Value Systems in a Changing Culture

NATHAN JUDSON BENDER

It is my purpose to call attention to two important books written by the late Harvard sociologist, Pitirim A. Sorokin: The Crisis of Our Age and The Basic Trends of Our Times. I shall also quote a few passages from other authors about our times and make some observations from my own experiences.

We are living in the throes of a violent revolution, signaling the end of an age. "Bombs or Bibles? Get Ready for Revolution!" Harvey Cox speaks of God's Revolution. The cover of Time, June 21, 1971, announces "The Jesus Revolution." Expatriates in Algiers are crying, "Violence in the United States is inevitable . . ." The Gallup Poll (February 7, 1971, reports that "college students say change will come with revolution." Will Oursler, in Protestant Power and the Coming Revolution, writes: "We are talking about revolution—not merely cultural or doctrinal but total and almost inevitably violent revolution." A French journalist, Jean François Revel, who recently visited the United States, has recorded his observations in Without Marx or Jesus the New American Revolution Has Begun. Jerry Rubin (Yippie leader and one of the Chicago Seven) has written a shocking book, Do It, in which he predicts that the revolution will completely destroy by violence the existing estab-
lishment and that the Yippies will bring about anarchy in every institution in the Western world.\textsuperscript{6} The list could go on and on.

Actually, we are in the midst of a transition from a brilliant culture that began about 1500 to a different form of culture. Thirty years ago Sorokin saw this change occurring and wrote:

We are living and acting at one of the epoch-making turning points of human history when one fundamental form of culture and society—sensate—is declining and a different form is emerging. The crisis is also extraordinary in the sense that, like its predecessors, it is marked by an extraordinary explosion of wars, revolutions, anarchy, and bloodshed; by social, moral, economic, political and intellectual chaos; by a resurgence of revolting cruelty and animality and a temporary destruction of the great and small values of mankind\ldots\textsuperscript{7}

It is difficult to realize the epochal nature of the crises occurring during this transitional period. Reinhold Niebuhr likens it to the day of Hezekiah. In his book, \textit{Discerning the Signs of the Times}, he quotes II Kings 19:3:

\textit{Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children are come to birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.}

Niebuhr, writing that Hezekiah faced a crisis comparable to our own, explained the metaphor in this way:

\textit{We are living in an age between the ages in which children are coming to birth, but there is not strength to bring forth: we see clearly what ought to be done to bring peace into the lives of the nations, but we do not have the strength to do what we ought.}\textsuperscript{8}

The late Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist, felt compelled to warn those caught unprepared for the great change taking place as the end of this aeon approaches—"when the spring-point enters Aquarius."\textsuperscript{9} Vera Reid, astrologer, explains in \textit{Towards Aquarius} that a radical change is about to dawn on the world.\textsuperscript{10} A witch, the late G. B. Gardner of the Isle of Man, writes: "We are in the transition period between two great ages."\textsuperscript{11}