

of the human equality which is professed so eloquently in our own Declaration of Independence.

Too often—because we do not really take history very seriously—we settle for the cheapest myths as to what our national pilgrimage really means, and what it really promises. We become the living proof that T. H. Huxley's funny definition may be serious after all: "A nation is a people united by a common error as to its origins and a common aversion to its neighbors."

A truly free people is open to every possibility that its dissenters may own a better definition of nationhood than its officialdom. There is a very precious term in the British political vocabulary: the "Loyal Opposition." How quick we are to assume, in American public debate, that opposition is disloyal. And how often we have been obliged to recognize, in retrospect, that dissenters may have had a much more majestic and humane sense of national loyalty than those who called them "traitors."

In the case of Martin Luther King, Jr., in spite of all the suffering of his people and in the face of the death he knew awaited him, he could yet say: "I still have a dream. It is a dream that is deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: . . . that all men are created equal."

Having been so unresponsive to a black apostle of non-violence who identified so profoundly with the symbols of the American heritage, white America can now hardly be surprised, and certainly not self-righteous, if some of their black fellow-citizens are doubtful about the philosophy of non-violence and offended by appeals to patriotism. For some blacks and some young whites, the alienation from any meaningful sense of belonging to America is almost complete. No patriotic exercises or exhortations will recall them. Justice and peace *might* bring them back.

Whatever the tasks of politics and the arts in the reconstruction of freedom in America, the churches are surely called to share the burdens of nationhood. It ought to be possible to imagine the churches—of all institutions—serving the people at the very places where communities are most shattered, where personal relationships are most estranged, where men and women do not know yet that creativity is a God-given necessity of their being, where justice is denied, where children are robbed, where healing is desperately needed.

Where churches do these things, we need not worry too much about their evangelical power to

attract the younger generation. But this generation has become a plumbline for the testing of authenticity in the Christian faith. Where churches continue to fly the Christian and the American flags side-by-side in their sanctuaries, but do not share the burdens of our broken and unfulfilled nationhood, the future of those churches is very bleak—as it should be.

Above all, the churches must cease to hold to such a cramped view of what it means to be "spiritual" in a society which must forever struggle to be truly free.

Alan Geyer

## EDUCATION FOR WHAT?

A great philosopher in another age proclaimed that survival was a race between education and destruction. Yet to restate this leaves unanswered the question, "education for what?" The Germans under Hitler were a highly cultured people yet wreaked destruction on the world; our own consciences are uneasy after Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The question turns in part on the meaning and purposes of education. From the standpoint of a democracy, we have linked education to the open society and to open minds on whom it depends. The educated man, we say, is sensitive to alternatives and aware of consequences. He is an agent of change and an instrument of progress. This notion of education for responsibility presupposes both process and purpose, for openness is based on some form of commitment, whether to science, progress, or truth. We can afford to be open because there are moorings and benchmarks. With William James we can say: "It is not thinking with its primitive ingenuity of childhood that is most difficult but to think with tradition, with all its acquired force. . . ."

This answer to the timeless question, "education for what?" has been "sufficient to the day." It has accorded more or less with the trends of the time and the spirit of the people. Now we find ourselves in a world rent by social and biological revolutions, sweeping alterations in interpersonal and national moods. We have less time to ponder and less willingness to forgive or forget or to practice restraint. Life styles for many have visibly changed, and for many more there are far-reaching questionings and doubts about who we are and where we are going. This growing movement presents us with questions that outnumber answers. We cannot be clear which aspects are trans-

ient and which will persist. Having witnessed the demise of the nineteenth-century idea of unending progress, we may be misled if we assume that world forces today are driving mankind, though not without risk, toward a higher moral and political plane. Yet men live by faith.

I would answer the question, "education for what?" with four necessarily over-simple propositions: (1) Education, while fostering individualism and equal opportunity, must help give us a sense of identity of who we are as a people and as a part of mankind. When we were less knit together by technology and communications, we could afford to have many nations within the one, and different levels of opportunity and citizenship. Today a house divided cannot stand.

Achieving equal opportunity is almost always socially disrupting. It feeds on its inner dynamics and momentum. We jostle one another as we seek to be equal. If the pain and offense are too great, it may arise from the poverty and narrowness of our view, for "one is not rich but poor, when one can always seem so right" (Marianne Moore). This surely touches both those who provoke and those who are provoked. The stages of growth of every society include periods of deep contradictions and schisms. Every action and counter-action must be viewed in this light. The end of the story, in periods like ours, is seldom in the event. In times like these "the deepest feeling shows itself in silence, not in silence but restraint." Miss Moore's wise words may appear as counsels of perfection. If we could follow them, though, we might find that whatever our differences, there were deep-running tides of unity which strident debate had temporarily obscured.

(2) I would plead that in education we avoid the apocalyptic view. Martin Luther's great phrase, quaint as it may sound, still has relevance: "Even if I were told that the world was going to pieces tomorrow, I would still plant my apple tree today and pay my debts." For modern man, it may be asking too much to cling to this faith. In personal and national life, we are driven over the precipice of tolerance, so continuous and all-consuming are the crises we face. As with the man who is grievously ill, we cannot accept the "learn to live with—" admonition. Instead of bearing our burdens, we are told there are only two choices: either the apocalypse or the new man—and with him, a new world. But the new man does not walk among us yet, nor are there discernible, comprehensive or total solutions in sight.

(3) Education must help us return to the mar-

ketplace and conference table. It must help fashion capacities for public and private decision-making. The trouble with silent majorities and marching minorities is that while they are silent and marching, someone else makes the great decisions. Pericles warned of this: "Each fancies that no harm will come of his neglect and by the same notion being entertained by all separately the common cause imperceptibly declines." We need to add that it is not participation as some kind of aimless and noisy activity we seek. Nor is it self-righteous factionalism seeking only to divide and destroy. It is participation at the point of leverage on policy. The guideline is still to act responsibly. With Bonhoeffer we need to say: "It is easier to act on abstract principle than from concrete responsibility." And to be concrete, we must immerse ourselves in matters, however limited, where we have earned the right to be heard.

(4) Finally, the greatest need of all, whatever one's temper, is for precise and definable targets to follow patiently discovered and determined routes. We must adapt and build social institutions, cope with population, improve the environment, limit and circumscribe conflict—and on and on. None of these steps may bring a new world, but they may contribute. And *Gulliver's Travels*, which often comes at our problems more directly than current writings, has observed: "And he gave it as his opinion that whoever made two ears of corn, or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before would deserve better of mankind and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together."

You will say I have tried to tie the Gordian knot, to link processes of continuity and change, and I plead guilty. But so did Alfred North Whitehead, who wrote: "It is the first step of wisdom to recognize that the major advances in civilization are processes which all but wreck . . . society. . . . The art of free society consists, first, in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and, secondly, in fearlessness of revision . . . Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay. . . ."

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