

The Communitarian Ideal in a Rapidly Changing Political Context

FRANKLIN H. LITTELL

RECENTLY, a general euphoria has spread throughout that part of the world which likes to call itself "free," an upbeat spirit that even the ambiguous climax and anti-climax of the Gulf War has not extinguished. This euphoria, which reflects the general enthusiasm of the peoples of Eastern Europe, arises from the explosion of the Stalinist Empire. At present, it is still uncertain whether this explosion will result in extensive disintegration, with a large number of new mini-states—in the Baltic, in the former Yugoslavia, and within the former Soviet Union itself.

Explosion and Implosion

The popular media in the West concentrated—day after day, week after week, and month after month—upon the rising or sinking fortunes of Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel, Mikhael Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. Few in the West seem to have noted that the *explosion* that leaves uncertain the future of one of the two former confrontational world powers has been matched by an *implosion* that at the same time has rendered the economic and political future of the other former world power highly problematical.

Less highly visible, with attention diverted from it by the surface success of the hit-and-run Gulf War, the consequences of that inward collapse are now rising up on the horizon. Quite simply, the United States and its allies broke the power of the Soviet Communist empire by pushing an arms race that drove the USSR into economic and

Franklin H. Littell is emeritus professor of religion at Temple University and the 1993-94 Charles Foster Cherry Distinguished Teaching Professor at Baylor University. This article was originally presented at the third triennial conference of the International Communal Studies Association, Elizabethtown, Pa., July 25-28, 1991.

political disintegration. Crudely speaking, the American empire had more fat to burn.

In its structural *explosion*, the Soviet dictatorship has exposed its ideological bankruptcy. This is common knowledge. But the American empire's collapse inward—its *implosion*—has also created a credibility crisis, a breakdown of confidence that mouthing the shibboleth of "de-regulation" of the economic engine cannot cure. Neither can trailing a runaway profit motive with an ambulance and a wrecker called "welfare safety net" restore public confidence. The politicians may still talk about "the individual enterprise economy," but the corporations live on the tax-payers—through government contracts with over-runs, through a dollar weakened to facilitate exports, and through huge allocations of "foreign aid" spent at home.

One of the supreme ironies of the present crisis is the fact that to work their way out of an economic dead-end, the fragments of the former communist superpower are turning with naive enthusiasm to a panacea called *Marktwirtschaft*, while the former capitalist empire is trying to resuscitate its dying corporations by massive infusions of government aid.

Positioned for a dash, we Americans were determined to have it all—unlimited consumer goods *and* unsurpassed armaments. No country in history, however, has so over-extended itself, so mortgaged future generations to pay for its excesses, without eventually repudiating its currency and compelling the common folk to start all over again to build up the common wealth. The warning that a vast armaments industry brings deprivation, suffering and disorientation to a society, even without direct military engagement, speaks to our condition.

It is not simply the S & L scam that has opened a yawning hole in the bottom of the American national treasury: we are now told that at least ten per cent of the banks are in precarious condition. While those who steered us into this calamitous shipwreck are floating down with golden parachutes, several million people going into retirement have already discovered that their life savings have evaporated—or, to speak bluntly, have been stolen. But scanning this landscape is a reminder of a serious sin against which the intentional communities have always raised warning: common, vulgar, wicked greed.

Neither is there time to mourn the ecological catastrophes of Love Canal and Prince William Sound, Long Island Sound and the Arthur Kill; the Bug and the Volga and the Dnieper, Lake Baikal and the mighty Lena—all of them sacrifices to a reckless industrialization that

put military dominance above peace-making, as well as envy and avarice above the common good.

Both of the two great confrontational powers of a generation ago are—each in its own way—in a state of radical change, and it does not yet appear what they shall be.

The Weakness of the Gradualist Model

Those who would lightly heal the hurt, who protest in the name of harmony when there is no harmony, may argue that mankind moves forward in spite of setbacks. The concept of slow but steady change for the better, imperceptible for generations, may be acceptable in the study of plants and insects. In the moments of decision in human history, the dogma of inevitable progress which seeks justification in the evolutionary hypothesis is morally unacceptable as well as intellectually disreputable.

One does not have to be a disciple of Velikhovsky to be convinced that the evolutionary model is inadequate when applied to crucial transitions in human history. In the last decade, massive and unpredictable events have moved to the center of the story, both in the Book of History and in the Book of Nature.

In times past, the communitarian ideal has been powerfully impelled by both moral revulsion against the evils of the dying age and by the determination that those yet unborn shall be less victimized by greed and violence. It would be odd indeed if the collapse of the two world powers that have dominated the scene during our lifetime did not result in a great new surge of intentional communities, as well as a major boost to already working models.

Certainly, the global crisis puts before all persons of live minds and alert consciences the command to confront again the questions of life's meaning, of social existence, and to get behind the facades to fundamental realities.

The Dialectic of Withdrawal and Return

To point to the dialectic of "withdrawal and return" gives a direction to the path before us. We reject the seductive appeal of the narcissism and hedonism with which many are seeking comfort for their melancholy. We also reject the often heard attack that communitarians are "sectarians," interested only in their own salvation. They may build an Ark, to be sure, but the purpose is that life on the planet may be saved.

The testimony of outside observers is as clear as the claims of communitarians themselves. Students of intentional communities/ Utopian associations/ Christian restorationist colonies have been fascinated equally by their internal order and by their contributions to society at large. They write that such communities of disciplined life and fellowship have made many useful contributions to the general society, some of them accidental by-products of the communities' own fundamental commitments and ultimate goals and some of them intentionally recommended to everyone in the here and now.

The kibbutzim virtually laid the foundations for their country, and in them we see the dynamics of such interaction clearly set forth. They have not only provided a significant life-style for their membership: with less than 4% of the population of Israel, they have contributed approximately 25% of the public leadership.

Here in America we can quickly recall the internal and external benefits of honest craftsmanship at Oneida, steel traps for the fur trade; at Economy, wagons for those westering on the National Trail; at Amana, good woollens and sound furniture for homesteaders. We remember, too, the permanent impact of Shaker style upon modern furniture as well as the present solid—and non-faddish—educational value of the Bruderhof "Community Playthings."

Quality products have been developed and sold, strengthening a community's economic base, on occasion sustaining a remarkable level of communal prosperity. But frequently there is a conflict of internal standards with the "values" of the society at large.

Years ago I met a homespun tinkerer in a Hutterite colony in Montana. He had invented a fine little machine to process and cut noodles and made several that were in use in sister communities. I asked him why he didn't organize a team and turn them out in quantity, selling them in the society at large. He said that the sale of wheat supplied their needs, and besides he wouldn't patent something: "We don't believe in private property." This was an unusual case, where a basic tenet of the faith conflicted with the challenge to provide outsiders with a useful, efficient, labor-saving, profitable artifact.

Generally, however, from earlier centuries when peripatetic missionaries from the monasteries carried selective breeding and straight-furrow plowing and planting out into the world, most communal movements have—in the dialectic of withdrawal and return—willingly, even eagerly, worked to better conditions in the society at large. In the present crisis, social inventions as well as artifacts need to be developed in the communal gardens and then seeded into larger social fields.

In the collapse of totalitarian communism and corporate capitalism, old/new models of order and discipline are desperately needed to replace the systems and structures that have lost their credibility. The communitarian social models of conflict resolution and self-governance can be as timely as the old and new inventions and products.

Intentional Communities and General Social Structures

Let me shift from the micro to the macro, to the problems in the social jungles that are spreading and that threaten to over-run our "gardens in the wilderness." In the advanced societies, highly sophisticated vocational and professional specializations have created new associational structures. These sub-political associations have burst the bonds of clan and neighborhood,¹ and they represent another level of social cohesion—of "community" in the broad sense.

Neither consanguinity nor propinquity protects urban dwellers when specialists and technicians turn predatory. Only the self-discipline of vocational and professional guilds, with high standards of education and self-respect, can save us. That self-discipline is not automatic. As the prostitution of the professions in the Third Reich demonstrated,² trade schools and professional colleges can train technicians for exploitation as well as service.

Western society's need for primary societies—societies that produce high quality persons of formation and discipline—has become desperate. This was a crisis of modernity even before the collapse and disintegration of the Russian and American empires. If the dialectic of withdrawal and return is to be meaningful, the virtuous habits of honest work, truthfulness and fair dealing which are cultivated in the intentional community must be plowed as leaven into the society at large. The appalling discrepancies between man's behavior at *Gemeinschaft-level* and his conduct at *Gesellschaft-level*³ must again be reduced to manageable proportions.

1. Franklin H. Littell "Democratic Discipline and Professional Responsibility," in C. Scott Fletcher, *Education: The Challenge Ahead* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1962), pp. 122-34, 132-33.

2. There has been a flood of articles and books on this topic in recent years, with excellent books on medical, legal, business and other professional groups' participation in "the treason of the intellectuals," but the classic remains Max Weinrich's *Hitler's Professors* (New York: YIVO, 1946).

3. The general reference is to the discussion initiated by Ferdinand Tönnies in his classic, translated as *Community and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Reinhold Niebuhr gave a special spin to the problematic in his famous *Moral Man and Immoral*

What kind of person, developed as a communitarian, does the larger society need? Clarence Jordan, founder of Koinonia Farm, set forth the following humanizing principles that a vital community must emphasize in the formation of persons: 1) the primacy of compassion, over the machine; 2) liberation from materialism; 3) wholeness of the person and the social unit, against alienation; 4) the claims of the common good, above individualism.⁴ We shall return later to the function of vocational and professional covenant groups, after setting forth the theoretical and historical case for a new birth of confidence among communitarians and a new surge of volunteers and vocations in the movement.

Even when not perfectly lived out in practice, the view of most intentional communities has implied a pattern of withdrawal and return, a dialectic of gathering and scattering, a creative tension between counter-culture and the larger social matrix.

There is a growing agreement that the present crisis, so obvious in its political and economic phases, has a deep ideological or spiritual dimension. In Russia they speak of the collapse of ideology. In America the familiar phrase has become "the naked public square."⁵ In both cases, the myths of identity, the "root metaphors" of the self-definition of a people, have been lost.

A Christian Portrayal of the Contemporary Spiritual Crisis

In Christian history, the Utopian impulse has been paralleled—and sometimes directly influenced—by the thrust called "restorationism." From time to time, especially since the Radical Reformation of the 16th century, there have been little groups gathered as "house churches" or "base communities," endeavoring to recapture the spirit and purposeful life style ascribed to the Church at Jerusalem. They projected the Golden Age of Christianity, before the suffering brethren of the primordium became the persecuting establishment of the Emperor Constantine and his successors, into the future. The Anabaptist program to prepare the way for the millenium was *restitutio ecclesiae*.

Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932). RN never developed, however, a concept of the role of associations intermediate between the State and the individual.

4. Based on notes in my Journal.

5. The phrase is lifted from the title of a book by Richard J. Neuhaus, published by Wm. B. Eerdmans in 1984.

The Anabaptist vision is alive today in many places. In Eastern Europe. Gyeorgy Bulanyi (b. 1919), who was disowned by the Roman Catholic Church and imprisoned for life by a Communist government, is now free to proclaim his vision of a community that nurses the seeds of human redemption. The alternative society he has projected, upon which small groups are re-emerging in Hungary, is called the "Bush" movement. (The reference is to Moshe, not George.)

The Hungarian "Bush" movement united upon six principles:

1. *Metanoia*—change of attitude, "to regard all people as our fellow human beings."
2. *Pandouleia*—with rejection of domination over others, "to serve everyone without exception."
3. *Pandorea*—"give everything" to those in need.
4. *Echthrophilia*—"love of one's enemy," translated into personal and social unilateral disarmament.
5. *Pankarussia*—proclaiming the Gospel by *all* disciples, since no followers of Jesus are bystanders.
6. *Kahal*—the small "base community," only as many as can sit around one table, within which disciples are taught and from which they go forth to gather another Twelve⁶.

For many centuries radical Christians have maintained that the only model for the True Church (*die rechte Kirche*) is that of the New Testament and Early period, and that the great establishments, with their devotion to ambition and materialism, their coercion and violence against "Jews and heretics," have little or nothing to do with the faith that converts and transforms.

These radical Christians were often accused—as they are accused today by the defenders of the establishments—of sectarian withdrawal from concern for the problems of the age. It is true that in the latter times some have settled down, social fossils paralleling the assimilated religions in their loss of eschatology. But in their high tide of faith, except where they were set in the survival mode, withdrawing simply to escape annihilation by their persecutors, the charge is false.

In early America, this was the kind of Protestantism that prepared the way for the Republic. The Town Meeting followed on the church meeting. The political covenant came on the heels of the congregational covenant. The ancient pattern of servile religion, in

6. Gyeorgy Bulanyi, "God Does Not Lord It Over Us," *The Plough* (February/March, 1991) 28, pp. 18-20.

which the theologians and ecclesiastics—like the generals, teachers, tax-collectors, and judges—tended the control mechanisms of the rulers, gave place to small, voluntary religious communities within which everyone shared the priestly responsibilities and the pastoral burdens.

Often the nature of the bond was signaled by restricting baptism to those making an adult decision and by limiting participation in the Lord's Supper to those ready to be ground up in the bread of persecution and poured forth in the blood of martyrdom.

It is true that many of the American Free Churches have across the decades accumulated through social acceptance and assimilation most of the problems that burden the legally established churches of European Christendom.⁷ But even among such "sleeping Christians," the vision of a better way does not die, and it warms up and bursts into flame today where the simple Gospel inspires and forms new men and new women.

"Sectarian" Protestantism?

Because this return to primal, unspoiled Christianity has often involved a break from "dehydrated" religious institutions and deadly culture-religion, the new religious movements (NRMs) are charged—even by supposedly "objective" scholars—with "sectarian" behavior.⁸ Levied against them is the charge that they "come out," that they separate themselves from the prevailing "spiritual" counselors and customs.⁹ Younger scholars, directed to a serious misreading and misuse of the church/sect typologies articulated by Alfred Hegler¹⁰ and popularized by Ernst Troeltsch, have written several dozen dis-

7. For an example of restorationist resignation and accommodation to general social perspectives, see Richard T. Hughes "From Primitive Church to Civil Religion: The Millennial Odyssey of Alexander Campbell," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLIV (1976) 1, pp. 87-104.

8. Until the Latin Church discovered a way to affiliate the protest movements with the Roman bishop, those who "came out" were persecuted as "heretics." Adolf Harnack, *Monasticism* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1901): "They fled not from worldliness only, but from worldliness in the Church." (p. 36) A recent discussion, with comparison of monastic communities with other Christian communitarian ventures, is by Thomas P. Rausch, *Radical Christian Communities* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).

9. In the words of Roger Williams, "abstract your Selfe with a holy violence from the Dung heape of this Earth;" quoted on page 57 of C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988).

10. Alfred Hegler, *Geist und Schrift bei Sebastian Franck* (Freiburg/Br: J.C.B. Mohr, 1892).

sertations purporting to show how some living "sect" or other has grown up to be a successful "church".¹¹

In the process of misapplying Troeltsch to satisfy their mentors (a scholarly error), the young idealists are often personally weaned away from commitment to or even sympathy with counter-culture programs. Those who are content with things as they are throw the words "sect" and "sectarian" against those who shake the foundations of the old order. The whole approach is specious, and because it has been canonized in so many graduate schools it deserves a few words of blunt repudiation.

In the first place, Troeltsch himself warned that the church/sect typology, which he mistakenly thought could be rendered non-pejorative, did not apply to the Anglo-Saxon religious scene at all. And he also said it did not work even in German church history after the Enlightenment. In the second place, a misuse of Troeltsch that blackens the Early Church as a "sect" and salutes the Constantinian alliance of throne and altar as "church" should be a priori suspect. In the third place, only under savage persecution and in adjustment to survival strategies have the intentional communities of the Radical Reformation lost sight of their purpose to be demonstrations—what today are called "pilot projects" or "working models"—toward a healing of the whole society. It is simply untrue that radical Christians were at the time of the breakup of the medieval monolith, or are in the present collapse of the age of political, economic and religious colonialism, indifferent to the needs of mankind at large.

The radical Christian communities do not let themselves be used, to be sure, by those whose basic commitment is to *stasis*. But the Anabaptists of the 16th century had already raised the eschatological banner of the restoration of all things (*Acts* 3:21), the *apokatastasis* of the Apostolic Writings. The *Tikkun* which we hear often today from Jewish colleagues is the same "mending of the world" that the Free Church fathers proclaimed, toward which the restoration of Christian community, "pure and undefiled" was to be the bridge.

In the Anabaptist vision, the "restitution of the True Church" was to be a preliminary to "the restoration of all things." As things developed, the persecuting state-churches of both Roman Catholic and Protestant "Christendom" put to death over 5,000 leaders of the

11. For example, see Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974), the opening sentence to the Introduction by William G McLoughlin: "This is a simple yet classic story of a well-known syndrome in religious history: the evolution of a sect into a church." (p. xvii).

peaceful wing of the radical movement, and most of those who escaped fire, water, and the sword concentrated on survival techniques rather than methods of evangelism.

Many surviving communities of radical Christian origin have, it is true, apparently lost their excitement about future history. For example, the Hutterites—today dotting the Great Plains of the USA and Canada with remote Christian communist colonies—were for several generations, before a savage persecution by Roman Catholic and state-church Protestant authorities almost wiped them out, the most vigorous Christian missionary movement of the 16th century. They were not social fossils until bloody persecution and the struggle for survival cut off their outreach. A parallel criticism can be directed at the legal or social religious establishments of "Christendom"—that they have become passive imprints of more dynamic popular movements, and have abandoned "separation" and internal discipline for the sake of political and social acceptance.

Most important of all, to identify contemporary Christianity in America with *either* the church type *or* the sect type is a total misreading of the religious crisis. As a recent Gallup study¹² clearly shows, generic Christianity in the United States has neither the sacramental order of the "church" nor the discipline of the "sect." It belongs, in truth, to Troeltsch's little-discussed "third type" of "spiritual religion".¹³

Like the adolescent who is "in love with love," the average American is in favor of "spirituality." But to be in love with love and to love or be loved are different things. To have a religion is not a third person verb form either. The shapeless body of most American religion calls, for its cure and formation, the rejection of civil religion (*Kulturreligion*), however high-minded. The specific pattern of recovered health calls for implementation of the dialectic of renewal and return, of gathering into disciplined voluntary cells of creativeness which creatively interact with the commonwealth at large.¹⁴

The Foundation of Renewal: Simplify

The Roman Catholic establishment has claimed a line of episcopal "apostolic succession" from Peter. The Protestant established

12. *National & International Religion Report V* (May 20, 1991) 11, p. 1.

13. Ernst Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften, I: Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1919), I, p. 425 (fn. 197).

14. See Franklin H. Littell, "Thoughts on the Church, for Brethren," *Brethren Life and Thought VIII* (1963) 2, pp. 4-12.

churches claimed an "apostolic succession" of preaching from Paul. The 16th century radicals defined "apostolicity" in a different way, as "true to Jesus and the Apostles."

"Apostolic succession" cannot be disproved as a "root metaphor," although historians have demonstrated its lack of factual basis. "Restoration" cannot be proven by facts but only demonstrated by living it out. In a time of radical dislocation, the theme of discontinuity speaks to the Christian condition far better than the metaphors that arise from assimilation, indigenization, and gradual change.

"*Ad Fontes!*"—"back to the sources"—the familiar appeal of the Radical Reformation, also implied "Back to the Basics." The line of march toward the millennium was indicated by the basic signs of the primordium: purity and simplicity.

The message of complacency, of satisfaction with the great progress civilized man ascribes to himself, predicates an historical line of continuity and gradual change. According to the conventional view put forward by the Christian establishments, the Christian religion has flowed forth like a river, gathering depth and breadth in its course to the present. According to radical Christianity, the river has picked up so much effluvium, silt and excrement that the only alternative is to go back to the pure, crystal spring at the beginnings.

Religious primitivism was often accompanied by technological and/or cultural primitivism.¹⁵ Being close to Nature meant to eschew the violence of Vulcan. The example of the Amish Mennonites, who reject the machines that rip and tear mother earth and prefer the animals that fertilize the soil, may not be a model to which all can defer; but it is assuredly a universal reminder of the dangers in unrestrained technology.¹⁶

In Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* there is an exchange between the Scientist (*Wissenschaftler*), in this case a musicologist, and his purported biographer, Dr. Zeitbjom:

'Do you consider love the strongest emotion?' he asked.
'Do you know a stronger?'
'Yes. Curiosity.'

15. Arthur O. Lovejoy, et al., *A Documentary History of Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935); see the "Prolegomenon" for the definition of chronological primitivism, cultural primitivism and technological primitivism. This typology was first applied to Christian groups in my *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Hartford & Philadelphia: American Society of Church History, 1952).

16. See John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 3rd edition, chapter 6, "Agriculture and Subsistence"; Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 200ff, on urbanization and its effects.

'By which you presumably mean a love from which the animal warmth has been withdrawn.'¹⁷

The Scientist laughed and said he would accept the definition. The modern university of Mengele and Freisler and their hundreds of educated accomplices—the university of unrestrained technology—is an engine to turn out products from which all "animal warmth" has been removed.

On the religious front in the 17th century, the radical Puritans who reacted against the materialism and bureaucracy of the Great Church and the "steeple-houses" believed that the stream of Christian history had been polluted by the addition of un-biblical teachings and traditions.¹⁸ The churches of European Christendom had taken over from the world the love of display, the arrogance of place, the coercive arbitrament and violent settlements, the duplicity and double-dealing that stained public life. In the New World, the garden in the wilderness, a restitution of the ancient order of Bible religion was pledged.¹⁹

On the political front, the constant reference to the "state of Nature" in the writings of the Founding Fathers and in such primary sources as the debates of the conventions that ratified the Constitution was "ante civilization, ante ecclesiasticism, ante monarchies and dignities and privileges and pomp." The pursuit of the origins led the fathers back to the created order itself. The "new order of the ages" (*Novus Ordo Seclorum*) was in their eyes the ancient, unspoiled order in which "soul liberty" and human rights were "natural" and not invented.

17. Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1948), p. 69. I prefer the translation "curiosity" to the rather bland "interest." When the Judgment comes, the words are these: "Love is forbidden you, in so far as it warms. Thy life shall be cold, therefore thou shalt love no human being . . ." (p. 249).

18. As is well known, the Great Seal of the first American university is inscribed in both Hebrew and Greek. The connection is not alone to the Christian Bible. Among the Puritans—including Oliver Cromwell, Roger Williams and William Penn—there was considerable speculation about the possibility the Indians were the Lost Tribes of Israel. A society was founded in England for the study and mystical interpretation of the Hebrew language, which was saluted as "the inspired, natural language, catholic before the corruption of the human race." Antonio Pastor, *The Idea of Robinson Crusoe* (Watford/Herts: Gongora Press, 1930), pp. 197-98.

19. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: the Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 9: "a stress upon the moral transformation, performance, and purity of individuals and their communities. In this category a variety of logically connected themes find their natural place: divine will and rule, the biblical presentation of moral and judicial law, covenant, worldly asceticism, church discipline, and work."

The inalienable rights . . . are not the gift or attainment of some future utopia, some New Jerusalem. They are, rather, inherent in God's original creation. Not granted by government, these rights can never be withdrawn by government. Not won through centuries of civilization, they are not lost by revolution, schism, regicide, or war. These rights cannot be alienated simply because they are original, primitive, given, belonging to man in his natural estate. If these rights are in fact not recognized, a restoration—if need be through revolution—is required. . . . The best government is the least complex, the least contrived.²⁰

Man's spiritual sickness and his political ills were to be healed by reference to the lessons of the Book of Nature. The first lesson was, "Simplify!"

The cultural impact of this primitivist thrust was as far-reaching as the religious and political effects. The radical Puritans were inclined to believe that civilized man's melancholy woes could be sloughed off by a return to the "natural," the unspoiled, the simple life of some bucolic Brook Farm.

In this way of thinking, the court philosophers and theologians are suspect. Some groups thought excessive "book learning," removed from work with the hands and closeness to Nature, a very dangerous thing for the soul. In part this is to reject the scribes' obfuscation of the Simple Gospel; in part it grows out of a preference for the articulation of truth by *consensus fidelium* rather than under the monopoly of an exclusive caste.

The anti-intellectualism that sometimes takes perverse forms in some groups of the Radical Reformation has an economic and social base. In the cultural lags that characterize "Christendom" in decline, the laity often have to assert their primacy over the professional ecclesiasts and theologians, just as the ordinary voter often has to assert his primacy over those he has entrusted with the stewardship of power in political office (*Amt*).

Excursus: the Story of Robinson Crusoe, Child of Nature

The drive to return to the basic things of life, to rid the culture of its useless sophistications and confusing accretions, was driven by the same thrust as scraping from Christianity its ecclesiastical and theological barnacles.

Consider the myth of Robinson Crusoe, a myth well known in the West, especially in the 1719 presentation by Daniel Defoe. In

20. Edwin S. Gaustad, "Restitution, Revolution, and the American Dream," XLIV *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLIV (1976) 1, pp. 77-86, 81.

Robinson Crusoe we have an unlettered child of an advanced society who, cast away on a desert island, through untutored study of the world of Nature and meditation on the created order attains true wisdom. Upon his return to the cities of men, his insight and perspective confound the intellectuals of the most cultivated cultures.

What is less well known is the fact that the story, which has been traced back to the Muslim *Romance of Hayy* ("Alive, Son of Awake") of 12th century Spain, was translated from a Latin version by the Quaker George Keith, a man well-known to students of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania history. Hayy, like Crusoe later, stood for intuitive knowledge—the "Inner Light" that was present at the beginnings of the race, before the perversions of the scribes and the compromises of the professionals obscured the Truth. As the contemporary scholar of the Crusoe myth has put it,

What is even more significant, is not the discovery that savages can be noble, but that civilized people can become good savages and be regenerated by a natural life.²¹

Two Quaker merchants of London subsidized the publication of the Keith translation of the *Romance of Hayy*. They knew that Truth is accessible to ordinary laymen who serve God with the tools of their trade, without the interposition of professional ecclesiastics or dogmaticians.

Excursus: the American Indians, Children of Nature

The well-known success of the Friends in dealing with the American Indians was due in good part to the fact that, like Roger Williams, also a radical Puritan, they dealt more sympathetically and honestly with them than did most Europeans. Some radical Puritans glamorized the American Indians as the "Noble Savage," the unspoiled child of Nature. Although after King Philip's War this special kind of romantic vanished in New England, it flourished for yet a few generations among the Quakers of Pennsylvania.

The Quaker sympathy was grounded in their primitivist viewpoint, including—as may readily be discerned in the writings of William Penn, Anthony Benezet, John Woolman and other Quaker leaders—a partiality toward what they saw as the simple, straightforward way of the natives. Nature's children—so they noted—were not conditioned to the double-dealing and violent ways of the whites.

21. Antonio Pastor, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-302.

They also praised the Indians' open-hearted hospitality and communal property practices, which in their view contrasted favorably with the acquisitiveness and selfishness of the masses of routinely baptized but unconverted immigrants.

When in 1756 the Friends yielded control of the Pennsylvania Assembly, they blamed the Europeans for the Indians' violence and the attacks on the settlers that made the colony's purchase and distribution of "grains" [of powder] the only popular political option.

Cultural Primitivism: Plain Speech and Simple Costume

To return to the direct cultural impact of the quest for the basics: plain speech and simple costume are other signs of the preference for the simple and natural, the unpretentious and functional, over the "conspicuous consumption" which Thorstein Veblen (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899) was later to identify as a central activity of the elite class of capitalism. Plain speech and simple costume are also important methods of "boundary-tending" for counter-cultures.

Excursus: the Mormons, People of the Oasis

The largest American intentional community of all, one that continues to display the chief characteristics of the common life that more two centuries ago disappeared in New England as that turf was lost to later arrivals—the work ethic, mutual aid, abstinence, pure living and high thinking—is growing very rapidly today. I refer to that Puritan experiment once based in the Kingdom of Deseret, but now expanded far beyond Utah across the world: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly called "Mormons."

During their early generations, the Mormons maintained their Puritan counter-culture in the face of brutal persecution. They left the United States for the territory of the Great American Desert, erecting there an oasis civilization with an intact society, economy, culture, political and religious order. That oasis has maintained itself long after most remnants of Puritan New England, both denominational and communal, have dissolved amidst the seductiveness of modern American pluralism.

The Mormons, incidentally, have also kept up front a motif that some descendants of the Radical Reformation have repressed or forgotten: the mending of the world, the restoration of all things. The LDS teachers proclaim the coming healing of the created order—the restoration which is to follow in due course upon the restitution of

the New Testament and Early Church.²² To date, the Mormons have maintained with fair success the dialectic of gathering and scattering.

Reclaiming Future History

A primary source of the theme of radical discontinuity in Western thinking was the periodization scheme introduced in the 13th century by the Abbot Joachim and his disciples. The Joachimite periodization of history, popularized in the protest of the radical Franciscans and adopted and adapted in the Radical Reformation, became an underground stream welling up in both religious and political protests. It has been appropriated by both restorationist and progressive movements, appearing subsequently in both political and religious movements.

Sometimes the ages of man and the periods of history are telescoped in such a way that both discontinuity and continuity themes are cultivated in the same community. At Oneida, for example, the "apostles and Primitive Church" were saluted as "the exponents of the everlasting Gospel" by a community that in the name of modern science practiced both birth control and "complex marriage."²³

For the 16th century spiritualizer Sebastian Franck and the 20th century Unitarian Duncan Howlett,²⁴ the "Third Age"—the "Age of the Spirit"—implied the dissolution of sectarian ecclesiastical structures. For the radical Puritan Shakers and the radical Pietist Community of True Inspiration ("Amana"), the penultimate period of salvation history was shown in the validation of new methods of interpreting and expressing religious truth. These new methods were closed to the "scribes" of the establishments but opened to the children of the Spirit, inaccessible to the learned but revealed to those for whom the angel unlocked the Book of Seven Seals.

For our purposes, the first important contribution of the Joachimite vision of history²⁵ was the demolition of the conventional view of Church history, a view in which nothing significant could happen between the Ascension and the Second Coming, a view in which

22. Richard T. Hughes, and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 137f.

23. Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), reprint of 1875 edition, pp. 259-93.

24. Duncan Howlett, *The Fourth American Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). "The fourth faith is the basic faith-mood of man which flows in his conscience like a great underground stream of water . . ." (p. 58).

25. The classical presentation of the Joachimite view of history was Ernst Benz, *Ecclesia Spiritualis* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1934).

such change as occurred was incremental, glacial in pace, imperceptible and ambiguous.

The second Joachimite contribution was proclamation of the truth that the defenders of the dying age resist change bitterly. In their view, the entrenched rulers of the Second Age, especially the Pope and other representatives of imperial and ecclesiastical privilege in Christendom, took on the face of the Antichrist in resisting the transition to the higher spiritual level. As they saw it, at every great transition in human affairs, new life is born in blood and suffering.

The third Joachimite contribution was to emphasize the spiritual wrestling, the suffering, the periods of melancholy (*Anfechtung*), the agony and anxiety (*Angst*) that the "saints" take upon themselves in fighting their way through the spiritual underbrush to the New Age. In the Radical Reformation, "saint" came to be applied to members of a faithful community rather than an individual.

As long as they kept their excited certainty about things yet to be, Christian Utopians have seldom been surprised by the hostility of the old order and its rulers. As long as their hope in future history remained strong, they have been able to overcome adversity and outlive their persecutors.

Not seldom, of course, they have had to follow the frontier to winter through periods of persecution. Mennonite, Hutterite and Mormon history are full of especially vivid illustrations of this survival strategy. Under the present guarantees of religious liberty in America, many of the early radical Christian counter-cultures have changed internally as well as in their interaction with the surrounding society. A tolerant society is more seductive than a persecuting one. Some other communitarians, ironically, also have found external toleration and internal prosperity to be far more problematical than the earlier years of persecution. But religious liberty also gives room for building new voluntary covenants, and that is the chosen path for restoration of the *Novum Ordo Seclorum* today.

A Pattern of Renewal: New Covenants

As indicated earlier in my rapid sketch of the global crisis, one of the most critical areas in our disintegrating society is the collapse of vocational ethics and professional discipline. We live in the shadow of the Holocaust, a time when all the systems failed. And now we are caught in the global impact of the explosion of the Communist empire and the implosion of the corporate capitalist empire.

The apocalyptic figures of our generation include the doctors who become killers, the lawyers who subvert justice, the religious

leaders who waffle the truth, the politicians who through avarice betray the public trust, the generals who in cowardice submit to tyrants and populist violence, the teachers who deliver the young to the idols of the season, the policemen who misuse force rather than administer it to protect the good and the helpless.

Consider the condition of the "proletariat," the working class to which radical political theorists and activists not long ago looked for the redemptive force, the carrier of history. Walter Reuther must have been the last American labor leader to take his stand that drunkenness and absenteeism are concerns of labor as well as management. Today the very existence of collective bargaining and unionism as a countervailing force is called into question, and not only by the rapid advance of technology that puts robots and electric tapes where human beings once performed. The labor movement is also threatened by a lack of vision, sense of responsibility and pride of performance among working people.

But bring it nearer home, into the sector of the professions. Most of us are products of *Akademe*. We are what the Germans call *Intellektuellen* (not so much "intellectuals" as professionals, products of college and university). We are they of whom Julien Benda 65 years ago wrote his warning essay: *La Trahison des Clercs*. The theme of the lassitude of professional ethics is gathering attention in university and adult educational circles.

A recent conference on business ethics in Germany, reviewing the record of corporations in reference to the slave labor camps of the Nazi period, and discussing frankly the sale of chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein, proposed a "Hippocratic Oath" for their own sector of the economy. The circumstances of the medical profession, dedicated in principle to the total health of a society, make it an easy source of metaphors for the whole problematic.

Take, then, the medical profession as a metaphor for us all. A recent survey of the lack of self-discipline in the medical profession can stand as representative of the status of ethics and morals in the professions generally. The medical doctors—like the Teamsters, the professors, the lawyers, the business executives—are skilled at defending their turf against outsiders. But they have grown remarkably careless in maintaining the internal ethics and professional self-discipline that is the free society's alternative to government control.

When an appalling breach of professional ethics occurs, as in the case of Dr. Dr Josef Mengele and his associates at Auschwitz, or in the case of the AIDS-infected dentist in Miami and the AIDS-infected family doctor in Minneapolis, the air is filled with the flying excuses of guilty bystanders. We do not have to agree totally with the bitter

death-cry of Kimberly Bergalis—the young woman infected by a dentist she trusted—to put in the right category the response of the County Medical Supervisor, Dr. James Howell, who said he could find no specific regulation requiring him to act to limit the diseased Dr. David Acer's access to the public.

A recent survey²⁶ by the Health Research Group of Public Citizen has demonstrated that although the number of serious breaches of professional ethics continues to grow, there has been a notable decline in discipline. Incompetence, operation under the influence of drugs or alcohol, sexual assault and other serious offenses receive slight attention even by the responsible state boards supposedly responsible. Serious penalties, such as license revocations, suspensions or probations, are declining in use.

The professors are no better, as anyone who has studied the Beatty Case at SMU or the Butz Case at Northwestern can testify. The *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Academic Questions* and other professional journals frequently carry discussions about the rising challenge to academic tenure, while some ambitious administrations are simply making an end run by using teaching lists of part-timers and academic gypsies. In dozens of cases the professors have let slumber the truth that the social contract that provides "academic freedom" also calls for the vigorous maintenance of academic self-discipline.

Self-discipline is the key concept. The health of a free society depends to a great extent upon the sub-political systems and structures that are centers of enlightened discussion, order and discipline. The totalitarian engines of control practice *Gleichschaltung* of necessity, for vigorous, independent centers of discussion and covenant are the true generators of liberty, the true guarantors of the informed conscience, and the wellspring of self-discipline. When in the open society the independent centers of order and discipline begin to falter and fail, the situation is already pre-totalitarian.

Karl Mannheim²⁷ and Kurt Lewin²⁸ long ago established the importance of peer groups in the maintenance of values and patterns of behavior. Studies of the conduct of doctors, lawyers, theologians, and business managers in the Third Reich have further documented the argument. Eberhard Mueller, the great founder of *Evangelische*

26. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* for 17 May 1991, in a report by Mary Ann Roser with a Washington byline, p. 2.

27. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1952), p. 252 on the breakdown of communication without a shared context.

28. Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1948), p. 67 on the importance of belongingness in the acceptance of new values, systems of belief.

Akademie Bad Boll, and the father of a significant movement of adult education and professional reformation in post-war Germany, called the approach to vocations and professions "the conversion of structures" (*Bekehrung der Strukturen*).²⁹

The reconstruction of Western society requires communities of intentional discipline, and it requires a frontal systemic—and not purely individual—plan of attack. The collapsing world of communism has to learn that the alternative to dictatorship is not anarchy but voluntary self-discipline, enforced by the covenants of free men and women. The fallen world of corporate capitalism has to lift up from the rubble of corporate structures that have collapsed inward the truth that wage-slavery is morally no better than peonage, serfdom and the once-accepted custom of owning and working human beings as chattel property.

A century and a half ago the crisis was expressed in these words:

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every activity hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has transformed the doctor, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-earners.³⁰

These words describe the dark side of secularization, as that process has accompanied modernity. The vivid words challenge us to affirm the seed-bed communities and fashion the covenants that will restore the numinous quality to living out one's calling in honor and dignity.

Conversion of the systems and structures of society can only be brought about by persons who are being renewed and sustained by support communities. The counter-culture communities and covenant groups and guilds can support an ethic and a style of life that is relatively immune to the spirit of the age that is passing away. They are those who are called out, who live in preparation for an age that is being brought to birth.

The same set of lessons may be applied to the political crisis in America. Into the vacuum of "the naked public square," from which the powerful covenant myths, "the root metaphors" of the authors of the Mayflower Compact and the American Constitution have been expunged in recent years, there have lately rushed the seven devils of populist (*voelkisch*) politics. Lest the jungle totally overgrow the new world where our forefathers once planted and cultivated gardens in the wilderness, more conscientious citizens must withdraw

29. Eberhard Mueller, *Bekehrung der Strukturen* (Zurich & Hamburg: Theologischer Verlag & Furche-Verlag, 1973).

30. Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), p. 476, quoting from "The Communist Manifesto" (1848) and commenting.

into new formative disciplines, in order that the future may be reclaimed from chaos through lives reformed and renewed.

Reasserting the Communitarian Message

With the vanishing of the geographical frontier, is it possible for new communitarian experiments to locate their frontier in the metropolis? Four out of five Americans now live in the twelve largest metropolitan areas. Is it possible that the dialectic of withdrawal and return can provide them a dynamic and redemptive model in the decaying general society which surrounds us? Can they also be regenerative models for life in the 21st century? Is it possible, for example, that the solution to the jungle of the inner city is "the urban kibbutz?"

During an earlier wave of interest in founding communities, an observer who had visited and reviewed many American colonies drew up these principles of strength:

1. Loyalty to a leader;
2. Religious exercises;
3. Cooperative discipline;
4. Adequate economic resources;
5. Education of children; Probationary period for newcomers;
6. Loyalty to a social theory;
7. Group loyalty over family loyalty;
8. A balance of intimacy and separateness;
9. Separateness from the outside world, yet concern for it;
10. An optimum size of 50-150 persons.³¹

This is no doubt a good checklist for any contemplating a new start.

However, we will do well to remember that the intellect is not the full mind, and the mind is not the whole person. Once the watershed is traversed, *the answer lies not in the blueprint but in the process*. Initiation of a new life venture requires an openness of spirit, well expressed a few years ago by a community leader in Maine:

Why are we afraid to be alive? Because to be alive means giving ourselves and when we really give ourselves, we never know what's going to happen to us.³²

31. Norman Whitney, *Experiments in Community* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Pamphlet #149, 1966), pp. 5-6.

32. Brother David Steindl-Rast in Michael Katz Marsh, William P. Thompson, and Gail Gordon, (eds.), *Earth's Answer* (New York: Lindisfarne Books/Harper & Row, 1977),

We are brought back to the challenge to create a life of interpersonal warmth, to convert the systems and structures into life-sustaining and life-serving entities in place of the powerful necrophiliac engines of destruction.

Some of us are already deeply involved in communitarian life, others are seekers, some are sympathetic students. But all of us want to know how in this *kairos* we can learn from each other, how we may accord a true respect for the liberty, dignity and integrity of each human person. We want to know how—amidst a pluralistic ethnic and cultural and religious situation—we can develop new models of *Menschlichkeit*, of order and self-discipline.

The alternative is clear enough for Europeans and for North Americans on both sides of the line that once ran through "Check Point Charlie." The peoples that cannot produce redemptive cells of renewal and return will not remain static: they will slide from prejudice to bigotry to repression to persecution to genocide. Whether Soviet communist or corporate capitalist, the end-station of the exploitative, technologically rigid, bureaucratically conducted, rational economy—the systems and structures from which all warmth has been removed—is a black hole called "Auschwitz."