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The Uses of an Education

By Edmund Fuller

The following is excerpted from remarks delivered by Mr. Fuller, the Journal's chief book critic, at the May 20 commencement exercises of Sewanee Academy, the prep school division of University of the South. This Sunday Mr. Fuller, who recently retired as chairman of the English department at South Kent School in Kent, Conn., is scheduled to receive an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the university. It will be his first academic degree.

Some people have said that yours will be the best-educated generation in the history of the world. To agree with that would strike the hearty, congratulatory note considered appropriate to occasions of this kind. Unfortunately, it is not true.

It is not so much a lie as an error arising from a confusion of terms. Simply in living, outside of school, you are exposed to more kinds of information, more masses of data, more multimedia stimuli, than any generation that has gone before you. The trouble is, all this that is poured upon you, especially through the potent medium of television, is fragmentary, unorganized, and, worst of all, is unevaluated information. It may have a bearing upon education, but it is not education in itself. It is more likely to hamper than to aid real education. It can lead to the junkyard mind more easily than it can contribute to the comprehensive intelligence.

Since the emergence of the human race, each generation has stood upon the shoulders of those before it and thus in some ways had a larger view. For centuries that involved an almost imperceptibly gradual increase in common knowledge. With the acceleration of scientific knowledge and technical skill in this century, the pace of which in the last 30 years has been such as to raise fears about our psychological and moral ability to cope with it, an astonishing amount of miscellaneous knowledge is available to anyone who owns a television set.

Specialists and Generalists

We have seen men walk on the moon, we have taken the temperature of Venus and dispatched probes to scan Jupiter and its moons close up and hurtle past it out of the solar system toward the heart of the galaxy; we have put instruments on the surface of Mars, tested the soil, mapped its geography; we have seen atoms split and atoms fused—all of this merely as television watchers, newspaper and magazine readers. Yet for all of this, who could think himself the peer of Aristotle, Leonardo, Galileo, or Newton? Who, even among the many brilliantly specialized minds that combined to achieve all this, could singly compete with those remote seminal intellects who seeded the knowledge now yielding fruits beyond their imagining? They were generalists, men capable of knowing almost all knowledge available to their eras. That possibility has vanished. Now no physicist can know all of physics; no biologist, all of biology. Yet the generalist, the comprehensively educated person, man or woman, is more needed than ever and is still possible on redefined terms.

In one aspect, all that I have mentioned can be viewed as an extraordinary advantage to you. In another aspect it makes your schooling a great deal harder, and it is harder, too, for us who are your living audio-visual aids and loosely claim that we teach you. The expansion of knowledge means that there is a vast amount more that must be studied, even at the school level, let alone in college or graduate work.

It is possible that you may become the best-informed generation in history — *quantitatively*. It is also frighteningly possible that you could turn out to be one of the worst-educated generations — *qualitatively*. There have been times when far fewer people were educated, but when those few received an education in depth unmatched today. You could be cursed with information without wisdom, with data without direction. You could wind up programming machines without knowing the implications of their use, naively handling instruments more sophisticated than yourselves.

There is a problem about man's knowledge and techniques on the one hand and his wisdom on the other. Modern man knows more and can do more than our ancestors. In that kind of knowledge we have advanced. But we are not wiser, or more spiritually perceptive, or more artistically creative than the people of either the far or distant past. It can be argued—and I'll grant it's a hot argument—that we are demonstrably less wide, less perceptive spiritually, less artistically creative than those before us. That possible truth is as hard for some today to admit as for the alcoholic to admit his alcoholism, but it is an equally necessary confession. In that truth vanishes the childish claim that the history, the art, the sacred writings, the poetry, and the drama of the past are not *relevant*. In naked truth they are more profoundly relevant now than anything that is produced today—which I say firmly even though, as a creature of my time and a professional critic of part of its culture, I do not wholly reject it or find its productions wholly valueless.

You could be cursed with information without wisdom. You could wind up programming machines without knowing the implications of their use, naively handling instruments more sophisticated than yourselves.

We have observed how much more the scientist today knows than Galileo or Newton. But no present day interpreters of our lives, in literature or philosophy, has touched depths of insight that have surpassed Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, or Dostoevsky. No prophet or preacher in the West has added to the revelation and wisdom of the Holy Scriptures, nor in the East have the ancient wisdoms and insights of the Tao, the Vedas, or the Bhagavad-Gita been transcended. That is why the great Dr. Samuel Johnson said: "Man more frequently requires to be reminded than informed."

Yet some kinds of revelation continue. Right now the channel of revelation is through the natural sciences, though what channels it may take in the future we cannot know. At present the sciences reveal to us more and more the extraordinary *how* of God's Creation but add nothing about the long-revealed *why*. The glory is that each major revelation of the *how*, through the powers with which He endowed us to make that pursuit, opens and deepens the profound mystery of being, the mystery that there is anything at all.

The reawakening awareness of nature and of our place in the ecological frame is one of the happiest developments and one to which your generation is warmly responsive. Yet no ecologist has enunciated this more marvelously than St. Francis in his exquisite canticle lovingly celebrating all items of the Creation, our brother Sun, our sister Moon, our brother Fire, our sister Water. Francis preached to the birds and converted the wolf of Gubbio; he saw every living thing as his friend.

Scientific knowledge alone is not sufficient for the mind or soul. If the sound of music and the sight of art, the cadences of words and the words and acts of worship diminish, life will be barren. When we invoke the soul we move from the realm of information to the more vital realm of wisdom, the attainment of which is the only true value of learning. It used to be said, "There's no fool like an old fool"—which now makes me nervous. But it is truer, and sadder, that there is no fool like a learned fool. It is possible to go through college and graduate school, to acquire degrees, and still to waste one's life in foolishness and shallowness.

A chief part of wisdom is moral sensibility. Facts, information, will not give you that. Knowledge, unchecked by wisdom and moral judgment, is easily corrupted. Our times have demonstrated that repeatedly. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, said: "Since learned men have appeared, good men have become rare." An 18th-Century Englishman, Thomas Fuller, said: "Learning makes a good man better and a bad man worse."

With all respect to Mr. Jefferson, I would put the pursuit of wisdom ahead of the pursuit of happiness, for without wisdom we have no chance at all of understanding what it means to be happy—something the present time understands little, for many imagine that drugs and sex and noise and speed and money and power can provide it.

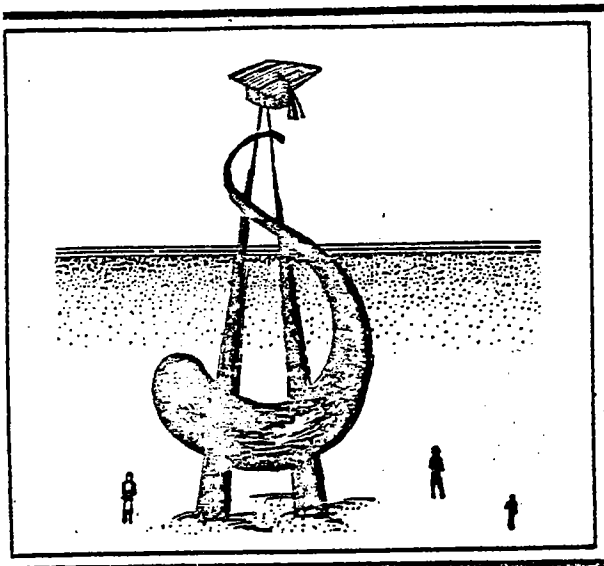
At a time when much confident false counsel calls the study of history irrelevant, the need is as urgent for us to understand our place in that enormous tapestry of events-in-time as to understand our place in the web of nature. Such understanding reveals meaning; only by ignorance of it, blindness to it, and false teaching can we slip into the despairing error urged upon us by some modern writers that life is meaningless and hence that man is irresponsible and absurd. Albert Einstein, the greatest scientist since Newton, said: "The man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unhappy, but hardly fit for life."

Enormous, portentous decisions must be made in your generation. Not that the problems began with you or will end with you, but that many people have an intuitive feeling that you are somehow a pivotal generation between the threats and promises delicately in balance, that the next 30 years, during some of which you will be largely in charge, are mysteriously crucial. These decisions involve the complex problems of nuclear energy, which I do not try to prejudge and which must not be oversimplified, for or against. They involve the proliferating, nightmarish technological weaponry with which superpowers confront each other. They involve the potentials for good and evil in the biological sciences. And as always, in simple times or complex, they involve the good and evil at war in our own souls.

All Will Be Involved

You will all have some role in these decisions, consciously or not, whether you are in business or industry or professions or arts, whether you are dealing with children as parents or as teachers, whether you are opting in or opting out. You will all be involved, some more, some less, by act or by default, in determining the quality, and even the continuing, of life in coming years. The more educated, the more skilled—and rarest of all—the wiser you are in moral and humane vision, the more constructive may be your role. So do not presume that your generation's education is the best—make sure that it is, as you go on from here, where you have had a more fortunate start than those in many American schools.

I am neither a pessimist nor an optimist —I am a hoper. And I believe in grace. If—and it's an if of a tall order—if you—not just you here, but your peers in your whole generation, too—will pursue your education in this vision, through college, or graduate school, and on through the rest of your lives; if you will, by the balance such an education can give you, walk confident and magnanimous toward your fellows, humble before God, open to the planet, open to the universe, then we need not look with dread toward 2001.



SIX PROFESSORS VIEW THIS YEAR'S GRADUATES

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The class of '79

John Ahern: 'Entropy rules'

THE CLASS of '79 does not know who it is, or where it is going. It does not know how it relates to the past or the future, and so has little sense of the present. No life-sustaining beliefs, secular or religious, provide it with a goal, and, having no goal, it can imagine no path of effective action. Earlier generations, with an unearned innocence, thought the United States had a unique message for other countries. Some joined the Peace Corps, others became lay missionaries. When they came home they brought the unwelcome news that we took more than we gave, that our prosperity generated other people's misery, and that nobody wanted to hear our message. The class of '79 feels no desire to go abroad. It has nothing to say to the rest of the world, of which it is a little frightened. Earlier generations thought they could teach racial harmony to the South. They learned that their class and their cities bear an even greater responsibility for racism. The class of '79 is not about to deliver any homilies on the subject, or join any crusades to right the ancient wrong. Earlier generations had the heady experience of protesting an unjust and illegal war, and of shutting down the schools where they studied. They found exotic models of moral authenticity in the plucky Viet Cong and fervent Chinese revolutionaries. The class of '79 has no war to protest. The Chinese and the Viet Cong have stripped off each other's masks. Wherever it looks, the class of '79 sees nothing that calls it to action, no model to imitate or reject, and so obtain an identity.

These are the orphans of the Energy Crisis, certain that the world's material and spiritual resources are reaching exhaustion. They take it for granted that their lives will be poorer and meaner than their parents', that the future will bring drastic changes for the worse. But like their elders they prefer not to anticipate that moment. They live in secret terror that some mad gesture will plunge the precarious, declining but comfortable world they inhabit into a crisis from which it will be impossible to recover. Their great, doomed wish is that things would go on forever as they are going on now. They are well aware that their lives depend on petroleum deposits in countries they do not understand. They know, but choose to forget, that torture and tyranny have assured them a steady flow of energy. When push turns to shove, they know that justice, freedom and democracy will not count, and they do not care. They have no faith in their own altruism or anybody else's. They might be the first Americans ever to countenance openly the deliberate suppression of the liberty of other countries.

Entropy rules their universe. Like men on the eve of the first millennium they think the cosmos is winding down. They do not think there is enough going around. "We are too many dogs gnawing on a single bone," one of them told me. Many say that children diminish the world's resources, rather than renew them. They doubt the wisdom of procreation. They do not believe that technology can provide a solution to these problems. The engineering students I know say that government and industry impede the development of the technologies we need. They feel helpless.

The class of '79 is haunted by what it will do when some unforeseeable turn of events brings it face to face with itself and the world. War would have a strong appeal for a generation that would like to act, but does not know how, that has no outlet for its dormant energies, that has known neither leadership, nor the satisfactions of belonging to a community with a common goal. War would offer it the chance to externalize its inarticulate inner conflicts. Whether it will give itself over to aggression, and whether that aggression might be morally defensible, will depend on the leaders it chooses and creates. It has found no leaders in its parents and elders.

Yet this class is disturbingly like its parents. In neither group can one identify a set of common religious and moral values. Almost passionate moral concern is expressed on only two issues: energy and abortion, which both agree, by and large, is the cornerstone of women's freedom and a moral act of ecological responsibility. Violence, injustice, fidelity and community are not words that figure prominently in their conversation. The lack of conflict with parents on important

issues deprives society of a necessary tension. It adds to the sense of perilous stagnation.

Like its parents, this class dedicates more and more of its time to athletic recreation. It turns with vehemence to physical activity in search of health, balance and energy. In physical activity it recovers and celebrates the sense of struggle which gave meaning to its ancestors' lives, and which used to be found in work and family life. During the weekends, at dawn and at dusk, the class of '79, like its parents, expresses and satisfies a need for self-discipline, asceticism and sacrifice in solitary liturgies of running and jogging. Some transform sport into a search for a transcendental breakthrough, a consoling and ineffable high, suspiciously (and comically) similar to contact with the Absolute, which is strenuously denied in other areas of life. It is to be hoped that somewhere in this class obscure misfits are taking advantage of this chance to look on the world as it is, without the filters and veils of their parents' ingenuous illusions; that they are running, fasting and meditating their way to that enabling vision which, for the present, is absent.

(John Ahern is assistant professor of Italian at Stanford University in California.)

Martin Marty: 'The exceptions'

MY INTERVIEW sample included Joel '77, in-law Susan '78, John '78, Peter '80, foster-son James '81, Micah '81. On the average, the Marty clan *is* the class of '79. Would they help me come up with something cute, something not obvious, something that would make my *Commonweal* remarks sound perceptive?

A brunch conversation and a couple of letters turned up the obvious. Good. Historians tend to trust confirmations of truisms. Sometimes "what everybody is saying" is closer to truth than is a clever discernment. The truism about '79, unanimously offered: it is self-centered, its best and brightest are career-minded, obsessed with grades for six days and on the seventh they rest with bursts of hedonism. They tend to be spiritually self-centered, too. They are impatient with disciplines that demand or institutions that exact commitment.

Some clan members are at public schools, some at private, some at church-related colleges, so the six may not be all that representative. They sound a bit like campus editors, which one of them is, and campus editors always complain about apathy and unconcern. But the six are also quick to point to blazing exceptions among their peers, to people who violate the boundaries of the generalizations. I must say that many of their peers lead me to blush to recall the seedy crowd that my classmates and I were thirty years ago. We did not yet think about thinking about anyone else, the subject had not even come up.

Peter's letter seemed especially reflective and patient. Making clear he was drawing on national, not merely local campus impressions, he reasoned why '79 is as it is: "With the increasing world crises (oil, population, inflation, crime) seemingly closing in on all sides of the forthcoming generation (us) there is a trend toward future security in the professional world. . . . Since 1970 our own liberal arts college faculty in business-economics has more than tripled while enrollment has been stable. In other words, money is more of a priority than 20 years ago. . . . Many of the world concerns are in a worse state than in the sixties (hunger, threats to peace . . .) but many now feel that with money and a good education, they will be on top of these concerns. . . .

"Therefore secular interests are much more of a preoccupation now than spiritual or ecclesiastical ones. Students may, and do, admire others of a decade ago who put deep values first in their lives, but they themselves are not about to get caught in the abyss of financial insecurity in the future decades of crises to come. . . . Many campus Christian organizations, Common Cause, environmental groups, have grown 'old' in our eyes—with few exceptions.

"Finally I think there is a tendency for all of us to look back to earlier campus generations and see what they did. In some sense we feel left out of their times. . . . Left out in the fact that there really are no major issues or trends. . . . Almost a regret that we did not go through college with any *great* events as those that confronted anti-war students. The search for new fads and musical groups is an escape. 'Things just aren't happening.' . . . We admire the students of the past and their actions, but everyday secular problems concern us and our futures more than values, convictions, etc. and we are therefore going to be concerned about a 'serious' future."

And he too adds that emphatic postscript: "Be aware, as I'm sure you are, that exceptions do exist. . . ."

And I am aware. As a sometime campus visitor, lecturer and consultant, I see mainly the exceptions in the form of students who pick up speakers at the airport, take them to dinner, host them in housing units and classes, and share concerns at end of day. They are no doubt as large a minority as were the genuinely engaged students who were surrounded by sunshine soldiers and faddish participants in the sixties.

I would like to see more of them, and a better future for those that already are visible. The Marxists would say: "no chance"; the current students are victims of capitalist consumerism and forthcoming collapse. The neoconservatives, who make a game of fighting the Zeitgeist while they are actually blowing with the prevailing winds, would say: why bitch? Social concern and spiritual depth are concerns of elites. The Christian prophets would observe that at last Original Sin is patent on all fronts, and that it has led to a new blindness. When, after all, was *more* happening than in the generation that gets the last chance to make the last decisions about, say, the environment (there being no second round for the ozone)?

Human nature evidently does not change, but human cultures do, and these envelop and enshroud their makers and victims. So long as the class of '79, with the encouragement of its elders, pursues nothing but private morale at the expense of public morale, it will generate a culture in which the self-centered self will continue to gain the whole world and lose its soul. My hunch is that the class of '79 simply exposes to view a

more honest set of exemplars of human nature than did the class of '69, which could pose as altruistic while setting out to save its own neck. Eisenhower: "Things are more like they are now than they ever were before."

Spiritually, all trends run against "public morale," whether in the form of fashionable therapies, borrowed Orientalism of most types, and Born Again salvationism. 'I'll get mine." I am puzzled over the class of '79's patience with mind-numbing or brainless sensations while it finds "boring" the deeper mysticism, more jarring prophecy, authentic spiritual discipline, and heroism and sainthood styled over the centuries. As a historian, parent, Christian, and seeker of public morale, I will join those who will continue to watch for, be moved by, and nudge the group my clan keeps reminding me of: "the exceptions." They are truly exceptional.

(Martin E. Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Chicago, associate editor of The Christian Century, *and author of* A Nation of Behavers.*)*

Paul R. Messbarger: 'Nameless'

I HAVE sometimes thought that the greatest power I exercise as a parent is the power to name my children. The effect of that act, admittedly somewhat casual, is sometimes profound and always incalculable. It initiates an identifying process as certainly as does the genetic pattern itself. Neither his family nor our nine-month-old child quite knows or understands the subtle shaping influence on his perceptions or ours of his name, Matthew, but of the influence I do not doubt. These thoughts are occasioned by the assignment to characterize the class of '79, and they were further stirred by the remark of a member of our campus ministry team who suggested that the most interested readership for such reflections must be the graduates themselves and precisely because they have so little sense of a collective persona.

Perhaps that's a starting point. The class of '79 is nameless. And maybe that is a blessing, considering the widespread, sometimes revealing, but always slightly specious labeling practice during the past three decades. To say that won't stop the practice, of course; Americans have nearly irresistible interest in cataloguing the national character, especially at that point of early adulthood when the outlines begin to firm. You will forgive me the mild indulgence of recalling the moment I, too, became a genre.

On a May evening in 1956 the graduating class of my college gathered in the spare environs of a basement dining room in Atchison, Kansas, to share for a last time the special fellowship of our four years together and to hear one of our classmates describe what it was that made us distinctive. Our interpreter, a student of the classics and a Benedictine seminarian, invoked for his theme a slogan very common among us. "Don't sweat it." Inelegant as the phrase is, we fairly basked in the meditation it evoked, suggesting a general state of contentment with ourselves and the world we anticipated, but based as much on a modesty of expectations as it was on any extravagant regard for our own capacities. Whether in truth this characterization bespoke a rare state of moral and psychological equilibrium or a dangerous degree of innocence is still, I think, debatable.

What is not a matter of contention is the fact that what for the 1950s was a coherent and generally benign world has, for our current graduates, become unglued. And that may give us a second point: our graduates perceive a world not only less congenial but also less coherent. Quite naturally their response is a pervasive tentativeness, frequently to be found in a preoccupation with immediate and precisely defined goals. And here the current stereotype may be useful: aware from early adolescence of the highly competitive state of job placement and education in the professions, large numbers of our students appear to have worked out a finely calculated program of segmented challenges. Each course, each fragment of a course, carries definitive significance; career and happiness, life and death ride on the second decimal point of a grade average. As traumatic as this may appear, and as destructive to a healthy learning experience as it certainly is, this crisis-ridden mentality has also a curious anesthetizing power. So long as the cosmos pivots on a mid-term grade, issues of war, poverty and destruction of the environment, not to mention vital introspection, keep their distance. And of course in this affair the educational institutions themselves have conspired. What to some academicians looks like a return to basics, to intellectual rigor, may very well be the intimidating effects of a tight job market.

But I am being unfair, to my own students and to the generation at large. At Loyola of Chicago, which is neither representative of the national student body nor wholly free of its general characteristics, the class of '79 is simply expressing a perplexity that numbs us all, and finding guidance as rare from spiritual sources as from secular.

Do they practice their faith with any kind of regularity? Who are their moral heroes? What issues out of the larger world engage them? These questions, too, yield an uncertain account. Undemonstrative in all such matters, the class of '79 appears to have a genuinely open spirit. At the very least, they do not repudiate such questions or, worse, arrogate to themselves a moral terrain too splendid to be shared with the rest of the population. For all their privatism, they are at least open to discussion of religious matters; do not, that is, scorn such topics as irrelevant or anachronistic. But a theological assertion that does not touch on direct experience gains little interest.

As a group, it is possible that the class of '79 has more sympathy for a Bakke than a Berrigan. It is not that they lack generosity or a sense of social justice. They are simply trying to cope with a fact their elders often forget: they may well be the first generation in this nation's history that is not licensed to expect a higher degree of affluence or cultural status than their parents. And for genuine moral heroes, they will take a "non-aligned" Mother Theresa of Calcutta over more strident prophets of social revolution.

I sense that the profile emerging from this account is terribly blurred and even self-contradictory, a gray mass of indistinct shape and voice. I prefer to think the image is less attributable to the students themselves than to this writer's inadequate sounding devices. And this deficiency argues for me the point that I should better have spent my words on anecdotes and biographical miniatures, a strategy that would have warranted a tone of cautious optimism. For our best do not lack conviction, and our worst are not filled with the passionate intensity of their elders of a decade ago. Instead, they appear to have provisionally accepted the limited terms offered them, with neither elation nor pronounced reluctance, and they will go about their lives willing to renegotiate those terms whenever necessary in the same spirit of realistic compromise.

That's not a bad exit line, even though the subject remains nameless. My guess is, however, that when a few years' experience has impressed itself on the class of '79, we'll find it occupying a fairly healthy middle ground between triumphalism and disengagement; and I, for one, take a good deal of comfort from that prediction.

(Paul R. Messbarger is Director of the Honors Program at Loyola University, Chicago.)

Michael Zeik: 'Likable'

UNLIKE the hateful class of '69 which was lovable, this one is likable. The seniors don't make trouble; they even study. Have our nuclear-energy plants, in one short decade, produced so remarkable a mutation of genes and chromosomes? Alternate hypothesis: our seniors are so concerned about 'getting on the boat,' they haven't the chutzpah to rock it. Their personal amiability derives in equal part from social apathy and economic anxiety . . . So far, no surprises.

It may be somewhat less fashionable, however, to point out that some of their apathy is probably due to the growing discouragement of their middle-aged profs. (including myself) regarding the present possibility of social and political reform. I am sure that the potentiality for student commitment is still there—awaiting leadership, and a certain amount of drama.

As regards the sexual and spiritual values of our seniors, I consulted—not willing to trust my own impressions overmuch—a few of my friends among them. The unanimity of their observations impressed me.

The ideals of marriage and sexual restraint are far from having been abandoned. While there is probably more premarital sex than a generation ago, it is not all that casual; and frequently ends (even without pregnancy) in marriage. Virginity itself, endangered, is not extinct. It is not, so far, even entirely apologetic. (Ideals aside, the seniors insist that men, when they want to settle down, refuse to settle for other men's playthings . . . The double standard is alive and well.)

God, by the way, is also alive and well, although weekly Mass-attendance has viral pneumonia. The seniors go—but on mood, not schedule.

One of my students tells me that probing, late-night conversations on religious concerns are on the increase; but she is the warm and thoughtful kind of person around whom such conversations would naturally coalesce—so I can't be sure her experience is typical.

At least the new cults are not getting them. Our seniors see them merely as avenues to 'belonging,' not God.

You want me to sum up? O.K. It could be worse; it could also be a lot better . . . God, make some trouble down here! Send us a saint! (Only, please, not in my family.)

(Michael Zeik teaches in the Department of History at Marymount College, Tarrytown, New York.)

Monika K. Hellwig: 'Personal'

THE EXERCISE of characterizing (perhaps unintentionally caricaturing) a younger generation always carries the danger that it may reveal much more about the author than about the group being described. They do, of course, look younger every year, and their attitudes and performance look less and less like the good old days.

How one sees the class of '79 depends a great deal on the standard of comparison. Compared with my own college contemporaries many aeons ago, they are distracted, they want quick results, they are not for the most part interested in learning but only in the status and income that a college degree will bring. But then I did my undergraduate studies in England in a situation where university studies were more elitist.

If one compares the class of '79 with that of '69, certain characteristics do seem to stand out in sharp relief. Those with whom I have had contact are not going to set the world on fire. They are for the most part unashamedly interested in money, that is in finding their way into high income brackets. It is my recollection that the graduates of '69 may have had this as a hidden agenda but would have been ashamed to admit to it. Consonant with this, they seem anxious to play the college game and the life game according to the rules. In the course of their college careers on our campus, the class now graduating have not engaged the administration in any major confrontation. During their college careers we have not once had to end classes early or close the campus down on account of demonstrations that threatened to get out of hand. My recollection of the late sixties is that we never finished a spring semester as planned. Though the upheavals and demonstrations did not always originate on our campus or with our students, they were sufficiently involved that it made the normal conduct of business impossible. By contrast, when a rowdy group of demonstrators approached our campus this spring, students massed themselves to form a barricade against the demonstrators' entry at the front gates to the campus. I asked a number of students whether they were opposed to the claims of the demonstrators. Their answer was that that was irrelevant; their concern was to keep any demonstrators off the campus, especially on a day when employment interviews were being held by business firms for graduating seniors.

In general it must be said that the graduating class of '79,

while still casual, looks considerably neater than the class of '69. In the small sample of my acquaintance, fewer of them look "spaced out," fewer of them have dropped out and refused to graduate. Although the employment situation and the prospects of admission to professional schools or fellowships for graduate schools, are all really no better if not actually worse than ten years ago, there appears to be considerably less discouragement and almost no anger against the established order of things.

In my recollection, religious values a decade ago were heavily prophetic. They were almost wholly identified with social justice issues of peace, poverty, civil and human rights, disarmament and so forth. Religious interest was turned to the East, toward the exotic, the forbidden, the unexplored. Social justice issues are not absent from our campus today, but they seem to carry neither the numbers nor the passion of '69. Interest in Eastern religions is not absent either, but the attraction is no longer that of the exotic or the forbidden. Religious interest in general is far less prophetic and far more personal. Many of the class of '79 have had experience, happy or otherwise, of the charismatic movements, of prayer groups, of student retreats. Few if any of them are angry at the institutional church, possibly because they do not even know enough about it. Most, during their college years on a Jesuit campus, have exhibited a pleasant curiosity about the church and its affairs or an amiable and friendly indifference on the matter on a "live and let live" basis. When they are interested in religion they are overwhelmingly interested in prayer and in understanding doctrinal teachings. They are not angered over official statements on divorce or contraception and such matters, because they do not on the whole take them very seriously.

It would be difficult to describe the moral values of the group. Perhaps the truest epithet would be "conventional," in the sense that they appear to accept the morality they have seen in operation among their parents. If truthfulness, honesty, sexual morality have been treated quite lightly in the world they have known, the standards are not questioned. If rather strict standards have been operative, they do not seem to be questioned either. It is my impression that students from such backgrounds are not ashamed to maintain their traditional morality on campus, whereas some years ago they would have felt very heavily pressured to "get with the swing of things."

When all is said and done, persons are free and responsible for their own values in any generation, thank God, and all generalizations are more or less untrue.

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Jean Bethke Elshtain: 'Search'

THERE is no single way to characterize the class of '79. At my own institution, this year's graduates represent a bewildering potpourri of political, religious, ethnic and social commitments, although the University of Massachusetts is unusual in the number of left-oriented radicals among its student population. (This can be accounted for in part by the presence of what *Science* magazine, in an article on the subject, termed the "critical mass" of radical faculty at the University.)

Perhaps the most cogent, direct evidence I can proffer concerning the class of '79 draws upon my experience teaching a seminar designed for senior majors in our elite Social Thought Political Economy program, a program which includes among its ranks some of the University's most highly politicized, theoretically sophisticated, and articulate students. These students are expressing more pointedly and poignantly than in previous years certain concerns which can only be seen as moral and even religious. Ambivalence is the term that best captures their respective states of mind and conflicted personal and political identities. The Soviet Union's barbaric treatment of its dissidents, China's "war of punishment" against Vietnam, the ignominy of Pol Pot's reign of terror in Cambodia (not forgetting America's role in helping to set the stage for that historic tragedy) have thrown irritants into what was, in some instances, an unreflectively held Marxist image and doctrinal truth. Students sensitive to moral concerns are deeply troubled by what these events and policies may say about their own and others' uncritical commitments to one or more variants of Marxist-Leninism. Thus I find deeper interest in the question of "socialism and freedom" than I have at any other time in recent memory.

My atypical minority of the class of '79 is interested in re-examining the American political tradition, à la Garry Wills's *Inventing America*, in re-thinking the question of "rights" and in attempting to bridge the gap between a tradition tied to rights and the socialist tradition without junking altogether their own shared historic roots. The values implicit in their restless and troubling search may be summarized by what appears to be a growing awareness that to answer the question, "What ought I to do?" one must first seek to determine "Who am I?" The latter question constitutes the key to these students' moral concerns for it cannot be treated without considering more broadly the nature of human beings, what it means to be a person. Cast in religious terms, a doctrine of personhood is being sought as part of the creation of a touchstone from which to defend the inviolable dignity of human beings.

As a teacher, I find that I can raise Kantian imperatives on "respect for persons" and find a receptive, if warily so, student audience. Amidst the admitted predatory individualism, instrumentalist use and abuse of others, narcissistic sensate-domination, and dogmatic cultism also to be found among students—and perhaps even more representative than my admitted minority—the group of seniors I have discussed embody the kind of humanistic concerns, also exemplified by Pope John Paul II, that retain a vibrancy our society's malaise has failed to altogether eradicate. Dare we share Freud's touchingly expressed conviction that, "The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest till it has gained a hearing"?

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