Values, of course, are deeply related to religion, and religion has been a basic factor in the world's great civilizations. In western Europe, as well as in other parts of the world, religious beliefs reinforced values. In what became the United States, Massachusetts Bay Colony was originally settled more for religious than for economic reasons. Although religious leaders soon found themselves at odds with the value systems of merchants in seventeenth-century New England, the American colonies and the nation-state they forged were never areligious even though the Constitution expressly forbade established religion. Religion continued to play an important role at the state level, at least until the post-1945 period and sometimes longer.

Early Puritan Americans were mostly congregational, but in nineteenth-century Massachusetts Unitarianism took hold as a religion of the elite. By the twentieth century, U.S. Protestantism had been split into many denominations. Unitarianism remained one of those, although over time it became greatly modified. My direct paternal ancestor, the Rev. John Lathrop, was pastor of the first church to break away from the Church of England. The captain of the Mayflower *belonged to his church, and the church provided much of the financing that enabled the Pilgrims to sail to America on the* Mayflower *in 1620. The Reverend Lathrop had been part of the group of Puritans at Cambridge University to which John Winthrop, leader of Massachusetts Bay Colony, also belonged. In 19th-century New England some members of my family became Unitarians. Because of my grandmother, a descendant of the Scottish Hutchison clan, I spent my early childhood as a Presbyterian. However, between 1957 and 1961 I was part of an interdisciplinary faculty teaching a course on American values required of all freshmen at Mills College in Oakland, California. This led to my being invited to give a number of "sermons" in Northern California Unitarian churches.*

The First Unitarian Church of Berkeley, California (actually located in the adjacent town of Kensington) invited me to deliver the Third Annual Lawrence Lecture in October, 1979. "The Lawrence Lectures on Religion and

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Society," the church stated, "were intended to inquire into the nature and relevance of religion as it relates to personal meaning and fulfillment." The title of my talk was given to me in advance by the church members who organized the lectures. The thoughts were my own.

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CHAPTER 7

Values and Religion: Are Liberal [Protestant] Values Expendable in Today's Pluralistic Society?

Are liberal values expendable in today's pluralistic America? My answer to that question is both "yes" and "no."

We have to begin, of course, by defining "liberal" and "liberal Protestant values," and since I am a historian, I can best define them by outlining the main historical stages of their development.

Early Stages of Liberalism and Individualism

Liberalism obviously has roots at least as far back as the Renaissance and some phases of early Protestantism, not to mention the Greeks, but for our purposes the earliest stage was in western Europe when overseas trade was spreading, the industrial revolution was underway, and the bourgeoisie was growing. Liberalism at that time was a creed advocating individual free enterprise, a market economy, relationships at arm's length through money transactions, the right of an owner to dispose of his property at will, and the virtues of technology. It was essentially a business creed attempting to free individual initiative and energy from the binding ties of more static social relationships. Fluidity, the ability to make changes rapidly, was important. Orientation was to the present and the future rather than to the past.

The optimistic, humanitarian, egalitarian, internationalist values of the 18th-century Enlightenment reinforced this business creed.

The American Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights in the Constitution gave impetus to the growing movement. Freedom of assembly and speech, freedom of inquiry and the press, served the purposes of the new liberalism. So did the creed of pacifistic internationalism which was the disguise for Western European and especially British imperialism.

Liberalism's cultural expressions in the 19th century were not only in science and materialism, but also in romanticism and idealism. The liberal of this era combined aspiration, sentiment, and hypocrisy, in an age when men went to church on Sunday and chased dollars the rest of the week.

Political and economic liberalism have always had religious counterparts. The conditions to which liberalism was responsive also led the authoritarian God to become increasingly benevolent and laissez-faire, working at arm's length

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through natural law rather than jealously through fiat. Liberal religionists came to believe that what men did naturally was what God wanted them to do. Some people even went so far as to agree with the Renaissance humanist view that what men wanted for themselves, in this world, was what really was important. Congregationalism spawned Unitarianism and Unitarianism encouraged an even more individualistic secular humanism.

Years ago when I was at graduate school at Harvard University, one of my professors, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., described the growth of Unitarianism in the 1830s and made the following evaluation: "Unitarianism offered a relief from religion's active demand on people's time and emotions. It allowed them to believe anything. Unitarians were benevolent but also sober and cautious, stressing salvation by character rather than through vivid personal experience. Their goal was regular conduct and social stability, not radical change or any excess. They repudiated mystery and awe, tension and tragedy, in favor of rationality and amiability in their relations with God. As a higher being very much like themselves, their God could be bargained with." Schlesinger's conclusion was that as a solution to social or theological problems, this creed was inadequate.

Middle Stage—Liberalism and Progressivism

American liberalism in a larger sense reached a second stage in the late 19th century and early 20th century, when the industrial revolution had matured enough to produce a growing salaried, as well as self-employed, middle class, a middle class that was professional, managerial and technocratic. Efficiency, expertise, regulation in the public interest, conservation, temperance, the assimilation of immigrants into the mainstream of American culture, the ordering of American cities to foster middle-class home life, the protection of women and children—these were liberal causes.

Old-fashioned American Puritanism could still be found among the Progressives who were the political expression of American middle-class liberalism. Richard Hofstadter, in *The Age of Reform,* says that a content analysis of Progressive speeches and writings shows that their key words were patriotism, citizen, democracy, law, character, conscience, soul, service, duty, shame, disgrace, sin and selfishness. Liberalism could embrace the Social Gospel, the idea that religion should reach out to help solve social problems.[1] Liberal ladies were quite properly settlement house workers bringing uplift to the poor. However, Geiger, a biographer of John Dewey, complained that a liberal was a naive optimist who did not really understand or accept sin. Therefore, when things did not work out (largely because liberalism grossly overrated man as a rational and intelligible animal), the liberal became hurt, bewildered and tired. Even when he was not tired, Geiger said, the liberal was congenitally inactive because of his purported habits of tentativeness, seeing both sides, weighing issues too long and

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carefully. He did not believe in absolutes, so he could not take anything too seriously. He had no basic convictions, but only working hypotheses.[2]

What this critic failed to perceive was the basic hypocrisy of many middle-class liberals, whose seeming openness was a tactic to co-opt people of the lower social orders and to disarm men with greater power. Liberalism served the self-interests of a middle class that wanted only those changes that it itself could design and help effect, but otherwise wanted order and stability.

Liberals created an atmosphere that made possible American receptivity to the cultural revolution coming in from Europe and furthered by the bohemians in Chicago and Greenwich Village. But revolutions in taste and thought expressed in modern art went beyond liberalism's rather timid gentility.

The 1930s Movement Toward a Corporatist Society

Liberalism reached a third stage in the 1930s during Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. But the roots of the New Deal can be found at least as far back as the 1870s. I believe that the New Deal was the United States' version of the kinds of socio-economic process known in Europe as neo-corporatism or, in its more extreme forms, fascism.[3] That is, society was changing away from free-wheeling individualism into a hierarchical pyramid comprised of people mobilized into broad vocational categories. The New Deal encouraged workers, farmers and small businessmen to organize in self-governing vocational associations. Less emphasis was put upon individual rights and more upon one's rights as a member of a group. In some of its phases the New Deal was populist. Some writers of the era suggested that the people as a collectivity were the reality that man may call God. However, like European neo-corporatism, the American version was often technocratic. The key words of New Dealer Thurman Arnold, according to a content analysis conducted by Richard Hofstadter, were needs, organization, humanitarian, results, techniques, institution, realistic, discipline, morale, skill, expert, habits, practical and leadership.

Recent Versions

In recent years, liberal Protestant ethics have become pragmatic or transactional, within a temporal frame that is still forward-oriented. Wrote John B. Cobb, Jr. in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*: "Christian ethics require that the person in the present moment accept full responsibility for past actions and commitments and be able to make trustworthy promises of future actions. Liberal Christian theology redefined God as Process."[4] Jurgen Moltmann's theology of hope described the future as the mode of God's transcendence. Cobb described Christ as the image of creative transformation. God is the Logos—the ordered givenness of relevant potentiality. "The Logos is an eternal aspect of deity transcending every actual world as the principle of possibility and of the

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relevance of that possibility.[5] . . . In its incarnation or immanence the Logos is always a specific force for just that creative transformation which is possible and optimal in each situation."[6]

Liberalism's fourth stage, in a political sense, came in the 1960s with the culmination of the civil rights movement, new militancy for women's liberation, the anti-Vietnam War drives, the small is beautiful and limits of growth movements, and the turning of some people toward consciousness expansion. Liberalism has had many shadings across both major American political parties. Not all of liberalism's recent manifestations have been future-oriented.

This cursory outline has helped, I hope, to clarify what I mean by liberal values. The question is do we want to keep them; and if we do, is it possible for us to keep them? To the first question, I would say yes, with certain reservations. (I might add parenthetically that while I am a believer in many liberal values, I am also especially concerned about the traditional Protestant work ethic and the idea of work as calling, the belief that one's life is held in trust and that one must exercise that trust with dedication and commitment to a standard beyond personal aggrandizement or hedonism. The forms of liberalism I personally would seek to preserve are those consistent with some earlier values of American Puritanism.) The second question invokes still another question, namely, what are the threats to the values I have just been describing; why are they precarious? Liberalism is in jeopardy partially because there are certain fatal flaws or possible errors within liberalism itself. Until the recent past, liberalism has assumed that man is basically good, functioning under a more or less benign natural law or of his own free will within a more or less bountiful nature. Liberalism has been for the most part optimistic, moderate, tolerant, reasonably altruistic, experimental, creative within limits, acting both as a channel for and check upon change. But the fact is that man is not innately good. Sociobiology has called our attention to ways human social behavior resembles the behavior of other social creatures—mammals, birds and insects. Man is not free to do what he wishes. Much of his behavior is genetically determined. Natural law is not necessarily benign. Indeed, science has shown us how indifferent the universe is to human needs and purposes. The world is not necessarily getting better. It may be getting worse. We cannot rely, as we once did, on the idea of progress. Loss of hope brings a loss of a sense of freedom. Loss of trust brings on loss of altruism, generosity or possibly even benevolence, or we react by seeking the solace of cults or fads that narcotize our fear. The most important flaw, it seems to me, is the premise—fundamental to liberalism—that individual selfhood or identity can be relied upon as the basis for other values closely related to ideas of selfhood. Western man used to believe that a person was divided between body and soul, the body was essentially dross, and the soul did not really belong to the individual as such. But the idea of soul

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subjected people to manipulation by the church, so the idea of autonomous integrated selfhood was developed as the basic premise of modern liberalism. As Alan Watts said, in *Psychotherapy East and West*, "[O]ne of the most important Christian conventions is the view of man as . . . the 'skin-encapsulated ego', the separate soul and its fleshly vehicle together constituting a personality which is unique and ultimately valuable in the sight of God. This view is undoubtedly the historical basis of the Western style of individuality . . ."[7]

If there was a self, the problem then became one of finding and defining it. As one critic has noted, "From the Romantic period to our own day literature has largely been concerned with the methods by which men disguise from themselves the gap in their beings where the soul once resided."[8] After nearly two centuries of preoccupation with the quest, modern man has still not been able to locate the self. Much of recent American social behavior (e.g., modern psychiatry, the youth rebellions of the 1960s, the women's movement) has been at base a search for identity. Novelists and philosophers have begun to say that selfhood does not exist at all. It is at best a social artifact, a construct.

Liberalism has been based on the idea of the self, but, according to Albert Camus, liberalism has always given only lip service to the concept. Camus' statement in *The Rebel* was that liberalism negates the significance of the person. The liberal self is a mask for the vulgar man. Freedom becomes an organization and a middle-class organization at that. Democratic freedom, he concluded, meant freedom for a single class and that class chose to be mediocre.

I think his indictment was too harsh and that selfhood is fundamental to human dignity, but there is no doubt that it is an achieved state, not a given, and it is a condition that many people do fail to achieve.

Finally, I think we cannot ignore the oft-repeated charge that liberalism is too irresolute, too tentative, often too mild, not really serious enough.

Liberalism is threatened not only from within but also by changed socio-economic circumstance. That is why European liberalism is but a shadow of its former self, and liberalism must re-examine its position in the American context.

Liberalism prospered in an era of relatively low ratios of man to land, of growth and open-endedness. The present total context is quite different from the one in which liberal values were born and nurtured. Our 218 million population is much greater than the population of the 18th century. At the time of the Revolution, the United States was 5 per cent urban; now it is 80 per cent or more urban. Business institutions and public government have increased enormously in size, scope and complexity—reaching far beyond American borders. The computer and mass media are becoming more important than public education as means of holding the population together and giving it coherence as a nation. (Japan has embarked on a program to computerize education, medicine, retailing and government administration. Soon we may do the same.)

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Society is much more interdependent than it once was, more technological, and more rapidly subject to future shock.

We must question very seriously whether liberal values can really serve the individual or society under present circumstances, since the circumstances are so different from those in which liberalism was born and nurtured. We no longer have an open frontier and we face severe raw material shortages. We are not self-sufficient as a nation and depend on other parts of the world for primary energy and other vital substances.

One of the greatest challenges to liberalism today comes from changes in the geopolitical position of the U.S. (as they appeared to be in the 1970s). American liberal values grew up in a time when we were relatively safe in the world and European liberal values were a byproduct of an age of European dominance.

American security in the 19th-century world was due to the protective shield of Britain's power at a time when Britannia ruled the waves. Our post-World War II role of dominance of the so-called free world was due to the drastic reduction of the power of England, Europe and Japan because of prolonged war, and to the rapid acquisition of independence on the part of Europe's former colonies. In other words, a trade and power vacuum occurred that we happened to be in a position to fill. However, now Europe and Japan have recovered their strength and some of Europe's former colonies have fallen under Communist influence. The Near East, South and Southeast Asia and Africa were formerly under European control. There is no assurance that we could not fall into the condition of being geopolitically a second-class nation. [By the end of the century, with the Communist bloc dissolved, the new threat seemed to be China.] We are rapidly losing our former trade. Our relative productivity and per capita income are declining. So is the dollar declining. [At the end of the century, various factors, especially technological innovations, had given a new bounce to the American economy.]

When a country does not dominate the world but must struggle to hold its own, and must be ever alert to danger, the question will be raised, can it afford the luxury of liberal values? To hold its own in the world, a nation should be internally coherent. Its people should be patriotic and regard their government as legitimate. They should feel a bond with one another and have a sense of citizenship and obligation. One of the threats against this is from too much cultural pluralism within the country: if sizable cultural groups have no sense of loyalty to the dominant cultural values, pluralism in excess could become Hobbesian, a war of all against all. Liberalism that encourages excess pluralism, or insufficient cultural homogeneity, may create conditions that make it impossible for liberalism to survive.

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If these are the threats to liberal Protestant values, the question becomes, are such values obsolete? Or should some be retained and others scuttled? And what should be the values of the future?

I do not believe these questions can be answered solely on the basis of preferences. Values arise and survive because they are suitable to circumstances.

The paramount circumstances, to my mind, are those related to national security. Liberals have always been prone to internationalism. But that proneness has been on the assumption that their country and their values would set the tone of that internationalism. If not, do we—should we—continue to favor internationalism over national realpolitik? Or do concerns for national security and relative national power override traditional liberal internationalism? My inclination is to say to other countries, if we have the power to command their attention: "Yes, we can all live together amicably and with due regard for one another's interests provided you accept the basic ground rules." This would seem to imply that we have a self-interest in maintaining substantial control over the ability to set those ground rules. This ability should be reinforced by common sense and decency and willingness to listen and to allow room for contrary viewpoints. But some basic control must be maintained.

On issues of scarce resources, it seems to me that my comfort and pleasure should not be purchased at the expense of another person's exploitation or starvation. We Americans should learn to live with less when more means greed and indifference to suffering. On the other hand, within that limit I see nothing wrong with the exercise of hard work, ingenuity and creativity to foster personal and national well-being.

Within the United States, with increasing cultural pluralism, it seems to me liberal values are not expendable. First, they help us accept and adjust to pluralism. But, second, they are needed to provide a cultural framework within which other disparate values are contained, transcending pluralism. There must be unity transcending pluralism.

Liberal values arose in the United States at a time when the dominant culture was primarily of British origin. They were later accepted by others who assimilated into the dominant cultural group. Recently some people seem to be contending that the prevailing social and cultural codes can be washed free of any ethnic implications and be totally neutral. I do not believe this is either possible or desirable. Ethnicity means cultural tradition, and thus defined it lies at the base and core of every viable country. France would not be France without Frenchman, nor China without Chinese.

We cannot make our national basic framework so devoid of human tradition that there is no one to love and cherish it. To sustain liberalism as the prevailing substance in that basic framework provides stability and yet gives

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American pluralism the kind of flexibility it needs. As for the liberal values themselves, plus the Protestant ethic of work as calling and devotion to a common weal as obligation and life purpose, for the most part I believe they should be fostered even if some of their premises have eroded and some have become obsolete.

What is to be avoided are hypocrisy, timidity or complacency. Instead, there should be a proper blend of compassion and toughness, imagination and realism, thoughtfulness and capacity for action. The root word of liberalism means freedom, and freedom is still a value some of us might die for—or, more difficult yet, live for. Liberalism, at its best, implies self-respect and respect for others and for the difference in others. In international affairs this should not preclude alert awareness to the realities of power. Liberalism does, or should, encourage heterogeneity, a lively environment permitting range and creativity. Liberalism fosters the kind of individual strength that makes growth possible. Liberalism should also entail commitment and responsibility, including responsibility to the future. Better a theology of realistic, benevolent and responsible hope than one of ecstatic delusion, resignation, or despair.

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