HOWARD M. MILLS

# The Urgent Need for a Truly *Social* Ethic

There may or may not be any correlation between the secondary status accorded Christian ethics in Canadian theology (including seminary faculties and curricula) on the one hand, and the relatively few articles and editorials that have appeared in this *Journal* on ethics and ethical issues on the other (less than ten per cent between 1960 and 1968).[1] In view of an editorial statement of 1967 affirming the need for 'a clarification of strategy and tactics' so that the churches may 'be more than handmaids of the "secular city," '[2] it would seem that the cause of this sporadic trickle of ethical debate must be found in a broader constituency than the *Journal*'s editorial committee.

The scarcity of ethical dialogue here is especially perplexing when it is recalled that these recent years have experienced both a major controversy among ethical scholars over the basis, methodology, and content of Christian ethics[3] and also increased challenges to established 'authority,' a wide variety of social upheavals, and intensified personal and cultural anxiety over being morally adrift, especially in the North American context. It will be obvious that all of these developments have been interdependent; nor can they be isolated from the total world picture of this decade.

Presumably Canadians have been participating in the very significant discussion of ethics in ecumenical circles at the international level in the past several years, but it is disconcerting that the printed feedback from such events as the Geneva Conference on Church and Society (1966) seems to have been limited to journalistic reporting.

No doubt Canadian churchmen have read about and discussed locally (or at least have considered meditatively) the wide spectrum of ethical issues streaming across our national, community, and ecclesiastical landscapes. But surely a scholarly and pastoral opportunity (to say nothing of responsibility) has been missed, if such discussion has failed to appear in this *Journal*. Surely whatever is distinctive in Canadian church life and theology could have added to, or at least paralleled, the kind of debate portrayed so helpfully in volumes like *Storm over Ethics*.[4]

1. In the 34 issues published between January 1960 and April 1968 (inclusive), there were 9 articles on ethics, 7 on ethical issues, and 3 editorials – a total of 19 items out of approximately 210. (The notion of 'ethics' applied in this count is of course the present writer's.)

2. *CJT*, 13 (1967), 4.

3. In North America the discussion has been focussed on the question of 'situation ethics' *versus* 'rule ethics,' with Joseph Fletcher and Paul Ramsey at the respective extremes. Cf. N. H. G. Robinson, 'Agape and Agapism,' *CJT*, 13 (1967), 79–85.

4. John C. Bennett (ed.), *Storm over Ethics* (Philadelphia: The United Church Press, 1967).

[CJT, xv, 1 (1969), printed in Canada]

But before too much time is given to confession and remorse, perhaps it would be wise to ascertain where we now are, to accept gratefully the clarification that has accrued from the heated debate by others over such things as 'deeds' and 'rules' in Christian ethics,[5] and, rather than put ethics back on the shelf for another decade, to resolve to take up the constructive ethical enterprise at its current growing edge. For there is facing us an urgent demand for a social ethic adequate to the complexities of this revolutionary and rapidly changing technological world. The encouraging aspect is that the recent positive emphasis on 'secularization' and the measure of agreement achieved in the conflict between 'situation' and 'principles' (according to which neither can claim any absolute character) have together cleared the way for the development of what is here called a 'truly *social* ethic.'

Although an attempt will be made below to outline the nature, the methodology, and one strategy of such an ethic, the main thesis of this paper will be an affirmation and an explanation of the urgent need for the development of such a 'truly *social* ethic.'

Why is the time '*now*'? A brief review of developments in the field of Christian social ethics during the past two decades will answer part of this query. The constituting of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948 brought with it a formalizing and an intensification of the international, ecumenical discussion of social issues with more inclusive ecumenical participation. That discussion, later to be called 'Ecumenical Christian Social Ethics,' had really emerged at the 1937 Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State. While at least three theological perspectives were represented at Oxford, the Conference served as a theoretical testing ground for the position which was later to be labeled 'Christian Realism.' Though it received no 'official' sanction then, this realist position 'dominated ecumenical social thinking and writing in the period up to the first Assembly of the World Council in 1948.'[6]

The Oxford Conference had listed specific recommendations for social policy, which were intended to apply for about a decade.[7] The experience of the second world war so abbreviated that period that, in many countries, those pre-war proposals were realized by 1945, especially in the economic sector. Confronted in the late 1940s with the two 'cold war' extremes of capitalism and communism, the 1948 Assembly recognized the need for a more comprehensive approach to social issues in the face of this ideological

5. Cf. *ibid.* The essayists, while diverging on particular points, seem to agree that there can be no either/or of 'context' or 'principle.' Even Fletcher writes more affirmatively than elsewhere about principles, and is concerned only to prevent their being absolutized.

6. P. Abrecht, 'The Development of Ecumenical Social Ethics,' in John C. Bennett (ed.), *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World* (New York: Association Press, 1966), p. 157. Cf. E. Duff, SJ, *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Association Press, 1956), p. 156.

7. Cf. J. H. Oldham (ed.), *Official Reports of the Oxford Conference* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1937), p. 98.

conflict. Thus the concept of the 'responsible society' was formulated to give expression to the search for new, creative solutions to the problems of social order and justice. The impact of this concept can be traced through the titles of a host of volumes on social ethics written in the 1950s. The Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1954) focussed on and further refined this concept. The initial statement or definition of the 'responsible society' went as follows:

Man is created and called to be a free being, responsible to God and his neighbour. Any tendencies in State and society depriving man of the possibility of acting responsibly are a denial of God's intention for man and his work of salvation. A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it.

Man must never be made a mere means for political or economic ends. Man is not made for the State, but the State for man. Man is not made for production, but production for man. For a society to be responsible under modern conditions it is required that the people have freedom to control, to criticize and to change their governments, that power be made responsible by law and tradition, and be distributed as widely as possible through the whole community. It is required that economic justice and provision of equality of opportunity be established for all the members of society.[8]

Most Canadian churchmen encountering this statement for the first time amid the disorder of the late 1960s might say: 'Amen, that's the kind of society we ought to have!' (The irony is that it never filtered down to 'the churches' during the period when it was guiding ecumenical social debate.) But affirmation of the 'responsible society' comes too late now. On the one hand, the Christian social ethic of Oxford and Amsterdam has come under serious fire because of its built-in 'questionable assumptions about the authority and universality of western Christendom.'[9] On the other hand, it has shown weaknesses in confrontation with the social problems of the new nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where the ideological and cultural biases of the concept limit its applicability. The 1960s have been characterized as an age of rapid social change and, as Paul Abrecht reports:

The development of the World Council's work in this area (Asia, Africa and Latin America) seemed at first to require no new theological-ethical categories. But gradually it has become apparent that new theological categories relevant to the problems of revolutionary change are needed, and there have been attempts to develop a theology of Christian action in relation to dynamic secular society.[10]

8. *Statements of the World Council of Churches on Social Questions* (Geneva: W.C.C., Department of Church and Society, 1956), p. 19.

9. Abrecht, 'Development of Ecumenical Social Ethics,' p. 161.

10. *Ibid.*

This is not the place to try to outline these various attempts. Much of the literature related to the Geneva Conference on Church and Society documents this ecumenical search, but for the purpose of the present survey attention is drawn to the preparatory volume, *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World: An Ecumenical Theological Enquiry*, edited by John C. Bennett.[11] In this single volume can be seen both the areas of emerging agreement among ecumenical ethicists (which Bennett stresses), and also the substantial divergences that remain. These differences reflect not only the relative interpretations of, and roles accorded to, biblical, theological, and empirical data, but also something of the denominational traditions and continental contexts from which the writers speak.

It is interesting – at times incredible to the present writer – to see how all twenty contributors to this volume have recognized the critical issues of the moment (in personal, social, economic, and political dimensions), and yet have disagreed so widely on the basis for social ethics and diverged so greatly (in this writer's view) in the adequacy of the 'social' ethics they propose.

A number of them advocate a 'social' ethic that must be described as providing guidance only for personal relationships and, in some cases, for the participation of individuals in secular society. They provide no apparent basis for altering social policy except a hope for the transformation of individuals, based on a faith-confidence in the ongoing effects of grace and redemption.[12]

Some other positions appear to be basically a reaffirmation of the 'responsible society' concept, with some updating. Though no longer so concerned with the 'cold war' issues, they return to a setting-out of general social principles (technically the 'middle axioms' of Oxford) for the guidance of Christians and others in their social action in community, national, and international life, presuming 'relatively stable situations which provide for orderly transformations of society.'[13]

A third category or position – with fewer representatives than the second – calls for a theology and ethic of revolution, as suggested by Abrecht above. It is with this approach that the present writer is most concerned, both because the conception of 'revolution' here advocated is broader than that which is assumed and feared by affluent security, and because such an ethic alone is adequate to the dynamics of a 'revolutionary era' and its need for a 'truly *social* ethic.'

The problem of the inadequacy of the systems of Christian social ethics now available can perhaps be best illustrated with reference to the current Canadian constitutional crisis. Canada's situation is clearly quite different from

11. New York: Association Press, 1966. Chapters were contributed by specialists in Christian social ethics representing the denominational-theological spectrum from Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox to Reformed and 'Pentecostal' and from evangelical to liberal, as well as all major geographical areas. (The largest single group, however, is from the United States.)

12. Cf. *ibid.*, chapters by Bruce Reed, Emilio Castro, and Hans-Werner Bartsch.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 374. Cf. chapters by Roger L. Shinn, Louis Janssens, and Roger Mehl.

that of the multitude of emerging nations. Canada has a literate population and a parliamentary system with processes for 'orderly transformations of society'; a rewriting of the British North America Act is in question, not a brand new start in nationhood. Nevertheless, presuming that a new constitution is to be written, should it serve simply as a reflection of present realities or provide a model for the further evolution of Canadian society? These two functions are not, of course, incompatible, but the first is primarily analytical, while the latter involves prescription. If the latter is included, as surely it must be in reference to a dynamic society, who will design the model and on what norms will institutions and social structures be prescribed? Will this all be left to the prime minister – as seems to be his desire – with debate and modification by parliament? Or will non-political, representative associations – like the churches – take the initiative to recommend the kind of society toward which the new constitution will guide the national life?

The present writer is convinced that the human issues involved demand such participation by the churches, just as urgently as the responsibility which the delegates to the Geneva Conference of 1966 have called the churches to fulfil in relation to the emerging nations.[14] The problem is this: on what basis could the Canadian churches, acting together or separately, apply themselves to the designing of a national (or world) social organization to which the constitutional lawyers could then apply their skills? Advocates of Christian ethics of the person-centred and orthodox 'two-realms' Lutheran types do not have a basis on which to design social order; logically their systems are limited to providing guidance for 'living in,' or simply 'responding to,' the established order.[15]

Nor is the Roman Catholic adaptation of 'natural law' adequate to the present situation. Used as it was for centuries to discern criteria for social policy, it, like Luther's teaching, accepted a static social order. Its apparent universality is certainly inviting. As Bennett remarks, 'no one doubts the existence of a common ground morality (not necessarily a universally recognized morality) on which Christians and non-Christians do cooperate.'[16] And this 'common ground morality' must surely play a significant role in the formulation of a 'truly *social* ethic.' Even though serious and literalistic references to Canada as a 'Christian nation' continue, the facts have never supported such a description. Nor can that be a justifiable goal of Christian social ethics. John Calvin's Geneva 'Theocracy' (with its New England descendants) was probably the last thoroughgoing effort to prescribe (and establish) a 'Christian' social order. Certainly insight was gained from that

14. Cf. *World Conference on Church and Society: Official Report* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967), pp. 90–93.

15. Cf. Bennett (ed.), *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, chapters by W. H. Lazareth, Harry Aronson, and N. H. Soe. The same criticism must be made of U.S. Leupold, 'Luther's Social Ethics Today,' *CJT*, 12 (1966), 238–44.

16. Bennett (ed.), *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, p. 377. The editor's concluding 'Epilogue' sharpens many of the issues scattered through the diverse contributions to the book.

experiment, but subsequent literary and theological-ethical reflection has indicated the human disaster of such an approach; it could not embody tolerance in the relatively homogeneous sixteenth century. Few could seriously welcome it in this pluralistic twentieth century. Thus a more comprehensive approach to the moral basis of social policy seems to be indicated. Natural law, however, as the source of universal ethical knowledge, appears to be dead.[17]

Similarly, for all its significant contributions to Christian social thought and involvement, the liberal idealism of the 'Social Gospel,' with its thrust for an eschatological society, proved to be unrealizable in confrontation with the economic and international realities of the twentieth century. Its assumptions about human nature and the power of the Holy Spirit had not dealt responsibly with the complex ambiguities of personal, social, economic, political, and global interaction. But the failure of the 'Social Gospel' set the stage for the integration of 'realism' into Christian social ethics.

The development of 'Christian realism,' primarily associated with the name of Reinhold Niebuhr, is the most significant advance in the evolution of Protestant social ethics to date. As Dan Rhoades has written:

> For more than thirty years Reinhold Niebuhr ... self-consciously, persistently, and persuasively insisted upon the importance of beginning from a realistic base in order to say a relevant word on 'affairs of state', without – as a consequence – dissipating the theological and ethical substance of the word which is spoken. His primary interest and historical contribution has been his criticism of liberal idealism and utopianism, epitomized in the superficial fusion of religion, ethics, politics and science in the social gospel. The prophetic character of his historical vocation is revealed in his efforts to remind an era of the finitude and sinfulness of man, the role of power in all social organization, the 'existential intimacy' between ideas and interests, and the relativity of all historical ideals.[18]

Reconciling the economic, political, and international power groupings typical of twentieth-century life with the thrust of prophetic Judaism and a particular interpretation of New Testament ethics, the Christian realist employed psychoanalytic insights and a deep sense of the ambiguity of history to advocate the necessity of a 'balance of powers' in the achievement of a more just social order. The gospel command to love (*agape*) was seen to be beyond human achievement, because of the human condition. This 'impossible possibility' was the ultimate criterion, with justice reflecting only approximations of it. The ambiguities of individual and group self-interest made justice both possible and necessary.

The genius of this position was that it both fitted the *modus operandi* of

17. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 323. Joseph Fletcher's treatment here of 'Anglican Theology and the Ethics of Natural Law' is particularly helpful.

18. D. Rhoades, 'The Prophetic Insight and Theoretical-Analytical Inadequacy of "Christian Realism,"' *Ethics*, 75 (1964–65), 1.

the contemporary secular world and 'justified' (indeed required) the participation of Christians in the socio-economic and political power-struggles of community, nation, and world, in the roles of both social prophet and responsible agent. Christian realism recognizes the ambiguity of human motivation, the complexity of contemporary social issues, and the role of power in them, as well as the Marxian insight about social institutions and structures. It recognizes the need for choosing priorities and accepting compromises in the process of securing greater justice. Christian realism has provided the most adequate rationale for the kind of recommendations and social action undertaken by many – perhaps most – individual Christians, churches, and councils of churches, from the Oxford Conference of 1937 onward. Its theory has been adopted very widely.

The realist position has been seriously criticized, however. For example, the followers of Barth demanded a clearer christological and biblical basis for Christian action in society.[19] (Niebuhr himself wrestled with this criticism and displayed a 'maturer Christianity' in his later writings.) In more recent years, Christian realism has come under increasingly severe criticism from several directions.

Critiques by non-western and/or non-Christian ethicists have focussed on built-in but unacknowledged assumptions about western Christendom and western democracy.[20] Seemingly supporting this criticism, Roger Shinn said recently, concerning the present adequacy of Christian realism, that one of 'the big differences between the present and the days when we were forming our ideas [is that] in those days we knew programmatically what we wanted to do.'[21] The implication here is that the needs of an earlier era for justice and equal opportunity were clear and that programmes were available; the ethic fitted. Today, however, programmes can be designed, but it is the social structures that are in question. It is at this point that Christian realism's basis in western democracy brings it into question.

Another line of criticism is connected with the recent shift to the 'contextualist corrective,' which has required all 'principles' (except *agape*) to be relativized, while at the same time pointing up the need for more adequate and comprehensive data about the 'situation.' The fantastic growth of the

19. Cf. P. Abrecht, 'Development of Ecumenical Social Ethics,' p. 161. Cf. Joseph Sittler, *The Structure of Christian Ethics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), and J. A. Boorman, 'The One Foundation of Christian Ethics,' *CJT*, 6 (1960), 159–69. Both criticize Niebuhr for overstressing the perfectionism of Jesus' love-ethic and for failing to ground Christian ethics in faith (faith active in love). Sittler, however, acknowledges (p. 89, n.5) that Niebuhr rectified his mistake in later writings. Boorman's essay, which stresses a 'christological ethic,' does not run the risk of being 'unchristian,' but it fails to give a basis for 'social' (as contrasted with 'personal') Christian ethics.

20. Cf. Isma'il Ragi al Faruqi, 'On the Significance of Niebuhr's Idea of Society,' *CJT*, 7 (1961), 99–107.

21. *Christianity and Crisis*, 5 August 1968, 168.

social sciences and the positivistic claim of some social scientists that awareness of the facts will lead automatically to the correct action have both challenged Christian realism's 'use' of empirical data and also made apparent the need for a more adequate working relationship between theology and the social sciences.[22]

Rhoades, in his criticism of Christian realism, attacks the superficiality of its 'realism' and its error of making the doctrines of human nature and sin so central to its political theory. Rhoades suggests that the most serious weakness of Niebuhr's thought is the use of an inadequate model, one which 'treats social structure strictly as the outgrowth and expression of individual tendencies ... seeking their egoistic, egotistic and prideful ends through the instrumentality of power.'[23]

The impact of such criticisms, the revolutionary character of the emerging nations in the 'third world,' and their own further reflections have brought a number of 'former' Christian realists to lay the axe to the root of their own tree, acknowledging (to push the metaphor still further) the limitation inherent in its having been nourished in the western democratic soil. For some time now M. Richard Shaull and others have been calling for a social ethic of revolution. What is meant here is, not a 'justification' of revolution, but an ethic which will recognize the importance and depth of the Marxian insight about the determinative power of social, economic, and political structures in community life, and the truth that such structures are different from individuals. Without taking an extreme determinist stance, it is surely possible to find adequate theological grounds for interpreting a state of affairs in which 'individuals appear to be little more than the product of the structures within which they exist – identifying their well-being as well as their interests with reference to these structures.'[24] A 'truly *social* ethic' must be able to deal with the apparent inertia and 'dominion' of the structures of societies, as well as with the ambiguous motivations and interests of the persons and power-groups within those structures.

To return now to the problem of formulating a national constitution, we may suggest that Christian social ethics has so far provided a basis for a prophetic analysis of the inadequacies of already established social orders, and has, on this basis, 'justified' particular political revolutions. It does not appear, however, to have found an adequate basis on which to formulate constitutional models for situations where western democracy is neither applicable nor desirable. But this, obviously, is an increasingly important part of the vocation of Christian social ethics in these revolutionary times.

To emphasize the need for a 'truly *social* ethic,' which goes beyond Christian realism, the reader's attention is drawn to 'Christian Realism: A Sympo-

22. Cf. W. G. Muelder, 'Theology and Social Science,' in Bennett (ed., *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, pp. 330ff.

23. Rhoades, 'Prophetic Insight and Theoretical-Analytical Inadequacy of "Christian Realism,"' 11.

24. *Ibid.*, 10.

sium' in a recent issue of *Christianity and Crisis*,[25] which reveals the qualms of some of the foremost Christian realists about their 'system.' M. Richard Shaull was one of the discussants. He urged social ethicists to recognize that, over and above the changes in 'cold war' circumstances, the problems of the 'third world,' and the reality of what he calls 'our counter-revolutionary attitude here' (in America), there are new dynamics which demand of Christian social ethics 'new conceptual tools for fitting together the empirical reality of a very new situation and the Christian symbols, in order to participate creatively in a moment that is as exciting for Christian social ethics as Niebuhr's time was.'[26]

Shaull draws his conclusions from over twenty years' experience in Latin America, as well as from the evidence thrust daily at any observer by the students of the 'new left' and by 'black militants.'[27] He believes, with others – note the increased evidence of alienation in the whole drama of the recent presidential election year in the United States – that a particular social system, constituted by certain social, economic, and political structures and forces (e.g., the technological thrust), is unable to solve the problems facing man at this moment in history or to meet the deepest human aspirations.[28] He argues further, in view of the American race issue and the emergence of 'Black Power,' that 'the assumption that we have a system of countervailing power between government, business, labor, etc. that provides the context in which the struggle for justice can proceed, simply isn't true any longer.'[29] Therefore, he concludes, 'we are confronted by the demand for the creation for new perspectives, of new life styles and new institutions.'[30] It is this kind of recognition that forces us to speak of the 'revolutionary age' through which the contemporary world, including North America, is passing. As much by neglect as by wilful action, western Christians have contributed to this situation in their homelands. We must also bear much of the responsibility for the revolutions of the 'third world'; sleeping peoples have been exposed by us (among others) to new levels of education, material standards, and freedom, with the result that the equilibrium of old societies has been upset and forces have been let loose which cannot be easily controlled by the economic and political structures of the past. Shaull writes: 'If we have helped to start this revolution we must also help to guide its development. Should we refuse to do so, we will share responsibility for the victory of Communism

25. *Christianity and Crisis*, 5 August 1968, 175–90.

26. *Ibid.*, 177. Cf. C. Freeman Sleeper, 'Ethics as a Context for Biblical Interpretation,' *Interpretation*, 22 (1968), 443–60. This article, which was published too late to be dealt with in the present paper, provides a complementary study of the reinterpretation of Christian symbols in the 'doing of truly *social* ethics.'

27. It is apparent that at least some French Canadian nationalists are akin to those members of the Black Power movement in the USA (and Canada) who want a new society, not a piece of the existing one.

28. Cf. *Christianity and Crisis*, 5 August 1968, 177f.

29. *Ibid.*, 184.

30. *Ibid.*, 178.

or other movements which take advantage of the crisis we helped to create.'[31] But 'to do so' presupposes the availability of a 'truly *social* ethic' of the kind advocated in this paper.

One further point of clarification is needed, however, in relation to the technological forces and the new life styles mentioned above. This language may cause some to think almost automatically of Harvey Cox and the style of life which he advocated for 'technopolis' in his book, *The Secular City*.[32] As helpful and 'liberating' as Cox's affirmation of secularization and its required life-styles may have been to many, that alone is not enough. For Cox's call was to a 'catching-up' process, to get modern men in step with technological society and to help us live in it, using its benefits without unnecessary guilt. As one author put it in this *Journal*, *The Secular City* is an affirmation of 'the Theology of the Great Society.'[33] This affirmation is not enough, because it does not direct men to challenge seriously and organize for man's benefit the technological forces which increasingly shape and dominate human life in spite of the countervailing powers structured into the democratic tradition.[34]

Something more is required – what is here called a 'truly *social* ethic' – which will enable a reinterpretation of the Christian symbols and an appropriation of the heritage of faith and culture in genuine dialogue with the social-human sciences, so that societies may be shaped *for* the future – that is to say, so that communities of faith may participate fully in the process of both coping creatively with the present and also initiating (not just responding to) the future.

It would be pretentious and premature for the present writer to try to spell out such a 'truly *social* ethic'; indeed it would deny all that he has written thus far. The development of such an ethic must, by its nature, be a community task. But lest all that has been said be dismissed as so much dreaming, an indication will be offered here of the character of the 'Christian input' of such an ethic; of who should make up the 'community' to develop and continue it; and of how it might be applied to the problem of creating a constitutional model for a society. What will be suggested might appropriately be called a 'strategy for doing truly *social* ethics.'

A. It should be remembered, in considering the 'Christian input' of an

31. M. Richard Shaull, *Encounter with Revolution* (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 78. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 73–82.

32. New York: Macmillan, 1965.

33. Cf. J. A. Doull, 'The Theology of the Great Society,' *CJT*, 13 (1967), 5–18. Doull's criticisms are frequently sound, but one-sided. As might be expected of a classicist, he affirms 'all that one is accustomed to call Christian' (p. 15). As will be seen in this paper, Cox cannot be pegged at 1965.

34. Cf. F. H. Blum, 'Harvey Cox on "The Secular City,"' *Ethics*, 78 (1967–68), 43–61. Note pp. 54–57, where Blum acknowledges Cox's distinction between 'order' and 'organization' (the latter being dynamic and open), but concludes with the present writer that Cox's 'organization principle' does not really provide a way to social restructuring; it sounds too much like Adam Smith's 'invisible hand.'

adequate social ethic, that the model for social organization sought is not that of a 'Christian society,' but of a fully human one in which 'human fulfilment' is the standard of measurement.[35] What is to be sought is not a society 'for Christians' but one for all men, because 'love ... makes "humanitas" the goal of social ethics ... the instrument whereby society is constantly revised and transformed in order to benefit man.'[36] As H. D. Wendland goes on to say, Christians are now called to participate in 'a socio-ethical task that is far greater than the historically limited effectiveness of the churches.'

The identifiably 'Christian' inputs to the 'doing of truly *social* ethics' are not substantially different from those advocated in Christian realism. They will include: (a) the personal qualities and faith commitment of the persons involved in the process; (b) their involvement in, and appropriation of, the ongoing theological-ethical reflection of the churches, especially in the further reconciliation of the radical demands of 'love in the situation' with the implications of the faith's ethical heritage in principles, middle axioms and ecclesiastical experience; (c) the scrutiny and challenging of the inherent value content and/or ideologies of the human sciences participating in the process;[37] (d) and the eschatological corrective necessary in view of the built-in dangers of deception and distortion characteristic of the revolutionary process. (As Shaull writes: 'Only the revolutionary whose political commitments are related to a broader vision of human life and history can cope with this situation and thus contribute significantly to the humanization of contemporary society.'[38]

It must be added that, if Christianity is to play its proper role in a revolutionary age, Shaull's sobering warning must be taken seriously: 'Any hope for a significant Christian contribution to the revolutionary struggles going on around the world will depend, I believe, on the emergence of new forms of Christian community on the front lines of revolution.'[39] Such experimental models would not be political communities as such, but communities of faith in continuous dialogue with the forces of revolution, using the insights of a 'truly *social* ethic' as their resource for front-line guidance. Shaull's warning is sobering because of the apparent recalcitrance of the churches with respect

35. Obviously the content of the frequently used term 'human' is open to debate. Nonetheless, it seems to be a useful and neutral term which can be shared and discussed by religious and non-religious alike. For helpful clarification of the term 'human fulfilment,' cf. Gibson Winter, *Elements of a Social Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 211f.; C. Oglesby and M. Richard Shaull, *Containment and Change* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 227–31.

36. H. D. Wendland, in Bennett (ed.), *Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, pp. 142, 139.

37. Cf. J. Milton Yinger, *Sociology Looks at Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 109: 'The tendency to use them [the ideas the "Founding Fathers" in economic and political affairs] as fully adequate guides today demonstrates that it is not only religion that needs to be "demythologized," to use the current term.'

38. Oglesby and Shaull, *Containment and Change*, p. 229. Christians do not, of course, have a monopoly here.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

to any basic restructuring of their own institutional life (except as demanded for technological efficiency). The churches are not likely to contribute creatively to the social organization of tomorrow if they are not actively researching and testing goals and strategies for their own vocation today.[40] Perhaps the urgency of the contemporary world's need and a widespread awareness of the churches' vocation vis-à-vis the world will bring forth a new response and initiative. Hence consideration is needed here of the elements required for doing truly *social* ethics?

B. The elements necessary for 'doing truly *social* ethics' cannot all be contributed by one person or by one category of persons (e.g. a community of theologians). The doing is really a process (though it will have tentative products), with the participants forming a community (in the true sense of being all committed to the common task and at the same time both supportive and critical of one another).

Gibson Winter, in his highly technical book *Elements of a Social Ethic*,[41] has identified two of the basic participants in the process; he explores the relation of social (human) sciences and faith in the formation of social policy measured on the basis of 'human fulfilment.' Whether or not one agrees with Winter in his opting for 'intentionality'[42] (the only approach to social analysis which does justice to man's capacity for freedom, creativity, and self-transcendence in the choice of the value priorities and programmes which express his individual and collective integrity), it is clear that he has shed new light on the necessary interdependence of social analysis and faith reflection for the formulation of social policy. Winter develops for these partners an ethical style which he calls 'historical contextualism,' which 'proceeds from the conditions and pre-given structures of an historical world and yet explores new values and possibilities amid competing and complementary interests,' with accountability for (rather than to) 'self-fulfillment in the context of communal fulfillment' ('fulfillment' connoting a futurist orientation). The common constructive task of the human sciences and ethics is that of 'discerning what is given in experience as the truth of man's being with his neighbor' (past and present) so as to guide 'man's creativity and accountability for enlarging human interdependence [love] and community [future].'[43]

For Winter, intentionalist analysis provides for the conscious meanings that men sense in the everyday world, and for the conscious intentions they may have for the lived world of the future. Thus the value systems operating

40. Cf. *CJT*, 13 (1967), 4.

41. See the review by H. B. Clark, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 22 (1966–67), 153–56.

42. Winter, *Elements of a Social Ethic*, p. 198, defines 'intentionality' as 'man's living toward the structure of his world in the unity of caring, hoping, conceiving, feeling and meaning. Its subjective dimensions are the constituting intentionalities of embodied consciousness. Its objective dimensions are the forms in which the world appears for this consciousness.'

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 241f., 244, 247, 284.

(openly or hiddenly) in various types of social analysis can be reconciled with the values inherent in faith interpretation, while the limitations and distortions of ideology can be challenged in both. Much work remains to be done on this 'introduction,' as Winter refers to his work. Nevertheless, it would seem to present an alternative definition of what has here been called the process of 'doing truly *social* ethics.' And it seems to meet adequately a concern voiced recently by Harvey Cox:

> ... I am suspicious of that particular kind of Christian realism which is unworthy of Reinhold Niebuhr himself. It gets its realism from what it takes to be the most sophisticated and most informed type of social analysis and then injects its Christianity after the analysis has been completed. I am discontent with this particular approach both theologically and scientifically. I believe that the Christian theological affirmation informs our social analysis, that the theological input does not come after the social analysis but informs it. We see things we might not have seen in our empirical analysis if we are informed and, in fact, motivated by a Christian vision of man's possibilities and the possibilities of history and society by the hope of the Kingdom of God.[44]

Winter indicates in his preface that 'historians, political scientists, sociologists, philosophers and theologians [all] work at social ethics as a dimension of their disciplines, although some would eschew such evaluative concerns.' The doing of 'truly *social* ethics' requires the participation of all these in the ongoing process of 'historical contextualism.' The present writer would go beyond this list and add economists (surely intended by Winter), classicists, artists,[45] social psychologists, medical scientists, technocrats, and (if there be such today) general humanists or some category to represent the 'consumers' of society (those who, while having no specialty, are most directly affected by social organization). Other fields could be added or engaged in the process in an ongoing consultative way. The latter would be a part of the over-all strategy that such a 'community' would work out – a strategy which would also deal with its relation to contemporary revolutionary movements and to those currently responsible for decision-making and the implementation of social policy.[46]

c. The particular strategy of calling the various participants into the process of 'doing truly *social* ethics' must be planned by the sponsoring churches, which would presumably co-operate in the testing of experimental structures and models of community, where appropriate. The shaping of a strategy for relations with revolutionary movements and elected officials, etc., would be part of the task of those participating in the enterprise.

44. *Christianity and Crisis*, 5 August 1968, 180f. Cf. J. A. Boorman, 'The One Foundation of Christian Ethics,' 160–63, 168, where Niebuhr himself is accused of, and found wanting for, just such an appropriation of realism, the implication being that Christian realism is not 'Christian' enough.

45. Cf. Howard Richard, 'The Social Responsibility of the Artist,' *Ethics*, 76 (1965–66), 221–24.

46. Cf. Winter, *Elements of a Social Ethic*, pp. 284f.

As an example of the latter aspect of Christian social strategy, Shaull suggests a kind of political 'guerilla warfare' which would attack the established power structures on many fronts simultaneously, co-ordinated by a new political alignment using the 'product' of those engaged in the process urged here. This would be a strategy of 'permanent revolution' (constant confrontation at those points in society where change is needed) rather than 'total revolution' (destruction of the existing power structure).[47]

Such a strategy appears to be both useful and advisable (however distasteful to many) in the present revolutionary world context. But it seems to the present writer to be premature (not chronologically but methodologically) for it has by-passed a critical step. Selection of such a strategy must, if the foregoing argument is accepted, arise out of the process of 'doing truly *social* ethics,' especially in view of the possibility of discovering 'in the process' a number of different strategies for initiating and participating constructively in revolutionary action (permanent, occasional, or total, as the situation may demand).

First, the process must be begun. Funded and 'called' by the sponsoring churches, this community of participants (perhaps one hundred in number), provided with the necessary staff and facilities, each member considering this a major time commitment (with compensation if necessary), would have to work out patterns of meeting, studying, consulting, dispersing into smaller groups, researching, and reassembling, in order to devote itself as comprehensively as possible to the 'doing of truly *social* ethics.'

Such a 'community' in the Canadian context, when confronted by the current 'constitutional crisis' (and seeing it as a matter of high priority), would apply itself to the discerning of what in particular is given in the Canadian experience as 'the truth of the people's being neighbours with each other and with the world,' in order to undertake the designing of a constitutional model which would both reflect the Canadian 'lived experience' and embody the 'new values and possibilities emerging amid the competing and complementary interests' struggling to shape the future. Such a task would be far from easy, and would meet much resistance, both within the churches and without. But it is surely integral to the churches' calling under the gospel to *humanitas*. Such a community would also provide a practicable means for the Canadian churches to participate in the world-wide ecumenical concern to provide 'models of social organization' that could be made available to assist both emerging nations and older nations undergoing social crisis. Furthermore, to develop such a community could be a creative way for the churches at national and international ecumenical levels to play a vital role in the terribly complex, but increasingly urgent, task of combatting the resurgence of narrow nationalism in the interests of a global community marked by interdependence and greater human fulfilment.[48]

47. Cf. Oglesby and Shaull, *Containment and Change*, pp. 237–48.

48. Cf. Harvey Cox (ed.), *The Church amid Revolution* (New York: Association Press, 1967), 'Introduction' (especially pp. 22–24).

The argument of this paper may appear to some to be either too visionary or not sufficiently grounded – either theologically or in the realistic possibilities open to the churches. My hope is that the urgency of the question at any rate, has been made clear. The process advocated may seem neither clear nor practicable. Nevertheless, it is not without a kind of concrete precedent, in that something of this methodology has been employed by a unit within the National Council of Churches in the United States for over twenty years. In less comprehensive terms than those advocated here, and with a focus on *issues* of social ethics (economic life, not economic systems), the Department of the Church and Economic Life has secured the voluntary and unpaid involvement of more than one hundred competent persons – some of them high-ranking policy makers – in an ongoing study, research, and policy-recommending process, since 1947. (Three two-day meetings and many more consultations, regional gatherings, etc., have been held each year, co-ordinated by only two executive staff members.) Even though the project has not been widely heard of, its influence has been significant.

What this agency has been and done is certainly neither adequate nor representative enough for simple copying at the level of 'doing truly *social* ethics,' as urged in this paper. But it can serve as a genuine and helpful prototype – and encouragement – for the churches in their response to the revolutionary urgency of this moment in human history.

In view of the present crisis in Canadian society, the churches of Canada could well undertake a concrete pioneering venture in an area where leaders of the World Council of Churches' studies of ecumenical social ethics have hardly dared to dream dreams. On the other hand, and much more easily, the whole problem of the evolution of Christian social ethics in Canada could just be shelved once more.