

Network Relations

Through Global Social Demonstration and Global Community Forum, we are learning much about Primal Community which, in the abstract, is the intensification of both the awakening of GCF and the engagement of GSD. Primal Community is that which sustains them both. But WHAT sustains them? What are the component dimensions of Primal Community? What is the "plus-factor" that sustains them? This is a key question in every Religious House and Nexus as well as in every community we touch. It is our missional question of the near future.

Several factors seem to be involved as components of Primal Community: 1) significant space; 2) Hallowed tradition; 3) structured care; 4) futuric purpose; and 5) expressed spirituality.

This week II, conversations are based on excerpts from The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism by Daniel Bell, Professor of Sociology at Harvard. We will use the readings to prod our thinking on Primal Community in the arenas of practical vision, underlying contradictions and creative proposals. If the conversations yield significant insights, please record them and send them to Research Centrum: Chicago. A form such as this would be helpful:

Stage Factor	Practical Vision	Underlving Contradictions	Creative Proposals
Significant Space			
Hallowed Tradition			
Structured Care			
Futuric Purpose			
Expressed Spirituality			

CONVERSATIONS

I	II	III	IV
1. What struck you? 2. What trends have you observed in Religion, Work and Culture? 3. How do they appear in this parish? 4. What does this suggest about Primal Community?	1. Where did you hear the truth in that passage? 2. How is that a stumbling block to the man on the street? 3. How is it a contradiction for us as the Order? 4. What are some ways we've...?	1. What do you hear him saying? 2. How has religion been a revolutionary force? 3. How does religion function in this community? 4. What proposals for Primal Community are implied by this discussion?	1. Which of his insights spoke to you? 2. What are practical ways of incorporation into community? - of being both parochial and cosmopolitan? - of emphasizing the special? 3. What are the implications of this for Primal Community?

With the three settings and the three cosmologies, there are also three modes of attachment or identity by which individuals seek to relate themselves to the world. These are religion, work, and culture.

The traditional mode, of course, has been religion as a trans-mundane means of understanding one's self, one's people, one's history, and one's place in the scheme of things. In the development and differentiation of modern society—we call the process *secularization*—the social world of religion shrank; more and more, religion became a personal belief to be accepted or rejected, not as fate but as a matter of will, rational or otherwise. We can see this process vividly in the writings of Matthew Arnold, who rejects theology and metaphysics, the "old God," the "non-natural and magnified man," and finds meaning in morality and emotional subjectivism, a fusion of Kant and Schleiermacher. When that occurs, the religious mode becomes ethical and aesthetic—and inevitably thin and attenuated. It is, to that extent, a reversal of the steps by which Kierkegaard found his way back to religion.

Work, when it is a calling or vocation, is a translation of religion into a this-worldly attachment, a proof, through personal effort, of one's own goodness and worth. This was not only Protestant but the view of men like Tolstoy or Aleph Daled Gordon (the theorist of the kibbutz) who feared the corruption of a sumptuary life. The Puritan or the kibbutznik wanted to work in a calling. We feel that we are working because we are forced to, or that work itself has become routinized and diminished. As Max Weber wrote in the melancholy last pages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: "Where the fulfillment of the calling cannot directly be related to the highest spiritual and cultural values, or when, on the other hand, it need not be felt simply as an economic compulsion, the individual gradually abandons the attempt to justify it at all." The sumptuary impulses replace the ascetic, the hedonistic way of life submerges the calling.

For the modern, cosmopolitan man, culture has replaced both religion and work as a means of self-fulfillment or as a justification—an aesthetic justification—of life. But behind this change, essentially from religion to culture, lies the extraordinary crossover in consciousness, particularly in the meanings of expressive conduct in human society.

Now, religion always imposes moral norms on culture. It insists on limits, particularly the subordination of aesthetic impulses to moral conduct. Once culture began to take over dealing with the demonic, there arose the demand for the "autonomy of the aesthetic," the idea that experience, in and of itself, is of supreme value: Everything is to be explored, anything is to be permitted (at least to the imagination), including lust, murder, and other themes which have dominated the modernist sur-real. The second aspect, as we have seen in the previous chapters, was to root all authority, all justification, in the demands of the "I," of the "imperial self." By turning one's back on the past, one dirempts or shreds the ties which compel continuity; one makes the new and the novel the source of interest, and the curiosity of the self the touchstone of judgment. Thus modernism as a cultural movement trespassed religion and moved the center of authority from the sacred to the profane.

II

All of this, inevitably, creates a distortion of commonsense perception in the total range of human experience. The effect of immediacy, impact, simultaneity, and sensation as the mode of aesthetic—and psychological—experience is to *dramatize* each moment, to increase our tensions to a fever pitch, and yet to leave us without a resolution, reconciliation, or transforming moment, which is the catharsis of a ritual. This is necessarily the case, since the effects that are created derive not from *content* (some transcendental call, a transfiguration, or a purgation through tragedy or suffering) but almost entirely from *technique*. There is constant stimulation and disorientation, yet there is also emptiness after the psychedelic moment has passed. One is enveloped and thrown about, given a psychic “high” or the thrill of the edge of madness; yet beyond the involvement in the whirlwind of the senses, there are the dull routines of everyday life. In the theater the curtain falls, the play ends. In life one has to go home, go to bed, awaken the next morning, brush one’s teeth, wash one’s face, shave, defecate, and go to work. Everyday time, necessarily, is different from psychedelic time; and how far can this disjunction be stretched?

The search for the modern was a search for the heightening of experience in all dimensions, and the attempt to make those experiences immediate to the sensibility of people. Yet there is every indication that we have come to the end of that phase, at least in the element of high culture (if such a conception is still possible), especially as these searches have passed over into the vulgarizations of the cultural mass. The literature of modernity—the literature of Yeats, Lawrence, Joyce, and Kafka—was a literature which, as Lionel Trilling put it, took “to itself the dark power which certain aspects of religion once exercised over the human mind.” It was, in its private way, concerned with spiritual salvation. But its successors seem to have lost concern with salvation itself. In this sense, present-day art has become post-modern and post-Christian.

At the other, curving end of the trajectory, then, is the overturn of the “rational cosmology” which shaped Western thought from the fifteenth century on: the sequence of time (beginning, middle, end), the interior distance of space (foreground and background, figure and ground), and the sense of proportion and measure that united both in a single conception of order. The eclipse of distance, as an aesthetic, sociological, and psychic fact, means that for human beings, and for the organization of thought, there are no boundaries, no ordering principles of experience and judgment. Time and space no longer form the coordinates of a home for modern men. Our ancestors had a religious anchorage which gave them roots, no matter how far they might seek to wander. The deracinated individual can only be a cultural wanderer, without a home to return to. The problem, then, is whether culture can regain a coherence, a coherence of sustenance and experience and not only of form.²¹

Where religions fail, cults appear. This situation is the reverse of early Christian history, when the new coherent religion competed with the multiple cults and drove them out because it had the superior strength of a theology and an organization. But when theology erodes and organization crumbles, when the institutional framework of religion begins to break up, the search for a direct experience which people can feel to be religious facilitates the rise of cults.

A cult differs from a formal religion in many significant ways. It is in the nature of a cult to claim some esoteric knowledge which had been submerged (or repressed by orthodoxy) for a long time but has now suddenly been illuminated. There is often some heterodox figure, mocked or scorned by the orthodox, who presents these new teachings. There are communal rites which often permit or spur an individual to act out impulses that had hitherto been repressed. In the cult, one feels as though one were exploring novel or hitherto tabooed modes of conduct. What defines a cult, therefore, is its implicit emphasis on magic rather than theology, on the personal tie to a guru or to the group, rather than to an institution or a creed. Its hunger is a hunger for ritual, and myth.

Will all this lead to a "new reformation"? Analogies are always tempting but deceptive. The Reformation—if one follows Erikson in his psychological interpretation—was not only an effort to break up corrupt institutions, but also the search of the son for a direct relation to the father, without mediation of the Church. The new cultic religiosity makes a distinction between personal faith and a cumulative historical tradition. The emphasis of the "new reformation" is on personal experience and personal faith unrelated to the past. Yet can such experience and faith have meaning without some tie to others—fathers—who have gone through the same vicissitudes? Can a faith be simply, naively, created anew, without memory?

What is being sought today, in the phrase of Alexander Mitscherlich, is a "society without fathers." The rejection of authority has come to mean the rejection of any notion of parent other than the peer group itself. Yet one wonders whether such a society is theologically or even psychologically possible. Religious belief, as Clif-

ford Geertz writes, "involves not a Baconian induction from everyday experience—for then we should all be agnostics—but rather a prior acceptance of authority which transforms that experience." If the peer group of the cult is substituted for the larger society, then we are once more enclosed in the Durkheimian circle, shrunken as it may now be, with its fatal enthronement of idolatry.

Despite the shambles of modern culture, some religious answer surely will be forthcoming, for religion is not (or no longer) a "property" of society in the Durkheimian sense. It is a constitutive part of man's consciousness: the cognitive search for the pattern of the "general order" of existence; the affective need to establish rituals and to make such conceptions sacred; the primordial need for relatedness to some others, or to a set of meanings which will establish a transcendent response to the self; and the existential need to confront the finalities of suffering and death.

As Max Scheler said: "Since the religious act is an essential endowment of the human mind and soul, there can be no question whether this or that man performs it. . . . This law stands: every finite spirit believes either in God or in idols." Max Weber, who agreed with these formulations, stated that the answer could only be a personal decision, at once arbitrary and unconditional. Given the nature of contemporary political religions, and the claims of "the possessed" for final truths, the real difficulty, I must add, is not the posing of the alternatives but the question of who is God and who is the Devil.

As Weber has shown, religion, at crucial junctures of history, is sometimes the most revolutionary of all forces. When traditions and institutions become rigidified and oppressive, or when the discordance of voices and the babble of contradictory beliefs become intolerable, men seek for new answers. And religion, because it seeks living meanings at the deepest level of being, becomes the most forward response. In these circumstances, we look for new prophets. Prophecy breaks down ritualistic conservatism when it has lost all meaning, and prophecy provides a new gestalt when there have been too many meanings. The prophet confronts both the priest, whose only claim is the authority of the past, and the mystagogue who derives his power from the manipulation of magic as a means of salvation.

There well may be a double answer. If one of the sources of despair lies in the existential questions, we can face them perhaps not by looking forward but by looking back. Human culture is a creation of men, the construction of a world to maintain *continuity*, to maintain the "un-animal" life. Animals seeing others die do not imagine it of themselves; people alone know their fate, and create rituals not just to ward off mortality but to maintain a "consciousness of kind" which is a mediation of fate. In this sense, religion is the awareness of a moment of transcendence, the passage out of the past, from which one has to come (and to which one is bound), to a new conception of the self as a moral agent, freely accepting the past (rather than just being shaped by it), and returning to tradition in order to maintain the continuity of moral meanings.

In every society, there are rites of incorporation and rites of release. The problem in modern society is that release itself has gone so far as to be without bounds. The difficulty with the new cults is that while their impulses are religious, in that they seek for some new meaning of the sacred, their rites are still largely ones of release. What I think the deeper currents of meaning are calling for is some new rite of incorporation, signifying membership in a community that has links with the past as well as the future. Yet as Goethe once remarked, "Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hat, erwirb es, um es zu besitzen." (If you are to possess what you inherited from your forefathers, you must first earn it.)¹¹

To this extent, a religion of incorporation is a redemptive process whereby individuals seek to discharge their obligations that derive from the moral imperatives of their community: the debts incurred

in being nurtured, the debts to the institutions that maintain moral awareness. Religion, then, necessarily involves the mutual redemption of fathers and sons. It involves the acknowledgment, in Yeats's phrase, of "the blessed who can bless," of the laying on of hands in the continuity of generations.

But such a religious commitment involves a challenge to the modern liberal temper. The answers which a liberal temper seeks are ethical ones. The difficulty of a commitment to ethics alone is that it dissolves the particular—the primordial ties of father and son, or of individual and tribe—into the universal. Given what we know about the nature of man, the dream of the Enlightenment to make mankind *one*—its dream of Reason—is futile; those who live in the continuity of generations necessarily must live in the parochial identities that sustain them. Yet to be parochial alone is to be sectarian, and to lose the ties to other men, other knowledge, other faiths; to be cosmopolitan alone is to be rootless. One, then, necessarily lives in the tension between the particular and the universal, and accepts that painful double bind of necessity.

And finally, we have to live along a different axis as well: to move from the temporal (the past, present, and future which so obsess us) to the spatial; to see the world as it should be, as a space of "allotted portions," as the separation of realms. To understand the transcendent, man requires a sense of the sacred. To remake nature, man can invade the profane. But if there is no separation of realms, if the sacred is destroyed, then we are left with the shambles of appetite and self-interest and the destruction of the moral circle which engirds mankind. Can we—must we not—reestablish that which is sacred and that which is profane?