

"ADULTS"

September, 1969

One of the men in my Wednesday Morning Discussion Group made an interesting statement the other day. He said, "I'm not as worried about the youth revolt

as I am of the adult surrender

I think what he meant was this: The tension and challenge of the younger sector in society over against the older is not only normal but essential. Out of this creative tension comes progress, the necessary change of meaningless structure that tends to be protected by inertia, and also the sense of individuality that a younger man needs to be really himself.

But today we are faced with a dangerous new arrangement of forces, resulting in the widespread confusion among adults as to what is their reasonable and proper role in the encounter of the generations. Every parent, school administrator, teacher, policeman, etc. must come up with some answers to this question.

I know what the answer is not! Oppressive domination is certainly no solution, but fortunately very few adults can even dare to attempt that feat anymore; another bad option might be titled the "stand up and fight every now and then" tactic. This has the element of surprise in it but is a little like the drunken father syndrome where the basically inadequate male symbol gets upset every now and then and lashes out at the family indiscriminately. The results are obviously negative though they do prove that authority figures in society are human after all and are as likely to be carried away as everyone else. The third bad choice is to simply collapse either by means of irrelevance or from lack of conviction. The dialectical tension between the generations is thereby shattered to everyone's injury.

If the youth form the muscles and nerves, the energy force of the body then the parents and adult generation must be the bony structure to which the muscular power is attached. Take away the bony structure with its strength, its stature and the result is violence. Men need a fixed pole to which to refer; (Dietrich Bonhoeffer) not that a teenager will always agree with his father, nor should he, but if he is unable to even find his father, if when he presses the pole it fades away or itself turns violent then the result is movement without any fixed reference point, and in the end the loss of authentic identity and justice.