

EPILOGUE

BEYOND CONFRONTATION: 7th STAGE SISTERS

What would be the impact on 6th stage sisters were they to collide head-on with massive male-manned bastions of intransigence to change? **WHAT IF**, from their towers and turrets, the clerical caste of the Catholic Church were to train inquisitional guns on the challenging female confronters as they quest forth in search of more authentic Christian Community?

Lawrence Kohlberg, among other social scientists, has directed research to that issue, —although framed in more general terms. Following his elaboration of **THE PARADIGM OF SIX DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES**, he mulled, as it were, these questions:

- WHAT IF** 6th stage persons sallied forth for years onto the injustice fronts of the world and found the dominators indomitable?
- WHAT IF** these 6th stage idealists finally realized that even the presumed bastions for ethical discernment gunned forth justice jargon that was little more than pious platitudes, —that the entrenched autocrats of the world had no intentions of releasing either their power positions or the supporting rationale?
- WHAT IF** sixth stage persons, gripped by such cognitive awareness, felt that further confrontation was meaningless and despaired of making any headway?
- Would the deflated 6th stagers, then, end all sorties against the powerful forces of domination?
- Would their feelings of responsibility for the human condition simply collapse?

(See "Continuities in Childhood and Adult Development Revisited" in **LIFE-SPAN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY: PERSONALITY AND SOCIALIZATION**, 1973)

Kohlberg speculated that were the above conditons of hopelessness, frustration and despair to obtain, 6th stagers would survive by moving upward to the 7th stage of maturation for which utter despair is a **PRECONDITION!** At the moment when 6th stage persons would contemplate the utter futility of self-autonomy, the pervasiveness of injustice, and the meaninglessness of finite values, they would be catapulted toward embracing a "more cosmic perspective" and toward identifying with the **INFINITE**.

This 7th Stage Maturation constitutes another **CONVERSION**, —a radical re-orientation of one's entire life. It involves a transformation or a movement of God from a position of peripheral presence into the very core or center of one's being. Commenting on the possibility of this 7th stage phenomenon, Walter E. Conn, Professor of Religious Studies at Villanova University (See Fall, 1982, **CROSS CURRENTS**, p. 327) wrote that such a religious conversion is not only rare but is probably not even religious in the ordinary sense. In fact, such a serious and radical transformation might be better described as "conversion *from* religion to God."

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Our journey of exploration and analysis pauses now far from the summits of our destinations. We have viewed together in these pages the major storm patterns which have engulfed world sisters during the past two decades since Vatican II:

- our facing head-on the cyclonic winds of culture change
- our struggle for extrication from the quicksand of **TOTAL INSTITUTION**
- our near entrapment in an intermediate stage of democratized bureaucracy
- our pioneering into consensual community patterns
- our breaking free from 4th stage moral maturation
- our experiencing a massive flow of creative energy toward 6th stage development and **VOCATIONS TO CONFRONTATION**
- our fresh framing of the vows in contemporary terms
- our reformation of counsels and canons in response to pooled charisms

The consecrated life in the Church will be as everlasting as the Church, —rooted as it is in our baptismal consecration—, but our specific patterns for bonding in community in the near future will be precisely what the consecrated persons of the present, responding to the Holy Spirit's directioning, determine them to be. No canons can cement sisters into frozen categories. Sisters of the world, cut free from traditional roles and excluded still from official Church positions demanding clerical status, will be, nevertheless, co-shapers of the renewing Church, builders and architects, engineers and designers of wholly new structures for the future ecclesia: the **CHURCH RADIANT**.

Our far future roles as sisters are a hazy blur on the horizon. We know only this about ourselves as **SIXTH STAGE** or **SEVENTH STAGE SISTERS**:

- We are pilgrims forever on the way, more concerned now with persons and processes than with products . . .
- We are spiritual adventurers sans pre-packaged tour norms and the luggage of old categories . . .
- We are pioneers, not identified with our jobs but with our journeying . . .
- We are wayfarers open to living in propertyless, placeless, and prestigeless Christian Community . . .
- We are sisters involved in the everydayness of human problems, willing to risk security for convictions, concerned with personal authenticity, faithful to the Gospels and Vatican II, determined to penetrate the world with Christ's love . . .
- We are sisters who see **POVERTY** as loving service and availability to all, who see **CELIBACY** as the celebration of the God-centeredness of all our loves, and who see **OBEDIENCE** as a listening and free response to the Holy Spirit, as concern for the common good and the value of **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY** . . .
- We are women deeply involved in the prophetic critiquing and creative reform-ulation of obsolete or person-denegrating Church patterns. Although we stand in conscientious objection to all forms of dominative patterns in the policies, practices, or personnel of the Church, we do so lovingly as authentic Christians, not in opposition to the authority which serves Christian Community, but in opposition only to the institutionalized elitism and male dominance that defaces it . . .
- We are women who have experienced the —**SUDDEN SPRING** of self-realization that frees us from the long winters of **ACCOMMODATION** and moves us toward inirradicable **CONFRONTATION DETERMINATION** . . ., and perhaps beyond . . .
- We are women too rich in experience to rhapsodize on the beauty of **SUDDEN SPRING** for we understand the grave responsibilities of **CONFRONTATION VOCATIONS** and the inevitable short-range consequences . . .
- We are women with our fingers on the pulsebeat of the Church, who feel new life coursing through it, —life to be contoured, finally, by the **CONSENSUS FIDELIUM** . . . of the emerging laity . . .
- We are women ever in process of **BECOMING**, stretching toward full personhood, strong with the courage of our convictions, sensing the deepening in our vocations to be co-shapers of the **CHURCH RADIANT** . . .
- Finally, we are the dancing flowers and illusive shadows of **SUDDEN SPRING**, —the mystery in the ferment of **NEW LIFE** . . .

WE ARE THE SPRIGS OF HOPE THAT HAVE BROKEN THROUGH THE ROCKS OF TRADITION, SEEDLINGS WHOSE PENETRATING ROOTS CRUMBLE THE STONES THAT HOLD BACK THE FUTURE . . .

