

## SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: SOME METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

In one of his stories, G. K. Chesterton describes a monk who has spent his entire life working on refutations of four dangerous heresies. Now actually these heresies had never been proposed by anyone; they were, like their refutations, a product of the monk's ingenuity. But as Chesterton observes, they are very dangerous, and it seemed to be useful to have the refutations ready just in case anyone should propose them. St. Epiphanius, working more or less in the same spirit, gives us a list of some four score heresies, not all of which are recognizable as anything that actually existed in the early Church. Even if nobody actually held these false doctrines, it is still interesting to hear about them.

Now it seems to me, as someone reconnoitering on the margins of the discipline, that both Chesterton's monk and Epiphanius were engaged in perfectly legitimate theological behavior. There is no reason in principle, as far as I can see, why both of them should not have been offered tenured positions at divinity schools or on theological faculties. Their research is no more obscure and no more useless than a good deal of the research done in, let us say, English, archaeology, geology, or, for that matter, sociology departments. There is no reason, in other words, why theology needs to be what the French call *actuel*. Like the work of any scholarly discipline, theology can be totally irrelevant to all present human needs and problems and still be a legitimate subject for human research concerns. Irrelevant theology may not do anyone much good, but then it doesn't do much harm either; and one of the rules of the scholarly game, I take it, is that scholars are free to study anything they damn please.

However, it is frequently the case that theologians develop passionate human concerns—in part, I suppose, because they tend to be clergymen or former clergymen or clergymen's children. They wish to theologize not for the ages but for their own era, and to theologize about the problems of their own contemporaries. I shall leave it to you as theologians to decide how many extra points you award a man, if any, for being social and intellectually relevant. I merely wish to make it clear from the beginning that I certainly would not hold any theologian to "relevant" research (no matter how generously one defines the adjective "relevant"); but I would suggest to you that if theology intends to reflect upon the situation in which contemporary humankind finds itself, then the

same sort of scholarly discipline is required to determine what that present condition is as is required for reflection upon it. All too often, it seems to me, theology combines professional reflection according to the methodology of its discipline with extremely amateur observation, producing a curious hybrid that is a mixture of serious scholarship and superficial pop social science. To put the matter even more candidly, theologians who are concerned almost to the point of obsession with the proper methodology for their own discipline seem to consider themselves dispensed from the methodologies of those disciplines that observe and analyze society when they, the theologians, want to discuss society.

Theologians seem to be saying in effect, "We are held to very rigorous methodology in our own discipline, but when we cross the boundaries into yours, we are not held to take seriously your methodologies." Not everybody can be a theologian but everybody who reads *Future Shock*, editorials in the *Christian Century*, articles in the *New York Times Magazine*, and maybe *The Wretched of the Earth* can be a sociologist. Now it's a free country and a free Church, and everyone can do anything they damn please. But I would like to respectfully submit that the mixture of professional theology and amateur sociology leaves something to be desired from the point of view of scholarship and also, to fall back on the ultimate norm, from the point of view of relevance. It would be much better for theology and for the consumers of theology if the theologian who intends to reflect about the present condition of humankind show the same respect for the methodologies of the "input disciplines," as I shall call them, as he does for that of his own. This means he must take empirical social sciences seriously; it may not mean that he will construct mathematical models himself, but it may mean that he will sit in for a couple quarters on the seminars of the people who do build such models so that he will know what they are talking about and what they are attempting to do. Ours may well be, as Michael Novak has generously suggested, an inferior and second-rate discipline; but I think you can only say that with confidence when you have gone beyond Michael and observe the operation of that discipline from the inside.

Will it do to become a master of historical sociology, as Gregory Baum has become? That's fine if you wish to theologize about historical social processes but it is not quite the same thing as theologizing about the present condition of humankind. Either the present condition of humankind is described with all the

discipline's refined, systematic skills of those who do it professionally or it becomes an exercise in fantasy at best and at worst a none too subtle form of projection.

Before I turn to my main concern in this presentation, the myth of modernity, let me make a few preliminary observations. First of all, any generalization that begins, "The American people . . ." (such as "The American people are becoming more conservative" or "The American people do not care about the Third World" or "The American people must bear the burden of guilt for . . ." or "The American people have lost confidence in their system" or "The American people are in a crisis of confidence") is a generalization about two hundred million people that cannot be supported with empirical evidence. The sociologist who encounters such a statement in the writing of theologians immediately wants a definition of not only the predicates, which frequently seem anything but precise, but also the subjects. What proportion of "the American people?" Which kinds of "American people?" To what extent and in which population subgroups? How many does a theologian have in mind when he speaks of "the American people?" Five per cent? Fifty per cent? Ninety-five per cent? When such questions are raised, the sociologist often finds himself waved away as though he is bothering the theologian with trivia. My methodology is trivial and yours is not?

The sociologist also wants to know how the theologian has got his data. How many of the American people did he interview? How did he select his sample? Unless one has interviewed the entire population, or has had a divine revelation oneself, or has read it in the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, one's comments about "the American people" are based on some kind of sample of the population with whom one has come in contact either in personal interview or by reading about them in the newspaper or from watching them on the television screen. The sampling methodology used by many theologians in their generalizations about the American people is not unlike the methodologies of those who comment on the sacred Scripture without reading any other language but English.

Incidentally, the available empirical evidence, for what it is worth, does not show that any of the previously cited statements that begin, "The American people . . ." are true for the majority of the American population. Most Americans do have confidence in their form of government, they are not in a crisis of morale, they have grown progressively more liberal, particularly in matters of

race and civil liberties, they are very concerned about the lesser-developed countries and are ready to help them.

I might also note that there are a considerable number of symbolic words being tossed around in theological discussion that lack both precise definition and empirical validation. I wonder why theologians are so ready to demythologize the symbols of the Scripture but not those that pass for social observation. Thus that favorite term of Protestant theologians, the "civil religion," has never been tested seriously by empirical data; and other symbols like the "sexual revolution," the "post-Vietnam, post-Watergate world," "youth culture," the "generation gap," "white backlash," "Third World," etc., etc., are doubtless rich and polyvalent symbols, but they are not precise scholarly terms and they have not been subject to rigorous testing and analysis. In other words, the theologians say, "We have to be careful about how we use our own terms, but we may use freely the terms of your discipline without care for precision or validation."

I shall illustrate my case by concentrating on one sociological model, the "modernization" paradigm, which theologians borrowed from an earlier generation of sociologists and seem to take virtually for granted even though it has been seriously questioned by contemporary sociologists. Hardly a major theological work is written today without some reference in the early chapters to the need for making the Christian message relevant to "modern man." Even David Tracy in *Blessed Rage For Order* is not immune from this ritual. My thesis today will be that outside of the university faculties and the national elite media and midtown Manhattan, modern man doesn't exist—at least not in the form the popular modernization mythology would have you believe. If you are theologizing for modern man or, as we are constrained to say now, modern humankind, you are theologizing for an empty Church.

Now I take it that modernization means that the changes of the last several hundred years have resulted in the emergence of a new kind of human consciousness that makes the modern human very different from his predecessors. Modern man is almost a new species, free from the constraints, superstitions, primitive ties, simple world views, and unscientific modes of thought that shackled his predecessors. I say "I take it" that this is what modernization or "secularization" means because that seems to be how contemporary humans, or at least the articulate and published ones, view it. Unfortunately the model does not adequately fit the data; we desperately need a new one. But the very attractiveness

of the modernization model, not to say its seductiveness, comes from the fact that it does fit very well some of the data that are immediately obvious to everyone; and at one time it seemed to fit a lot of other data too. Part of the problem of those of us who are uneasy with it is that any alternative we come up with lacks its elegance, simplicity, and even its explanatory power.

The modernization model has become part of the collective preconscious of the north Atlantic world; it is reinforced by all the evolutionary theories—Marxist, Comteian, Darwinian, and Christian.<sup>1</sup> To question the modernization model is difficult if not impossible, because even if one wins some telling points, one is unable to dislodge the picture from the preconscious of the other in the dialogue. Even the most sophisticated social scientist is apt to respond something like, "Science and technology make large corporate bureaucracies necessary, don't they?" The answer is no, in fact they don't. Historically, bureaucratization and technology have been linked, but the link is by no means necessary or inevitable. The point will be accepted by some, but the picture is still not dislodged. Science and technology means the great factory, the huge machine, the large corporation; and the picture remains intact.

Robert Nisbet, in his *The Sociological Tradition* summarizes the contributions of the sociological greats—Tonnies, Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Simmel—to the modernization thesis. One could add such American writers as Cooley, Becker, Redford, Luckmann, and Rostow (Table I). Talcott Parsons and his colleagues and students have provided the most elaborate (if not always the clearest) of the modernization phenomena. The broad line of their argument is that the Reformation freed the individual from the rigid controls of the medieval society; and the newly independent and mobile individuals began to explore the far reaches of the globe, the internal depths of the personality, the complexities of the world, and the various possibilities of the new scientific knowledge that their explorations made possible. A multiplier effect set in and knowledge, technology, mobility, and innovation accelerated the speed of development. New institutions emerged to make use of knowledge, technology, and freedom.

<sup>1</sup>All of which owe something to the fourteenth-century mystical visionary Joachim de Flora, who was in his own way a direct lineal descendant of Augustine. (Consider the propensity of the various evolutionary thinkers to use three stages: medieval, bourgeois, and socialist for Marx; Catholic, Protestant, and sociological for Comte; challenge, selection, adaptation for Darwin; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for the Abbot Joachim.)

## I. APPROACHES TO "MODERNIZATION"

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| Parsons <i>et al.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Institutional differentiation</li><li>- Separation of abstract and emotion, effect on child-rearing through differentiation of roles of parents</li><li>- Emergence of autonomous individual operating freely (Protestant)</li><li>- Universal, specific, rational achievement behavior replacing particularistic, diffuse, nonrational, ascriptive</li></ul> |
| Cooley                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Decline of the "primary" group</li></ul>  |
| Tonies, etc.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Movement from <i>Gemeinschaft</i> to <i>Gesellschaft</i> (from "community" to "association," from kin to contract)</li></ul>  |
| Becker, etc.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- From sacred to secular</li></ul>  |
| Redford               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- From folk to urban</li></ul>  |
| Patterson             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- From "ethnic" to universalist</li></ul>   |
| Slater and Bennis     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Emergence of transient man in temporary society</li></ul>   |
| Luckmann              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Emergence of belief systems and resultant behavior patterns functional for large corporate bodies (old systems—family, religion—may survive in "interstices")</li></ul>   |
| Rostow                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Arrival at economic takeoff point</li></ul>   |
| Nisbet                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Decline in community, authority, status, and the sacred, leading to alienation</li></ul>  |
| Shorter               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Breakdown of family constraints</li></ul>   |
| Bell                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Rise of bourgeois economic impulse and cultural modernity</li></ul>   |

They rapidly differentiated themselves, acquiring more and more specific functions. The state bureaucracies, the mercantile organizations (such as the East India Company), and then the manufacturing and transportation corporation emerged to handle functions that either had not existed previously or had been taken care of by the Church and the family in much less elaborate fashion. These two latter institutions had at one time vast and undifferentiated powers and functions but gradually yielded most of them to the new specific institutions. The family began to focus specifically on the provision of emotional satisfaction to the spouses and the socialization of the children, yielding virtually all of its productive and economic functions to the new corporations. The Church gradually limited its role to dealing with ultimate issues, yielding its legal, economic, and welfare roles to new institutions or to the growing state bureaucracies.

At the same time, according to Parsons and his disciples Platt and Wendt, differentiation of roles and the division of labor within the family emerged. In the "premodernized" world there were relatively few distinctions between the roles of husband and wife; both performed similar economic and child-rearing functions. However, with modernization the husband became the specialist in abstract, task-oriented leadership in the family and the wife a specialist in socioemotional leadership. This led to a situation in which the child had to internalize two kinds of parent—the abstract parent and the loving parent. In resolving the tension between those two, there emerged a personality with both the need and the ability to break even more decisively with the traditions of the past. Such a personality could no longer accept the hierarchical sacred authority which demanded not only obedience but emotional dependency. The new personality did not depend on "pre-Oedipal authority" but rather identified with internalized "Oedipal authority." Modern man had come into existence.

This is all very neat, plausible, and reasonable; it seems to fit so much of what we know in the world today. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to link such a model with the detailed historical data that are becoming available, especially since it is now apparent that different groups have followed different paths to modernity. The Italian family, for example, seems to have maintained a very different husband-wife relationship in their American experience than did many other immigrant family groups. The Italian wife is a person of considerable importance within her family system with some areas of absolute authority; but because her

virtue is of such sacred and compelling importance in Italian culture, the husband and sons are most reluctant to let the wife and daughters work outside the family environment for any sustained period of time. Thus even in comparison with the Poles, who came at roughly the same time, it would appear that Italian women are much less likely to enter the industrial occupational force and are more likely to engage in "home work," such as making clothes or taking in boarders. Presumably such a rigid approach to family life would impede "Americanization" and social mobility, but in fact it would appear that such behavior patterns—remarkably tenacious even among Italian upper-middle class suburbanites—provide the Italian family structure with much greater resilience in the face of the traumas of immigration. It produced less family disorganization and actually facilitated Italian upward mobility, so that at the present time Italians are the third wealthiest religio-ethnic group in the United States (behind Jews and Irish Catholics). So one must ask, then, which family structure is the more "modernized," the more differentiated, the more mobile?

Part of the difficulty of trying to contest the modernization assumption is that meanings seem to shift, as is natural, I suppose, whenever a treasured picture is under assault. Thus I have tried to set down schematically in Table II my understanding of the modernization model. A second difficulty in discussing modernization is that one never knows when the description will turn into prescription. As most Americans are committed to the notion that evolutionary progress is good, and since modernization is a description of the evolutionary process, that which is described in the first column of Table II often seems to be not only an account of what has happened but also an account of what should have happened and a norm for what should continue to happen. Some thinkers, including anarchists and some New Leftists like John Schaar, are prepared to concede that the modernization model as depicted in Table II had occurred but will contend vigorously that it should not have occurred and that it should not be permitted to continue. Their criticisms of modernization as a normative model are presented in the second column of Table II.

The modernization model sees the process as beginning (however and whenever that might have been) by the freeing of the individual from the "nonrational" ties and obligations imposed by birth and providing him first with personal autonomy and maturity and then, as a result, with social and territorial mobility. As modernization occurs, in other words, the individual is freed from ties



of place, tribe, faith, ancestral family, parent-chosen occupation, the authority of church, parent, and traditional political leadership, and now even from the ties of traditional sexual role definition.

Such a modernized person is raised in a family characterized by romantic love, emotional intimacy (between spouses and between parents and children), open and permissive childrearing, and sensitivity to the needs of children. When he reaches maturity the modernized person recreates the family of his childhood and obtains from it the psychic and emotional satisfaction necessary to sustain him when he enters the formalized, bureaucratized, rationalized, universalized, and, more recently, computerized system of specific institutions by which the modern commercial and industrial world continues to operate and to produce the wealth that makes an affluent and abundant family life possible. These institutions in their turn are organized scientifically and rationally on the premise that all that is required from the individual participant is the effective and responsible exercise of the particular and specific occupational skills he brings to the organization so that the organization may achieve its own limited and specific goals.<sup>2</sup>

While the most fundamental emotional and psychic needs are to be derived from the interpersonal intimacy of the family, it is still assumed that for well-educated people at least the behavior of the world of the corporate institution offers compellingly attractive need satisfactions. The familial intimacy is perhaps taken for granted, and the difference between success and failure is measured by achievement in the world of career. So despite the emphasis of Parsons and others (including a whole generation of American novelists) on the fundamental importance of sexual fulfillment and intimacy, the major emphasis of the feminist movement, in fact if not in theory, has been on career satisfaction. The family and the Church, Luckmann tells us, operate in the interstices of life that have been left vacant by the large corporate bureaucracies.

Career success is of especial importance for the well educated segment of society; and interaction partners—economic, political, recreational, and to some extent even sexual—are not only chosen on the basis of personal decision but to a very considerable extent on a rational consideration of how such ties may contribute to

<sup>2</sup>In Japan the corporation may play a far more paternalistic and familial role than it does in the United States, but that is taken to be a peculiarity of Japanese culture.

## II. MODERNIZATION MODEL

<i>As Description</i>	<i>As Norm to be Rejected*</i>
1. Modernization frees individual from ties and obligations imposed by accidents of birth, leading to personal autonomy and maturity and social and territorial mobility, e.g., ties of geography, ethnic group, religion, family of origin, occupational inheritance, political traditions, hereditary and sacral authority, and, more recently, sexual role definition.	1. Loss of support provided by old times—lonely crowd, one-dimensional man.
2. Family life marked by romantic love, emotional intimacy, nonauthoritarian socialization, and awareness of needs of children.	2. Trap of bourgeois marriage.
3. Assumption by specific institutions (usually large, formal, and bureaucratic) of roles formerly played by undifferentiated family and church.	3. Role diffusion because of inconsistent demands.
4. Organization of institutions of “rational,” “scientific,” and bureaucratic principles instead of sacred or hereditary symbols.	4. Alienation, normlessness, rootlessness.
5. Interaction partners (economic, political, sexual, neighborhood, etc.) chosen on the basis of personal decision—presumed to be rational, individual, and career oriented.	5. Mass society, oppression of individual by “system.”

MODERNIZATION MODEL—*Continued*

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| 6. Personality characterized by self control, deferred gratification, independent decision-making (identification with and internalization of Oedipal authority) as opposed to impulsive, emotional, dependent, labile personality (dependence on pre-Oedipal authority). | 6. Inability to give self in trust, openness, intimacy. |
| 7. As a result, notable decline in importance of intimate, personal, informal, nonrational, local, permanent, loyalty-based relationships—both to individuals and social systems.   | 7. Quest for community.                                 |
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\*Defenders of modernization often simultaneously depict it as a "description" (the way things have been and are) and a "norm" (the way they must be or ought to be, e.g., Orlando Patterson). Critics generally accept it as a description (though not Lasch) but question it as a norm or an ideal. Some (like me) question its adequacy as a description. Catholic theory would doubt its ability to describe because Catholic theory doubts that 7 can happen. Anarchists in general would not doubt its possibility but would question its desirability.

one's career success in the corporate institution. Such an autonomous, rational, individualistic, career-oriented individual is well disciplined, emotionally well controlled, self actualizing, and motivated by the internal satisfactions of success more than he is by loyalty, pleasure, honor, and other such nonrational and impulsive emotions. Surely we all know people who fit this description of "modern man" (and woman, of course). For the most part they are members of the national elites—professors at the great universities, executives in the large national corporations, administrators in the upper levels of the governmental bureaucracies. If the scholars who write about "modern man" take it for granted that many people embody those characteristics, the reason may be that in the environments in which they live and work many people may indeed be so described.

But these characteristics of "modern" man that constitute the first six numbers of the schematized model of Table II are only a prelude to the seventh proposition, which is a basic if not always explicit premise, I think, in the discussion of modernization.<sup>3</sup> It is assumed that the human being who has emerged from the modernization process will differ from his ancestors (at whatever point in the past one wishes to indicate was just prior to the beginning of modernization) in that he places much less importance on intimate, personal, informal, nonrational, local, permanent, loyalty-based relationships on both a personal and societal level. As a free, autonomous, rational human being, he is not tied down by archaic, premodern, sacred, "ethnic" ties.

Part of the immense appeal of the modernization model is its "evolutionary" and "progressive" character. It purports to represent the wave of history, the natural working out of forces of development that make for fuller and freer human life. Modernization is the "future" triumphing over the "past"; it is the way things should be and in fact the way things will be, because inevitable historical processes are at work insuring the final success of modernization. One jumps on board the train for the future before it pulls out of the Transylvania station. The modernization model flatters our pride; we are better than those who went before us. It satisfies our need to be in the advance guard; we are the way those

<sup>3</sup>Another proposition which might parallel number seven in Table II would be that modern humans, because of their mobility, their rationality, and their autonomy, no longer need the sacred. Hence they are increasingly and progressively dispensing with the need for religious symbols to cope with ultimate questions of the meaning of life and the universe. There is, I have suggested, even less data to support such a proposition, but I discuss that subject in my book *Unsecular Man* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

who come after us will be. For many semi-educated moderns, these twin appeals are enough for them to buy the modernization model without a second thought. Ethnocentrism is not about to go out of fashion.

But note how often and how persuasively this sort of argument has been used—by Comte, Marx, the social Darwinists, Margaret Mead, Alvin Toffler, B. F. Skinner, Charles Reich, and, more recently, by George C. Lodge. If one presents a policy or a program or an ideology as an historical inevitable because of the evolutionary forces at work, one has already made a large number of converts. It is, after all, the same sort of argument Augustine used for buying a one-way ticket to the City of God. Only he didn't confuse it with social or historical science.

I have spent considerable time specifying precisely what contemporary social science takes to be the modernization paradigm so that it will be clear what I am denying. You may say, "But that's not what I mean by modernization at all." Well, I do not have to accept your description of it. As my four-year old friend Nora Maeve McCready would say, "I don't gotta." Surely you don't gotta accept my description either. But since sociology introduced the term "modernization" into contemporary discussion, there is something to be said for taking its definition of the term seriously. If you have a different one, well and good, but I would require of you that you be as specific and as explicit about what you take it to mean as I have been. I would also note in passing that such specificity and explicitness about social science terms is generally wanting in most theological work.

I shall limit myself today to three bodies of literature that call into question the adequacy of the modernization model, the work of the historical demographers who question the *terminus a quo* of modernization and the work of the "rediscoverers of primary group" who question the *terminus ad quem*, and the political scientists who study the "new nations."

Beginning with Elton Mayo's Hawthorne studies in the late 1920's, a massive amount of evidence has been assembled to indicate that the primordial, the informal, the primary not only survive but keep the large corporate bureaucracies running—to the extent that these monsters run at all. It was the friendship group on the Hawthorne assembly line, for example, that determined the productivity standard. It was a small combat squad held together by loyalty to the father figure noncom officer that keeps the modern army going. Marketing decisions, the use of innovative drugs

by doctors and innovative agricultural methods by farmers, and voting decisions take place not in interactions between an isolated individual and the mass media but in small informal friendship groups into which various "opinion leaders" become the key persons in diffusing innovation and impelling decision. The majority of American families still live within a mile of at least one grandparent; and siblings and cousins are still the people with whom visits are most frequently exchanged for most of us. Urban research from the time of Robert Ezra Park to Gerald Suttles have emphasized the "urban village" (to use Herbert Gans' term) dimension of the ethnic neighborhood. More recent research shows the persistence of the neighborhood phenomenon even into the suburbs. Informal but powerful cliques come into being in almost all large corporate bureaucracies, and if one wants to know what a decision means that has come down the formal chain of command, one plugs into one's favorite informal communication network to get the word.

The world is not on a pilgrimage from the particularist to the universalist; it is rather a combination of both. There may be rather more universalist norms and relationships available now than there were in the past, but that simply is because there are more relationships. The particularistic has survived, and indeed probably provides the warmth and affection and support that makes universalistic behavior possible. Similarly, the fact that there is a much larger number of formal, stylized, specific relationships does not mean that these relationships have increased at the expense of the informal, casual, diffuse ones of the past. Rather what has happened is simply that the number of human relationships have increased. If anything, there may even be more primary group relationships than in the past; we are part of more intimate friendship circles now (some of them perhaps even transcontinental and intercontinental) than our ancestors were. Weep not for *Gemeinschaft*; it is alive and well and living in Midtown, Chevy Chase, Cambridge, and even Berkeley.

"But something has changed," says the theologian, falling back to his last defense. Certainly something has changed, but one of the most important changes runs in exactly the opposite direction to the modernization model. It is precisely because of the complex differentiated, highly organized structure of *Gesellschaft* society that contemporary human beings have available to them a much greater number of intimate, personal, diffuse, informal, intense relationships than was available in an earlier era. Far from

reducing the dense organic network of intimacy, modernization has made it even denser. My great grandfather, living in County Mayo, Ireland, may have had *Gemeinschaft*-type relationships with his parents, his spouse, his children, his cousins down the road, a couple of other friends in the parish, and maybe (but by no means certainly) his parish priest. His descendants in County Cook (Richard J. Daley, mayor) have a much wider variety of intense personal relationships, most of them limited by geography, but some extending around the world.<sup>4</sup> "Aha!" says the sociological modernizer (or the nonsociologist for whom Alvin Toffler has become the bible), "these relationships are not nearly as deep as the old ones back in County Mayo."

It all depends on what one means by "deep," of course. If one speaks in the physical or quasiphysical sense, it is surely true that the old intimacies of the "premodern" world had immense power. One simply did not leave them no matter what. Divorce did not occur, and to leave Ballyhaunis, Mayo, for another country, to say nothing of another continent, was for all practical purposes to die. Indeed, "American wakes" were held in Ireland for those who were leaving to migrate to the United States. As far as their family and friends were concerned, they were dead. One can now sunder such relationships fairly easily; one can end a marriage or move with much greater ease. One knows now that a new set of relationships can be created, and the telephone and the jet airplane enables one to sustain the old relationships at least in some fashion. Moving is not easy and neither is divorce—despite happy talk about "transient man" and a "temporary society"—but both are possible. Relationships do not have the compelling physical depth they used to have.

And yet one could make the case that the psychological depth of some relationships is much greater than in the premodern world. We have learned how to be much more open and vulnerable to our interaction partners; we become more deeply involved humanly and personally in nonfamilial relationships than many of our ancestors did even in their familial ones. A marriage today, even if it

<sup>4</sup>Those of us who get caught up in the world circuit know how it is possible to have close friends whom one sees only once or twice a year and is nonetheless able to take up the relationship just where it was left off. There are some interesting aspects of these transcontinental and transoceanic friendships. Simply because people see each other so rarely they tend to invest substantially more emotional energy—and sheer time—during those interludes when they are in physical proximity with one another. Furthermore, since one is not sharing life space on a day-to-day basis in such relationships, one can take risks which one would be hesitant to take when dealing with one's next-door neighbor.

should end in divorce, probably involves more vulnerability and intimacy than many premodern marriages which did not end in divorce. I am not suggesting that there is more love today than in the past—that is both an unprovable and absurd suggestion. I make the much more modest claim that there seems to be much more self-conscious interpersonal vulnerability and hence much greater opportunity for psychological depth if not physical depth in contemporary relationships than there were in premodern ones. The modernization model must once more be stood on its head. Not only are there quantitatively more *Gemeinschaft* relationships for modern man than there were for his predecessors, they are also qualitatively deeper and richer. The real problem of modern man is not that he is the isolated, alienated individual lost in the lonely crowd of the mass society; the real problem is that there are likely to be far greater demands for intimacy and vulnerability placed upon him—and far richer rewards promised—than he has developed the personal skills to respond to. Furthermore, society, which has created the kind of affluence and leisure that in turn has made possible such demands for intimacy, has been unable to restructure itself either to socialize young people in the skills necessary to respond to such demands or to organize the production, distribution and consumption sectors in such a way that they do not notably impede response to the demands of a *neo-Gemeinschaft* culture.

The historical demographers are those extraordinarily patient scholars who dig back into parish registers, county archives, and other ancient and musty sources of data and reconstruct the vital statistics and the family structures of previous ages in history. Their work has had an absolutely devastating impact on all broad and general theories about what Europe looked like in the time between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Family size, age at marriage, living arrangements, life expectancies, mobility all varied up and down in those centuries, depending on such factors as agricultural productivity, internal peace, disease epidemics, and the ebb and flow of technological innovation. The picture that emerges is rich, complex, dense, and fascinating; but it simply does not fit any simple unidimensional, unidirectional model of social change. Most important, however, from the point of view of today's subject, both private property and the nuclear family—those two classic "results" of modernization—have existed in Western Europe as far back as the demographic researchers can go. Communal ownership of land and the extended



family, which was supposedly the mode of existence for humankind in premodern societies, are invisible in any Western Europe that can be reached by precise and specific research methods. And there is some question as to whether single or tribal ownership of the land was the case in pre-Christian or even prehistoric times among Celt-settled lands, for example. The single family on its plot of land, Irish archaeologists are beginning to suggest, was the way things were on that soggy but lovely island long before the arrival of Christianity.

In fact the greatest impetus to the modern era was neither a revolution in ideas nor the development of industrial technology but an enormous population expansion that occurred in Europe (and in China, too, it would seem) in the early to middle 1700's. There were a number of different factors that explain this expansion that persisted in Europe until the middle to the end of the 1800's. Almost none of them was related to the improvement in public health, disease control, and infant mortality decline, which accounts for the present population explosion in non-Western countries.<sup>5</sup> Some of these factors are:

1. The stabilization of a balance between European populations and infectious disease parasites through the development of immunities.

2. The development of newer and more productive agricultural techniques and the importation of American crops, such as the potato (which led to a tripling of the Irish population in the first four decades of the last century). These changes made death from famine much less likely in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

3. The warming of the climate after a hundred years of a "little ice age" (which had cut short a population expansion a century and a half previous).

4. The absence of foreign invasions.

5. Relative domestic peace after the Thirty Years War, the Wars of the Roses, and the Hundred Years War.

6. The consequent development of international and inter-continental trade.

7. The development of crude but effective vaccination against smallpox.

<sup>5</sup>The European and North American demographic transition was essentially brought under control before the improvement of medical care at the end of the last and in the present century and also before the development of modern birth control devices.

<sup>6</sup>The potato famine in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century was a cultural and human disaster for that poor country, but it was an isolated exception.

All of these changes enabled people to live longer—still not very long by our standards, of course. In the late 1600's, life expectancy at birth was less than 30 years. By 1800 it was closer to 45, where it remained until the beginning of this century. But the results of that increase were very great:

1. The migration of large numbers of landless peasants from farms to cities, without which the industrial expansion could not have been possible. (Only in 1900 did birth rates in London exceed death rates, which meant the city ceased to depend on rural migration to replenish its stock.) These peasants would not have survived to adulthood a century earlier.

2. Migration across the sea to the new world. Most immigrants to the United States (including the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Eastern and Southern Europeans) represented the surplus of fertility rates over mortality rates that resulted from this demographic transition. A century earlier they would not have lived to migrate.

3. The breakup of the strong moral control of preindustrial peasant society over its young people—an indirect effect of the survival of more young people who could not hope to succeed to ownership of the family farm or any viable portion of it. If there ever has been a sexual revolution, it began in 1750-1800 rather than in the 1960's.

4. Much greater concern for children among parents. When only one out of two infants would survive to adulthood, parents had to restrain their emotional investment in children.

5. Eventual development of effective means of population control. All species control their population. At most times in human history, disease, famine, and war have made it unnecessary for humans to exercise more than minimal conscious control. However, in Western Europe, from the late 1700's on, most of the traditional methods of population limitation were used to bring the demographic transition under control—delayed marriage, infanticide (in one form or another), abortion, and *coitus interruptus* (which may or may not have been an eighteenth-century discovery—one suspects not). Until the 1700's, however, as many as eight pregnancies would be necessary to produce two surviving adults.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Two remarks here: The Church kept almost completely silent about the population limitation of the nineteenth century despite insistent pleas for clarification from France on the practice of *coitus interruptus*. Leo XIII's encyclical on marriage ignored the problem completely.

The massive infanticide of the nineteenth century, I presume, was not consi-

Note that such factors as climate, peace, new crops, disease, trade, and population can explain the great transition of 1750 to 1900 without any need to fall back on a "new consciousness." Minimally, theologians who write about "modernization" should be familiar with the complexity of the factors at work and realize that reading such sociological commentators on the transition as Weber and Tones is no substitute for studying more sophisticated modern social, economic, demographic, climatic, and epidemiological literature. The change in the consciousness, to the extent that it has happened at all, seems to have been for most people the result rather than the cause of other factors, if for no other reason than that they would not have lived long enough to acquire a new consciousness had it not been for these other forces.

But even more important, it seems to me that theologians ought to recognize the total transformation of the ambience of human life caused by the increase of life expectancy and the patterning of that expectancy by the paradigm of the "life cycle." This is a change of fundamental importance the like of which has never occurred in human history. We are still born to die, but most of us die much more slowly than humans ever did before. No wonder, then, that a book like Gail Sheehy's *Passages*, can stay on the bestseller lists for months. Whatever its deficiencies, it strives to deal with a critical and relatively new human problem, long life and slow death with the many transitional turning points in the life span. It is clearly a problem of meaning and thus, explicitly, a religious problem. Though Ms. Sheehy does not call—and may not consider—her responses religious, they surely represent an attempt, however incomplete, to deal with the mystery of life and death—long life and slow death.

I should think that this fundamental change would be a matter of great fascination and great opportunity for theologians (as would the related question of intimacy, which becomes a crucial and poignant issue when men and women can expect fifty years together instead of ten). But I have the impression that theologians are too busy dialoguing with the imaginary "modern man" (or "humankind," if you will) who doesn't need meaning in his life to respond to the life-cycle paradigm that demands meaning.

dered to be a desirable method of birth control. Most Catholic moral theologians do not seem to grasp that modern birth control techniques developed as alternatives to the "baby farms" to which children were sent, allegedly to be nursed but actually to be killed through neglect; and this was not much more than a few years over a century ago.

To put the matter at its most simple, the rural cultures from which the Polish peasants came to the United States at the beginning of this century were in most important respects indisputably "premodern." In the American opportunity system, these peasants and their children could achieve survival, success, and even more recently, affluence by the exercise of the traditional peasant virtues of diligence, frugality, thrift and shrewdness. It was not necessary for them to undergo any fundamental change in consciousness, much less "future shock" to become affluent Americans. On the contrary, I suspect that if they became "modern" men and women—that is to say, if they began to think like college professors—they would have been much less successful.

The Polish peasant, in other words, came into contact with the urban industrial world three or four decades before the peasants of many of the LDC's (lesser developed countries) and with roughly the same result that the political scientists report as occurring in those countries—a mixture of "traditional" and the "modern," with the traditional by no means minimized.

Another source of doubt on the evolutionary theory of modernization has been the research done by historically-oriented sociologists (some of them, curiously enough, Marxists) on the actual modernization process that is going on in the "new nations" of the world that have emerged since 1945. Joseph Elder's "Brahmins in an Industrial Setting" and Manning Nash's *Machine Age Maya* uncovered little evidence of conflict between the traditional and the modern that is necessitated by the process of industrialization. Richard Lambert discovered that traditional values of security and primary-group loyalties were a strong element in the successful operation of Indian factories in Poona. Lloyd and Suzanne Rudolph systematically and categorically question the applicability of the modernism model to political development in India.<sup>8</sup> As Nash observes of Cantel (the Guatamalan town he studied):

[It] is not the same society it was before the introduction of the factory, but it is still a going concern and still a distinct way of life, rich in local meanings and in patterns of social relations far removed from the kinds of societies which have invented and spread machine technology. Cantel's experience with the mechanisms of adjustment to a new economic form and its resultant pressures means at least this: factories may be introduced into peasant societies without the drastic chain of social, cultural, and psychological consequences implied in

<sup>8</sup>L. and S. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

the concept of "revolution." The idea that social change involving new forms of production is necessarily wasteful in human terms finds no support in Cantel.<sup>9</sup>

In a powerful and important paragraph, Nash concludes that not only is tradition not an obstacle to industrialization but that industrialization will not be effective unless it respects tradition:

To judge from Cantel, a people's ability to accommodate to new cultural forms is intimately related to their actual and felt control over their social circumstances. The sense of control seems to stem from their freedom to choose how they will combine the new elements, and to discard or accept the innovations as their consequences become clear. Cantelese did not begin to absorb the factory into their communal life until force and the threats of force were withdrawn. They began to come to the factory as workers when they realized it as a means of implementing some of their goals.<sup>10</sup>

The Rudolphs are even blunter:

The assumption that modernity and tradition are radically contradictory rests on a misdiagnosis of traditional societies, a misunderstanding of modernity as it is found in modern societies, and a misapprehension of the relationship between them.<sup>11</sup>

The Rudolphs analyze the persistence of caste in the modern Indian political structure, the persistence of traditional charisma in the impact of Ghandi (the founder of modern India rather than its present prime minister), and the persistence of traditional Indian law in a "dual system" of law. They observe that all three are examples of how the traditional and the modern mix and blend, with the modern building on the traditional rather than replacing it.

Clifford Geertz, in his classic analysis of the religion of Java,<sup>12</sup> demonstrated that in Indonesia even modern party politics, allegedly based on universalistic ideologies, actually became closely identified in practice with ethnic and religious group loyalties at the village level. You could not mobilize Indonesians for modern politics unless you appealed simultaneously to traditional values.

The strongest argument that industrialization leads to "modernization" has been made in a six-nation study by Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith.<sup>13</sup> The two authors found that in Argentina,

<sup>9</sup>M. Nash, *Machine Age Maya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 144.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>L. and S. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>C. Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1960).

<sup>13</sup>A. Inkeles and D. Smith, *Becoming Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Chile, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), India, Israel, and Nigeria there was a broad pattern of behavior connected with factory experience that could properly be called "modernization." However, they excluded from their definition such components of the classic modernization theory as weakening of family ties, decline of religious activity, and lessening of concern for the aged on the grounds that such variables might increase with industrialization—which in fact they did—leading to "modern" religion, "modern" family, and "modern" care for an aged relative. The Inkeles-Smith project—a monumental and ingenious enterprise—thus does establish that something happens, and it is important. Included in that "something" is more active citizenship, greater economic aspirations, heightened sense of personal efficacy, greater assumption of personal responsibility, greater valuation of education. But these things do not occur as a result of the decline of certain basic and tradition allegiances.

The research of political scientists like the Rudolphs and anthropologists like Geertz on the Third World countries provide an excellent model for the reexamination of what happened in Western Europe during its industrialization era. If we can leave aside a model of "modern man" that assumes that he is different in some fundamental way from his ancestors and design our research on the basis of a model that assumes only that contemporary man is not much different from his ancestors but has acquired some new skills, perspectives, and experiences, as well as a much longer life expectancy and greater social and geographical mobility, we may understand the meaning of the industrial revolution in the West much more clearly than we do when we use the evolutionary modernization model.

Thus demographic historians in their rediscovery of the nuclear family and private property at the beginning of modernization, the sociologists of the primary group and their rediscovery of the persistence of *Gemeinschaft* in the modern world, and the political scientists who analyze the "developing" nations find not modernity replacing tradition but a marvelous combination of modernity and tradition intertwined with one another. All three strike a shattering blow to the theory of modernization.

Therefore, the burden of proof for the widespread existence of a "modern consciousness"—much less a "post-modern consciousness"—ought to be on those who assert its existence. It is, I think, no longer something that theologians, or any other scholar, can take for granted. And, as anyone who has spent any

time in an urban or even suburban ethnic neighborhood will testify, you are going to have a very hard time coming up with that proof. Those folk don't think like college professors and divinity school faculty members, and they are not about to. Worse still, they don't even feel guilty about it.

The increased life span allows us more time for self-reflection, as well as the time and the inclination to develop a vocabulary designed for self-reflection and oriented explicitly toward self-fulfillment. There is more time in each day to read, to think, to reflect (if one wants to and oftentimes when one doesn't want to), and more time in one's life to engage in a wide variety of relationships and to reflect more on them, oneself, and the meaning of life.

Now I would submit that such a description of modern man ought to be more attractive for theologians than the one of deracinated, technological, sexually-revolutionized man. For if modernization does not mean liberation from the sacred but rather the availability of time to reflect about human life, if modernization does not mean freedom from primary group relationships but more time to appreciate and agonize over the meaning of those relationships, then that discipline that deals with those symbols, that is specifically designed to illumine the ambiguities and the uncertainties of the meaning of life and the meaning of human intimacy, ought to find itself in a seller's market. Far from apologizing for the seeming irrelevance of their symbols to an autonomous, independent new kind of human consciousness that needs neither faith nor community, neither meaning nor belonging, theologians ought to rejoice that people have more time explicitly to reflect upon an act about meaning and belonging, meaning, purpose, and intimacy, faith and community. If there is a modern consciousness at all, it is one that ought to be more concerned—because it has more time to be concerned—about the ultimate purposes of the human condition. Admittedly one does not encounter such concerns among the nation's intellectual and cultural elites, who have taken refuge from the agonies of wondering about the purposes of life behind the Maginot line of what Michael Novak once referred to as "bourgeois agnosticism." How satisfactory the agnostic copout can be over the long haul remains to be seen. Certainly the upsurge of interest in the occult in the late 1960's, continuing to the present, among the intelligentsia suggests that by no means all of them are happy with their agnostic solutions. But it seems to me that by definition dialogue with an agnostic is an impossibility, because his position defines dialogue as useless. The mistake of too many

theologians, is to assume their agnostic colleagues on the university faculties do indeed represent the *avant garde*, the wave of history, the ultimate step thus far in the evolutionary process, the most recent thrust of the modernization dynamic. Doubtless they would like to think so, but the evidence, I am suggesting here, does not support such a claim.

Mystery is still the name of the game, and mystery in both the dark and the bright sense of the term, in both the limitation and gratuity of the limit-experience, in both the dark finitude of our lives and in the bright hint of something beyond the finitude, in the hard stone wall of limitation and the voice beyond the wall, as well as the occasional apparent movement of the wall itself as we push up against it.

Our premodern predecessors had these experiences and so do we. They had to reflect on them and so do we. They did not reflect on them all the time and neither do we. They lived in darkness much of the time, so do we; but they had interludes of blinding light and so do we. They could talk about their limit-experiences and did so in their poetry and their art. We have more time to reflect upon and to talk about these experiences of limitation and gratuity and a vocabulary specifically designed to do so—though part of our intellectual milieu is shaped by the conviction that the bright side of the limit-experience is illusory and that all reflection and conversation is a waste of time—a notion that it is probably safe to say was not entirely absent among our ancestors too.

But mystery persists, and theologians are just those scholars who *ex professo* reflect on mystery. As an outsider to the discipline, one who engages in constant reconnaissance along its borders, I am baffled why theologians would lose confidence precisely at a time when there is more explicit and self-conscious reflection on mystery than ever before in human history, turning to politics and social action as a substitute for theological reflection, which is perceived as irrelevant. God knows (you should excuse the expression) that much theological reflection is irrelevant, but I would suggest that that has more to do with narrowness, rigidity and fear than the irrelevance of theology to modern consciousness. If theologians have lost their nerve they should not blame the evolutionary process for making their work irrelevant but rather should look at their own depleted sense of wonder and weakened capacity for surprise.

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