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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS



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United States Technology and Adult Commitment

John M. Staudenmaier, S.J.

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THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, laity, men and/or women. Hence the *Studies*, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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UNITED STATES TECHNOLOGY
AND
ADULT COMMITMENT

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For your information . . .

This issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* both deals with technology and has required technology new to our office in its preparation. A computer manipulated the text; a laser printer generated the new type face, Times Roman. The changed appearance of *Studies* is a first step in a redesign of format. A new firm is responsible for printing and mailing.

Only a very generous involvement of people made all of this possible. Especially important here were three persons. To each of them we owe much thanks. Mrs. Anne Millburg, secretary for the Institute of Jesuit Sources and for the Seminar on Spirituality, moved with intelligence and good cheer from the simplicities of a typewriter to the complexities of a computer. Father Philip Fischer with great care edited this issue through several print-outs and formats. Father Martin Palmer, lastly, stands first in producing it. Anyone who has tried to tame computer hardware and software knows how intractable they can be. Hours of work at the computer console, patient willingness to try and try again, insight into the vagaries of the several beasts (the computer, the printer, the programs), the skillful imagining of a multiplicity of options from which to choose, all of those on the part of Father Palmer were necessary to produce this redesigned issue. Again, thank you!

Do American Jesuits experience a serious gap between the language of our religious experience and the languages we use with our colleagues in the institutions and public arenas where we work? What do you think? Joseph A. Appleyard, S.J., of Boston College, will address that subject in our next issue of *Studies*.

John W. Padberg, S.J.

Editor

Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits

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UNITED STATES TECHNOLOGY AND ADULT COMMITMENT

by

John M. Staudenmaier, S.J.¹

Jesus said: "In the evening you say, 'It will be fine; there is a red sky,' and in the morning, 'stormy weather today; the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to read the face of the sky, but you cannot read the signs of the times." [Matthew 16:2]

INTRODUCTION

In the late sixties, while studying theology in St. Louis, I attended an evening lecture on the history of the Society of Jesus. One paragraph stays with me:

Three major crises have faced the Church during the life of the Society: the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and contemporary Western secularization. The historian naturally asks how well the Society read the signs of the times and responded to the challenges. For the Reformation the Society gets an "A." By and large we fought the right battles, for the right reasons, at the right times. Our grade during the Enlightenment is not so good. We tended to fight the wrong battles, for the wrong reasons, at the wrong times. It is still too early to judge how we are responding to the current crisis.

¹ Author's address: University of Detroit, 4001 West McNichols Road, Detroit, Michigan 48221.

Years later, one paragraph from the 32nd General Congregation struck the same chord:

Too often we are insulated from any real contact with unbelief and with the hard, everyday consequences of injustice and oppression. As a result, we run the risk of not being able to hear the cry for the Gospel as it is addressed to us by the men and women of our time. [Our Mission Today, Paragraph 35]

In this essay I try to read three signs of our times. First, in the twentieth century a set of complex technologies--the telephone, radio and television, the automobile, nuclear weaponry, the computer and so forth--have come to structure our nation's life and to influence our personal, communal and civic lives. Second, this same set of technologies has recently begun to show signs of a crisis in America's technological style. Third, a striking change in the way Americans experience adult commitment has occurred, a change reflected in the dramatic decline of our own Jesuit numbers over the past twenty years. Unlikely as it may seem at first glance, all three signs of the times are related.

A changing culture

To begin, we might keep two interesting patterns in mind.² (1) In 1910 America's divorce rate stood at 8.8% of marriages attempted. The seventy-year climb to today's 50% rate does not describe a consistent curve over this period. Marriage failures actually declined during the Depression (from 17.3 to 16.5%), but in the tumult of World War II's ending they leaped to 30%, a then all-time high. After settling back into the mid-twenty-percent range, divorces gradually climbed back to 32.7% in 1970 and then soared in 1976 to an astonishing 50.3% and have stayed in that range ever since. (2) In like manner, we find that 9% of America's dwellings in 1950 housed only one person, a rather large percentage not so surprising in a society in which the high mobility of nuclear families had already caused a decline in multigenerational family living.

² For data cited in this paragraph, see Appendix 2.

Today, after thirty years of consistent growth, the percentage has nearly tripled to 23.4% (1984)--a reflection, probably, of our affluent "singles" society.

Both patterns reveal that people in our culture have more difficulty making communal and enduring commitments than their forebears did. These patterns correlate with the trend in religious vocations. The declining number of Jesuits worries us: besides forcing major changes in ministerial style, it tempts us to doubt that vowed religious life remains viable.³ More significantly, American troubles with commitment tell us something important about the men who invest their lives in the Society today, about our fellow citizens generally and about ourselves. It could be argued that these trends reflect nothing more serious than a significant shift in the way Americans understand and live their commitments; that demographic changes (in particular, increased life span) and social changes (in particular, geographical mobility, increased affluence and a dramatically broadened array of career options for men and women at every age) have led more and more Americans to opt for a series of temporary commitments any one of which is subject to critique and replacement. It would be foolhardy to discount this interpretation, and indeed such is not my intent. On the other hand, I do not find it a complete explanation. Taken alone, the rationality implied by this interpretation misses several important facets of the commitment phenomenon as we find it today.

A crisis of personal values and emotions

Men and women rarely, if ever, experience divorce or departure from religious life as a primarily rational act. Both choices declare bankruptcy on one of the most significant decisions of adult life. They often evoke deeply felt grief, fear, anger or guilt. Even more telling, in my experience, young adults often experience strong

³ In the Society, the number of entering novices declined precipitously from the early sixties through 1970. Then, after a modest resurgence in the mid-seventies, they have declined from 1979 to the present. (See Appendix 1.)

anxiety when facing a binding commitment, whether temporary or permanent. Something more goes on here than a calm, rational response to changing societal conditions. In what follows, I will suggest that these troubles with communal commitment are one symptom of a society in crisis. Every stable culture provides, among other things, a coherent world view which renders adult commitment believable. We Americans may well live in one of those times when a society faces the challenge of renegotiating its cultural world view, of finding the way to a new consensus about adulthood, both its opportunities and its responsibilities.⁴

Such a major cultural shift cannot be explained by any single cause. Thus, if one were to flatten the divorce curve over the century, one could argue persuasively that American troubles with the marriage commitment reflect the growing influence of therapeutic and self-centered individualism and a correlative decline in our capacity to base our lives on shared consensus about the common good.⁵ On the other hand, one might explain the first surge in the divorce rate as a result of forces set in motion by World War II and the second surge, after 1965, in terms of a host of factors (the flower children, the Vietnam War, Watergate and so forth) which have eroded American trust in established institutions generally. Studies of men and women religious by Neal, Shields and Verdieck, and others explain declining religious vocations in terms of Vatican

⁴ The success of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and similar groups at Maryknoll and elsewhere suggests that commitment troubles do not spring from a decline in generous desires to say "yes" to God's redeeming love for the world. The volunteer structure works precisely because it permits young adults to exercise their generous desires in a nonpermanent way. The year-long experience helps volunteers grow in the belief that a life shaped by permanent commitments to faith and justice is possible. Still, the JVC knows it flies in the face of the culture just as novice directors know the Society does. The JVC's playful-serious motto is "Ruined for life." For these men and women, as for Jesuit novices, the question of commitment is as frightening as it is central.

⁵ See also *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), where Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven Tipton present persuasive evidence of America's need to renegotiate a vision of the common good. *Passim*.

II and related changes in religious congregations and the Church.⁶ I agree with all these interpretations. In this paper, however, I will explore a less frequently considered dimension of our cultural context. We can deepen our understanding of American culture and our current commitment troubles by paying attention to our technological style, asking as we do so how the values embedded in that style influence our experience of commitment.

Making use of recent scholarship in the history of technology and my fifteen years of counseling young Americans, I will address the following questions: Which values do American's dominant technologies foster and which values do they hinder? How can we interpret recent evidence of a crisis in our technological style? How has America's changing technological style influenced young people as they face adult commitments? Finally, what does all this tell us about the relationship of the Jesuit charism to present American circumstances?

I will begin by defining "technological style" and suggesting two personal traits required for adult commitment. These introductory notes will be followed by a sketch of America's technological style as it bears on commitment.⁷ Our technological style flourished through much of this century until, partly because of the powerful influence of World War II, it entered a period of crisis somewhere in the 1960s. The limitations of our technological style suggest some of the causes of its own crisis even as they provide a partial explana-

⁶ Marie Augusta Neal, S.N.D. de Namur, *Catholic Sisters in Transition: From the 1960's to the 1980's* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc. 1984). Joseph J. Shields and Mary Jeanne Verdieck, *Religious Life in the United States: The Experience of Men's Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 1985).

⁷ By limiting my analysis to the United States I certainly do not mean to deny that similar problems face Europe and the rest of the world. Western technology has begun to have global impact. Nevertheless, different cultures experience Western technology differently. Since my own area of research has been the United States, I do not want to claim a thorough understanding of how permanent commitment is experienced outside this country. Doubtless, the vocational problems we study here are not unique to the United States.

tion of how commitment has become problematic in the recent past. Both the limitations and the strengths of our American twentieth-century technological style provide us with some clues about how we Jesuits might respond to "the cry for the gospel as it is addressed to us by the men and women of our time." These clues can assist our efforts to help young people who are called to join us and to help one another live our own commitments.

PART I. TECHNOLOGICAL STYLE AND ADULT COMMITMENT

Technological choices and human adaptations

No successful technology, not the moving assembly line, not nuclear power plants, not television, not even a new cosmetic, ever came into being as the result of "inevitable progress." Human beings with their tangled motives decide which designs are attended to and which ignored. Real people decide why the technologies found worthy of inventive attention take the final shape they do. This maxim, the central tenet of the contextual history of technology, provides a basis for understanding "technological style."⁸ Because a technical design reflects the motives of its designers and potential users, historians of technology look to the values, biases, motives and world view of the designers when asking why a given technology turned out as it did. Every technology, then, embodies some distinct set of values. To the extent that a technology becomes successful within its society, its inherent values will be reinforced. In this sense, every technology carries its own "style," fostering

⁸ The argument is complex. For a full elaboration see my *Technology's Storytellers: Reweaving the Human Fabric* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), especially Chapters 1 and 5. Henceforth *Storytellers*.

some values while inhibiting others. In the technological view of history, tradeoffs abound. There is no technological "free lunch."⁹

To take the matter one step further, we might note that those with access to the venture capital that new technologies always require tend to be people who hold cultural hegemony in their society. "Holding cultural hegemony" means belonging to that group of people who shape the dominant values and symbols of their society. While they never form a single historically tidy group--as a technological conspiracy theory might suggest--they do tend to view the world from the same perspective. Consequently, we can look for a set of successful technologies that, in any relatively stable era of history, embody the "technological style" of their society.¹⁰ It is no accident that Henry Ford's moving assembly line and the post-World-War-I consumerist style of advertising reflect similar values. To be sure, technological style does not operate as the sole cause of prevailing cultural values. The values embedded in successful technologies originate in the world view of those who design and maintain them. Ford's paternalism and obsession with centralized control predated the moving assembly line which embodied them. On the other hand, technological style causes as well as reflects values. Just as America adapted to the automobile in a host of ways (from superhighway-funding legislation to shopping malls), so every society adapts to the designs of its successful technologies. In the process, the values that fit the technologies achieve societal momentum while values that do not fit diminish in importance.

So important are successful technologies in shaping societal structures and fostering cultural values that, when a once successful technological style becomes obsolescent, its host society faces a

⁹ On the tradeoffs inherent in technological style, see Thomas F. Hughes, "We Get the Technology We Deserve," *American Heritage*, October-November, 1985: 65-79.

¹⁰ On cultural hegemony see T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *The American Historical Review* 90, no.3 (June 1985): 567-593. For a more complete discussion of technological style and contextual method, see *Storytellers*, chapter 5, pp. 192-201.

major crisis. Such, I believe, is our situation in America today.¹¹ If I am right, it should not surprise us to see signs of crisis in all aspects of American culture, including the capacity for enduring, communal commitment.

Memberships unchosen and chosen

Before turning to the sketch of America's twentieth-century technological style, let us consider two personal traits (durable personal identity and the capacity for communal life) that are central to commitment. Whether I like it or not, my life is structured by the groups into which I am born--familial, local, ethnic, religious and national. Membership is not optional; these groupings are part of the givens of birth. When I make an *adult* commitment, however, I enter a community that, from my point of view at least, need never have existed. This freely chosen involvement, so unlike the inevitable bonds of infancy, requires a capacity for communal living and confidence in my personal identity.

I do not engage in a life-shaping commitment on the spur of the moment. Rather, some series of events leads me to believe that this person or this congregation is "for me." To move from uncommitted outsider to committed member, I must come to see that series of events as blessed, as the beginning of a communal life story wherein my individualistic "I" gradually becomes part of a "we." As long as the events remain disconnected episodes, I remain a lone wanderer. Only after I recognize the pattern that they form can I imagine that these events and the person or community central to them might become key elements of my adult identity. Permanent commitment, then, is less a prediction of my future than an act of belief in my history. I believe that the fabric woven of these blessed events will not be frayed by the uncertainties that will surely come as I and those to whom I commit myself live communal life.

¹¹ See pp. 25-30 below for my argument. For a vivid portrayal of America's technological crisis, see Francis Ford Coppola's *Koyaanisquatsi*. The film title is a Hopi noun meaning "a situation out of control that requires change."

For my choice to be shot through with Christian faith, I must come to see the blessed events not only as uniting me with some person or community, but also as the fabric of a vocation from God. For a Christian, God is the one who leads on the journey of faith. The community of the Church grows out of faith in the Lord Jesus and expresses itself in our adult commitments to one another.¹² In my exposition here, however, I am less concerned with our belief that Christian commitments are rooted in God's call than with a prior question, our inner capacity for a binding adult commitment of any sort.

One major change in recent American culture seems to be the replacement of stable expectations for the future by a radical uncertainty about the changes that will come. Young people today seem acutely aware of the storms Jesus took to be inevitable in his parable of the house built on sand or rock (Matthew 7:24). They show less confidence in their ability to find the rock on which to build. "What," they seem to ask, "do I need if I am even to imagine myself engaging in an enduring and communal faith commitment?" My counseling of young adults has suggested two characteristics they need: First, one must trust one's identity, believing that one's inner life can be the source of a life story that will endure, that one's life-events and one's choices are not disconnected episodes, shifting like the sands on which Jesus' ill-fated house was built. Second, one must have the capacity to grow from the individualism of the outsider into the bonds of community, at once so liberating and so constraining.

¹² Christian commitment as vocation, so pervasive in both the Old and New Testament stories of response to God's call, is elegantly articulated by John Dunne: "God is not 'how things stand.' 'How things stand' is not God. God is not domesticated by 'how things stand.' God leads on an adventure. God is wild." *The Reasons of the Heart: A Journey into Solitude and Back Again into the Human Circle* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), p.21.

Keeping these two characteristics in mind, let us turn to a sketch of America's technological style, asking first, "How do the values of that style affect my sense of personal identity?" and second, "How does that style affect my capacity for communal life?"

PART II. PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL IDENTITY: SOME AMERICAN TENSIONS

For historians, causal explanation resembles the wire strands of a cable more than the links of a chain. In a chainlink argument, every event must "prove" the next; the whole weight of the argument rests on each segment. Because of the complexity of their subject matter, historians look for trends, for events which, like the strands in a cable, reinforce one another.¹³ Rarely does a historian argue that "this and only this caused that." With such reservations about what I mean by "cause" I will note some positive American technological values that foster commitment, but I will stress the negative. This reflects the primary purpose of this paper: to consider a few strands in the cable of factors that "cause" adult commitment to be so difficult today.

Negotiation replaced by systemic standardization

Until 1870 or so the challenge of conquering the wilderness shaped the dominant technological style in the United States. As generations of men and women from Europe or the more settled eastern United States headed west, their longing for a "middle landscape," a livable place carved out of the wild, grew into a central element of the American character. Fifteen hundred miles of virgin forest, another one thousand of prairie and deserts and mountains--the land itself inspired an American dream. To non-Indian eyes it was empty of history but full of both promise and

¹³ I am indebted to the late Dr. James Collins, who, long ago in a philosophy class at St. Louis University, introduced me to this distinction.

danger, a manifest destiny challenging the best people had in them. Building a human place, clearing fields and rivers and constructing homes, roads, canals, bridges, tunnels and cities preoccupied the technological imagination. Americans honored technical expertise as "know-how"--a blend of rules of thumb, occasional engineering elegance, courage and an intimate knowledge of local terrain--as the context whose constraints defined the limits of every project. Technological style, then, demanded a continual negotiation between the skills, tools and plans of white Americans and the godlike wilderness they sought to conquer.¹⁴ Despite their passion for freedom and individualism, Americans found negotiation a basic necessity in human interaction as well. People needed one another in an empty land.

Lest we idealize the American conquest of the wilderness, we should note that the myth of the "middle landscape" had a special place for native Americans and blacks. Native Americans were seen as part of the wilderness, godlike in their ability to live in the forbidding terrain and subhuman at the same time, lacking both culture and history. Blacks, on the other hand, were part of the tools that white Europeans used to conquer the wilderness. Neither image, of course, is even close to the self-image of these two peoples.

Long before the technological style of the white pioneers fell from pre-eminence, however, a successor began to exert its influence. Beginning in 1815 with the U.S. Ordnance Department's

¹⁴ Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980) traces the gradual shift, in Western Europe, from Nature defined as the goddess who sets the rules and boundaries for human enterprise to a still feminine but newly passive reality destined for exploitation and conquest. As early Americans encountered the virgin wilderness, they found their heritage of conquest tempered as much by nature's raw beauty and power as by the crudity of their tools.

For other discussions of the middle landscape see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford, 1964), John F. Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976) and Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), pp.33-39.

commitment to standardized uniformity in weapons production, a new technical ideal was gathering momentum in the land.¹⁵ The new ideal embodied a radical shift in values. The older style's negotiation with nature and with co-workers shifted toward standardization's precision design and centralized authority. The new American factory system turned out a host of new products and, in the process, transformed the relationship between manager and worker from the sometimes respectful and sometimes tumultuous interaction of the early American small shop to heavy-handed enforcement of work rules coupled with the "de-skilling" of workers through increasingly automated machines.¹⁶ The transformation was hardly limited to the factory. Little by little, a broad range of technological endeavors began to adopt the standardization ideal. Space forbids a detailed account, but three examples--railroads, electrical power and commercial advertising--will suggest the flavor of the new style.

(1) Railroads evolved from a turnpike model--state-owned and state-supported roadbed--to a private centrally owned enterprise that included roadbed and most system components. In the process, the relationship of railroads to their surroundings changed dramatically. Historian J. L. Larson contrasts the design of grain-shipping facilities in St. Louis and Chicago in 1860. The St. Louis design demanded bagging the grain, loading it onto train cars, off-loading it at the outer edge of town where the tracks ended, teamstering it across the city and loading it again onto river boats. The Chicago design permitted bulk loading onto grain cars because the track ran all the way to the docks, where it was off-loaded onto grain boats.

¹⁵ For a careful study of the drive toward standardization in the Ordnance Department, see Merritt Roe Smith, "Military Enterprise and Innovative Process," in M. R. Smith, ed., *Military Enterprise and Technological Change: Perspectives on the American Experience* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985).

¹⁶ The most helpful single source on changing labor-management relations in America is Herbert Gutman's *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage, 1966).

Larson concludes his description with the following provocative sentence:

If the Chicago system was a model of integration, speed, and efficiency, the St. Louis market preserved the integrity of each man's transaction and employed a host of small entrepreneurs at every turn--real virtues in ante-bellum America.¹⁷

The St. Louis setup required negotiation as part of the shipping process while the more complex and capital-intensive Chicago design achieved greater efficiency and permitted railroad management to ship grain without needing to negotiate with that "host of small entrepreneurs at every turn."

The geographical range and managerial complexity of the railroads fostered standardization in many ways. The railroads' need for precise timetables transformed a land of multiple local times into 1885's single system of standard time divided into our now familiar four time zones. The depot, that little building where town and rail line met, gradually evolved toward a standardized architecture, thus reflecting the triumph of railroad system over local style. The telegraph, essential as an information component for the rail lines, soon became the vehicle for nationwide, standardized news with the development of the wire services.¹⁸

(2) We see the same trend in the changing character of electrical systems. If we lived in a small town in 1890 and held a town meeting to decide whether to buy some electricity, our debate could lead to a "yes" or a "no." If "yes," we would shop among the three manufacturing firms--Thompson-Houston, Edison General Electric, and Westinghouse. Once installed, the system would be ours, a tool we had purchased to serve our needs. We townsfolk were independent vis-a-vis the technology. We could take it or leave

¹⁷ J. L. Larson, "A Systems Approach to the History of Technology: An American Railroad Example," a paper read at the annual meeting of the Society for the History of Technology, 1982, p.17.

¹⁸ Carlene Stephens, *Inventing Standard Time* (Washington, D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution, 1983). Mark Duluk, "The American Railroad Depot as Technological Vernacular Architecture," in *Dichotomy* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 10-15.

it, and we could purchase one or another type as well. Today our little town no longer maintains this independent position. From the perspective of electrical systems management, our town serves as a functional component. We no longer "negotiate" with the electrical technology. Our dependence on electricity and the complex requirements of generation and transmission systems have changed the earlier negotiated relationship to one of conformity.¹⁹

(3) A major redefinition of advertising, just after World War I, extends the pattern. Beginning in 1923 with the arrival of Alfred P. Sloan as president of General Motors, the task of marketing new cars shifted from Ford's approach, stressing the economy and technical competence of an unchanging Model T, to fostering cyclic dissatisfaction with one's present car, the basis of "turnover buying." Continued expansion of the mass-production system required turnover buying for, as the recent automobile recession demonstrated, when too many owners hold on to their cars for too long, the new-car market stagnates.²⁰

Sloan's marketing strategy at GM was only the most striking example of an extraordinary shift in the nature of advertising after World War I. While some areas of marketing continued to stress the older "reason why" style--effective and attractive communication of a product's virtues--the new style tried to program the consumer's emotions, creating a sense of personal inadequacy and discontent as the basis of impulse buying. Consumerist marketing does not work with money-conscious shoppers who tenaciously negotiate every purchase or who stay home content with what is already there.

In a way, consumerist advertising is the epitome of standardization's triumph over negotiation. Where the Ordnance Department

¹⁹ For a definitive study of electrification in the United States, Germany and Great Britain, see Thomas Parke Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1983). For the matters discussed here, see especially chapters 1 to 6.

²⁰ For Sloanism see Emma Rothschild, *Paradise Lost: The Decline of the Auto-Industrial Age* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1973), chapter 2.

tried to standardize musket parts and the work patterns of skilled armorers, and where centralized railroads later in the century began to standardize equipment and to expand corporate control over previously independent entrepreneurs, the new form of marketing tried to extend standardized conformity into human motivation itself.²¹

Benefits and liabilities--concerning railroads, electricity and advertising

These three vignettes indicate a radical shift of the values embedded in our normal technologies. "Technology" once meant "the tools and techniques that humans make and use for their purposes." Now our twentieth-century style reflects a new definition of our most complex technologies: "elegantly designed systems on which we depend for our survival." Twentieth-century systems tend to resolve the old problems of peers negotiating with one another by bringing once independent negotiators inside the system as functional components.

Three examples do not do justice to the scope of this value shift. I have hardly mentioned our changing relationship with nature. Thus, our century-long neglect of waste-disposal problems, seen so vividly today in acid rain and toxic pollutants, reveals a consistent pattern of overriding or ignoring nature's constraints. Only recently have the majority of Americans begun to recognize that nature "has a say" in the technological endeavor.²²

²¹ On the shift in advertising style, see T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History. 1880-1980*, Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), pp. 1-38, and Michael McMahon, "An American Courtship: Psychologists and Advertising Theory," *American Studies* 13 (1972): 5-18.

²² On early twentieth-century avoidance of evidence indicating ecological damage from technical systems, see John Burke, "Wood Pulp, Water Pollution, and Advertising," *Technology and Culture* 20, no. 1 (January 1979: no. 175-195.

Standardization yields substantial benefits. Standardized mass production permits a much larger segment of the population to own relatively high-quality manufactured goods, improving the standard of living for poor as well as rich. Even more important, standardization fosters and rewards the virtue of precision. Living as we do in an age where elegant systems such as telephone networks, electric utilities, medical technologies and computers are commonplace, we find it hard to imagine a world where the art of making steel seemed almost magical. Precision design has joined the family of the elegant arts even as it makes possible the systems on which our communication, our health and our productivity depend.

With its many virtues, however, standardization carried significant liabilities; most important for us is the atrophy of negotiation. Negotiation is a messy business. When mutually independent peers must find a common way of proceeding, their different world views, vested interests and styles make the outcome unpredictable whether the people in question are skilled workers and managers, shoppers and sellers or independent nations. In the quest for a common good, no one participant's version of the best solution will be adopted. Despite its inefficiencies, the interdependence inherent in negotiation requires and therefore fosters a capacity for intimacy with others not like oneself and an abiding sense of the value of agendas other than one's own.²³

Two questions

(1) What are the challenges for adult commitment in a standardized culture? At the time of this writing, two recent events suggest one answer. In mid-January, 1986, the space probe Voyager 2 approached Uranus almost five years and one billion miles after

²³ We should distinguish two types of negotiation. The type required for adult commitment rests on the conviction that the negotiating partners seek a single resolution of their problems. They are "in this thing together" and must seek a working consensus. By contrast, America's labor-management negotiations assume that each side tries to get what it can from the other. Tradeoffs between two discrete parties substitute for a single consensus.

launch. Its computer control systems timed the encounter within one minute of the original plan while programing a rotation that permitted extraordinary photographs of this distant planetary neighbor. Several days later, before a stunned America, the space shuttle Challenger exploded, killing six astronauts and one school-teacher. Our almost blasé acceptance of the one and our horror at the other remind us of our temptation to take precision elegance for granted. We tend to forget that complex systems are human achievements, that the labor of human beings, trained in a tradition of excellence, maintains them as they work their wonders.

Such amnesia has serious consequences even in the realm of adult commitment. When we forget that our systems are the work of human beings, they seem to acquire a godlike inevitability and we begin to feel like dwarfs in their presence: "I am just a little person. What difference do I make in a world dominated by these massive technologies. Am I anything more than a passive drifter on the inevitable technological tide?" Even the technically competent among us can suffer from these feelings of inadequacy. Outside our areas of expertise, all of us depend on technologies beyond our comprehension. But adult commitments require a deep confidence in our creative power. To make a binding life commitment, we must believe that we can create a life story whose meaning makes life's struggle worthwhile. The ancient Christian tradition of contemplation may help us meet this contemporary challenge. A habit of contemplating precision-design systems as human achievements might become a form of prayer that liberates us from a subtle form of idolatry. Freed from the false worship of godlike "autonomous" technologies, we reaffirm our creativity as free human beings called by God to take responsibility for the works of our hands and minds.

(2) We can turn the standardization-negotiation relationship around and ask a second question: Are we Americans, schooled in a host of conforming patterns and unschooled in the difficult process of negotiation, tempted to relate to one another and to God in the same fashion? Insofar as commitment to the Society of Jesus is an

adult act and not just a search for security, a Jesuit embraces lifelong negotiation with the brethren. He enters in the hope that he has an identity so vital as to make a difference to the rest. Thus, by throwing his lot in with the Society, he believes that he makes a real difference to the community just as each member of the community makes a difference to him.

Jesuits base their lives on spiritual conversation as defined by the early Jesuit companions. "Our way of proceeding," as they called it in the earliest years, looks remarkably like what I am calling negotiation. Negotiation is hard work and demands vulnerability of all participants. Not knowing how it will work out, we need deep mutual accessibility.

When we consider the role of spiritual conversation for obedience and friendship, the issue becomes clearer still. Ignatius insisted on verbal communication not only in the face-to-face manifestation of conscience and the daily interaction of community recreation, but also in frequent letters. Unlike religious orders with the charism of stability, Jesuits cannot depend on the wordless rhythms of a life lived in the same place. It would seem that our style of negotiation, the many Jesuit processes of verbal intimacy, constitutes an essential means for sustaining the communal life.²⁴ Notice, finally, a temptation into which we American Jesuits might easily slip. We can evade the intimate depths of our particular form of negotiation by alternately conforming to one another's demands. Conformity alone cannot sustain commitment, whether the relationship unites a Jesuit with the Society, with friends or even with God.

²⁴ Thus, for example: "The more difficult it is for the members of this congregation to be united with their head and among themselves, since they are so scattered among the faithful and among the unbelievers in diverse regions of the world, the more ought means to be sought for that union. For the Society cannot be preserved, or governed, or, consequently, attain the end it seeks for the greater glory of God unless its members are united among themselves and with their head." St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, George E. Ganss, S.J., trans. (St. Louis, 1970), Part VIII, "Helps toward uniting the distant members with their head and among themselves," [655], p. 285. On the importance of letters see [673], p. 292.

Prayer, like the rest of adult life, flows from the encounter of free persons, a lifelong "negotiation" wherein God chooses the humility of intimacy with us.

I do not mean to suggest that negotiation should replace all conformity! Conformity, whether in the form of simple good manners, civic responsibility or a host of other pragmatic arrangements, makes ordinary life possible and bearable. If we tried to negotiate each aspect of life at every turn, we would wear ourselves out with endless wrangling. Still, the American tendency to replace negotiation with standardized conformity creates a serious imbalance in our society. It challenges us to find ways to recover our ability to embrace the unpredictability of negotiation. Standardization's precision and negotiation's uncertainties--the two societal virtues seem to work best in creative tension with each other.

The following section will situate this same tension in a longer time frame and will involve one of our most pervasive and important technological triumphs. By tracing our culture's desire and demand for "absolutized light" back to its roots in Britain's industrial revolution and by using Edison's instantly popular electric light as a primary metaphor, we may note further dimensions of the challenge of commitment today.

"Absolutized light" and the "holy dark"

Since Plato, the West has exhibited a penchant to give sight primacy of place as the metaphor for knowledge.²⁵ We have a few expressions linking touch and hearing with the act of knowing ("I am in touch with," "What I hear is"), but our primary metaphor is sight, the only sense that cannot operate in the dark. We say "I see"; we speak of "insight." Our cartoon image for a new idea is the light bulb. Still, giving primacy to sight and light does not define

²⁵ See Evelyn Fox Keller and Christine R. Grontkowski, "The Mind's Eye," in Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality* (D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 207-224.

darkness as evil. Earlier Western thinkers would not necessarily have been put off by praises of the dark such as we find in Psalm 127:

In vain do you get up earlier and put off going to bed,
sweating to make a living, since God provides for God's
beloved while they are sleeping.

With the advent of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century, however, we find a transition from favoring light to absolutizing it. In his seminal work, British labor historian E. P. Thompson documents a radical redefinition of work and time at the core of the industrial revolution. Time is no longer measured by human events, the length of time it takes to say an Our Father, for example, or by natural sequences like the motion of the sun from its rising to its setting. It becomes a precisely quantified and even monetary measure, as in Benjamin Franklin's "Time is money." Christian writers of the period participated in this ideological revolution by mounting a savage attack on sleep and rest. Consider two texts:

By soaking . . . so long between warm sheets the flesh is as it were parboiled, and becomes soft and flabby. The nerves in the meantime, are quite unstrung. [John Wesley, sermon "On the Duty and Advantage of Early Rising," 1786]

Thou silent murderer, Sloth, no more my mind imprison'd keep;
Nor let me waste another hour with thee, thou felon sleep.
[Hanna More, "Early Rising," 1831]²⁶

Like it or not, however, these advocates at wakefulness had to deal with the inevitable night. Before the electric light, people lived a diurnal rhythm alternating between light and dark. Night was a culturally experienced reality, a time of sleep, intimacy and storytelling, but not, one prayed, a time of crisis when poor artificial light left people nearly helpless. Electric lights have soothed our ancient night fears, but they have also realized the dream of the eighteenth-century divines--and that turns out to be a mixed blessing. With high-quality light we can now do almost anything,

²⁶ E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, 1967, pp. 87-88.

from grading papers to repairing freeways in any of the twenty-four hours of the day. Lacking a common "night" to stop us all at the same time, we tend to squeeze more and more into our days. Ours is the first culture where anyone but the rich could afford the luxury of very good light and its correlative insomnia. The elementary human process of entering the unconscious has become problematic, and we often need the help of chemicals or exhaustion to make the passage.

What happens to a culture that loses the night? Imagine for a moment that we were to "fast" from electricity--telephone, radio, television, stereo, computer and electric light--one night a week. How would it influence us once we had gotten over its novelty and settled into a weekly rhythm? The absence of electricity's networks would foster leisure for many forms of intimacy. We might tell stories by candlelight, sharing the events of the week with their passion and ordinariness. We could have a party, but human beings, not electronic equipment, would provide the sounds of merriment. We might sit still in contemplation. Or we could retire early and enter the mystery of sleep gently. Unlike our ancestors, we would celebrate these virtues of the holy dark with little fear that crisis might shatter our tranquillity. If needed, the electric lights are at hand. Would such a rhythm, a real "night" one night a week, be acceptable? Would a good American want to drop out of the fast pace of life in this fashion? Not readily, I suspect.

Avoidance of the night symbolizes but hardly exhausts every aspect of our fear of the dark. Reverence for the holy dark requires acceptance of uncertainty as a virtue to complement clarity. Americans do not generally experience uncertainty as a virtue. I have already spoken about our fear of the unpredictable negotiation process. Our fear of crime floods our streets and yards with light.²⁷

²⁷ Parker J. Palmer (*The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life*, New York: Crossroads, 1985) would argue that street crime is a public problem demanding inclusive public processes for solution. He argues that the dramatic increase in America's penchant for door locks, security

Even that primordial place of the holy dark, the womb, has become an arena where people fight the uncertainties of life's origins with early-warning systems (amniocentesis and sonograms) and resort to abortion to preempt the undesirable outcome. People find it hard to wait, uncertain and poor, for the mysterious processes of creativity to reveal their fruit. We are a nation that loves football's "run to daylight" where I shake off my tacklers. The image of Jacob wrestling with God in the dark is less attractive for us.²⁸

Electric lights and in-utero analysis are hardly the only examples of this "light-dark" imbalance. Electronic systems (telephones, television, computers) require extraordinary precision. Sometimes their need for accuracy--"systemic rationalization," as it is often called--generates a style with little tolerance for human ambivalence. Computerization provides vivid examples. Tales abound of seemingly mindless rigidity in computer algorithms that confront our unique circumstances, whether one seeks a loan from a bank or tries to tell a collection agency that one has already paid the bill.

guards and outdoor lights uses private defensive strategies to solve a public problem. The tension of public and private domains in America is an increasingly popular theme of social analysis. See, for example, Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1985), especially chapter 6, and Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*.

²⁸ Honoring the holy dark should not deny the existence of the violent dark. Jesus was not the only one to observe that those who do evil seek the dark because their deeds are evil. My point is rather that there is a holy dark as well as a holy light. My concern is that both violent light and the holy dark tend to be ignored in our common language today.

We find some recent evidence, in the theological community, of movement back to a balance of holy light and holy dark. See, for example, Harvey Egan, S.J., "Christian Apophatic and Kataphatic Mysticism," *Theological Studies* 39 (1978): 399-426; John F. Teahan, "The Dark and Empty Way," *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978): 263-287; Michael Buckley, S.J., "Atheism and Contemplation," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 680-699; Constance Fitzgerald, O.C.D., "Impasse and Dark Night," in *Living with Apocalypse: Spiritual Resources for Social Compassion*, Tilden H. Edwards, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 93-116; Michael Molloy, "The Mysticism of Darkness," Masters Thesis, Collegeville, MN: St. John's University, Graduate School of Theology. Fitzgerald, in particular, notes the trouble contemporary Americans have with what I have been calling the holy dark, pp. 105-107.

Harley Shaiken, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Shoshanah Zuboff, of the Harvard Business School, have begun to document the effects of nearly omnipresent scrutiny as more blue- and white-collar work places are computerized. In an analysis reminiscent of George Orwell's ominous telescreen in 1984, Shaiken has coined the term "over-computerization" to describe the introduction of computers that increase managerial control while decreasing productivity and efficiency.²⁹

Darkness, light and commitment

How does fear of the dark influence commitment? It does so by driving people toward light--in this case, the light of scrutiny. Contemporary society honors scrutiny of existing relationships and, more than most cultures, acknowledges the value of changing what needs to be changed. Effort aimed at such improvements nuances the original commitment--for the better, one hopes. But the very effort has its risks, its ambiguities. Sometimes, indeed, the light cast on the commitment makes it painfully clear that termination is the only life-giving alternative to a failed relationship. (Some of us have known men and women who, with great courage, have taken this step and met God at a deeper level than ever.) But sometimes, too, a focus on private relationships or personal needs--Robert Bellah's "therapeutic individualism"--can erode our capacity for commitment itself.³⁰ No culture, and no faith community, can long survive if the binding energies of committed relationships unravel in a tangle of short-term liaisons. When does God call us to endure the burdens

²⁹ Harley Shaiken, *Automation and Work in the Computer Age* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983); and his 1984 study for the Office of Technology Assessment. Shoshana Zuboff makes the same point about an excess of worker scrutiny in the same study, where she analyzes the impact of rigid algorithms. See her "New World of Computer-mediated Work," *Harvard Business Review* (September-October 1982). Her full-length monograph on computerization in a series of corporations is in process.

³⁰ Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, passim but especially pp. 93-97. On the emergence of the therapeutic ethos in the United States, see note 33 below.

and self-sacrifice of a present commitment and when to abandon it as unsalvageable? We cannot avoid the question.

We may be helped to discern the quality of our commitments by learning to think of light and dark as a creative tension. The life stories we craft with our adult commitments demand an alternation of journeys in the light and journeys in the dark. We rightly celebrate the Resurrection as the triumph of light over darkness. But the journey of faith has always been made in the mysterious holy dark. One thinks immediately of the dream visions of Abraham, Samuel and Joseph or the dark night of the mystics. During the past few centuries, we have tended to overlook the holy dark in our reading of Scripture. Even the Transfiguration, which we normally remember as a moment of light, moves from light into darkness. After Jesus, Moses and Elijah have appeared in brilliance, a cloud overshadows them. From the darkness comes the voice of God speaking tenderly of his beloved Son.

Relentless clarity kills adult commitment. We cannot avoid the uncertainty inherent in negotiating our changing relationships. In marriage each must permit the other his or her journeys in the dark, the times when there are no words to explain "what's going on." Each must learn to wait for the outcome to become clear. Jesuit life, on level after level, makes the same demand. Our commitment to learning involves long periods of confusion before we achieve genuine understanding. In the journey of faith, we must permit ourselves the mysterious dark times when what stirs within us remains inarticulate. Our close friendships call for the same reverence for dark times that marriage does. Finally, the inculturation we have been called to by Father Arrupe and the recent General Congregations cannot happen unless we are willing to spend time with another culture in the vulnerable darkness of a newcomer. For Jesuits, as for everyone else, such darkness is essential to the human rhythm of life. A culture dishonors it to its peril.

More could be said about adult commitment and our technological style. Telephones, radio and television, and computerization in

particular create societal forces whose complexity demands detailed analysis. The preceding pages only scratch the surface of this kind of technological contemplation. Even in this short essay, however, we must consider one final piece of the technology-commitment puzzle. America's technological style, with all its strengths and weaknesses, appears to have entered a stage of crisis in the recent past. In this final section I will explain what leads me to this conclusion and, more important, how the particular quality of the crisis influences young people as they face adult commitment.

PART III. SINCE WORLD WAR II: COMMITMENT AND HOPE

In trying to understand America's technological style and its relationship to commitment, I have been struck by four related observations. First, the surge in American divorces and the parallel decline in religious vocations occurs at the same time, the late 1960 and early 1970s, that America's technological style appears to enter a stage of crisis. Second, my experience with young adults facing commitment strongly suggests that they experience the call to commitment, at a very deep level, as the grace of hope in the midst of despair. Third, both their hope and their despair simultaneously involve them on the levels of personal identity and global citizenry. And fourth, World War II seems to signal the beginning of several powerful social transformations that would lead not only to America's technological crisis, but also to the global and personal character of hope and despair experienced by young adults today.

The war set in motion a series of events--technological, economic, political and symbolic--that created a global consciousness that is new for Americans and, indeed, for the human race. At the same time, the war brought together the various elements of America's technological ideal of standardization and precision, amplifying their strength catalytically so that their tendency to erode our capacity for adult commitment reached crisis proportions.

Then too, the momentum achieved by these events has recently begun to show Americans that their extraordinarily successful technological style is in crisis. The war was not the sole cause of the current crisis of technological style nor of the related crisis of adult commitment. Nevertheless, its impact on America, as symbol and as catalyst for change, should not be ignored as we try to understand our present situation.

Six phenomena

Let us consider six phenomena: (1) World War II itself; (2) the constantly expanding array of nuclear weapons; (3) the exploration of space; (4) the worldwide communications network; (5) recent evidence that our technical systems begin to put pressure on global ecological resources; and (6) unmistakable signs that we are no longer "number one" militarily or economically.

World War II was fought in every major area of the world except, perhaps, Latin America. Most Americans knew friends or kin who risked their lives in exotic places like Burma, Guadalcanal, Tunisia and Sicily. Concern for them forced our national attention past continental boundaries. We began--it was a revolution for a rather insular America--not simply to look back to the homelands of our immigrant ancestors, but to look out at the wide world. Our consciousness was changing and, distracted by the pressures of a terrible war, we hardly noticed.

The war sowed the seeds of technological ambivalence by revealing technical excellence as a form of the demonic. Germany, heretofore the world's leader in many areas of engineering and science, shocked the world with its death camps. Technically they were very efficient; one cannot kill millions of people without sophisticated engineering. But the death camps pale in comparison with the extraordinary technological achievement of the atomic bomb. Images of these two technologies remain with us, compelling signs of an ambivalent era. The bomb may be our most powerful postwar symbol. This new weapon can destroy the planet and not

just one city; it forces us to imagine our whole frame of reference exploding.³¹ Space travel reinforces the shift from local to global consciousness. Exquisite photos called attention, as nothing previous could, to the beauty of the earth as a single planet and a small one at that.

World War I has been called "the chemists' war." In World War II, aircraft and electronics designers dominated the technical arena. Since that war, world communications networks (air travel, telephone, radio-television-satellite and computer) have created an economic and political world order woven together in a web of mutual causalities. Two hundred years ago one might hear of famine in Africa and grieve while realizing that one had nothing to do with the tragedy. Today's troubles, in Ethiopia or Guatemala, press upon us partly because, in an era of multinational corporations, jet transport and nearly instantaneous communication, our economy and polity directly affect theirs. But even if we wanted to ignore those links, the radio-television network forces us to pay attention. Each day, news programs broadcast a bewildering array of world events into the privacy of our homes.³²

Increasing international awareness of natural-resource limits--such as water shortages, deforestation and toxic pollution--begins to make us see technological expansion as an ecological problem of planetary rather than local or even national dimensions.

Finally, Americans have recently begun to realize that we may no longer be "number one" economically or militarily. We find this particularly unsettling because America had emerged from World War

³¹ J. Robert Lifton is the foremost scholar writing about the psychic effects of living in the nuclear age. See *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case Against Nuclearism*, with Robert Falk (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

³² For an analysis of the psychological impact of broadcast news on our experience of world events, see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., Elisabeth Sifton Books, 1985), chapter 7, and Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*, passim and especially chapter 14.

II as the undisputed world power on both reckonings. The atomic bomb, together with our sophisticated long-range bomber fleet and electronic information network, gave us trump cards to play as we confronted the new Soviet adversary. Ours was the only industrial plant left standing after war's ravages. We saw ourselves, too, as the planet's benefactors. At great national sacrifice we had defeated two enemies whom we saw to be demonic and, in the process, saved the world for democracy. A return to domestic abundance enhanced the heady excitement of war's end. After fifteen years of abstinence inflicted on them by the Depression and the War, Americans could again buy new homes, automobiles and household appliances. Consumerist hunger for these goods fostered an economic boom of unparalleled proportions.

Gradually, however, our circumstances have changed. Russia, motivated in part by its traditional paranoia, has achieved rough military parity. New industrial centers, Japan being the most noteworthy, have risen from the war's ruins to challenge our technological supremacy in area after area. We are shocked to learn that American "know-how" no longer leads the world.

A small, troubled world

The cumulative effect of these six phenomena is unsettling, revealing as it does a nation in technological crisis and a troubled world suddenly grown very small. Throughout our history and almost without our noticing it, America's technological success depended on the nation's splendid isolation. Our technological style emerged in a massive land so extraordinarily endowed with natural resources and so empty of any history deemed worthy of notice that we assumed unlimited expansion as a national birthright. But the very expansion of those systems that now unite the planet, together with our technological style's erosion of the will to negotiate, has finally caught up with us. Americans must learn to negotiate with one another, with the natural environment and with our neighbors on this planet. We cannot foresee the outcome and that frightens us.

The uncertainty of our times has many causes, among them the crisis of our once successful technological style that today requires substantial restructuring. Then too, standardization has gradually influenced our personal sense of identity and our capacity for communal life, sowing seeds of doubt about our capacity for adult commitment. Finally, the Second World War transformed the national self-image from prewar isolation to that of the dominant world power even as its communication and transportation breakthroughs set in motion a new world order which would soon challenge that supremacy. Like it or not, we have become citizens of the wide world, a world whose political, economic and social pressures often seem to overwhelm us with their intractable complexity.

Despair, hope and adult commitment

How might we interpret these signs of the times? Taken together, it seems to me, they invite us to live in hope just as much as they tempt us to despair. Because our world has grown so much closer together, we are called to a hope at once personal and global in its scope. For us members of the Church, the signs of our times reveal, as in no previous era of history, the extraordinary daring of Jesus' invitation to "go out into the whole world and bring the good news to all creation."³³

Many young people who seek religious life today come because they have been inspired by the nobility of Jesus' call to work for

³³ Mark 16:16. In his interpretation of Vatican II, Karl Rahner, S.J., indicates one of the challenges for a shrinking world. He argues that the Council inaugurated the third major epoch of the Church. Jewish Christianity (first epoch) opened out into the Church of "Hellenism and of European culture and civilization" (second epoch). Vatican II begins "the period in which the sphere of the Church's life is in fact the entire world." Karl Rahner, S.J., "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (December 1979): 721.

Rahner does not discuss the post-World War II context of the Council. I suggest here that the cumulative effect of Western technological style in the past century should not be viewed, despite its frightening dimensions, as if it falls outside the workings of the Holy Spirit. From this perspective Vatican II might be understood as an early sign of the Holy Spirit working in us toward the redemption of our present situation.

the healing of the whole world. But they do not come unmarked by the struggle with despair. Despair tempts us all in the form of a numb passivity that inclines us to withdraw from effective commitment and to ignore the larger challenges of our society and our world. Despair, too, explains the anxiety which these young people feel when they face adult commitment. A generation ago it may have been possible to *enter* the Society because a ghetto Catholic culture rewarded the move with high social status and to realize only later what Jesus was really calling one to. Today, however, when religious life has lost much of its social-status luster, many who consider a vocation face the stark challenges of the vowed life at the outset. "Can I make a commitment that lasts? Can I engage in the life-long intimacy of prayer and community? Can I respond to Jesus' love for the whole world in a way that makes a difference to that world?" The questions run deep indeed. I do not intend to prescribe a simple recipe for encouraging commitment. Still, let me draw some suggestions from the analysis just completed.

CONCLUSION: THREE SUGGESTIONS

(1) Pay attention to the force of technologically based imbalances.

Whether I face my responsibility as a citizen of a society in crisis or the more personal call to enter a religious community, it helps me to expect that the value imbalances of my culture will challenge the hope on which these commitments depend. It does not help to be surprised either that I am tempted to premature conformity or that I am unskilled at negotiation's inner discipline. On the other hand, I should not be surprised when cultural pressure to conform generates an inner backlash of individualism that makes communal life difficult. Finally, my temptation to avoid the mysterious intimacies of journeys in the dark can be resisted more readily when I recognize that I come by it naturally as a member of a culture that prefers clarity and certitude. The American virtue of

"precision accuracy" helps us to keep our commitments honest and self-aware, but it can also foster individualistic and seemingly endless inner scrutiny that often masquerades as intimacy even while it avoids the communal commitment on which intimacy rests.³⁴

Paying attention to the force of cultural values does more than help me live my own commitments. The more I am aware of my own temptations as one who embodies the values of his culture, the more I can support and encourage others who desire and nevertheless fear adult commitment.

(2) Respect the struggle with hope and despair.

I read somewhere that Ignatius preferred candidates who need a bridle to those who need spurs. He would not, I suspect, see a young man deeply moved by hope and tempted to despair as unsuitable for the Society. Repeatedly in the *Constitutions* and the *Exercises* he counsels attention to the inner movements.³⁵ As we help candidates and men in the early stages of Jesuit life to interpret their experience, we do well if we pay more attention to their deepening maturity about and their increased access to their hope and despair than to evidence that they can conform their behavior to Jesuit norms. This is a difficult matter. Some level of consistent appropriate behavior must be present before the attempt at religious life is possible; sheer chaos in the name of honoring the

³⁴ The development of this inner anguish is a subject demanding a study as long as the present paper. The emergence of depth psychology, in particular its role as a therapeutic response to middle-class feelings of personal inadequacy in the late nineteenth century and its use in designing twentieth-century consumerist advertising, can hardly be overestimated as a social force in America. See, in particular, T. J. Jackson Lears's remarkable study *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). For a shorter treatment see Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in Lears and R. W. Fox, eds., *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

³⁵ See, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, tr. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola U. Press, 1951), paragraphs [6]-[10].

inner journey does not work. But if we do not allow time for the vulnerability and confusion of the inner journey, we run the risk of driving vital and gifted men from our midst or of encouraging premature conformity. Such a short cut can lead to a life of sterile rigidity or postpone the encounter with hope and despair until it erupts in later life. Neither outcome represents the Jesuit charism. Ignatius wisely insisted on repeated experiments at the outset of Jesuit life aimed at evoking and testing the inner movements of the man seeking life in the Society.³⁶

(3) Honor storytelling and make time for it.

Storytelling is not a form of entertainment that radio and television have rendered obsolete. When we set aside time to tell each other the details of our life, our good and bad news, we embody the profound and simple hope that intimacy stands at the heart of life and commitment. Jesuit tradition enshrines two forms of storytelling as the heart of our spirituality. In the manifestation of conscience we reveal our graces and temptations to the superior so that together we can decide how best to proceed. In spiritual conversation--with a spiritual director or with others in the community--we entrust ourselves to one another on a more intimate level than idle conversation about the news, sports or weather.

In the fast-paced life of a culture that honors performance more than the ambiguous inner journey, we might prefer to avoid the vulnerability of storytelling because it recalls the painful uncertainties most of us know deep within ourselves. We might excuse the avoidance because the structures of our life do not leave time or place for it. We have, for example, drifted into using television as a passive replacement for common recreation. In this, we replicate contemporary American social life. Television and other

³⁶ See, in particular, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, Translated with an Introduction and a Commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), "The General Examen and Its Declarations," chapter 3, [13 and 14], p. 91, and chapter 4, passim but especially [34 and 35], pp. 103-104.,

electronic systems such as the Walkman and the discotheque create entertainment patterns that preclude the possibility of conversation. "Is my story worth your attention? Do the events of my life, my successes and failures, my joys and griefs, matter to you?" These questions haunt Americans, particularly those who lived their formative years with a television baby sitter. Infants learn early that what they have to say does not matter to those who perform on screen.

We cannot expect that we will be good at storytelling simply because our Jesuit tradition calls us to it. Nor can we expect it of those who choose to join us. To recover the art we will have to risk being countercultural. The suggestion of fasting from electricity may be more than a heuristic device aimed at revealing our addiction to that technology. One night a week dedicated to staying home and telling one another our stories--a practice that many Jesuits have begun through the structure of small support groups--might transform our communal lives. It would help heal the temptation to show only our strengths while hiding the ambiguous and vulnerable core of our humanity. Jesuits need not fear that vulnerability will somehow sap our strength. The call to courage and creativity resonates through the *Exercises* and our entire tradition. But true strength flows from the tenderness of intimacy, whether in prayers, spiritual direction or communal life.

Could it be, then, that the complex relationship between America's technological style and the crisis of commitment comes down to the challenge of intimacy? I think so. As citizens of our culture, we will contribute to the renegotiation of our technical priorities if we are willing to become intimate with the virtues and liabilities of our present technological style. As mature adults, we will embrace our commitments if we are willing to balance conformity with negotiation and the clarity of light with the mystery of the dark. Finally, as Jesuits, we will respond to the call of Christ if we risk intimacy with our world, our brother Jesuits and our inner

journey of faith. In the process, we have good reason to hope that others will continue to be called to join us and that we will have the inner resources to welcome them.

Whoever wishes to join me in this enterprise must be willing to labor with me, that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory.³⁷

³⁷ *Spiritual Exercises*, "The Kingdom of Christ," [95].

APPENDIX 1

NUMBER OF ENTERING JESUIT NOVICES: 1969-1985

YEAR	NUMBER	YEAR	NUMBER
1969	119	1978	112
1970	76	1979	92
1971	87	1980	96
1972	93	1981	99
1973	95	1982	79
1974	133	1983	111
1975	127	1984	86
1976	149	1895	65
1977	131		

Source: National Jesuit News, November 1985.

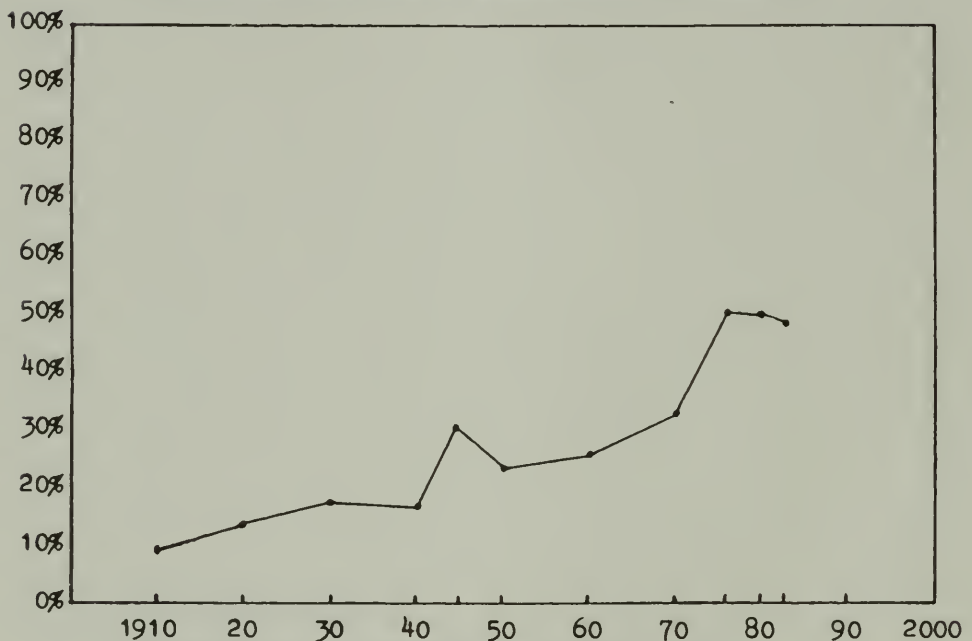
APPENDIX 2

TRENDS IN ADULT COMMITMENT

Divorces as percent of marriages: 1910-1983
(in thousands)

YEAR	MARRIAGES	DIVORCES	%	YEAR	MARRIAGES	DIVORCES	%
1910	948	83	8.8	1971	2190	773	35.3
1915	1008	104	10.3	1973	2284	915	40.1
1920	1274	171	13.4	1974	2230	977	43.8
1930	1187	196	17.3	1975	2153	1036	48.1
1940	1596	264	16.5	1976	2155	1083	50.3
1945	1613	485	30.0	1977	2178	1091	50.1
1950	1667	385	23.0	1978	2282	1130	49.5
1955	1531	377	24.6	1979	2331	1181	50.7
1960	1523	393	25.8	1980	2390	1189	49.8
1965	1800	479	26.6	1981	2422	1213	50.1
1970	2163	708	32.7	1982	2495	1179	48.2

DIVORCES AS PERCENTAGE OF MARRIAGES: 1910-1983



Source: *Statistical Abstracts of the U.S.*, 1985 [57,82]; *Historical Statistics of the U.S.: Colonial Times to 1970* [49,64].

Single-Person and Family Households
as Percent of All Households: 1950-1984

YEAR	ALL HOUSEHOLDS	1 PERSON UNITS	%	FAMILY HOUSE- HOLDS	%
1950	43554	3954	9.1	38838	89.2
1960	52799	6896	13.1	44905	85.0
1970	63401	10851	17.1	51465	81.2
1975	71120	13939	19.6	55583	78.1
1980	80776	18296	22.7	59550	73.7
1982	83527	19354	23.2	61019	73.1
1984	85407	19954	23.4	81997	78.6

Source: *Statistical Abstracts of the U.S.*, 1985 [40]

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