# *Editorial . . .*

## The Evangelical in a Changing World

The scope and the rapidity of social change in the mid-twentieth century leave many in the position of old Anton in Friedrich Hebbel's *Maria Magdalene*, who stood bewildered by his age and gasped, "I do not understand the world any more!" A number of dynamically revolutionary factors have converged upon our generation, factors which compel the free nations to experiment, often somewhat blindly we fear, with policies and measures which seem untried, and in many cases, lacking in realism. Yet the evangelical Christian must live creatively in today's world; he has no modern equivalent of the monastery to which he may retreat, even should he be disposed to do so. He must try to understand his world.

The unprecedented rise in mass communication, the growing self-consciousness of minorities formerly passive, the series of scientific breakthroughs, and the sudden burgeoning of world population—these have changed the complexion of our national life almost overnight. For with mass communication, man has developed the power of manipulating public opinion upon a scale undreamed-of a half century ago. Moreover, mass communication has developed upon the part of our entire citizenry a demand for participation in all of the results of a growing affluence. While this is true on a world scale, it is acutely true in the United States, so that the idea seems to have developed that each must share in affluence, without regard for his personal contribution to social good and economic productivity.

Man's inventive genius has altered, with almost frightening rapidity, the base of employability of manpower. With the increase of automation and cybernation, the pool of unskilled and semi-skilled labor is becoming, to an increasing and almost terrifying degree, superfluous. The base of employability has risen at a phenomenal rate; and our educational facilities can only with the greatest difficulty keep pace with the demands upon them to train for highly skilled performance.

Minorities are demanding, and with right, that which our form of society finds it difficult to provide with the rapidity which the

urgency of the day requires—namely, an access to their share in the products of an affluent society. Long deprived of facilities for training which would make many of their number employable in the more skilled levels of our industrial life, they have made a commendable effort to earn their place in an affluent society. Their problems, along with that of the traditionally unskilled layers of our working society, are aggravated by the fact that the "population explosion" affects them in a manner out of proportion to the rest of the society.

The generally accepted norm of affluence (and by this we mean not merely wealth, but the rigidly controlled distribution of national wealth) has created a national conscience which is disturbed by the existence of economically depressed minorities, whether racial, linguistic, or regional. Whether we like it or no, the controlling norm of our society seems largely conceived to be that every citizen shall participate generously in the results of affluence, whether he is employed or employable, or not. This, of course, goes against the grain of much of the ethos of historic Christianity, with its emphasis upon industry, self-reliance and thrift—with its mandate that "he who does not work shall not eat." It seems to be taken for granted that the bond of work-and-reward is to be disregarded—and seen from some points of view, this mandate seems to be out of harmony with democracy in its economic expression.

Our national policies seem, at the moment, to be geared to the principle that economic well-being shall be achieved by a closely managed system of fiscal deficits, based upon careful calculation of the future gross national product. The current administration assumes that it undertakes its task with a mandate from the nation which enables it to rely upon a consensus of roughly two-thirds of the voters. These theses imply, obviously, radical departures from the principles which have been thought to underlie sound financing, and from a basic concept of government operating in a limited fashion upon the basis of a simple majority. It will not be easy for over twenty-five million voters who voted against the present incumbent of the White House to accept these daring principles, particularly the latter, in the light of which any concerted opposition to the "official" policies will be deemed a grave liability. It is possible that the pressures toward political conformity with the newer concept will be increased; it will be unusual indeed if a liberal administration can avoid stereotyping all conservatism with such adjectives as "radical" and "extreme."

How shall the evangelical Christian respond to these facts? Shall he view the coming changes in society as inevitable, and

perhaps the logical and normal outcome of the dynamics of our national life? Shall he, on the other hand, regard them as reflecting an abandonment of the basic principles of character and conduct which belong to the structures of the Christian life? Perhaps the question resolves itself to the terms of the following: Shall the Christian retreat into socio-political seclusion, feeling that he is being by-passed in the dynamics of today's society, and that there is no real place for the expression of his convictions any more? Or can he find a place in which he can play a creative role in an emerging society which, while it is not wholly to his liking, yet offers him the possibility for projecting his witness to the Living Lord?

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