proclivity to sexual intercourse before marriage tends to come under control the longer he stays in college, while that of the female tends to grow as graduation (and/or marriage) approaches, and that the more religiously conservative one is, the less ready one will be to get involved in "serious sex."⁴³ However, a new element has appeared in recent years: female sexual aggressiveness. The "double standard" which seemed to be firmly entrenched in American mores in the 1800s began to break down sharply about the time of World War I. However between then and 1960, surveys indicated that the ratio between male and female "non-virgins" on campus stood at about 50 per cent for the former and 25 per cent for the latter. Data gathered around 1970 present a different picture. According to three Johns Hopkins social scientists examining the practices of nearly 8,000 students on forty-eight campuses, the figures for junior and senior male non-virgins is closer to 60 per cent, that for junior and senior female non-virgins about 40 percent. The ratio among freshmen was perhaps even more alarming: 42 per cent of freshmen males and 29 per cent of freshmen females had experienced premarital

⁴³ See Hans Sebold, *Adolescence* (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, Inc., 1968), pp. 395-464; and Jerry D. Cardwell, "The Relationship Between Religious Commitment and Premarital Sexual Permissiveness: A Five Dimensional Analysis," *Sociological Analysis*, 30 (Summer, 1969), 72-80.

intercourse. "On the basis of our unpublished survey of roughly 1,100 male and female students from a dozen U.S. colleges," writes Professor Paul Gebhard of the Indiana Institute for Sex Research, "you can say that there has been a substantial increase in the incidence of premarital intercourse among college girls."⁴⁴

Not the practice of sex but the ideology supporting this practice may very well constitute an unsustainable "impact of American culture and experience" on Catholic theology. One source of the new sexualism may remain unknown to all but the most intellectually inclined young persons. It is the Freudian concept which Herbert Marcuse has worked out in his *Eros and Civilization*. Although the germ-ideas do not come from this country, the kind of technological development which produces the affluence that makes possible the non-repressive sublimation of sexual drives is an American phenomenon.⁴⁵ Another rationalization, however, is quite American, and hits not only at the traditional double standard between men and women but also at conventional norms governing homosexual activity. This "ideology" goes beyond the notion of "true love" justifying premarital sex or a homosexual liaison. It claims simply that all human beings share the same right to sexual experience. Available research suggests, contrary to conventional opinion, that this democratic approach to sexual behavior is actually raising the status of women rather than cheapening it.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Figures from Malcolm G. Scully, "Students Found Tolerant on Sex, Marijuana, Even 'the System,'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, V (February 15, 1971), 6; quotation from a letter to the writer, dated February 5, 1971.

⁴⁵ See pp. 180ff., or Slater's analysis, *op. cit.*, pp. 81ff. and 139.

⁴⁶ "The closer woman comes to being treated as a sexual being equal to man, the more her dignity and self-respect will be enhanced. Woman will no longer have to engage in sex as a kind of submission to the aggressive male, but will engage in sex only as a mutual partner. This seems to be the experience in Sweden, and also is borne out in a recent study made by the Institute for Sex Research at the University of Indiana which reported that 'the female today is regarded less as a sexual object to be exploited and more as a human being with rights to sexual expression'" (Quoted in the *New York Times*, December 27, 1967.) "As woman becomes sexually emancipated, she is not going to jump in bed with every man, but rather, will treat her sexual life not as a commodity to be abused, but as a vital part of her total being to be enhanced through a relationship of tenderness" Deane William Ferm, "Sweden,

Is there a "solution" to the problem of contemporary sexualism among youth? Some research indicates that to think of oneself as religious is a stronger indicator of sexual behavior than to subscribe to conservative religious views. That is, "for those who define themselves as religious, engaging in premarital sexual activity would involve behavior which was incompatible with their self-definition."⁴⁷ Counseling and private prayer based upon insightful dogmatic and moral theology, and liturgical practice stressing involvement and self-donation through planning and participation, would appear to be the primary means, after that of family upbringing, for developing a sense of oneself as religious.

In offering these pastoral reflections on how the institutional Church might respond to the new social maturity of young persons in general and to the intellectual and moral precocity of the avant-garde, pace-setting youth in particular, I have dwelt upon issues which the "brain trusts" and middle management of Catholicism can take up. By this I mean the modernizing that professional liturgists, theologians, and canonists on the one hand and bishops, religious superiors, chancery officials, heads of special youth divisions, and pastors on the other, can accomplish. The premise underlying these suggestions is a familiar one. Since God has revealed himself in his Son, and since his Son reveals himself through his Church, the responsiveness of structures becomes a motive of credibility. I would like now to conclude by developing briefly a similarly familiar premise, a reflection which should have special relevance for the training of priests: *age quod agis*.

By their own testimony the young affirm that the right kind of person representing the institutional Church can sustain their love and loyalty even though the structures hold stones instead of loaves. But the young expect a priest to be and to act as an adult. He must fulfill this role for several reasons that are rooted in the psychology of the young. Though youth tends to reject adults as symbols of changelessness and therefore death,⁴⁸ they have an even greater dis-

Sex and the College Student," *Religious Education* 64 (January-February, 1969), 59.

⁴⁷ Cardwell, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁴⁸ See Keniston, *op. cit.*, pp. 639-40.

dain for "pseudo-youths" who ape their language and styles to such a degree that they demean themselves if not their station. John Henry Newman, who consistently won the hearts and minds of youth without losing his olympian command over their admiration, suggests the reason for this negative reaction to inappropriate adult behavior. He took as a cardinal principle that "the young for the most part cannot be driven, but, on the other hand, are open to persuasion and the influence of kindness and personal attachment."⁴⁹

That is the point! How can this honest and personalistic generation of young people develop an authentic relationship to one who is himself unsure of his maturity? Without always being able to verbalize their awareness the young keenly sense whenever an older person transfers his own identity problems onto them. The priest must maintain his "distance" because the young need him precisely as an adult. In so many cases they have no significant authority figures to whom they can turn, no older person whom they can trust to speak with sympathetic objectivity about their personal condition and mediate between them and the adult world which seems at times so hostile or incompetent. While this so-called "ministry of presence" may be impossible to define in a job description or to itemize in a budget, its supportive, critical, loving impact may constitute the primary significance of campus ministers, chaplains to parish clubs, coffeehouses, "rap sessions," and other forms of contact with the country of the young.

But young people expect the priest to be a special kind of adult. A black high school student in an inner-city parish expressed it this way: "In all this mess we live in we need a man to come down from the top of the ladder and give us hope." Other youths select terms like "joyful" or "got his head together" to convey the same idea, one which St. Augustine apparently had in mind when he said the Christian should be "an alleuia from head to foot." They expect the priest, because he is close to God and an intimate of Christ, to convey the tranquility of Francis of Assisi, the merriment of Thomas More,

⁴⁹ *My Campaign in Ireland* (Aberdeen: Edited for Private Circulation by William Neville, 1896), p. 115. The writer thanks his friend, Rev. John Tracy Ellis, who himself exemplifies the very principle under discussion, for bringing this citation to his attention.

the buoyancy of John Bosco, the tenderness of Mother Cabrini. Young persons can tell when a priest is unsure of himself or uncommitted to his calling. And they can tell when he is satisfied in his service to God, mankind, and church. Only by living the light and exuberance of the Resurrection and gradually deepening his own personality can he help the young in their condition of eruptive vitality and development. In wisdom, age, and grace they are poorer than he, and he cannot succeed in his pastoral duty unless he helps them to inherit the earth by being as fully as possible in possession of himself.⁵⁰

If by being mature the priest responds to the tentativeness of youth and if by being a "resurrection man" he echoes the energy and celebrativeness of youth, he must nevertheless be more. He must stand "at the piercing point of evolving moral consciousness" as one who "perceives the moral insensitivity of his society and explodes . . . (and who) . . . is fired with concern for the *anawim*: the poor, the exploited, the benighted, the powerless, the have-nots who are ever manipulated for the gain of the haves." He must be a discontented, courageous, compassionate, perhaps bizarre, political being who summons forth in men a sense of guilt over the traditions they have betrayed and who liberates in them energies to break out of the present they have accepted.⁵¹

To be prophetic, however, often divides the community that being pastoral confirms. Will such a priest fall into the trap of "going with the elite" (who are often morally proud and self-serving) and thus alienate the mass of youths who appear to be conventional, even though restless? As Henri de Lubac once warned, the Church "is no exclusive club for spiritual geniuses or supermen, no academy of the clever; in fact, she is the very opposite. The warped, the sham and the wretched of every kind crowd into her, together with the whole host of the mediocre, who feel especially at home in her and everywhere set the tone of things."⁵² The correct answer seems to

⁵⁰ See the reflections of Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Intimacy: Pastoral Psychological Essays* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1969), pp. 123-164.

⁵¹ See the summary of an address by Daniel C. McGuire in "The Church is a Specific Distinctive Community," *Momentum*, 3 (August, 1970), 11-14.

⁵² *The Splendor of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), pp. 226-27.

be inescapable. Because the Church is constituted by men she is always in need of reform. Because the Church is called "to show by the quality and character of her own life as a community what the Kingdom is all about and what is to be the final destiny of mankind,"⁵³ she always needs to hear the stern voice of those of her members who, though they may themselves sin in the effort, nevertheless call her to her destiny. And especially in a time when accepted structures and conventions no longer work and a new moral urgency has appeared among the young must the priest be a prophet: it would be sinful not to speak.

But this reflection on the personal responsiveness of priests to the imperatives of youth brings us back to the need of reformed ecclesiastical structures. The young people we face today have seen some of their most cherished public heroes destroyed: Medgar Evers, John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King. They are painfully frank in declaring that ecclesiastical authorities who ignore or silence outspoken, compassionate priests who may violate certain ecclesiastical norms in the name of the welfare of God's children, also deprive them of hope. In one of his most beautiful similes, Pope Paul VI once said that the Church welcomes youth the way an ancient tree welcomes the springtime. In this winter of our travail, the young are watching.

JOHN WHITNEY EVANS
*Director, National Center
for Campus Ministry,
Cambridge, Mass.*

⁵³ Richard P. McBrien, *Do We Need the Church?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 131.