

# Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts Evaluated

Several persons have asked for my evaluation of the popular offering, Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts. After reading several manuals filled in by people who have attended the seminar, and after discussing the lectures with some of those who have attended, I am convinced that here is a strange mixture of adolescent psychology, naive marriage counseling, Levitical legalism, disjointed use of Bible quotations, and even a few indications of superstition, all interlaced with a recurring thread of authoritarianism.

Basic Youth Conflicts appeals to us today because of the loneliness and loss of intimacy in a depersonalized society. Disengaged from supportive institutional expectations and starved for human acceptance and understanding, we easily move to an agnostic religious stance. Signs and wonders become the alternative to faith, trust, love, and mystery. Despairing of this world, we attach ourselves to more authoritarian and other-world simplicities to route our way through the frightening dilemmas of history.

Sociologists observe widespread evidences of depression because of disillusionment over the loss of our individual and national dreams and the dislocation of our ideals, which have been badly hurt. Vietnam, pollution, technological Frankensteins, Watergate, and inflation give variant saturations of guilt, powerlessness, and despair.

## Losing our basic trust

Most of us have had orientation in familiar, small, rural communities or stable neighborhood associations in the city, where people knew us well and we received support from the group. Ironically, now when we have instant communication, technical efficiency allows less meeting of persons, feelings, and ideas. This

our being finite (subject to death) and at the same time endowed with freedom to ask "Who am I?" Constantly we despair of the tension between who we are and who we should be. This anxiety becomes heightened and more intense as social stresses dislocate us from traditional and familiar patterns of living. Conflict is basic to human existence. I propose we take more seriously our doctrine of sin and grace. Sin enslaves us within our anxiety; grace permits us to be free of the law (I have recently reread Romans). After the cross the law is dead, says St. Paul. We walk by faith, not by rules. We are children of grace, not slaves of fear.

The alternative is to do like the children of Israel who were weary of wandering in the wilderness as they were anticipating the promised land. They turned away from trust in the pillar of fire and the pillar of the cloud to design a physical religious focus. We can collect registration fees and build a big fat golden calf of authoritarianism. We can develop a festive mood, gathered with thousands of expectant and anxious people. We can dance with their thoughts. Our fingers and pencils can assume mystical meaning, taking notes before a visible authority figure. We can abandon trust in the promises of God and repudiate



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these men gave themselves as wholesome citizens of this world to unfetter

there to claim that the kingdom is contained in visible evidence.

We will not be able to redeem the creativity of man, which is dramatically and naturally expressed in our technology, if we would escape both the beauty and the harshness of the natural world. The discipline that is required of us is a commitment to love unselfishly, shared with whomever is next to us at the moment. If we need courses in adolescent psychology or seminars in marriage enrichment, we should not have them bracketed or rationalized with incongruent Bible passages. This kind of proof-texting use of the Bible is a violation of our concept of a dynamic and living Word. Our confessional Lutheran theology puts the gospel—Christ, grace—in a manger (incarnate), not in a moralistic harness, not within incantation of magic words.

The increase of highly subjective and introspective religious life-styles indicates a search for spiritual reality. Such occasions may tempt the Christian to flee opportunity and responsibility to be disciples in the turbulent arena in which he finds himself. Authoritarian and highly structured thought patterns and life-styles and simplistic biblical interpretation may become a monastic escape from the world for which Christ died and to which we also should offer ourselves to affirm the wholesomeness of the family of God, the joys and strengths of marriage, the wonder of children, and also the variety of single life-styles. This includes a commitment to look at mystery in people as well as God. This includes courage to risk ourselves to heal the hurts and to dare intimacy. This includes a loving touch when there is chance of rejection and misunderstanding. The First Article needs reemphasis so we dare venture forth with faith, wonder, and creativity. The new humanity in Christ gives unity to First, Second and Third Article Christianity. **J. Elmo Agrimson**