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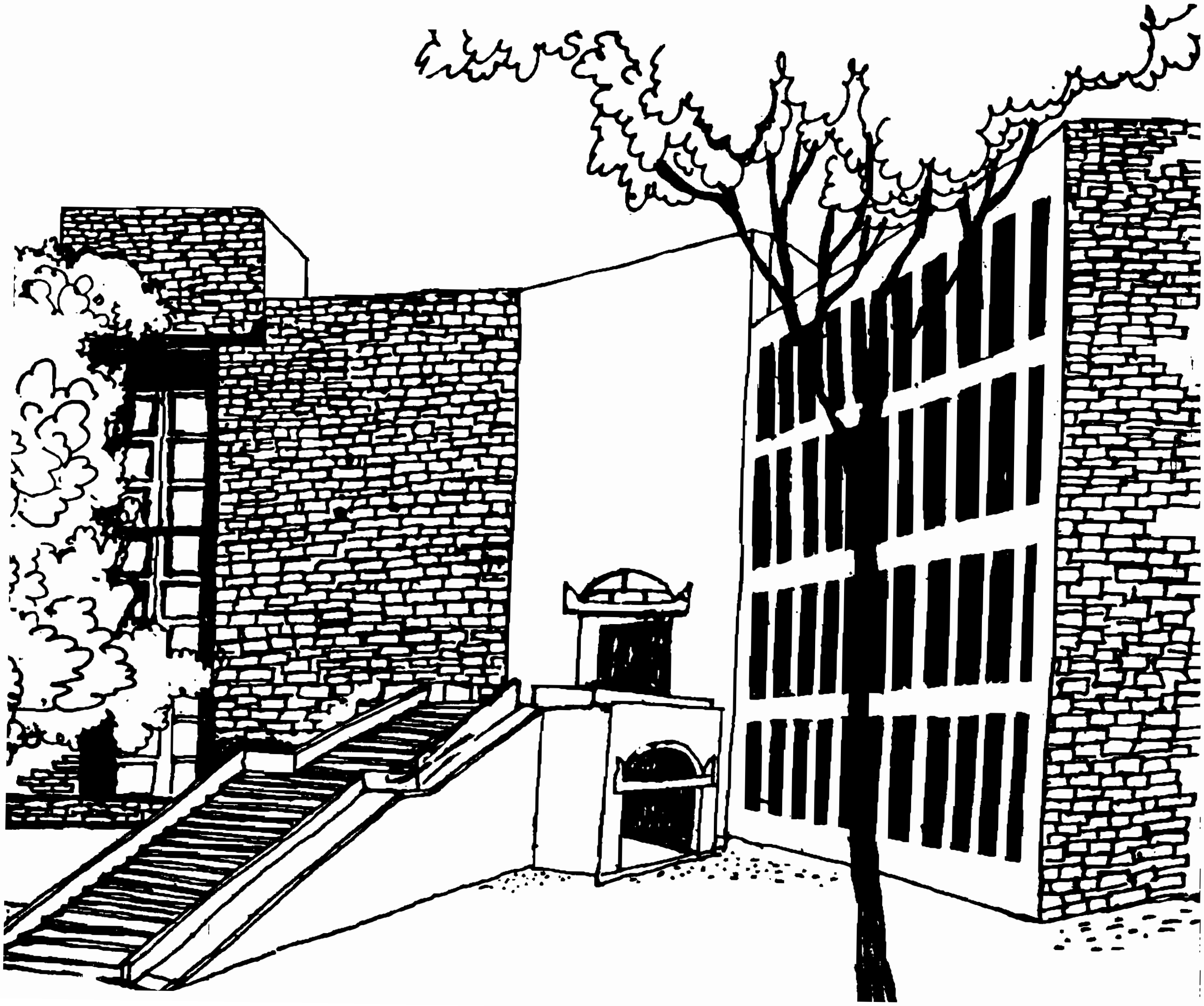

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY UNITED STATES

By

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Religious Movements in the Contemporary United States

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Introduction

Our contemporary moment is characterized by a global resurgence of religion. This resurgence is taking place in all varieties of social systems--from the technologically most advanced to the traditional societies--and has manifested itself in many forms--from religious fundamentalism, even supporting terrorism, to a spiritual renewal of self and society. The public resurgence of religion has taken place in most advanced societies, contrary to the prediction of the prophets of modernity that with the march of time religion would lose its public significance and, if at all, would persist only as a residue in individual lives, as an aspect of personal faith. As one perceptive student of contemporary religious resurgence tells us: "Faith persists and in persisting allows us to build a world more human than one in which men, nations or economic systems have become gods. Twenty years ago it seemed as if religion had run its course in the modern world. Today a more considered view would be that its story has hardly yet begun" (Sacks 1991: 93).

This story of the persistence of faith and the public resurgence of religion is as much true of the United States as it is true of a society such as India. Since the late 60s a wave of religious movements have swept American society. These movements have been of various kinds--mystical, Christian fundamentalist, and evangelical left. These movements have brought religion back to the secular city and in the process have challenged various institutional and symbolic boundaries of modernity--the boundaries between religion and politics, private and public morality, religion and science, and state and society (Cox 1984, Wuthnow 1988). These movements have embodied what Parsons calls an "expressive revolution" and have striven to establish the public influence of religion in the face of privatization (Parsons 1978, Beyer 1990). According to Robert Wuthnow, one of the most perceptive students of the religious scenario in the contemporary United States,

> Even the United States has refused to obey the laws of cultural evolution prescribed by modernization theorists. According to these laws, the high level of economic development achieved by the United States over the past century should have reduced its level of religious commitment to one of the lowest in the world. But among industrialized countries, the United States continues to manifest one of the highest levels of religious commitment. And, despite general decline in voter turn out and political participation in the populace at large, the religiously orthodox have become more political active in recent years (Wuthnow 1991: 5).

The public resurgence of religion in the United States takes place at a time when life, culture, and society in the U.S. is in the midst of a transition. Contemporary United States is in the midst of an all-pervasive restructuring which touches all the domains of lives and subsystems of society--from the script of life to the organization of economy and the discourse of politics. This restructuring is caused by the coming of a post- industrial society (Bell 1973, Block 1990). Economic restructuring has led to the "deindustrialization of America", political restructuring has led to the breakdown of the consensus regarding the welfare state and social democracy, and the rise of new forms of work arrangement has broken down the integration of the individual life course with a stable arrangement of occupation and employment (see Buchman 1989; Giri 1993a).

The resurgence of religion is taking place in this wider context of structural and discursive transformation in the United States. This resurgence, as we shall see in this paper, is a response to the challenges of contemporary changes, such as the colonization of the life world by the system world and the reduction of the meaning of life to measures of money and power. For instance, homelessness is a major problem in the contemporary United States which is directly related to its postindustrial transition and its valorization of capital through investment in the built-environment.

Religious associations, church groups and religious movements have responded to this crisis by building shelters for the homeless and affordable houses for the low- income. When the built-environment of life in the contemporary United States renders invisible inequality by "residential separation, and an often shocking indifference to human misery... religious associations are among the few institutions with large memberships that partly mitigate these tendencies towards segregated lives" (Bellah et al. 1991: 268). At the same time religious initiatives are not simply responses to societal problems; they also provide a new identity to individuals as seekers of meaning, truth, and justice for both the self and the other (Nicholls 1979, 1982). As Anthony Giddens writes: "New forms of religion and spirituality represent in a most basic sense a return of the repressed, since they directly address issues of the moral meaning of existence which modern institutions so thoroughly tend to dissolve" (Giddens 1991: 207).

Religious Fundamentalism in the United States: The Case of the New Christian Right

In his insightful essay "Religion in Postindustrial America" sociologist Talcott Parsons had written nearly two decades ago:

"[when we look at contemporary United States] it is legitimate to speak of a fundamentally new phase in the development of Western religious tradition. The most salient feature of this situation is the emergence of a movement that resembles early Christianity in its emphasis on the theme of love" (Parsons 1978: 313). When Parsons was writing he had in mind the religious movements of the 60s which was part of the emergent counter-culture in the U.S. He had not anticipated the rise of some other kinds of movements such as Christian fundamentalism, which has been one of the most important cultural forces in the contemporary United States.

While looking at the cultural history of the U.S., what strikes one most is the fight between the forces of liberal modernity and the forces of religious fundamentalism. This tension and fight is specifically visible when the U.S. was making the transition from its small town rural landscape to the culture and complexity of the big cities. During the early decades of this century fundamentalists, however, had an upper hand in setting the terms of the debate about the future of America, for instance in the leadership of W.J. Bryan, the famous political leader of his times (Cox 1984). But from the 1920s onwards the fundamentalists became sidetracked by the forces of modernity and had to live as a ridiculed minority. They lived as the "Other Americans", not in Michael Harrington's (1984) sense of poor "Other Americans", but as the ridiculed other Americans opposing and sidetracked by the forces of modernity (Hadden & Shupe 1988). But towards the 1950s, these forces made their presence felt in the broader cultural and public domain of the United States, for instance, as illustrated in the work of the evangelist Billy Graham.

But in the last decades Christian fundamentalist conservatives have made their presence felt in the broader political and cultural spectrum of the United States. Their renewed public significance had both to do with Christian disenchantment with the counter-cultural movements of the 60s as well as the moral crises of the 70s. With the series of moral crises in American society such as the Watergate, Christian evangelicals felt it necessary to define America in their own Christian way--to redefine the boundaries between religion and politics, faith and morality, the private and the public. The social and economic crises of the mid-70s and late 70s facilitated this evangelical return to American politics. With the election of Jimmy Carter, a compassionate born-again Christian, this evangelical entry into politics and other key institutions of the U.S. society had a visible legitimacy. Towards the end of the 70s, however, it is the Christian Right, more appropriately the New Christian Right, that took the center stage of evangelical activism and politics.

Understanding the New Christian Right

Before discussing the culture, theology and ideology of the New Christian right it is to be stressed that this fundamentalist movement did not occur in a vacuum, nor did it occur in complete isolation of the transformational shifts in the broader intellectual and cultural life of American society. While agreeing with Liebman that the New Christian Right has to be understood on their own terms not as a brain child of either televangelism or the new secular Right, it is still essential to place it against the background of a broader cultural discourse (Liebman 1983: 56-57). L.J. Himmelstein therefore writes, "The New Christian Right has appeared in the context of a broader conservative political movement that calls itself the New Right. Our study of evangelical Christian politics, therefore, appropriately begins by examining that broader movement" (Himmelstein 1983: 13).

The New Right, which does not have a unified ideological program quite similar to the inconsistencies and contradictions of the New Christian Right, has three broad themes: economic libertarianism, social traditionalism and militant anti-communism. These three themes "do not obviously belong together, but are a historically specific combination that is fraught with potential contradictions" (Himmelstein 1983: 15). Economic libertarianism offers free market model as the solution to contemporary American problems such as inflation, unemployment, higher taxes and interest rates. Social traditionalism faces the crises in values and social structures by invoking the notions of traditional American community, family and morality. The third theme of militant anti-communism focuses on the issue of national security and tries to elicit almost a hysterical response from the American people. A related theme is the view of the U.S. as the chosen nation of God to fight against the evil forces of communism. Here specific invocation is made of the notion of America's covenant with God as a special nation. These themes, taken together, have deep seated roots in American culture. Contemporary conservatism affirms both God and capitalism, both social stability and economic ferment. "Each combination speaks strongly to important abiding cultural themes" (Himmelstein 1983: 23).

By November 1980, the new Christian Right was a loose and poorly articulated collection of TV evangelists, newly formed lobbies, a vaguely defined constituency, and numerous coordinating committees. Nevertheless, a clear organizational structure had become apparent as Christian Voice, the Religious Roundtable, and Moral Majority, emerged into national prominence and drew religious activists from local and smaller organizations. Christian Voice was the first to appear--launched in January 1979 by California ministers Robert Grant and Richard Zone. The Voice was a merger of several pre-existing anti-gay, anti-pornography, pro-family groups on the West Coast. By mid- 1980, the group claimed a mailing list of 150,000 lay men and 37,000 ministers, including 3000 catholic priests and some Mormon clergymen. For disseminating its message Christian Voice depended heavily on TV evangelists, especially on Pat Robertson, who featured Christian Voice on his "700 club" and on his massive Christian Broadcasting Network.

After the establishment of Christian Voice, Moral Majority was founded in July 1979 by Rev. Jerry Falwell. In addition to Falwell, its board consisted of a shifting coalition of independent Baptists and a few well-known conservatives from the main-line Southern Baptist and Presbyterian denominations. Robert Billings, a staunch fundamentalist trained at the fundamentalist institution of Bob Jones University, acted as executive director and Washington lobbyist for Moral Majority. Moral Majority soon raised a fund of $3 million by using Falwell's computer lists of 250,000 prime "Old Time Gospel Hour" donors. In the meantime, Falwell continued his travels to all fifty states to hold "I love America" rallies (usually on the State House steps with prominent local politicians as guest of honour) and continued to set up local chapters of Moral Majority. The national organization claimed a membership of 300,000 by mid-1980, including 70,000 ministers.

The New Christian Right tried to influence the Congress and the political apparatus by lobbying and through the campaign mail. But its inexperience in political lobbying was a major hindrance in its way. To mitigate this Moral Majority made early efforts to recruit Congressional candidates who were "pro-life, pro-American, pro-free enterprise, pro-Biblical morality and pro-family" (Guth 1983: 35).

In course of their political campaigning, different organization in the New Christian Right developed serious internal feud and rivalry. Fundamentalist Bob Jones 11, during the Summer of 1980, attacked Falwell as the most dangerous man in America in so far as Biblical Christianity is concerned. Falwell's response was that he was "dangerous to liberals, feminists, abortionists and homosexuals, but certainly not to Bible-believers" (Guth 1983: 41). But it was Moral Majority which continued to remain at the center of the fundamentalist politics and "attracted the greatest following" (Liebman 1983). Because of its ability to survive the intra-fundamentalist rivalry and its success in initiating a broad cultural and ecumenical movement, it is essential to focus on Moral Majority more closely as a representative case of the New Christian Right.

Moral Majority

Because of its chauvinist and anti-intellectual posture it is easier to end up judging Moral Majority as nothing but a "March of the Folly." But Moral Majority is more than this: it also embodies a struggle to redefine America. As a cultural movement, bent on creating a new collective identity, Moral Majority "contends against at least two mythologies-- secular humanism and liberal Christianity" (Heinz 1983: 133). In its crusade against secular humanism, Moral Majority characterizes it as godless, morally indecent and sexually permissive. Crucial to this anti-secular manifesto is Moral Majority's conviction that secular humanism has twisted the First Amendment to the constitution of the United States to mean the separation of God from government and society.

The other major target of fundamentalism in secular humanism is modern science and its numerous authoritative and unquestioned social institutions. Specifically significant here is the Christian Right's opposition to the teaching of scientific evolution in the schools and its campaign for the inclusion of Creationsim in the syllabus. But Moral Majority's critical posture to the logic of modern science is not necessarily a total rejection of it. Its culture of anti-scientism is not the same as the closed minded anti- scientism of the early 20th century fundamentalists, which resulted in the infamous Scopes trial. For Harvey Cox Moral Majority advocates the teaching of Creation on an equal basis with Evolution not because the Bible teaches Creation but because they believe that Biblical creationism can be established scientifically. Therefore contemporary fundamentalists are not anti-scientists per se, but have an idea of science which is "the expression of a subculture that has refused to accept the modern division of labour by which theology was to deal with the inner life of faith and science with everything else" (Cox 1984: 55) As Cox interprets, it is a fight "against the air-tight compartmentalization of science and religion, something both the pre-modern and post-modern mind refuse to accept" (ibid). This fundamentalist refusal to accept the institutional and the discursive boundaries of modernity is better understood with the arguments of Robert Wuthnow, who also argues that contemporary fundamentalism is basically an attempt to redefine the symbolic boundaries of modernity (Wuthnow 1983: 183). In his recent work on the restructuring of American religion since World War II, Wuthnow writes: "Many of the controversial issues in which religious organizations have become embroiled in recent decades focus directly on the increasingly problematic boundary between church and state... To look at the restructuring of American religion, then, is to look at the ways in which its symbolic boundaries have changed" (Wuthnow 1988: 10).

Egalitarianism and individual choice as aspects of the secular humanistic discourse are also Moral Majority's target. In place of the current egalitarian discourse of "positive discrimination" and "equality of opportunity," Moral Majority emphasizes upon individual competition. Jerry Falwell defends capitalism even in the name of Christianity (Cox 1984: 63). However, it is to be noted that this pro-business and pro- establishment orientation of the contemporary fundamentalists is at odds with the pro-poor and anti-corporation stand of the earlier fundamentalists of W.J. Bryan's generation.

Against Liberal Christianity

So much for Moral Majority's attack on secular humanism. Now some comment on this cultural movement's struggle against the liberal Protestant churches and liberal Christianity is in order. In recent decades, the National Council of Churches--the umbrella organization for mainstream Protestantism in this country-- has become Moral Majority's main target. "The NCC has been attacked for representing a value system and world view that appears to the New Christian Right to be much closer to secular humanism than to historic Christianity" (Heinz 1983: 135).

The first tenet of the fundamentalist anti-liberal theology is its literal reading of the scripture. The fundamentalists interpret the Bible literally and look to it for answer for almost everything. It will be made clear in the subsequent discussion of Nancy Ammerman's ethnography how "the new fundamentalism uses the Bible as an economics text book, a political handbook, or a family reference guide" (Roof 1984: 23). Fundamentalists also contend modern theology's understanding of faith by rejecting its interpretation that faith is a "personal encounter with God which carries with it no necessary cognitive content and needs no historical mediator" (Cox 1984: 57). "The fundamentalists insist that faith is not just a relationship: it also has a doctrinal content. God not only reveals himself. He also reveals certain truth about himself. Faith is substance as well as form" (ibid).

In its struggle to provide an alternative definition of America, different from that provided by secular humanism and liberal Christianity, Moral Majority carries its fight to the symbol producing centers of the contemporary U.S., mainly churches, schools, neighborhoods and the family. Moral Majority fights for traditional family; law against abortion; autonomy and tax-exempt status of the fundamentalist educational and cultural institutions; and control over the secular ones.

The Bible Believers

In the preceding discussion we get some sense of the way Moral Majority strives to formulate a cultural identity and its accompanying mode of resource mobilization. But how does it legitimize itself? In its search for legitimation it brings forth the theme of religious awakening in American history and presents the current fundamentalist resurgence as harbinger of another great religious awakening (Lechner 1985). The second theme it employs in its search for legitimation is the notion of providential Americanism, which believes that the United States had always had a special "covenant" with God.

Writing about contemporary American fundamentalist revitalization Hadden and Shupe tell us: "In tracing the story of God's covenant with America, the concept of awakening is critical. For awakenings are signposts of the Americans' repeated attempts to rework their understanding of the covenant --to make fit their circumstances and the terms under which they must live upto it" (Hadden & Shupe 1988: 97). Moral Majority as a cultural movement legitimizes its objective and agenda by arguing that this covenant is now broken. Falwell therefore calls for national redemption and declares the 1980s as a decade of destiny.

In their search for legitimation Christian fundamentalists have made extensive use of television both to mobilize resource as well as to seek support for their identity. Televangelism is now an important cultural force in the contemporary United States, which embodies a "critical link between mass media and social movements" (Hadden & Shupe 1988: 40). While it is true that the communications revolution is now "reshaping American religion" (ibid) and "the move from the revivalist's tent to the vacuum tube has vastly amplified the voices of defenders of tradition" (Cox 1984: 69) the mechanical reproduction of prayer and soul therapy in these electronic churches also detaches the agents from the bases of living tradition.

Now to come to the much belated question of the constituency of Moral Majority, there is a distinction between its constituency and the constituency of the old Right who were mainly old in terms of age group; and rural small town Americans. The constituency of the new Christian Right represents all cross-sections of American society--college educated, office executives, university teachers, white collar workers and the old conservative constituency of the blue collar workers and the rural Americans. At the same time it has to be born in mind that the constituency of Moral Majority does not share all its political and moral agendas. In their study of Moral Majority's constituency in the Dallas Metropolitan area two sociologists tell us that only 16% of Moral Majority's supporters made favorable comments about organized religion's involvement in the political arena, while 31% opposed it (Shupe & Stacey 1983: 114).

Culture and Practice in Fundamentalist Communities

Contemporary fundamentalist resurgence has been misunderstood by its students--journalists, academic critics and social scientists--because they "fail to see that fundamentalism is an enclave, a little world that has been preserved by a range of schools, churches, colleges in which many of the assumptions of pre-modern world still obtain. In the subculture of fundamentalism people talk and think differently" (Cox 1984: 56). Nancy Ammerman's study *Bible Believers* provides us a thick description of this subculture of fundamentalism. In her study of Southside, a New England fundamentalist church, Ammerman found that for the fundamentalists, religion is grounded in an institution (the church) and in a document (the Holy Bible). Southside churchgoers are quite dogmatic about the literalness of the Bible. In fact this uncompromising attitude to the literalness of the Biblical truth distinguishes them from their closest neighbors, the evangelicals (Ammerman 1987:4). For the Bible believers, all knowledge is contained in the Bible. For these fundamentalists any one who contradicts the "plain words of the scripture" is doing the work of Satan whether they know it or not (ibid).

Fundamentalists at Southside seek to explain almost everything in terms of the scripture. The happenings in the present are interpreted to have been prophesied in the scripture. They even interpret the evening news as validating the prediction of Jesus. Here "principles of dispensational millenarianism is used as an interpretive scheme through which scripture is understood" (ibid:45). For instance, Ammerman discusses the case of Janet Slavin, a teacher at the Southside church and a pregnant woman, whose position was terminated by the pastor. She reacted: "For a split second, I was hurt, and then I realized it was the Lord's will, it was the Lord's will that I was going to be trained to be a mother now, not a teacher" (ibid: 61). From such cases of response and reasoning, Ammerman argues that Southside fundamentalists tailor divine plan to individual desire. Southsiders make suffering bearable by always finding the good intent of God in it. When the Southsiders can not find any other reason for their suffering, they explain that good people suffer because Satan is persecuting them. The trinity of the church, the Bible and the pastor at Southside is always ready to give an answer to the Believers for all the questions they face in their lives.

"The assembling together of believers" in the Church mainly on Sunday but also in other week evenings is a very important event in the life of the Southsiders. "Although they may not hear church bells calling them to morning prayers or evening vespers, their days and weeks and lives are no less regulated by the church's cycle of events" (ibid). As a Southside churchgoer says: "A good Sunday service gives me something for the whole week" (ibid). The various church fellowship meetings are also very important where the participants tell each other stories about their success, ask for prayer about their needs. The way things are done at church provides the underlying structure for how believers expect the world to be. In this togetherness and fellowship, the shepherd is the pastor. The pastor has enormous authority and one of the situations where that authority is manifest is the preaching situation in the church. The pastor speaks to the believers and "they learn from what he says." "None of them expects to have close personal friendship with the pastor; rather they expect to admire and imitate him" (ibid: 120). The Bible believers are baffled by his sermon and maintain an idealized view of his character. Jim Forester, a Southside church member, says: "..I look at our pastor.. I'm impressed with him very, very much. Sometimes I ask the Lord, 'If it's all right, I do not want to be Ronald Thompson, but you could give me some of his patience!'" (ibid. 122)

The most important challenge for the Southside believers is to nurture their children in the line of the admonition of the Lord. In the early stages of childhood, the children of the Bible believers learn about religious initiative and guilt. From the religious culture at home, they get "substance over which to feel guilty: not going to church, forgetting to read the Bible, disobeying, or playing with an unsaved child" (ibid: 171). The children of the Bible believers go to their own Christian church academy. At the Southside, there are strict rules about proper conduct with the opposite sex, strict rules about the hair and dress that the students can have. Bible is very much visible in the academy. "Biblical ideas are also likely to appear in tests, biology lessons, and in government or history classes... History is called American Christian History...The United States is meant to be a Christian nation, and capitalism is essential to that identity as conservative religion" (ibid: 187).

The parents of the southside kids see public schools as the greatest challenge to the transmission of the fundamentalist culture, because for them these schools are the repository of false ideas. "They see public school children being taught false ideas not only about biology but also about government, economics, history, geology, and other sciences" (ibid: 178). However while being assured of a true Christian training in the Church schools, the parents nevertheless worry about the prospect of such a predominantly Biblical education and the quality of training in the field of natural science and engineering. "They are afraid that the Academy graduates will be trained only for the "Lord's work." They fear that those who emerge to face the secular world of work will be totally unable to handle the challenge" (ibid: 179).

The operation of the academy is a site for political activism and political contention for the Bible believers. As Ammerman tells us: "Much of the political activity at Southside, in fact, is aimed at defending fundamentalist's ability to establish and run Christian institutions as they see fit" (ibid: 201).

Ammerman sees fundamentalism as basically a cultural movement. For her, "Fundamentalists are not defending declining prestige or economic position, but a culturally coherent way of life" (ibid: 193). She also places fundamentalism in the backdrop of social change in the contemporary United States when she writes: "..When rapid technological change exceeds our ability to respond, feelings of lostness are to be expected. At such times, growth in fundamentalism can also be expected (ibid: 192).

Beyond Fundamentalism: A Critical Look at Religion and Society in the Contemporary United States

Fundamentalism is part of a broader movement in the United States, which has challenged some of the "secular assumptions" of American society and with it God has finally arrived in Washington (Ballah et al 1991). But when God is brought to Washington does His followers lose some of His vision? According to Robert Bellah, yes they do. Bellah and his colleagues offer a profound critique of the tendency in Christian fundamentalism to bring God to Washington. In their words, "In mediating between State and the churches, so as to preach religious visions of a good society from public pulpits....specialized para-church institutions may have the effect of making the churches more like the state..." (ibid: 185). Moreover "in the process of learning the State's language of legal rights, cost-benefit utilities, and justice as due process, they have forgotten the language of covenant and communion" (ibid: 193). If Parsons had argued that new religious movements must achieve "a new level of integration with the secular society" (Parsons 1978: 322) Bellah and his colleagues show how some of the leaders of such movements argue that religions while positively relating to society must not be mere functional appendages to the integrated social system, it must offer a total critique of the contemporary condition, which stifles human spirit in many ways. Bellah et al. tell us how there is a sign of such a critical engagement in the contemporary religious resurgence.

The ideal of a "transformed Christ" is dear to many young church leaders who "grew in the 1960s" (ibid). Mary Hatch, one of the church leaders whose views Bellah and his colleagues discuss at great length tells us: "...the mainline churches have done a lousy job in naming the suffering of middle-class existence in our time. We haven't told the truth about it. That's the church's greatest sin-not saying that the competitive driven existence that divides what it is to be a man or a woman, a white or black, is a form of human suffering. It narrows and binds the human spirit. The Church's greatest challenge in America is to enable middle class folks to recognize that their nice consumerist culture is killing them, plus killing the Third World" (Bellah et al. 1991: 210). For Hatch the Church must educate its parishioners about the fact that "consumerism... denies the needs of the poor in the name of our anxious desire. But most of all, 'consumerism kills the soul, as any good Augustinian can see, because it places things before the valuing of God and human community" (ibid: 211).

For Hatch, the mainline churches have stifled people's imagination and the preaching and teaching they provide "simply reify what people get from the newspaper and television" (ibid: 206). The reason for such stalemate lies "deeper than membership losses, and political controversy. A lot of it stems from assigning religion to the private realm... When modern Christianity decided that it couldn't say anything true in substance about the public or political world, it turned inward" (ibid: 207). For Hatch, the Churches should be "more like basic Christian communities on the liberation model... The church ought to form its worship and liturgy around waking people up and getting them moving in the spirit instead of putting them to sleep with a thirty-minute lecture" (ibid: 208). Hatch pleads for revitalizing the American social gospel tradition which she treats as a "uniquely American movement," which "uses American democratic norms and prophetic Christian ideals to criticize both society and the church, including the undemocratic aspects of America's political economy and the privatization of bourgeoisie Christianity" (ibid: 210).

In the new religious movements there is now an effort to go back to the Bible. Hatch believes that people can use Bible as a "working document" because of the "incredible pluralism" within it (ibid: 209). According to Robert Cooper, a Methodist Minister: "The buzzword today is 'spiritual formation'. You hear that all over the Methodist Church" (quoted in Bellah et al. 1991: 199). But mainline churches with their rationalist emphasis are unable to infuse the church goers with this living spirit. Hence they are leaving the mainline churches to join the spirit-filled evangelical churches. In the words of Bellah and his colleagues

> The crucial point in such trends is that the erosion of mainline religion's strength has been a matter more of ethos than of numbers. It remains numerically strong but with a growing consciousness of itself as a beleaguered cultural minority, caught between the widening free ways of secular city and the rising bastion's religious right, and divided from within by conflict between spirit-filled evangelicals and dispirited if still stubbornly principled liberals (ibid: 188).

The Sanctuary Movement

The above discussion points to the diversity within the resurgence of religion in the secular city. While the new Christian Right represents one spectrum of religious resurgence in the contemporary United States the other spectrum is represented by many base-communities which are inspired by the Latin American movement of liberation theology and evangelical movements for social justice, human dignity and equality. One such initiative is the famous Sanctuary Movement in the United States. Sanctuary movement is a broad-based Christian movement which strives to provide sanctuary to the refugees from Central America, who leave their homelands for threats of murder, political persecution and economic insecurity (Wiltfang & McAdam 1991). It was started by Jim Corbett of Tucson, Arizona. Corbett and his friends decided to provide shelter to the refugees in the churches and they provided Biblical justification for their action by invoking the Book of Numbers where Moses was commanded by God to establish "cities of refuge for the people of Israel, and for the stranger and the Sojourner among them, that any one who kills any person without intent may flee there" (Tomsho 1987: 26). The pastor of the Tucson Presbyterian church which was the first church to declare itself a Sanctuary wrote to the-then U.S. Attorney General: "We have declared [our] church as sanctuary for undocumented refugees from Central America...We believe that justice and mercy require that people of conscience actively assert our God-given right to aid anyone fleeing from persecution and murder" (ibid: 31). When we listen to the activists we get a sense of the conviction that animates the US citizens who defy U.S. law in the name of Biblical responsibility. In the words of one such activist who was arrested on the charge of smuggling illegal aliens and found guilty by the jury: "We have lost sight of the fact that when our sister and brother anywhere are hurt, we are hurt... I am a woman with a heart and a mind. My faith commitment connects me to people and injustice" (ibid: 149).

The Sanctuary refugees come from Central American countries of Guatemala and El Salvador where Christian base communities are also active providing assistance to people in their fight against and flight from the military regimes. Base communities are characterized by lay control. These communities are places of festivity which offers critical analysis of the secular situation in the light of the Biblical message (Cox 1984). These base communities are run on the vision of liberation theology, which also provides a critical source of inspiration to the evangelical actions for social justice in the United States. Liberation theology stresses on "orthopraxis," which favors the poor rather than "orthodoxy," (Cox 1984). In its theological imagination God is a suffering God who is suffering along with the humans in their confrontation with evil. Its "logos" (world) is a corporate world plagued by corporate and class conflict (ibid: also see, Walzer 1985).

Base communities also exist in the U.S., and Cox writes about one such Catholic parish in Cape Cord, Massachusetts: "Even a casual visitor to St. Frances Xavier cannot help notice that something is happening in the American catholic church which could hardly have been foreseen two decades ago" (Cox 1984: 103). According to one of the Catholic Fathers, this change lies in the fact that American Catholic church is changing from "one that in this century won national acceptance and even respectability to one that now, under very different and emerging circumstances, dares to challenge the national and international structures of injustice, selfishness and complacency of which our nation is undeniably a part" (quoted in Cox 1984: 104).

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity is a broad-based ecumenical and non- denominational Christian initiative in collective action and critical reflection, which builds houses for low-income families in the United States as well as in other countries around the world. As of January 31, 1993 Habitat had house-building projects in 815 American communities and in forty overseas countries. Habitat for Humanity was founded as an international ministry of housing in 1976 by Millard Fuller, an ambitious young Alabama attorney "whose competence and drive made him a millionaire at a very early age" (Carter 1985). His wealth and reputation were rapidly expanding, when his wife got separated from him. Fuller reconciled with his wife, who found no meaning in his pursuit of riches, by giving away his fortunes and starting their life anew in the service of Christ.

"No More Shacks" is "the daring vision of Habitat for Humanity" (Fuller 1986a). Social movements in our times have been conceptualized as the key need interpreters (Fraser 1987). Central to Habitat's need interpretation is the question of shelter. For Fuller and the activists of Habitat

> Obviously, the nuclear question is a big issue. Women's rights is a big issue. But one of the biggest issues of our day is shelter. Homelessness has been on the front burner now for a while in this country, with so many homeless people, especially in our big cities. A million more are not homeless in the sense of being on the streets, but they are living in some little hovel that is grossly inadequate for human habitation (Fuller 1986b: 42-43).

Habitat takes the pledge to eliminate all the shacks from the face of the earth. If "No More Shacks" is the goal of Habitat for Humanity, its props are two axial Biblical principles: "Economics of Jesus" and "Theology of Hammer." Commentators on the postmodern scene deride any notion of foundation and prefer to look at the human condition as a surrealist web of contingencies and the frivolous play of signifiers (Madison 1988, Rorty 1989). But for Habitat the issue of a solid foundation upon which one has to stand and to reinterpret the relationship between "word and the world" can not be compromised. Fuller tells us about the strong foundation of Habitat in love and faith:

> The Bible tells us that what does matter is faith that works through love. Faith alone is not enough. Love by itself can be mushy, sentimental, possessive. But when faith and love are put together, there is powerful synergy. Faith plus love equals spiritual dynamite. The result is something that really does matter. A stream of energy is released that transforms both individuals and society. Habitat for Humanity is a vehicle through which faith and love are mixed and then released into the world. The result is thousand of houses built with love in the mortar joints and faith under their foundations (Fuller 1992: 1).

Habitat for Humanity brings all these Biblical teachings together in the "theology of hammer" and practice of "Love in the Mortar Joints" (Fuller 1980). Habitat's theology of hammer is put into practice in building houses. Theology of hammer not only celebrates intervention and embodiment, but also prepares the context for transcending doctrinal differences and becoming genuinely ecumenical. For the German theologian Johannes Baptist Metz, Christianity can be ecumenical only when it strives to meet the practical needs of ordinary people and thus reclaims the "alien world" for the "Son of Man" (Metz 1970: 88). As Metz writes:

> It is surely true to say that the frontiers of modern theology run right across confessional boundaries. In this case, how could theology itself determine and guarantee the distinctive unity of what it is concerned with? The quest for unity of faith is itself transformed into a practical quest. Its dwelling place is not pure theology but that body of principles which is the churches' profession of faith in practice (Metz 1970: 92).

Metz's assessment enables us to appreciate the broader implication of what Millard Fuller says:

> One of the most exciting features of Habitat for Humanity is that people who do not normally work together at all are coming together everywhere to work in this cause: the affluent and the poor, ...Roman Catholics and Protestants, and every racial and ethnic group you can think of. We might disagree on how to preach or how to dress or how to baptize or how to take communion or even what communion is for. We may disagree on all sorts of other things--baptism, communion, what night to have prayer meetings, and how the preacher should dress...[However] We will agree on the use of the hammer as an instrument to manifest God's love (Fuller 1986a: 127).

Moral Criticism and the Paradigm of Building

In their recent moral critique of institutional arrangement in the contemporary United States, Bellah and his colleagues tell us that contemporary American form of life minimizes seeking of any "larger moral meaning..." (Bellah et al. 1991: 43) and Americans have pushed the "logic of exploitation as far it can go" (ibid: 271). In this context, they plead for a new paradigm for the actors and the institutions of the United States--what they call the pattern of cultivation. This paradigm of cultivation refers to the habit of paying attention to the needs of one another and belonging to communities and traditions. Attention is described here normatively which refers to pursuing goals, and relationships which give us meaning, and is different from 'distraction' and 'obsession' (ibid). For the authors of *Good Society* and participants in its conversation while channel flipping TV watching, compulsive promiscuity, and alcoholism is a form of distraction spending time with one's children, repairing the broken car of a neighbor and building houses for those who don't have a roof over their head is a form of attention (ibid). "Attending means to concern ourselves with the larger meaning of things in the longer run, rather than with short-term pay offs" (Bellah et al. 1991: 273). In the words of Bellah and his colleagues,

> [The pattern of cultivation is] an attempt to find, in today's circumstances, a social and environmental balance, a recovery of meaning and purpose in our lives together,

> giving attention to the natural and cultural endowment we want to hand down to our children and grand children, and avoiding distractions that have confused us in the past. Again, what has for a long time been dismissed as idealism seems to be the only realism today (ibid: 271).

In Habitat we see such an idealism at work. If the actors in Bellah's conversation on good society express their idealism through the idiom of cultivation, the actors of Habitat express it through the idiom of "love in the mortar joints." The paradigm is a paradigm of building -- building homes and building communities. Fuller talks about pursuit and building as appropriate models of the care of the self-- as appropriate modes of being in the world and self-engagement. Like Bellah's actors Fuller also presents his idea of pursuit as a normative one and argues that "a spiritual dimension to our various pursuits is essential to make sense of what life is all about" (Fuller 1992c:4-5). Fuller speaks simultaneously of "pursuing peace and building up one another" (Fuller 1992a). Fuller challenges the educated and affluent in North America: "Don't sell out for a big salary, a picket fence and 2.3 children. These things will take care of themselves if you aim high and go for the joy and reward of a life of accomplishment, excellence and building a better world" (Fuller 1992b).

Here it must be noted that many commentatators of the emergent American consciousness point to a pervasive spiritual urge within a section of the population so that critical exhortations from interlocutors such as Millard Fuller does not fall only on the deaf ears . For instance, one observer tells us that a strong social ethic is emerging as a major component of the new spirituality. What she writes rings a bell in the discourse and practice of the actors of Habitat for Humanity. "This ethic might be called *an activist form of mystical endeavor*, for it supports transformative work in society *as an outgrowth and manifestation of transformation of the self*..Still further, movement people regard their immersion in transformational activity as a work of healing" (Albanese 1993: 138). Another observer of contemporary American religiosity argues that the religious scene is characterized by not only "pastiche styles of belief and practice, combining elements from such diverse sources as Eastern meditation, Native American spirituality [etc.].." but by a "profound searching" (Roof 1993b: 165). This profound searching is "not so much that of navel gazing, but a quest for balance--between self and others, between self-fulfillment and social responsibilities" (ibid). It is noteworthy that in his remark on this emergent social ethic and spirituality, Roof mentions Habitat for Humanity. Roof says that in his research on the spiritual urge of the baby boomers he was struck by the existence of self-help movements and small groups within which seekers explored the depth of meaning. In his words: "...there are meaningful group experiences and, often, bonding experiences-whether among those spending a week working with Habitat for Humanity or among those exploring the meaning of visualization and dream analysis; there is community and celebration on Jesus Day but also on Earth Day. In all of this, what seems essential is that people find ways to forge a link between individual experience and religious and spiritual teachings, and, in so doing, they often find community" (ibid: 167).

An urge to pursue meaning in life by building houses for the less fortunate and building relationship both with one's higher self and the Other animates the actors of Habitat. When lives and communities are broken down by forces upon which individuals have little control, theirs is a striving to build. This paradigm of building has a potential for recovery--recovery of meaning in individual lives as well as recovery of communities from the threatening logic of speculation where speculation on profit takes an upper hand over the human need for a decent shelter. This paradigm of building also embodies a hermeneutics of recovery for our ways of world making and frames of interpretation.

A hermeneutics of recovery in both theory and practice requires trust in one another and communities which sustain us and give our interdependence a moral meaning. If contemporary United States, as Katherine Newman (1988) argues, is falling from grace, then Habitat's vision of "No More Shacks" and its paradigm of building is a sign of recovery. It is undoubtedly true that it is just a sign and has not yet become a symbol. But despite this, its potential for engaging Americans in a hermeneutics of recovery cannot be lost sight of or missed. About such religious movements, Bellah and his colleagues have written that "their witness is a profound and moving gesture of hope; but it remains a gesture, a sign but not a pattern for transforming the whole of society" (Bellah et al. 1991: 33). But what is so exciting about Habitat is that in its continued striving to build, it is transforming itself from a mere sign to a pattern for transforming society. The actors who are convicted by its vision embody the possibility of a recovery of meaning and community in their practice of "building homes for God's people in need." As Doris Poole (1993), a volunteer at Habitat International headquarters, who left her job in an insurance company after nineteen years of work to work full time with Habitat tell us: "I really feel that Americans today live a compartmentalized lifestyle. We don't want our jobs, our religion, our friends, our social lives to mix together. Coming to Habitat has given me a more integrated lifestyle."

Religion, Secularism, and the Challenge of Spiritual Renewal:Widening the Universe of Discourse

Indian intellectuals are currently engaged in a debate on the relevance of secularism for contemporary Indian society. For some of them, secularism is a western ideal and is not suited to the cultural ethos in India while for others the ideal of secularism is as much significant for modern India as it is for modern West, since secularism is not only at the core of our identity as citizens of a united India but also at the core of the organization of roles, occupations and institutions in contemporary India (Beteille 1993). But this debate is being carried out without paying attention to the process of retreat from secularism and the resurgence of religion and without realizing that the retreat from secularism that we are witnessing today in contemporary India is part of a similar global process of retreat and revival. But it is essential to pay close attention to the actual process of this simultaneous retreat from secularism and revival of religion and be sensitive to the hopes, fear and aspirations which animate this deconstruction and reconstruction rather than take side hastily and see in the resurgence of religion the inevitable doom of humanity.

It is with this objective of bringing an anthropological view from afar that I have presented here the story of the religious movements in the contemporary United States, meant to provide us a different vantage point to rethink our taken-for-granted assumptions about the ascendancy of politics and the decline of religion in the modern world (Beteille 1980). The story that we have heard here is one of persistence of faith in the modern world; and is a response to the narrow view of human beings that utilitarianism, rationalism, and secularism have put forward before the modern man and his essential need for familiarity with the transcendent source of values. Thus the retreat from secularism and revival of religion in the US is taking place not simply because of the machinations of some apparent crooks such as Jerry Falwell but also because of the fact that more and more individuals are now realizing that science, technology, and rationality fail to give them meaning in both their personal and occupational lives. They are realizing that it is not just enough to play one's role efficiently in modern organizations but to ask the more fundamental questions of well-being, justice, and fairness. They are realizing that the infinite fragmentation that modern and postmodern developments have caused in their lives and they are striving to put these fragments back together again into a meaningful whole.

At the heart of many religious movements in the United States is an urge to participate in a spiritual transformation of self and society. Religions have always had two dimensions--social and spiritual (Pande 1989, 1991, 1992); and it is because of the sociologists that we have not been deliberately told about the spiritual dimension of religion and its significance as a perennial source of criticism and transformation (Chardin 1956). Secularism is making a retreat because it has failed to resolve even some of the institutional problems of modern society, what to speak of providing a guide to our quest for ultimate concern, a concern which is not just abstract and isolated but an integral seeking, covering the whole space from food to freedom. Secularism has deliberately put us in the dark about the fact that there is a hierarchy of meaning in our lives and without a continuous touch with a Transcendental Sacred even the institutions which individuals are supposed to efficiently man become fossilized because individuals cease to be bearers of critical consciousness (Giri 1993b; Griffin 1988, 1989; Habermas 1984; Unger 1987).

But modern intellectuals have not cared to understand the spiritual dimension in the work of self, culture, and society. What is striking is that even Indian intellectuals have not looked at their secular assumptions critically. Thus it is no wonder that while talking about the career of secularism in modern India they can only talk of Nehru, not Gandhi (see Beteille 1993). It might be true that "in trying to bring a secular india into being" Nehru did not turn his "back on religion" but it is also true that Nehru did not take religion seriously. But Gandhi took both religion and secularism seriously and sought to achieve both through spiritual *sadhana* and cultural movements. The story of the revival of religion in a technologically advanced society such as the contemporary United States shows us that there are multiple meanings of both religion and secularism and the Gandhian agenda of secularism through spiritual transformation is probably the only alternative we have as we are stirred by the call of faith in a complex and plural world.

But appreciating such an approach to religion and secularism requires us to adopt an appropriate stance to the world view of modernity and an "interpretive stance towards religion" (Wuthnow 1991: 14). This does not mean that "we must abandon rigor, or view religious fanaticism with sympathy" but it means trying to "interpret the significance of contemporary movements in terms of hopes and aspiration of their participants, including their hopes for salvation and spiritual renewal..." (ibid). At the same time, taking an appreciative stance towards the significance of religion, especially its hidden spirituality, faces the daunting task of distinguishing between the wheat and the chaff--between religious bigotry and spiritual movements. Those who use the name of religion or God to break another believer's place of worship are making a misuse of both religion and politics; they represent what Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher (1989) call "bad conscience" of the modern world and destroy the spiritual essence of a religion. In our story of the religious movements in the US we have also seen them at work in the Christian fundamentalist movements (Harding 1987). But those Bible believers who make a chauvinistic equation between Christianity and the national destiny of the US don't exhaust the scenario of religious revitalization in the contemporary United States nor does American civil religion ends up with their chauvinism since it has almost always incorporated vital international symbolism into its horizon (Wuthnow 1988). The challenge that Rienhold Niebuhr presents to religious bigots is as much true for the Indians as it if for the Americans:

> We cannot expect even the wisest of nations to escape every peril of moral and spiritual complacency; for nations have always been constitutionally self-righteous. But it will make a difference whether the culture in which policies of nations are formed is only as deep and as high as nation's ideals; or whether there is a dimension in the culture from the standpoint of which the element of vanity in all human ambitions and achievements is discerned. But this is the height which can be grasped only by faith....The faith which appropriates the meaning in the mystery inevitably involves an experience of repentance for the false meanings which the pride of nations and cultures introduces into the pattern. Such repentance is the true source of charity; and we are more desperately in need of genuine charity than of mere technocratic skills (Niebuhr quoted in Bellah et al. 1991: 231).

Destroying other people's faith and home in the name of religion is not fundamentalism and its critique is possible and in fact most effective when forwarded from within the horizon of faith. As Jonathan Sacks challenges us:

> Fundamentalism is the belief that timeless religious texts can be translated into the time-bound human situation, as if nothing has changed. But something *has* changed: our capacity for destruction and the risk that conflict will harm the innocent...It is the virtue of those who believe unconditionally that rights attach to individuals as God's creation, regardless of the route he or she chooses to salvation. That is counter-fundamentalism, the belief that God has given us many universes of faith but only one world to live together" (Sacks 1991: 81).

Notes

1. It has to be kept in mind that until recently these two mythologies formed the almost unquestionable currency in the cultural vocabulary of the US. While the authority of secular humanism as a zeitgeist and as a basis of social institutions in contemporary United States needs no further explication, the growing liberalization of the Christian churches is documented in the pioneering study of Jeffrey Hadden, *Gathering Storm in the Churches* (Hadden 1969). Hadden provides statistical evidence and public opinion studies to show how more and more clergies have not been willing to interpret the scripture literally in the post-1950 period.

2. As Heinz writes, "Issues after issue of the Monthly Moral Majority report dwells on this theme" (Heinz 1983: 134)

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