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THE ALIENATED STUDENT

It is my privilege to talk to you briefly concerning one of the most pressing problems the Church faces in our day, the alienated student. Joseph Stalin once remarked, "Let the old people waddle to Church, I want theyouth." This is a sharp statement, but it has its point for us, especially in a time when the great majority of our young people are or will be attending college. Simply expressed: No college youth in the Church today, very few adults in the Church tomorrow. Young men and women alienated from the Church today, adult mem and women alienated from the Church tomorrow.

Who, then, is this alienated student, and why is he alienated? The answer to the first part of the question is relatively simple. The alienated student today is the great majority of students, including almost all students who come from a Lutheran background. The answer to the second part of the question, concerning the cause of the alienation, does not come so easily.

The sociologist, Kenneth Kenniston, has emphasized that the life of the contempoary student is split into two worlds, on the one hand the world of expertise and professional accomplishment, on the other hand the private world where meaning for life is sought.

As Kenniston writes, "the jobs that most students at selective colleges will eventually take are almost without exception professional jobs. They will become research scientists, government administrators, account mangers, reserach and development experts. They will be tomorrow's corporation lawyers, aeronautical engineers, medical specialists, and the up-and-coming professors of the 'knowledge industry.'"

Students feel, accordingly, that their skills and talents and their very lives are predestined to be absorbed into the Great Machine called society, that they are predetermined to be cogs in a horrendus hufluan computer.

I was at a social gathering the other day and a recently graduated student, who had just been introduced to me, casually asked me I if were a "slave of industry." He evidently felt that he was. And this is typical, even at places like Harvard where there has been heavy emphasis on humanistic values, on "being a gentleman." The outer life of the student today, then, is defined by the LaereLLabLv prospect of being absorbed inevitably vadt into a vast technological mabbine called society, the prospect of losing his identity and individuality.

The inner life of the student, — which seems to come to the fore in the arts and in friendships and specialized spsots(such as mountain-climbing), is the area where he searches for meaning. This is a rather intense matter, and it is 8X kept radically separate from the outer life of NWWMlX slavery, to the societal-educational machine. This inner search, according to Kenniston, rarely reaches fulfilment. SX It tends to be a matter of many, many starts, trying many things, from literature to LSD, with no real satisfaction.

in the protest movement at. Berkeley. [illegible]
interestingly enough, one boy marched with a sign hung about his neck readings "X am a V.C. student. Please do not fold, spindle, or mutilateSWX me."

It almost goes without saying that the alienated student is alienated from the Church.

He sees the Church as being totally caught up in the Great Machine of socckdty. He grew up in a parish, undoubtedly, where his educational materials were mass-produced with all the loving care of a computer, where he XKK had to look at sacharine-sweetXpictures on mass-produced bulletin-covers, where perhaps he heard sermons which sounded like they had been turned out of some mass-produced digest, too. The EChurch, as he sees it, beldngs to the pweer-structure, to the establishment.

He sees the Church as a kind of stained-glass foxhole — to use a cureent expression. People go to Church, he feels, in order to be tranquilised so as to be able to escape the reality of the modern world. Their chief interest is directed to spiritual things in the Church, especially tn some nether-netherland other world beyond death. They have little or no concern for this world. At the same time they pretty much accept this world as it is.

"My father is an active member of the Church Council," a freshman told me the other day, "but how my father can be so bigoted against the Negro X don't understand." This is the image the alienated student has of the Church memberr the church member is one who goes through a lot of rather senseless motions, pitting on a big show, but when the chips are down, membership in the Church doesn't really change that person's pattern of life. X Sb person can be a Church Councilman and a bigot at the same time, and nobody seems to care — that's the way the alienated student feels.

The situation is especially acute regarding the Pastor. The alienated student by and large sees his Pastor as one whose chief responsibility is to keep the wheels turning, who is usually unwilling to think anything /new, not to speak of doing anything new.

A sophomore /told me the other day, "My home Pastor tells Bible stories MN all the time and then concludes by telling us to be good tanstjc boys and girls." JOffiMX Another student remarkeds X "My Pastor is an intelligent man, but he has sold his soul to a congregation which really doesn't want to think."

X can report, with no small relief, that along the way many of our students meet a layman or a Pastor who challenges their imagination and intellect and will-to-creative-action. But, by and large, the student sees such people as temporary exceptions, as small remants which will soon be sucked up into the machine-like motions of the Church.

Hence you will not be surprised when I tell you that the question I hear most often from students is this: "Pastor, what difference does it really make if you belong to the Church?"

Behind this question is the presupposition, which we can express in the words of American economist Thorstein Veblen(one who was brought up a Lutheran), that the Church is "the accredited vent for the exudation of effete matter from the cultural organism."

Xn a word, many students today, including those who come from a Lutheran background, couldn't care less about the Church.

What difference does it make if you are a member of the Church? Remember now, pious phrases won't help much in the student world, words like justification by faith, the forgiveness of sins, Grace, Sternal Life, Christian Freedom, and so on, are just so many words to most students. Moreover, most students wonder whether the people who use such words themselves know what they mean.

Well we must struggle to answer the question, what difference it makes if you are a Christian. This, X guess, is what our whole ministry in the university is: a struggle to exhibit in deed, even more than in word, that being a Christian makes a difference. It's not an easy task.

We try to meet our responsibility within the context of a elipse which has two foci, the gathered community centering around the Word and the Sacraments, and the consaunity dispersed throughout the university world, where we affirm all that we can and identify ourselves with all that commends itself. Xn this way we try to raise the sign of faith without embarassment and joyfully in an alienated world. -

In our work we are continually bolstered by the support we receive, financial and spiritual, from this Synod. And we take every occasion we can to remind students that it is precisely what they see as that MMX stuffy, do-nothing, tranquilized institutional Church which is encouraging us to help them (and ourselves) to make contemporary sense out of the Christian Fatih and at the same time to exhibit that Faith in a vibrant way. Thank you.