



## Project FORWARD '76

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To the Heads of Denominations and Other  
National Bodies

Dear Friends,

You will recall receiving my letter and questionnaire of July 30th soliciting information from churches and other national organizations on the nature and extent of their participation in the observance of the American Bicentennial.

The response to this enquiry was very gratifying. The resultant report is a 250-page compendium of policy statements, publications, program activities and other information from nearly two hundred churches and other national bodies in addition to extensive data from regional and local ecumenical agencies, seminaries and individual leaders. One section of this book is a reflective commentary on the data entitled "The Nation With the Soul of a Church" by Richard R. Gilbert, of which a copy is enclosed.

We have a small further supply of the Gilbert piece. If you would like to have additional copies we can send you as many as ten as long as they last at a figure between \$1.00 and \$2.00 for the expense of handling and mailing the total number, the exact cost depending on the quantity.

In the case of the full report, I regret that unless there is a greater demand than we expect we cannot reproduce more copies at reasonable cost. Should there be enough requests, however, to enable us to produce and mail it for as little as \$5.00 apiece we shall be glad to process it and to fill your orders at not more than this figure. For your convenience in requesting either of these pieces, a reply form is enclosed. If you order the full report and we cannot supply it we will refund your money.

May I express my thanks to the large number of you who supplied us with information. I believe those of you who did not reply will be equally interested in the Gilbert essay as well as in the full report. May all of your people continue to be blessed as they give gratitude to God for the religious heritage of our nation.

Sincerely,

*R. H. Edwin Espy*

R. H. Edwin Espy



RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN BICENTENNIAL

*"The  
Nation  
with the  
Soul  
of a  
Church"*

Richard R. Gilbert

with an  
introduction by  
R. H. Edwin Espy

## INTRODUCTION

What has been the interaction between the religious dimension of American life and the observance of our nation's Bicentennial? To what extent has this brief experience said anything fundamental about the role of religion in our history? In our present society? In our address to future issues?

The following essay by Richard R. Gilbert, "The Nation With the Soul of a Church," is a stimulating contribution to the study of these questions, a distilled appraisal by one authority of a compilation of over four hundred responses to approximately a thousand questionnaires sent to persons in five categories. This compilation became a 250-page report, "Religion and the American Bicentennial," prepared by a small team of specialists. The respondents and other persons who contributed data were reporting in some cases their own experience and viewpoints in relation to the Bicentennial but most of them were speaking in behalf of churches, church-related bodies and other interested organizations. The term churches in this context embraces Jewish and other faith groups.

This national survey was conducted by Project FORWARD '76 at the request of The American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) which wanted its final report to the American people to include information on the role of religion in the Bicentennial celebration. Project FORWARD '76 was a three-year program, now concluded, whose purpose was to encourage a deeper religious dimension in the observance of the Bicentennial. It was sponsored by The Interchurch Center in New York and two hundred fifty leading Americans who supported its purpose. It enjoyed the cooperation of many national organizations which greatly facilitated the gathering of the extensive material for the ARBA report.

The following monograph, however, is not a factual summary of the data but rather a creative reflection on their meaning. It cuts beneath the facts and figures to the basic religious ethos and values of America in their particular bearing on our life as a nation.

It is hoped that Richard Gilbert's trenchant commentary will be as evocative to those who will read it for the first time, and who have not seen the total report, as it has been for those of us who have been involved in securing and compiling the data on which it is based. We will be especially gratified if this essay stimulates a deepened interest in the themes it discusses. The moral and religious issues which face our nation must be treated seriously if we are to surmount our problems and exploit our opportunities.

As the Gilbert commentary makes clear, we are called to continuing study and some hard decisions in the years just ahead as we plot our way from the Bicentennial Era into the Twenty-First Century.

R. H. Edwin Espy  
Editor, Report on Religion  
and the American Bicentennial

November, 1976

## "THE NATION WITH THE SOUL OF A CHURCH"

In the 484 years since Columbus, roughly 60 million people left Europe and came to America. With the exception of the native Americans who walked across the Bering Straits from Asia some 20,000 years earlier, all of us came here by boat or descended from those who did. This matchless movement in history was what Franklin D. Roosevelt had in mind (or tongue in cheek) when he began a speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution with, "My fellow immigrants..."

Why did the immigrants come? Sir Walter Raleigh allowed that "men have traveled, as they have lived, for religion, wealth, for pleasure, for power, and for the overthrow of rivals." Sir Walter added parenthetically that he had come to "annoy the King of Spain." The millions who followed, however, came for the sake of the values they held dear, "Gold, Glory and the Gospel," and for reasons more immediately personal, such as running from the authorities.

During the Bicentennial Year, Americans have been taking a fresh look at the values that brought them here and kept them here, the ideas and feelings and beliefs that lead a people to the endless, inventive search for the kinds of action and the quality of existence which is a fitting response to the nation's creation.

As with Raleigh and the King of Spain, the values celebrated by some have done more to annoy than to uplift. Early on, a writer from *The New York Times*, coined the word Buy-Centennial. An estimated 25,000 products were created for the occasion. Although the *American Revolution Bicentennial Administration* (ARBA) awarded its seal to the deserving few whose standards were high, multitudes wrapped their shoddy wares in the red, white and blue, ran them up the ad-pole and asked the public to salute. There were Revolutionary air fares, Minutemen vitamin tablets, endless gadgets priced at \$17.76, and inevitably, a Bicentennial bathroom. As P. T. Barnum observed, "Nobody ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public."

Tastelessness aside, the Bicentennial was neither the orgy of commercialism and self-congratulation predicted by some nor the terrorist bombing of the Statue of Liberty predicted by others. Beginning early and continuing still, an astonishing array of historical pageants, dramas, sagas, parades, fairs, and exhibitions came into being. Books, secular and religious, gushed forth from presses like an ever-rolling stream. People

gathered in small groups, what FORWARD '76 called "cracker-barrels," from which historical perches, sitters and talkers have taken a hard look at what America can become. And it is a flat fact, that July 4 was a magnificent day of fireworks and bell-ringing of gay spectacle and solemn worship.

Amidst this kaleidoscope of celebration was the religious response to the Bicentennial. Evaluating that contribution is like isolating the parts of a Chinese puzzle. Nevertheless, when Dr. R. H. Edwin Espy sent out a call to religious leaders and institutions, asking them for their reactions to the year's events, he was inundated with replies. Of course, leaders are a very limited edition of the religious chronicle of their time. Often they are so far up-carpet that they cannot be fully aware of what transpires in the main corridors below. Yet from their height it is possible to see around a few curves where the scenery is plunging and rolling away from the rest of us.<sup>2</sup>

Judged by their reports, bolstered by our own files and the lush profusion of brochures and booklets, American religion did not so much celebrate the Bicentennial as study it. The golden thread that wove its way through the religious tapestry of 1976 was genealogical...the search for roots.

What happened religiously was a giant excavation of those historic roots which give each faith its identity and uniqueness. From Baha'is to Baptists, from Jews to Catholics, from the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel to the standard brands of Protestantism, the religious communities dug into their histories, traced their emergence on the American scene, faced their shortcomings, and honored their heroes and heroines.<sup>3</sup>

The irony was that in tracing their own roots, they stumbled across the often interlocking roots of others and finally, chanced upon the single greatest puzzle in America's religious life, the civil religion that poses as our family tree and purports to unify the nation in the midst of its diversities. In a sense, the wandering tribes of Israel traced their ancestry back to Eden, but when they got there, they were not all that pleased with their oneness.

Oneness? To the disgust of plain folk, the world of religion is a Tower of Babel, a confusion of tongues. It is also a confusion of ideas, desires, aims and practices. The mind finds it hard to accustom itself to the bewildering variety where Jews hold to the absolute oneness of God, where Christians believe in a Triune God and Buddhists follow a religion that makes no room

for God at all, where the religious activist is amazed at the scholar's ivory tower, where one sociologist says that America is a vast wilderness of secularity, and another notes that every index proves that the U.S. is the most pervasively religious land on earth, where the Unitarian looks upon the Jehovah's Witness as a fanatic and the millenarian returns the compliment by regarding all intellectuals as hopeless elitists, where the Supreme Court accepts first one definition of religion and then its very opposite -- in short America is a curious land in which one's delight is another's distaste and even those who teach religion often regard those who practice it as degraded, blind or perverted. Add the quicksand of separation of church and state to the general confusion, and the outside observer becomes pardonably paranoid.

The bewilderment increases when it is realized that the simple dictionary definition of religion is not so simple after all.

The most popular definition is that of the Oxford Dictionary: "Religion: belief in the supernatural, together with the communal life and practices related to such a belief." This covers what most people mean by religion. Simply read, it is belief in God and membership in a church. Does that common meaning work?

The answer is no, for the following reasons:

1. If religion has to do with belief in God, then it excludes historical religions like Buddhism which make no room for the supernatural.
2. If religion has to do with membership in a church it fails to include millions of Americans who belong to no religious organization, but who believe in God, pray, and consider themselves "religious."
3. AND if religion has to do only with belief in God and church membership, it excludes much of what is taught in secular universities about the essence of religion as a cultural phenomenon.

Civil servants, business executives and just plain people will be glad to know that one contribution made by religious study during the Bicentennial was the search for a root definition for religion that is adequately inclusive, precise, nonsectarian and illuminating.<sup>4</sup>

For our own purposes we have simply tried to de-limit the major senses in which religion is used. First, we speak of Organized

Religion...the congregations, the denominations, all their real property, program and practices.<sup>5</sup> Second, we speak of Religious Knowledge, a major branch of learning at colleges, seminaries and universities. Third, we speak of Religious Orientation, whatever one values most intensively and comprehensively. We will attempt to see how Religion U.S.A. operated on these three interlocking levels during the Bicentennial.

#### I Organized Religion...It's contribution to the Bicentennial

The first thing that hits one about organized religion is its sheer enormity. 131 million Americans are members of 350,000 congregations which collect annually almost 9 billion dollars, over half of all charitable giving, and each Sunday some 80 million worshippers gather for services, boasting more musicians in the choirs, than all the rest of the musical world put together! What this adds up to is a staggering fact: Despite slackening attendance and contributions, there is still a lot of religion around.

Organized religion includes, of course, the personal expressions of religion which usually take the form of prayer, study, Bible-reading, worship, adoration, meditation, mysticism and religious arts. At the same time, one does not have to be a part of organized religion to engage in one or all of these practices, individually or communally...Indeed a staggering amount of religiousness occurs outside congregations.

Publishers and record companies call this the world of unorganized religion, and a formidable market it is. Gallup reports year after year that, whereas only 62% of the nation is connected to the "churches," 96% of the people say they believe in God, pray or read religious literature! Put another way, church attendance is not the only index to the religiousness of America.

One quickly adds, however, that the flesh and blood congregation is the basic cell in the body of religion, for it is the only kind that trains leaders, builds buildings, raises money, leads reform movements, gathers and disperses for worship and work. In short, without corporate religion the faith would scarcely be passed on to succeeding generations.

#### A. POLICY AND PRONOUNCEMENTS

What then, was the attitude of the leaders of organized religion to the occasion of the Bicentennial?

One recalls the axiom that no generalizations are true, not even this one. If one were to make a sweeping generalization about the spirit of '76 among hierarchies, executives and all others in authority, it would be this: They did not let the Bicentennial interfere with matters of greater importance.

On a scale of one to ten, America's 200th birthday party would have received a 2 or 3. With few exceptions, religious leaders were as taken by surprise when January 1, 1976 rolled around as were their peers in education, science and government. With few exceptions, resources were not planned far enough ahead to break into projections and deadlines for curricula. On the whole, it is fair to say that neither celebrations nor studies swept aside the older priorities of education, evangelism, stewardship and social action. Rather, the Bicentennial was shoe-horned into those on-going programs.

The great exception was history. A great many religious communities from local congregations to denominations, commissioned their own histories. The busiest offices in each communion were the departments of history. The most sought-after speakers from colleges and seminaries were historians. The typical topic in the questionnaires received by FORWARD '76 was related to the role of religion in the American experience.

As one's finger runs across the historical brochures produced by the various religions, it is not surprising that the accent was parochial. Evangelical bodies were most thankful for religious liberty and called upon their people to win the nation for Christ by the year 2000. Those with liberal leanings questioned the hypocrisy of a revolution fought for freedom which subsequently denied that freedom to blacks, native Americans, women and ethnics. Revolutionary communities suggested that the American people, after winning their revolution, have hated every revolution since.

The policy statements of the various bodies are listed in this report. Many of their programs, launched from denominational headquarters, had considerable substance. We mention, as representative, these few:

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops held discussion programs in 100 dioceses on the meaning of freedom and justice as it affects the individual, the family, the neighborhood, the nation, the world community and the Church. Many of these "hearings" were widely covered in the press. The value: people and leaders had a chance to listen to one another talk about up-front issues of race,

ethnicity, work, and in so doing, to identify the subjects to be forwarded to a national meeting, Call to Action. Thus in Detroit from October 21-23, delegates from the church at large will meet to suggest specific actions to the end that America may become a freer and more just society. To the outside observer, the lesson was clear: While most denominations procrastinated through 1975 and pronounced during 1976, the Catholics had already printed and distributed their study material (notably an excellent booklet called, *Liberty and Justice For All*) planned and conducted meetings, and more important, encouraged the rank and file to speak out locally, to be heard officially, and register opinions nationally.

The Southern Baptist Convention, like the Catholic Bishops, was not caught by surprise when 1976 arrived. In fact, for sheer energy and activity, the Southern Baptists led the way with study, special events, curriculum material, books, (18), music and drama (8 productions), audio-visuals (10), and a host of pamphlets, radio-TV spots and promotional material known only to those with that special Nashville touch. Another thing. When the Baptists have a conference, they don't put in the second team. Leaving aside President Ford who was not reluctant to address the Convention, they held a three-day meeting in the Presidential Ballroom of the Statler Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C., which featured the following: Senator Kennedy on health; Harvey Cox on revolution; Senator McGovern on justice; Representative Barbara Jordan and Senator Howard Baker on the political year; Leonard Woodcock on integrity in labor, and J. Irwin Miller on integrity in business. Surprisingly, for those who stereo-type the Southern Baptists as hard-shell conservatives, a special Bicentennial conference was held in the summer of '76 which featured "Minorities and the Bicentennial," "American Civil Religion...Bane or Blessing," and "Baptist Social Reformers." Clearly the lesson for Protestants in the low-church tradition who want to celebrate an event: Turn things over to the denomination's Historical Society in combination with its Christian Life Commission, or to its Social Action agency, by whatever name.

The Mennonite Church is representative of those denominations which took a long, thoughtful look at the Bicentennial

and were unimpressed, or downright suspicious. In 1975, the Mennonites celebrated 450 years of life and history; 200 was not that magic for them. Furthermore, they called their people to repentance; "...where we have been unthankful for the bountiful freedoms and benefits; for a clouded witness regarding militarism, nationalism, imperialism, exploitation, elitism, idolatry; for inability to resist the calls of the nation state where they have conflicted with the claims of the kingdom of God." And finally they made it clear that in their tradition, "Christ's kingdom transcends national boundaries and includes believers from all nations...."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The Mormons were among the most active celebrants of the Bicentennial. Their policy statement offers an interesting contrast to the one which follows by the NCCC Task Force. The Mormons, who have no paid ministry, alluded to the American locus of their faith, organized in Western New York by Joseph Smith in 1830, and stated: "While we must never permit an erosion of the freedom the Constitution guarantees, we cannot let permissiveness replace responsibility. There must be a dedication to observing and honoring the law of the land. To remain strong, we must cherish chastity and fidelity, love of work, personal integrity and the desire to serve our fellow men." This reaffirmation of the Protestant Ethic was matched by celebrative activities featuring national TV appearances by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, a commissioned musical, *Threads of Glory*, a pageant *Above All Other Lands*, family night study materials, no less than 16 full-length Bicentennial musicals produced by congregations, and publication of five major books. Above all, the church challenged its members to contribute nearly six million man-hours of community service during the Bicentennial.

NCCC Task Force. The Ecumenical Task Force was set up by the National Council of the Churches of Christ to be its "working body" on the Religious Observance of the Nation's Bicentennial. And work it did. Without a doubt, one of the best backward looks at religion in the Revolution and an unusually trenchant look on the issues facing Christians in the future were those resources produced by the Task Force. *The Light in The Steeple*, 20 pages done in tabloid

size and format, addressed the American Revolution and the religious forces contributing to it.

Reflecting the policy statement of the NCCC "to act with vigor on behalf of the poor and powerless..." one article in *Steeple* described the Forgotten History of the Revolution. It made the point that "the contributions of women, blacks, Indians, Jews, and other non-white, non-male, non-English groups..." have been overlooked. For example, few history books in public schools mention the mob of over 100 women (Philadelphia 1777) "who overpowered a merchant who was hoarding a hogshead of coffee and took it away from him," according to a letter from Abigail Adams to her husband, John.

Twice the size of *Steeple* was another publication called *Bicentennial Broadside* which assembled a Who's Who of Scholars, (Martin Marty, Roger Shinn, Robert Bellah, James Smylie, etc.) for a spectrum approach to religious liberty, civil religion, celebration, theology, history, ethnic studies, witness and the arts. On religious liberty, for example, Dean Kelley wrote in *Broadside*, "The primary way of enhancing religious liberty is not just to talk about it but to use it. This does not mean to claim special privileges for it...nor to thrust our religious views on others with the state's help or acquiescence. Instead, it should mean finding ways to strengthen and enhance the voluntarism ...that is one of the great resources of our society."

Other units in the NCCC were active during the Bicentennial. Friendship Press published four major books. The Communications Commission produced with the three networks a number of national broadcasts. One that seems sure to enjoy a long run around the church market is *The Right to Believe*, (ABC-TV) a one-hour special which traced the development of religious freedom in America, with the help of Dr. Henry Commager. NBC came through with a drama called, *A Gathering of One*, the life of Jonathan Edwards, and CBS aired a program on alleged political oppression in the U.S., *Limits to Freedom?*

Perhaps the heaviest contribution of the NCCC was denominational in nature, which sounds a bit curious to outsiders who may not realize that the National Council is not a church but a cooperative agency of denominations like Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Reformed, etc. It was the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, for example, which produced the *Bicentennial Broadside*. Staff

from these bodies, working with NCCC staff, were determined that the Bicentennial not be "triumphalist" but recognize and rectify the nation's shortcomings by advancing "the role of minorities, women, the poor and victims of injustice." That accent was the triumph of the NCCC.

The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). America's oldest Pentecostal Church (1886). The Church of God celebrated its 90th birthday by building a church every day in the year! As for American history, this body went on record with its loyalty and love for the land. [America] "needs true friends and loyal supporters as never before. There are many subversive groups busily working to corrupt and change our government and our American way of life. It is high time for all loyal Americans to stand up against anti-American activities and proclaim our love and devotion to its principles of equality, human rights and liberty."

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States. Noting that its local spiritual assemblies had grass roots programs of their own (community parades, special meetings, service projects), the National Spiritual Assembly made special mailings to American leaders which interpreted their principles of progressive revelation, religious unity, and a new world order. "Believing in the oneness of religion, the oneness of mankind, and the importance of one's daily acts being the expression of one's beliefs, Baha'is have attempted through this Bicentennial Year to convey to their friends and neighbors their conviction about the spiritual potential of America and the significant role it plays in the world."

The American Jewish Historical Society. Like many similar historical groups in the denominations, the Jewish society acted as a resource for local celebrations. Articles, booklets, audio-visuals, and exhibitions of documents, photographs, posters, and newspapers contributed to the aim of the society; the collection, preservation, exhibition, publication, and popularization of material of every kind having reference to the settlement, history and life of Jews on the American continent...."

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America. Although most of the activities were a "reflection upon our role in advancing the religious principles upon which this nation was founded," this body did not overlook the international aspects of the Bicentennial. A council was convened in Athens in which the message of the Bicentennial was carried to Greece. In an encyclical, Archbishop Iakovos stated: "We are called upon to use our God-given creativity, our resourcefulness, and our sense of historical perspective in renewing the original spirit of America for the salvation of our nation. A spiritual and moral renewal is the basic call of the Bicentennial...."

## B. CONGREGATIONS AND STUDY-GROUPS

Although many of these pronouncements and denominational meetings had their impact, it is doubtful that the local congregations did more than nod their heads. What did affect them was the study of history in small groups and the interpretations of Religious History from the pulpit.<sup>6</sup>

That study had two foci: one was the theme of religious liberty as it first emerged on the American scene; the other was the continuing relationship between church and state.

### 1. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND DISESTABLISHMENT

It was fascinating to view the different interpretations of the great American experiment with establishment, disestablishment and pluralism. Since Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Episcopalians were the dominant religious forces before 1776, their historians led the way in what many regard as the most radical step in church history...the reversal of over a thousand years of establishment.

Robert T. Handy, who contributed an article in the Bicentennial book published by FORWARD '76, *Forum: Religious Faith Speaks To American Issues*, points out that, with few exceptions, Americans of the 17th century were very much convinced of the wisdom of "one faith for one commonwealth." They believed it was the duty of the state to support religious uniformity with taxes and defend it with the sword. In England toleration was stirring, but this was a far cry from freedom; the Church of England, secure



in prestige and power, patronized dissenters, permitting them existence but not equality.

When the Puritans landed in New England, they were establishmentarians to a believer. Some of the resources studied by Presbyterians through their Historical Society<sup>7</sup> defend the Puritans from the modern day charge of hypocrisy. According to the conventional wisdom (even at the level of the Supreme Court), the Puritans came to America to worship freely but once here, denied that same liberty to others. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Puritans, like Catholics and Lutherans, did not come half way around the world for the sake of tolerance. They braved the wilderness for the sake of the Truth as they saw it. They did not want religious liberty; they wanted Establishment. They did not believe in democracy but in theocracy. Had they prevailed, we would be celebrating the 200th anniversary of church-state.

What caused the American colonies to reverse 1500 years of church establishment and espouse the novel cause of pluralism? Judging by the historical resources prepared for the Bicentennial, there seems to be a remarkable agreement among church scholars. Perhaps part of this story has the musty smell of a small town museum. For me it was as exciting as the birth of a nation's mind; in which the mid-wives were pluralism, The Enlightenment and The Great Awakening.

### Pluralism

The sheer multiplicity of religious groups served to check the advance of any one church. It became more and more difficult to maintain the "one true faith" when ten others were pushed with equal vigor. With many churches occupying the same territory and rivaling each other's claims to truth and authority, all absolute claims were shaken. In actual fact, no one religion was ever able to win the allegiance of a majority of Americans.

An added dimension to multiplicity was the fact that most Americans were not churched at all. It's estimated that upon the outbreak of the Revolution only 10% of the population were members of any church. The other 90% were hardly prime prospects for ecclesiastical pressure.

Perhaps more important than "outsiders" who wanted to be left alone were the insiders like Roger Williams<sup>8</sup> who sought sepa-

ration for biblical reasons. The left wingers of Puritanism, the Baptists, and Quakers, were exceptions.

Scotch-Irish Presbyterians brought to America painful memories of persecution in Ireland, and Anabaptists shared similar experiences in Lutheran Germany!<sup>9</sup> These vocal groups espoused liberty not on prudential grounds but on the solid rock of the gospel itself. Simply put, they thought that anyone who had to be forced into religion by the state would be a rotten believer. Even Roman Catholics in the East, who were strongly committed to establishment in principle, came to prefer pluralism, as Bishop Carrol reported to his superiors in Rome.

Organizationally, something new was emerging, the spirit of which affected both "churchly" elements and "sectarian" elements. It was the middle course of denominationalism, the very word suggesting a numerical basis for religion, analogous to the numbers worn on football jerseys which identify functions not ranks.

### Enlightenment

"The great Mr. Locke" and his empirical brother, Newton, were quite influential in colonial America, particularly at Harvard and widely among aristocrats. Flocking to their banners were teachers and clergy from Philadelphia, New York and Boston. By far, their best American spokesman was The Reverend Charles Chauncy. He offered America a God who was Father, parental in his love toward every creature, damning no babies, preferring no elect. Chauncy and a host of like-minded liberal clergy and laymen planted seeds of humanism and liberalism which were to flower in the 20th century.<sup>10</sup>

The other wing of the Enlightenment was Deism. Never a widespread movement, it deeply influenced the "creative talent" of the Constitution--Franklin, Madison and Jefferson. For the Deist, God was the great clockmaker who had wound the world up at creation and left it to tick on its own according to rational principles built into the nature of man and his society. Unlike liberal Christians of the Enlightenment, Deists did not worship a personal God, nor did they revere Jesus as more than man, albeit the best man. Flourishing in the hiatus between the Awakenings, it may have been more directly responsible for the religious clause in the First Amendment than any other influence. This fact should temper the claims of religious patriots who would root the birth of our nation exclusively in the soil of the "Old Time Religion." Not so.<sup>11</sup>

Taken whole, the Enlightenment set in motion a train of thought that was to play a critical role in American life and values. It balanced, and paradoxically found common ground with, revivalism; it widened the understanding of religion to include far more than the church-going, theistic believer; a germ that was to grow in the minds of theologians like Tillich and jurists like Warren and Douglas and Frankfurter. And it formed one of the two great poles of American religious thinking, that of Humanism.

### The Great Awakening

The most far-reaching and transforming movement in the 18th century religious life of America was the Great Awakening. It is not too much to say that it marked the appearance of a distinctively American form of Christianity. Evangelical historians have brought this event to the attention of their churches during the Bicentennial.<sup>12</sup>

A Bicentennial issue of *Christianity Today* paints a picture of this Awakening in the 1730s, which swept across farming communities in every part of the colonies, converting about one-sixth of the people, making inroads in towns and colleges, infecting the frontiers, and spooking the war horses of Calvinism and Anglicanism. Taking aim at half-way Christians and hard-hearted sinners, the Great Awakening put its emphasis on "conversion," the transforming regenerative change, as the normal method of entry into the church. It was the first infectious idea to spread across all the colonies, breaking down barriers between them and preparing the way for a larger national unity. But perhaps more than anything else, it produced thousands of Christians in non-established churches, people accustomed to running their own lives and that of their congregations without interference from state or hierarchy.

Both on TV<sup>13</sup> and in Bicentennial articles, the United Church of Christ has tried to rescue from oblivion the mind of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was born only three years before Benjamin Franklin. The contrasts between the two stand like bookends around the revivalistic and enlightenment thought of the period.

But the interesting fact is this: The common man of America had no difficulty reconciling the political ideals of Franklin with the religious ideas of Edwards. The late colonial American voted like a Deist and prayed like a Calvinist. This common

ground of belief, this majority credo, had a later impact on civil religion, middle-America and "Americanism."

As for the effects wrought on later history by the Great Awakening, the major one is the legacy of revivalism. With the emergence of Jimmy Carter as a political force, more Americans are becoming aware that Evangelicalism is still the dominant force in American religious life.<sup>14</sup> Winning souls, emotional conversion, itinerant preachers...the line can be drawn straight from Whitefield to Finney to Moody to Sunday to Graham. From this rich soil came the lusty subcutaneous growth of Baptist and Methodist churches. Thousands were swept into their folds. Clearly, the churches using revivals became the giants.<sup>15</sup> Although church religion was at an all-time low during the revolutionary period, it is interesting that only a few years after the adoption of the First Amendment with its rational and enlightenment undergirding, the second Awakening broke out and continued to throbb until the Civil War--and subsequently into the 20th Century.

These major forces, then, pluralism, Enlightenment, and Awakening, were the seed beds of the great reversal, the disestablishment of religion and the emergence of religious freedom. The fact that thousands of churches studied these events during the Bicentennial may have a more lasting effect on contemporary religion than more flamboyant celebrations.

What, then, did the thousands of church schools and adult groups learn from a study of their own early histories?

For one thing, they learned about the melting pot in which nothing ever melted down. Handy writes: "People of English descent made up more than half of the nation's population at the time of its birth but persons of Irish, Scottish, German, Dutch, French, Swedish, African and Indian origins, formed important segments of American society. It was already evident that a way had to be found to allow persons of many backgrounds and interests to become part of the new nation without losing their own identity and traditions."<sup>16</sup>

For another, religious study groups during the Bicentennial dipped into the next phase of our history, the separation of church and state. As Handy put it: "It was no accident that the very first clause of the First Amendment dealt with religion."

## 2. CHURCH AND STATE - The Context of Religious Liberty

One of the first publications of the Interchurch Center in New York was the book by Francis Stuart Harmon, *Religious Freedom in America*. This compilation of old prints, photographs and famous quotations from Roger Williams to Luther Weighle has been one of the most useful study documents in Bicentennial religious observances. Octogenarian Harmon, a distinguished lawyer and churchman, writes, "All our basic freedoms are in one bundle; freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, freedom of individual dignity derived from 'the laws of nature and nature's God'. He who undermines one of these fundamental freedoms, weakens all."<sup>17</sup>

In travels to the major cities of America over a three-year period, I have come across hundreds of the posters from this book, many exhibited in libraries and secular offices. A widely quoted page deserves to be reproduced in any account of religion in the Bicentennial.

### "Liberty and Responsibility"

"In our first two hundred years as a nation, the United States has honored religious liberty both in theory and practice to an unprecedented extent for a vast country with a diverse and shifting populace. The main pillars of religious liberty are secure:

- No one is put in jail because of the church he attends or doesn't attend;
- No one is taxed to support any church or all churches;<sup>18</sup>
- No one is denied public office because of religious affiliation;
- No one is punished by civil authority for preaching heretical religious doctrines.

"Our disputes in this area now are over derivative, though no less serious, questions:

- May prayers be offered in public schools?
- May tax funds be applied to secular purposes in church-related schools?

- May persons who object for reasons of conscience be exempted from laws applying to others?
- May persons be punished for acting in accordance with their beliefs in unorthodox, unpopular or even unlawful ways?
- May religious groups be restricted or penalized by government for expressing their collective witness on public affairs?
- May persons be discriminated against because of their religious beliefs or adherence (or lack thereof)?

"These are the new areas of religious liberty through which our understanding and application are gradually expanding. Generally, there has been no purposive denial or diminishment of religious liberties once granted. Will that continue to be the case? No court or constitution can vitalize the liberties which citizens no longer exercise or treasure. The liberties which citizens robustly use and responsibly defend, no arm of Government will take away. What, then, will be the status of American religious liberty in another century? Or two?

"The answer is already being shaped by the esteem in which we hold the liberties we now have, by the vigor with which we exercise them, by the zeal with which we seek to extend them to others.

"What will be our generation's contribution to the unfolding and safeguarding of religious liberty for the future?"

I am sure that Mr. Harmon would be amused at a judicial exchange some years ago between a Justice of the Maryland Supreme Court... and butcher Sam Friedman, who was being tried for selling meat on the Sabbath, i.e. Sunday.

Justice: Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

Friedman: No sir.

Justice: Were you not convicted of selling meat on Sundays?

Friedman: That's a crime?

Justice: That's a crime!

Friedman: So excuse me. I'm sorry.

Justice: You were convicted of a crime then?

Friedman: No.

Justice: (Angry). You were convicted of selling meat?

Friedman: Yes.

Justice: And weren't you fined?

Friedman: Five dollars, I was fined.  
Justice: (Triumphant). That is a conviction of a crime.  
Friedman: Oh, oh--I thought when you made a holdup, that is a crime.  
Lawyer: Your Honor, apparently the witness seems to confuse religious and civil crimes.  
Justice: They are both crimes--holdups and selling meat.  
Friedman: Selling meat is a crime?  
Justice: Oh, all right. No further questions.

#### Summary...Organized Religion.

For 200 years, church and state have been tracking side by side. The Bicentennial gave religious organizations a fresh vision of that old adjacency and a new occasion for evaluating the historical laterals laid between them.

The Bicentennial roads travelled by the religious bodies were full of bumps, twists and curves. There were well-lighted areas of denominational programs. The busiest streets were congregational where numberless study groups addressed the twin subjects of religious liberty and church-state relationships. What happened on the unpaved sections overlooked in our survey may have greater significance in the long run. No one knows. On the whole, there were few religious collisions even when diverse leaders faced one another on divisive issues. The chief benefit, in my view, was the historical study which led to a discovery of the formative forces which religion has provided for the national character.

## II Religious Knowledge - The Significance of Civil Religion

The teaching of religion used to be the exclusive domain of organized religion. No longer. Today there are many more "religionists" who teach the history, philosophy and social-psychology of religion in universities than there are theologians who teach in seminaries. Their fields overlap, of course. Both are dedicated to scholarship. But whereas seminaries are in business chiefly to prepare graduate stu-

dents for the ministry, the university department of religion has the broader task of teaching undergraduates something about religion as a whole, its history and impact upon their lives. Beyond this, university departments have the internal task of relating religion to other disciplines--the arts and sciences that intersect religion at many points.

In the late sixties and early seventies, the intellectual center of gravity in religion shifted from seminary to university. The study of religion was broadened from the church (Organized Religion) to culture (Religious Orientation). During that shift, American religion may have reversed itself once again. 200 years ago we moved from establishment to disestablishment. Now to the delight of those who learned that wonderfully long word, antidisestablishmentarianism, we seem to be reversing the reversal. From the free market place of competing religions, we have formed a conglomerate called Civil Religion.

When first discussed, civil religion was scorned as patriotic piety, that malaise of middle America that homogenized all faiths in an effort to keep the Communists from winning the world. Contemptuously, theologians quoted President Eisenhower on the subject: "Our Government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."

Will Herberg is generally credited as uncovering this pernicious amalgamation of loosely-held beliefs and flag-waving propensities. He seized on the American Way of Life as the enemy of that diversity which protects religion from the ooze of uniformity.

The whole matter of civil religion hangs on the definition of religion.

Historian Sidney Mead has devoted a long scholarly life to drawing a distinction between organized religion--the religion of the churches and civil religion--the "Religion of the Republic." Mead follows the dictum of Paul Tillich that "religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion." In other words, religion is the stuff that gives meaning to culture and culture is the thing that gives shape to religion.

Previously religious scholarship was more or less comparative. Scholars compared their histories and doctrines with others and theirs looked better. Now the study of religion is the study of the entire culture. Put in lay terms, you go to church on Sunday or to synagogue on Saturday, but you are truly religious Monday through Friday because that is when you are most meaningfully involved in the total American Culture.

FORWARD '76 made this point in a study piece written for ARBA and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Naturally enough, the official understanding of religion focused on "organized religion" and conjured up fears of warring sects and judicial taboos like prayer in public schools. The mere mention of the word was enough to spook officialdom.

We wrote to clarify the cultural sense in which religion has been defined and accepted by the Supreme Court: "Religious orientation is the basic impulse of religion. Closely related to religious knowledge, religious orientation asks the question: What is religion in itself, defined on its own terms rather than on the terms of social sciences and the humanities, or even in the traditional terms of Christians and Jews? Inspired by the writings of Paul Tillich, there is now a growing consensus among "religionists" who teach in departments of religion: According to them, religion is ultimacy, whatever one values most intensively and comprehensively. Although some, like Sidney Hook, are bitter about this line of thought, feeling that it is circular and polemical, more the result of an identity crisis among teachers of religion than clear thinking, it has been fruitful.<sup>19</sup>

For one thing, religious orientation has infected the thinking of the Supreme Court justices. They now call "religion" whatever one values as most relevant for all people. That means that ideologies like atheism, pacifism, Marxism or secularism are religious orientations and therefore deserve protection under the First Amendment. What the Court and religionists seem to be saying is that serious, life-orienting ideologies are substitute religions.

The result of this line of thinking was revolutionary for public schools where, as we shall see, "Top Values" could be substituted for "religion" just as Mead predicted.

Into this moment made by Mead, stepped the Minuteman of Civil Religion, Robert Bellah.

Dr. Robert Bellah startled many people when he defended the American Way of Life as a useful civil religion.<sup>20</sup> In the past, says Bellah, Americanism has operated as a genuine faith with its own set of sacred persons (Lincoln, Washington), events (Revolution, Civil War, Westward Ho), beliefs (One Nation Under God), rituals (Thanksgiving, Fourth of July), and symbols (Flag, Constitution). This consensus of values has been, on the whole, a good thing. Why? Because Americanism has offered us an "ultimate concern" which gives citizens, church members and the unchurched, a plain road to God. Despite its all-out praise of America, the American Way of Life is capable of being self-critical (Watergate). The American civil religion is a growing and functioning force in society. It deserves to be treated with respect, not contempt. In short, said Bellah, civil religion is inevitable, necessary and can be good.

Answering Dr. Bellah, many seminary and university professors dipped their pens in blood and said:

- (1) Civil religion is mushy idolatry. Civil religion so confuses religion and national life that you can't tell one from another. Far from One Nation Under God, it puts the nation over God.
- (2) Civil religion is the lowest common denominator of values. Democratic and vulgar, it replaces vigorous black and white distinctions with a soggy synthesis. It smudges the good racial, religious, and ethnic lines that are America's glory.<sup>21</sup>
- (3) Civil religion is hopelessly self-satisfied and dangerously uncritical of all that is bad in national life--racism, sexism, the military-industrial complex. Blindly, it can celebrate "free enterprise," affluence, success, God-Loves-America, we're-number-one, etc.

Teapot tempest or Bicentennial blessing, civil religion was the most discussed and debated issue in Academia. What happened, then, during the Bicentennial period to the level of religion we call Religious Knowledge? First, the center of intellectual gravity in religion has shifted from seminaries to universities and from theological specialists to interdisciplinarians. Second, the definition of religion has been broadened from Organized Religions to Religious Orientation, from being a Protestant, Catholic or Jew to being any American who is serious about life, who gives himself to anything, heart, mind, body, and soul.<sup>22</sup>

With the field of culture so dutifully seeded, could the harvest of Values Education be far behind?

### III Religious Orientation - The Emergence of Values

While religious scholars were debating the meaning of religion, secular educators stole a march on them by finding a better word for religious orientation than religion, namely, "value." That, in one man's opinion, is the most significant development for Bicentennial religion, even though most religious leaders have not faced its implications. Because the word "religion" still means denominations, devotions, church-going and God-believing, because public officials approach the word with all the enthusiasm of a hound-dog sniffing a snapping turtle, and because the broader definition of religion as ultimate concern may not catch on at the corner bar, the in-sight of Mead/Tillich/Bellah had to find a new label. That label is "value."

Thanks to the popularity of people like Sidney Simon and Lawrence Kohlberg and to the alertness of religionists like those in the Religious Education Association, the Bicentennial was the occasion for a popular introduction to "Valuing" as America's newest substitute for religion. In fact, values education<sup>23</sup> is the most significant explosion in American public schools since the Evangelical Establishment met the Supreme Court and lost.

Let us look first at the value revolution and afterwards illustrate it in the American Issues Forum:

It is generally conceded that teaching religion in public schools is an impossible job, something like the paper cat chasing a celluloid rat through the halls of hell....How does a teacher find dependable norms for value judgments?

- The Puritan Ethic has had it.
- The Judeo-Christian Ethic has sprung a leak.
- The New Morality has doubtful appeal for the general public.

As a result, teachers live in a hazy hiatus between an old value system that is dying and a new one yet to be born. In this predicament, they arrive at value judgments more or less intuitively, and certainly without norms. For a touchstone, a star to steer by in a pluralistic culture, the teacher has nowhere to look. The valuing groups suggest a way out.

Think of the givens. Public schools

- ....face governmental regulations,
- ....reflect values in the transmission of information,
- ....suffer the criticism of parents and teachers,
- ....live in the First Amendment world of pluralistic values,
- ....serve the general public.

Today, valuing has suggested a way out of moral relativism without bringing back the evils of religious inculcation. In brief, thousands of public schools have opted for the values process without violating constitutional protections against values prescriptions. That's the theory, although in practice teaching values is just as tricky as teaching religion.

For 150 years, there was no acknowledged value problem because public schools were in effect Protestant parochial schools. Children were taught personal faith in a biblical God, Calvinistic individualism and work ethic, the black and white morality of the Ten Commandments, and the concept of America as God-chosen people leading the rest of the world to democracy. Then came massive immigration, industrialization and, somewhat tardily, the Supreme Court decisions. Result: moral prescriptions based on a religious ethic were flatly forbidden. By 1950, the inculcation dinosaur was declared dead.

Unfortunately, the values problem would not go away. Even though schools championed moral neutrality, it didn't work. Teachers were loath to talk about standards of right and wrong. Family and church were supposed to move into the valuing game, but their batting average was low. Behavioral standards were abdicated to childrens' peer groups, or in many cases, smuggled in by administrators via dress, sex and other modeling codes. Worst of all, teachers were put in an impossible position when teaching biology (abortion?), history (Watergate?) and anything with ethical overtones. The plain fact was, moral neutrality was not so neutral after all.

Desperate for discipline and motivation, schools embraced the process of values clarification. They discovered three simple things:

One, kids are natural valuers who love to talk about right and wrong, fair and unfair. They like to rank values.

Two, kids need a method for valuing that will help them deal with alternatives, face conflict situations, and work through their own value systems individually and relationally.

Three, teachers can be trained to preside over this process without advocating prescriptions. The idea was to teach about values, not teach values. In other words schools have moved from values abdication to values participation without falling into inculcation.

That is the theory, but as Sportin' Blood said, "It ain't necessarily so." The jury is still out on this question as writers for *Kappan* magazine have shown. The American Issues Forum is a case in point.

In 1974, FORWARD's staff spent several weeks on the road talking to local leaders in 75 cities and 43 states. Our job was to promote the American Issues Forum, a national Bicentennial discussion program funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and ARBA. We quickly discovered that most of the religious leaders had little enthusiasm for "one more discussion group on civics" and not a whole lot of interest in the Bicentennial itself. ("How do you spell it?")

What did interest them, however, was the growing concern their constituencies had for "basic moral values." The questions they wished to pursue: What is right and wrong, good and bad, fair and unfair in American life? How do personal values conflict with economic, religious, political and community standards? Does our community still share some unifying consensus or is it a case of "anything goes?"

The leaders asked us to supply simple, intellectually respectable resources, printed and audio-visual, which would help them probe these questions without pushing any one line -- religious, philosophic or economic.

We reported these feelings to the Endowment and sold them on the idea of going at "valuing" instead of at "issues." Supporting grants came from the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Dodge Foundation, The Interchurch Center (a non-profit corporation which rents to religious and educational bodies) and from its subsidiary, PROJECT FORWARD '76, a coalition of 250 leading educators and religious leaders.

FORWARD enlisted 75 volunteer coordinators and provided the resources requested, a 14-part filmstrip package and a leader's manual, *Ethics for Everybody*. Some excerpts describe the AIF.

"The cracker-barrel is one of the earliest things known to Americans. People who gathered at country stores were just plain, everyday folks who had never heard of discussion groups or seminars. They just loved to talk and argue, laugh, tell stories, describe predicaments, ad-lib, tease, politic and beef-grumble-and-growl. They opened most conversations with, 'Well, now, the way I look at it is...' They closed many an argument on a moral note: 'Nope, it don't seem right to me.' That's the way talk rolled along, and it was good.

"We the People have always come highly recommended as talkers, wherever we've been talking. William Hazlitt said, 'You will hear more good things on the outside of a stage coach from London to Oxford than if you were to pass a twelve-month with undergraduates or heads of that famous university!'"

That's the point for the American Issues Forum. Like the country store-keeper, the Forum provides seats around the pot-bellied stove for those who come to enjoy themselves by talking about what's right and wrong in America.

How does good talk get going? One way. It happens when you strike an exposed nerve, when you hit on a subject that is right up there on the surface of people's attention, a subject that is hotly a part of their experience and concern."

Walter Cronkite recognized this yearning for clear-cut values when he suggested that America celebrate the Bicentennial with a national dialogue--the American Issues Forum. He felt that America's 200th birthday should not pass without our trying to get at what it means to be an American.

The FORWARD '76 survey of American values suggested that the changes in the American mind set since 1776 have not been as radical as the crises of Watergate and Vietnam might indicate. The contrasts were evolutionary, a watering down of the ethic as seen in the following:

1776: "Fierce, emotional belief in a personal God."

1976: As we've seen, 97% of the public says it believes in God. Today that God is no longer exclusively Calvinistic. He's a gentler deity, more the loving Father and helpful presence than the tough-minded, omnipotent, justice-loving, history-making deity.

1776: "Strong regard for the essential goodness of man."

1976: Polls confirm that Americans still consider the human being more good than bad. But I have the feeling that Americans are re-thinking the nature of man, perhaps paying more attention to the social scientists than to preachers. Not as innocent as we used to be about evil and corruption, we know how complicated and ambiguous our nature is. We still hope that we are on our way to becoming human.

1776: "Black and white code of morality based on the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule."

1976: Americans yearn for the blacks and whites, but live in the gray and know it.

1776: "Extraordinary self-assurance, optimism, confidence that unleashed frightening energies and will power."

1976: We still have the "can-do" spirit as individuals. No doubt about that. But every poll shows that Americans are a shaken people, vastly reduced in self-assurance and will-power, satisfied with material achievements but disillusioned, fearful that social and personal bonds are breaking, convinced that the "old days" that gave warmth and integrity to human life, are deteriorating. In short, the last 20 years have brought a definite increase in rootlessness, a loss of identity.

1776: "Great pride in America, blessed by God, destined to lead the world to life and liberty."

1976: The pride is still there, although lessened. Polls point to a growing conviction that America's role as defender of the democratic faith has all but vanished.

1776: "A lust for liberty and a suspicion of big government and big church."

1976: Few people worry about the "big" church anymore, except tax assessors. But Americans are deeply split on big government.

Today, as 200 years ago, our very diversity of races, religions and cultures keeps us from entrusting any one group with "the monopoly to define the truth." However, the earlier question persists: How do persons of many backgrounds find their unity in the nation without losing their identities and traditions? For many Americans, our differences, far from implying conflicts, need one another for mutual support. For others, there is a hunger for harmony, some kind of higher, common code that offers the nation coherence and stability.

Compared with the dominant American Vision of 200 years ago, the Puritan morality, the work ethic, the sense of individual achievement and orientation to delayed rewards have decreased; whereas tolerance, socialability, inter-personal relationships, present-time orientation, moral relativism and the desire for comfort, pleasure and leisure have increased. The most notable ethical trend in recent times has been the renewed search for values.

## Conclusion

The great failure of organized religion during the Bicentennial was its parochialism. Each studied its own and in the process the ecumenical chance to explore our oneness was largely lost. If there is anything leaders owe their flocks as citizens, it is a clear grounding in the rights which permit religious denominations their very existence. For the first and only time in all our lifetimes, public attention was focused, however fitfully, on the founding documents. Here for a moment was the magic of the First Amendment, our common positioning between those clauses:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion

or

prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Lay people haven't the foggiest notion how the dialectic of "no establishment" and "free exercise" bears upon matters of the most practical urgency--such as the taxation of church property or the new establishment of values in public schools.

Granted that the intent and purpose of subsidies is secular and therefore constitutional, are they right? Should any religious organization get free water, fire and police protection? Granted that public schools need values education for disciplinary purposes, are there not serious implications for the First Amendment if values are really ultimate concerns, and ultimate concerns are really religious?

The Court has ruled that public schools may teach about religion but not teach religion--and everyone knows how difficult it is to be objective about another's religion. But thousands of teachers are discovering that when they teach about the value techniques of Sidney Simon or the value theories of Lawrence Kohlberg, they may unconsciously bootleg the religious orientation of either into the minds of children, thereby creating the specter of a new establishment outside the sanctuary but inside the classroom.

These and other vital issues, such as the political activities of tax-exempt religions, depend upon a public familiar with the Bill of Rights and alert to both the dangers and possibilities. Perhaps now that religious leaders are no



longer spooked by fears of a berserk Bicentennial Americanism, they can point toward the Bicentennial Era in which we have 12 years to celebrate the Constitution.

Dr. R. H. Edwin Espy blew a clear blast on the trumpet of religious liberty in 1975 when he introduced *FORUM*: "A common conviction pervades all the essays: that religion has been a major force in the shaping of America and that the religious dimension must continue to be taken with utmost seriousness if 'liberty and justice for all' are to have a solid foundation.

"This book comes to you with the hope that it will help to deepen your conviction that, as we examine the issues and values of our society in this Bicentennial era, we stand deeply in need of the divine inspiration, unique illumination and sustaining power of religious faith."

Although religion, by and large, did not heed this call, we can take considerable satisfaction from the historical and intellectual achievements. What happened was constructive.

Religion in the Bicentennial, organized, scholarly and cultural, succeeded in understanding more clearly the very nature of religion, and did so smack in the middle of a secular, technological society. Each generation between Luther and Freud has been progressively more secular, in that family, government and education have been touched less profoundly by religious institutions than previously. Paradoxically, the religious nerve in individuals and society seems livelier than ever. Is this what Mead, who never defined religion, meant when he wrote Leroy Moore about "an existential and all-consuming sense of the eternal and cosmic significance of their [people's] puny lives."<sup>24</sup> Or when he called humor the functional equivalent of religion? Is this why Jews and blacks are the best comedians because one is existentially religious and the other culturally religious?

Following in the footsteps of Bellah and Mead, bright young religionists like Hefner and Benne have tried to explain how a nation can have a national religion which neither competes with denominations nor sells out to the Pentagon. When Cherterton said that the United States is "the only nation...that is founded on a creed," he went on to say that The Declaration of Independence "does condemn anarchism, and it does also by inference condemn atheism, since it clearly names the Creator as the ultimate authority from whom these equal rights

are derived."<sup>25</sup> Do our people in fact accept such a creed, what Ruth Benedict calls a constellation of ideas and standards that give a people a sense of belonging together and of being different from those of other nations and cultures?

Until quite recently, people in the Southern Baptist tradition, for example, were highly suspicious of Mead's "religion of the Republic" because it seemed to render more to Caesar than to Christ. Similarly, people in the NCCC Task Force tradition, liberationists and social actionists, were suspicious of civil religion because they failed to understand that our founding documents are "essentially prophetic, which is to say that [their] ideals and aspirations stand in constant judgment over the passing shennanigans of the people."<sup>26</sup>

A second observation about religion during the Bicentennial has to do not so much with definition as with power. Organized religion is no longer the leading generator of moral, spiritual, intellectual or theological insights in America. Education has replaced the church. The university has replaced the seminary. The brightest religious writers are found in secular universities, not in ecclesia.

Furthermore, the deepest insights into the values by which we live (which is the orientation level of religion) come not from those trained in the theological and philosophical traditions but those who are social scientists and academic humanists. This would seem to be the occasion for those who are interdisciplinary scholars; they realize that to go where the action is ethically and philosophically they must read sociology, psychology, literature, history, economics and art criticism.

The challenge for the Bicentennial Era in the next 12 years has to do more with values priorities than with religious values, or economic values, or educational values. It has to do with the entire American value system, with the good life which depends upon style, balance, quality, proportion and design. As we move from technical surprise to surprise, we must learn how to elaborate the truly human life among the competing possibilities. Man's soul will hang over the marketplace of values. First we must survive. Then we must develop. But when the billions are fed and housed, will there still be room for choice, for adventuring in human values? Surely it will involve more than tilting against the windmills of our past. With whatever skill and subtlety we penetrate our own history and dig into today's headline, we still want some attunement to our most basic motives, to the loftiest aspirations.

## REFERENCES

And here we return to the ordinary folk who may reach into the bags of their potential to produce a richness and diversity that is the current extension of the American heritage. The Bicentennial belongs to them. They are the ones who will bring out and put together the new visions of America, the previously unthought or unseen, soon to be displayed for our illuminations, our chastening, our wonder, our delight.

The last word belongs to Chesterton. He observed that America was either a new edition of the Spanish Inquisition or a "nation with the soul of a church."

- <sup>1</sup>BINET, ARBA, 5/17/76 e.g. Sun Dance:Ute Religious Dance Program of Colorado
- <sup>2</sup>A Convocation of religious leaders was held in Washington, D.C. which was possibly the most inclusive "summit" of religious leaders ever held...convened jointly by ARBA and Forward '76.
- <sup>3</sup>Typical was an excellent study guide prepared by the American Lutheran Church and entitled, *The Third U.S. Century and Our Mission*. See also July 4 issue of *Lutheran Witness* (Missouri Synod): Our Country and Our Church, by President J. A. O. Preus.
- <sup>4</sup>*Understanding Religion*, published by Forward '76.
- <sup>5</sup>The terms used for organized religion are a conspiracy against the layman. In common parlance "the churches" refers to all religious organizations. But "church" can denote both the congregation (Mt. Sinai Baptist Church) and the denomination (the Southern Baptist Convention). The very word "church" has too much the flavor of Christianity to suit Jews and "denomination" offends those who feel that its numerical quality begs the question of oneness and truth. "Sect" often carries overtones of divisiveness or of condescension, although it properly refers to people who gather around a unique leader or vital principle. For outsiders it is usually safe to say "congregation" for the local unit and "religious community" for the larger body such as a denomination. We use "the church(es)" as an umbrella term for organized religion.
- <sup>6</sup>The variety of these projects is illustrated in ARBAs Binet, 5/17/76, pp 1,3,4,6,7,12,17,22,29,39,51,53,60,66,79.
- <sup>7</sup>*JOURNAL OF PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY* (Winter 1974)
- <sup>8</sup>Excellent study materials were prepared honoring Williams, by The American Baptist Convention.
- <sup>9</sup>We estimate that over 2,000 pageants or dramas were performed in local congregations celebrating such beginnings. Readings from the pulpit were standard.
- <sup>10</sup>Unitarians-Universalists and such groups as the Ethical Culture Society featured the Revolutionary Humanism in lectures.
- <sup>11</sup>This point is underscored by Gunnar Myrdal in "A Worried America," a Bicentennial address to the American Lutheran Council of the U.S.A.

- <sup>12</sup>Several Southern Baptist seminaries highlighted The Awakenings in lectures and pamphlets.
- <sup>13</sup>A special was aired on "The Life of Jonathan Edwards" by CBS-TV.
- <sup>14</sup>One suspects that unchurched believers, those millions from unorganized religion who believe in God, pray and have mystical experiences are mostly evangelical drop-outs.
- <sup>15</sup>The Roman Catholic Church had not become a force. However, it was evangelistic, not revivalistic.
- <sup>16</sup>Robert T. Handy, Professor of Church History and Academic Dean, Union Theological Seminary, New York.
- <sup>17</sup>*Religious Freedom in America*, by Francis S. Harmon. The Inter-Church Center, New York.
- <sup>18</sup>Recently more than 50 taxpayers in upstate New York were "ordained" by a diploma mill church and the new "clergy" are applying for the exemption on their properties claiming religious use. This was to highlight the decrease in the tax base due to religious exemption and the increased burden for others.
- <sup>19</sup>Evaluating the Religion-in-Culture idea purely in terms of its infectious spread across the brightest minds in university departments of religion, the Tillichian umbrella may be favorably compared with the famous Cartesian stove.
- <sup>20</sup>*DAEDALUS* (Winter, 1967) p. 1-20.
- <sup>21</sup>See *The Forgotten History of the Revolution in The Light in The Steeple*.
- <sup>22</sup>See article, A Community of Faith: Christian and/or American in the *Bicentennial Broadside*, NCCC Task Force, Room 552, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10027.
- <sup>23</sup>By far the best treatment of values education appears in *Phi Delta Kappan*, the magazine of professional educators, June 1975.
- <sup>24</sup>*The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, '76.
- <sup>25</sup>*Church History*, p. 36, No. 3, September 1967.
- <sup>26</sup>Head, *The People*.

### About the Author

Richard R. Gilbert, a minister of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., has a long background of study, teaching, writing and speaking on the subject of religion in American life. A native of Georgia, he was a pastor for a number of years in Tennessee. He then became founder and director of the Center for Continuing Education at Princeton Theological Seminary. From 1964-72 he was executive director of the Division of Mass Media of the United Presbyterian Church. In 1974 he joined Charles Brackbill, who had been a colleague in the Division of Mass Media, on the staff of Project FORWARD '76 where they served until mid-1976 as leaders of its nationwide program in support of the American Issues Forum. In this capacity Mr. Gilbert travelled widely and spoke extensively to conferences and over radio and television on American issues and human values. He has written several books and numerous monographs and program scripts in this field. Currently he is director of the World Arts Foundation and of Affiliate Artists, and continues his writing, speaking and consulting.

Richard Gilbert, Charles Brackbill and Helen E. Baker were the associate editors of the Project FORWARD '76—American Revolution Bicentennial Administration report on Religion and the American Bicentennial.

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