

# Sacrificial Strategies: Catholic Pilgrims in Time of Devalorizing Change

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# Sacrificial Strategies: Catholic Pilgrims in Time of Devalorizing Change

GEORGE PARK and CHERYL BROWN

MORAL VALUES ARE partly a matter of use and wont — hence partly observable. But it has always been easier to hear what people regard as correct moral teaching than to observe what values they respect in action. We as anthropologists would like to think we can trust our eyes, but not at the cost of mistrusting our ears. In this essay we find ourselves dealing with members of an older Newfoundland generation whose lifestyle so differs from that of their early adulthood that simple observation suggests — what they will firmly deny — that their values today cannot be the same they held then. If we would believe both ears and eyes we have an evident contradiction to explain.

The visitor to a new community gradually grasps what matters and what not, where the people can be expected to take a stand and where not, who is admired, who pitied, who censured. At an abstract level we say the visitor is learning about local *values*. But scholarly efforts to develop a formal method for the study of values have generally disappointed. Our best understandings still come from personal knowledge, much of it gotten vicariously from novels and films. Still, some of the best reports of the way people actually feel or think about, and finally judge, one another have been done by scholars following the general mandate of cultural anthropology. In the study of values, descriptive accounts of everyday life and talk seem to be most convincing. Particularly telling are those studies which focus on moral growth and decay, crisis and succession.

For Newfoundland we think of Cato Wadel's dialogue with "George" (1973) or Louis Chiaramonte's portrait of craftsmen and their clients in an outpost setting (1971). Each of these studies was built from an initial grasp of local meanings by the visiting observer. What makes each more than a lingering

tourist's portrait is the insight a reader gains into the way individual intentions come to be woven into the fabric of community life, taking meaning from it and giving back both substance and structure. In this paper we refer to these intentions as *moral strategies*. Our position is that values are engendered and confirmed in the working out of individual moral intentions within a social field. Even if yesterday's reader of our outport community studies perceived them as if under a stopped clock, today's cannot. Today we perceive in these portraits the fragility of the whole cultural scheme by which our people were living only two decades ago.

The process by which individual commitments, through their validation in action, transform into an accepted community code of manners and morals is termed *valorization*. If our understanding of human value systems today is vivid enough at the level of description but disconcertingly vague at the level of analysis — in the street sense, “psychology” — the reason is that we know very little about valorization. We can say it is directly tied to stable social boundaries and will not survive their suspension. This paper aims to look at *devalorization*, the erosion of traditional values, as a contribution to studies which build upon but try to go beyond the local and descriptive. It is a premise of our thinking that devalorization is associated with the loss of local and class boundaries. The scholarly field into which our mandate carries us cannot nicely be described as psychology, sociology, or semiotics. The paper falls only accidentally into the new field of women's studies, and by the same route into Newfoundland studies. We approach the problem simply as anthropology, the most general and (as we may hope) the least technical of the social sciences. We think our essay shows sympathy toward the pilgrims whose world is its subject, but we have no hidden agenda: the particular moral strategies they pursued are not taking young recruits today. We offer only a note on the conditions under which the valorization of new strategies for women is emerging.

Sometimes in the study of meanings it is hard to know what the rules of evidence are. If we did not find Wadel and Chiaramonte credible, we could have little interest in what they have to say; yet we should be hard put to prove the worth of these studies to a doubter. To describe the values (the moral premises) of pilgrims from Newfoundland to St. Anne de Beaupré we do not rely on the documents we cite — we cite them because they confirm and clarify what we primarily know from direct observation. For a social science there is usually more risk in letting direct observation bow to documentation than the reverse. Cheryl Brown tagged along on two expeditions, communicated with the pilgrims, and learned how the experience took meaning from and gave meaning to their lives. Our evidence is as good as her witness. We treat pilgrimage less as an institution generated by a church than as an undertaking meant to serve the pilgrim at the deepest personal level. Still, a pilgrimage *is* an institution. What makes it particularly fruitful to study is its quality as a once-

in-a-lifetime event for most of the individuals it recruits: in discovering the institution, they uncover themselves.

Moral strategies are not observable, they must be known through understanding; but social action is always interwoven with a kind of value which can be called observable. Technically, it is cultures not individuals that bring observable values into the world. A person acting unobserved and without reference to others of her culture may show much about herself but will not show us what we can confidently call values. Where they can be seen is where a consensual attribution of meaning, locating acts on a scale of approval and disapproval, can be shown to apply. We have to be able to see that actions are being taken as meant. When we say we understand the structure of a human situation, we claim to understand the values on which members of a particular group can predicate meaningful action. A pilgrimage is rife with observable values: in effect, it is a group of strangers determined to become a community by showing their commitment to common values.

But observation without much understanding can lead to a cold-hearted kind of description which errs by leaving out what gives human life its peculiar dignity. Anthropology calls for a measure of objectivity but does not convey a simple license to offend. The people of Lumsden are still prepared to fume about what James Faris had to say of them a quarter-century ago.<sup>1</sup> Some would like to make him out a fool. But even if he was far from being their fool in the field, we find it hard to defend his style of description. His outporters lack depth. The reason is that Faris has tried to report the observable pattern of their lives without giving us much understanding of the moral career which gives that pattern its essential meanings. We single out Faris not because his work is out of the mainstream but because it is largely done in the style of the "omniscient narrator," and as neighbours we happen to know the popular reaction to his omniscience. We identify with the subjects as readily as with the writer they came to resent. Faris wrote within the tradition of social anthropology as it was in the middle decades of this century. Students in the western world easily accepted studies of that kind applied to a South Seas people or tribals in India — who would have thought *they* would object? In this study we try to follow a more frankly interpretive tradition which honours the possibility of penetrating surfaces. Our line of inquiry is necessarily indirect, exploring a socially constructed world not a diagrammatic one. We have no claims to omniscience.

Below the consensual surface of any structured human situation, individuals never cease pursuing moral purposes. These are not always harmless. People succeed or fail in a given situation by the way they perform in their own eyes, not necessarily by "winning" or "losing" in terms of the public play at hand. In these pages we try to describe a pilgrimage and explore its meaning. Some readers will find the tale less than moving, even less than religious. This impression flows from the surface of events we describe.

Chaucer buffs should not be surprised. But the women who play the role of pilgrim in our piece are deeply engaged in finding and confirming meaning in their lives, and the "ideological" frame of the Roman Catholic Church can set up but cannot direct their search.

The Church is not the only human institution this essay touches and may inadvertently offend. A pilgrim today must take her every step against hard winds of change. Our focus is not on feminism or its apologists in Newfoundland, though we feel we should touch the subject to recognize its presence in the moral climate we have sought to understand. For most women even today, and for all the pilgrims we discuss, the direct agents of change have not been voices in the vanguard of a major social movement, but voices, quite likely anonymous, of the Great Marketplace which North America has become, voices often belonging to faces on a two-dimensional screen. The new mythology of the Independent Woman has come to some of the pilgrims from their own daughters — kin and friendship networks cross all the lines of generation, class, and education. The same myth speaks mutely through lifeless objects and signs in the shopping malls: of how many things there can it not be said that they are designed to make the home a place of effortless leisure and entertainment, not of necessary work. What these voices say to ordinary men and women of the metropolitan majority is one thing. For the Yuppie couple in Toronto, the message may be that the world is somebody's oyster. What the pilgrims of our study are more likely to hear is that their lives have been spent in needless hardship.

We think the deepest human values are functions neither of the momentary situation nor of group or institutional cultures but of life careers. Whatever the ontological status of the Freudian Unconscious, it has served to remind us (in moments of lucidity) how rare is true self-knowledge, yet how pervasive the naive conviction (in other moments) that we possess it. The women we shall meet have predicated their lives on what is fast becoming an old-fashioned moral strategy. We may call them housewives in the old, ironic sense of the term. Some are left widows, lucky even to have a familiar house to connect them with the busy world of a past which asked nothing more heroic of them than their "housework." Yet today in the culture which surrounds them, in the messages of the media which saturate their lives at home, lately even in news of scandal within the bosom of the Church, they hear they have been serving false gods. In much of their everyday lives our subjects are *of* the very metropolitan culture which is eroding traditional Catholic values. How far then does the pilgrim know her own soul? Our study remains one of pilgrims not of souls, but we think we do know what private intention a visit to Ste. Anne can serve.

On the ground of surface observation half our pilgrims are urban, coming from downtown St. John's. The others are from rural communities, mainly on

the Avalon Peninsula. None qualify as "suburban middleclass women." As Newfoundlanders they belong to an Atlantic Fringe of Canada, along with Cape Bretoners and other comparable Maritime communities. This makes our pilgrims "marginal metropolitans": they have been pulled into the orbit of metropolitan Canadian culture. The result is not alienation but a different phenomenon, devalorization. One of its locales is the rural community losing its isolation. Another is the "struggling" family which is emerging into a new class situation. A moral career engendered in one world is asked to find its destiny in another.

After industrialization began in the British Isles, a "Celtic Fringe" was formed by the spread of metropolitan lifestyles into but not through Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.<sup>2</sup> In anglophone Canada a few longsettled rural areas have the kind of deeply rooted rural population which makes an internal protectorate (on something like the British pattern) possible. Newfoundland is only the most obvious candidate; Galbraith (1966) has celebrated the case in the recent past of a "Scotch" community in Ontario itself. What happens in the politically unintegrated or "fringe" subculture is that local values are threatened not by uprooting and removal to a strange land, as with migration, but by a kind of blight infecting roots in the home ground itself. This is the phenomenon of devalorization. Many studies have examined communities like Galbraith's "non-potable Scotch" or Bennett's Hutterites (1967), which for a time have shored themselves up against the onslaught of metropolitan interests. In Newfoundland a full-blown analytical model — "sphere theory" — has arisen to account for the stable coexistence of a traditional outport with a modernized metropolitan economy.<sup>3</sup> But generally today the economic and cultural separation of bay and town is a feature of the past. The impression given by an extensive literature from the recent past is a poor guide to present times.

There is a paradox in life on the fringe today which goes well beyond ambivalence toward metropolitan values. Particular members of any family may be successful achievers in the matrix culture; other members are on the dole, some happily, some not; most are increasingly comfortable in their housing and their vehicles; they dress middleclass. On the surface they *are* metropolitans, and they are often connected to as many urban as rural people. But at another level the pilgrims do not belong, and their taking to pilgrimage in itself says as much. They embrace needs a consumer culture can't supply. The longterm moral strategies our subjects pursue do not match the plan of their increasingly metropolitan world. Observers have to focus on a community fundamentally altered by an extension of its horizons. Devalorization studies are concerned with the languishing of values in a traditionally integrated culture, with special attention to the way superficial change may induce deeper processes of motivational loss. The "intentional" activity we examine in this paper is calculated to stay such losses.

## PILGRIMAGE: SYMBOLISM AND EXPERIENCE

Each summer for over thirty years a group of Newfoundlanders from the Avalon Peninsula has departed from St. John's to participate in a week of prayer and penance at the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré, Quebec. First initiated in 1954 by a woman who had received a cure at the shrine, the number of pilgrims has steadily risen over the years. In 1979 when fieldwork<sup>4</sup> was conducted, 140 people participated in two week-long pilgrimages. Only about thirty were not middle-aged or elderly women. We treat the pilgrimage as a continuing institution, much the same today as a decade ago, and one which may even have the vitality to outlive its founder. In a continuously changing civilization, we cannot even be sure that the one generation of women we have focused on is near the end of a series. The changes of our own time typically seem more definitive than they will in retrospect.

Previous studies have identified a variety of motives for undertaking a pilgrimage. These include illness, death, social and personal problems, and spiritual pursuits.<sup>5</sup> Oddly enough, none of these themes would account for the gender bias — the virtual non-participation of men — in such a case as the Newfoundland pilgrimage. The story line associated with Ste. Anne de Beaupré sanctifies the roles, values, and self-sacrificing lifestyle of traditional women. That helps to put the matter of gender bias in perspective. But the association of women with collective displays of piety is hardly restricted to Newfoundland, and there is every indication that the shrine would be responsive to a pilgrimage of men, should the men be inclined to come. The truth may be that devotion as such is part of a constellation of values men do not share with women in those western cultures or subcultures which support pilgrimage.

The women brought to the shrine a variety of private complaints, all with a common thread of self-sacrifice. Pilgrims suffering from debilitating disease evinced less physical pain than anguish of a kind reflecting diminished personal worth. They felt their disabilities were keeping them from fulfilling the supportive, service-oriented roles which had made them important to others.

Maude, a widow in her early sixties who suffered from age-onset diabetes, lamented that she was only able to perform the simplest household tasks without becoming fatigued. Now she was worthless. She reminisced about her early years of marriage, when life had been a whirlwind of work catering to the needs of a husband and nine children.

Widowhood and a declining household are particularly devastating for many Newfoundland women of Maude's generation. Lacking opportunity for outside pursuits, their sense of personal worth has revolved around duty to home and family. With the death or departure of loved ones, women are often left feeling lonely, depressed, and worthless.

At the shrine the aged and the sick regained their sense of personal worth by "offering up to God" their suffering, to benefit living and deceased family

members. Suffering was offered up for the temporal and spiritual "intentions" of the living, and for the speedy release of others from Purgatory. By such acts women could continue to play the supportive part in a family drama, serving even the dead.

Older women were affected by the immorality they perceived in Newfoundland's modern social life, and in particular by the alien values and lifestyles of their children. Several women were distressed that their offspring had left the Church. Regina came to pray for a son who had separated from his wife, Mae for her daughter who was living common-law with a divorced non-Catholic. A mother could harbour a sense of guilt for having failed to instill stronger traditional values in her children. Prayer and penance were dedicated to the redemption of the fallen.

Fulfilment of the traditional female role of caring for the young, aged, and sick accounts for the participation of many middle-aged pilgrims. These "accompanying pilgrims" offered practical and emotional support to dependent family members, directing their prayers and penance towards the recovery or relief of their loved ones. The role was virtually gender-specific; in only two cases were fathers the sole escorts of afflicted children, and both were widowers. Accompanying pilgrims prayed not only for the intentions of their dependents, but for the sustained moral and physical strength needed in the caregiver role. The stress which falls upon the caretaker of an ailing relative goes unobserved by all but a few in the metropolitan culture.<sup>6</sup>

While cures or resolutions to secular problems are rarely achieved through pilgrimage, most pilgrims are manifestly revitalized by the experience. A personal transformation is achieved through embracing the sacred message of the shrine, which infuses suffering, adversity, and self-sacrifice with a fresh and positive meaning.

Christ is the key symbolic referent for the elevation of suffering to virtue. To demythologize a bit, let us say the "key scenario" is the Crucifixion. Christ on the Cross represents the ultimate way to deal with adversity as dignified resignation. This is achieved by faith in God and devotion to others.<sup>7</sup> At Ste. Anne de Beaupré the Newfoundland pilgrims recall and contemplate the suffering of Christ each day by participating in the Mass, scaling the Way of the Cross on the hillside, and making a gruelling climb up twenty-eight Holy Stairs on their knees. By replicating Christ's suffering, pilgrims symbolically unite their trials with those of their Saviour, so that pain and self-sacrifice are transposed from dreaded burdens to the sacred "crosses" which all saintly persons want to bear.

While Christ is the central figure structurally, Ste. Anne as patroness of the shrine appeals particularly to Newfoundland women. The mythical story of her life supports the message of Christ's suffering, providing a female model of self-sacrifice. The basis of this mythology is the apocryphal Gospel, written late



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in the second century, which denotes Anne as Mary's mother and Joachim as the father. The legend of Anne's life is richly represented at the shrine and usually taken as fact by pilgrims. The legend is given in the Catholic *Encyclopedia*:

It happened one day that Joachim, who was rich and respected in Israel, met with reproaches because of his sterility. Feeling downcast, he left his wife Anne and retired to the desert to pray and fast. Meanwhile Anne too, now that she was left alone, wept and lamented before the Lord, bewailing her seeming widowhood and actual childlessness, which she regarded as a punishment from God. Finally, the prayers of both spouses were answered. An angel appeared to Anne and announced that she would conceive and bear a child who would become famous throughout the world. Anne thereupon promised to offer the Lord the fruit of her womb. At the same time Joachim in the desert had a similar vision. Full of joy, he returned home. When his wife was told of his coming by messengers, she went out to meet him at the city gate. At the sight of Joachim, she ran and embraced him. "Now I know," she said, "that the Lord has wondrously heard my prayer. I who was a widow am a widow no longer; I who was once sterile have conceived in my womb."<sup>8</sup>

The focal point of private prayers at the shrine is the Miraculous Statue, a life-size depiction of a matronly Ste. Anne holding the child Mary with her right arm. For over 300 years pilgrims have knelt at the base of the statue, seeking Ste. Anne's intercession in the form of temporal or spiritual blessings.

Ste. Anne's life is graphically depicted in the electronically-programmed wax museum. The six scenes highlighting her life story all focus on family themes, primarily the importance of family at life crises: birth, marriage, and death. Ste. Anne is depicted on prayer cards and innumerable souvenir items ranging from holy medals and shrines to pens, pencils, buttons, and backscratchers.

Through her story line Ste. Anne speaks particularly to the trials and difficulties associated with the role of traditional women: neglect or abandonment by one's husband, infertility, motherhood, bereavement, and widowhood. Through myth, symbol, and liturgy, it is communicated that the qualities necessary to fulfil the sanctified role are those of suffering, self-sacrifice, and faithful resignation. This is evident in the litany of Ste. Anne:

Saint Anne, model of womanhood...  
Saint Anne, model of obedience...  
Saint Anne, model of patience...  
Saint Anne, model of mercy...  
Saint Anne, model of piety...  
Saint Anne, protectress of the Church...  
Saint Anne, guardian of children...  
Saint Anne, example of mothers...  
Saint Anne, support of the family...  
Saint Anne, consolation of widows...<sup>9</sup>

The association between self-sacrifice and the role of motherhood is marked in the explanation of the symbology of Ste. Anne's Cord:

The five knots [in the cord], in honor of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Joachim and Saint Anne, symbolize penance, meekness, humility, patience and confidence in God, all virtues necessary to a Christian mother.<sup>10</sup>

The image of Ste. Anne as a loving Grandmother has particular appeal for elderly pilgrims. A shrine publication states Ste. Anne "has the heart of a grandmother; and grandmothers love children very much. They have to give them all they have."<sup>11</sup> The *Annals of Ste. Anne de Beupré*, the monthly publication of the shrine, features a "Grandmother's Page" in each issue. Readers are encouraged to join the "Grandmother's Club," whose members pray for each other's intentions every Tuesday. In Ste. Anne, elderly Newfoundland pilgrims have a friend and role model.

During mealtime conversations, the saintly virtues of certain Newfoundland pilgrims were extolled. Bernadette selflessly cared for her aging parents despite her own affliction — acute osteo-arthritis. Each morning Carmel ascended the Holy Stairs with her ten-year-old crippled daughter in her arms. Ellen accompanied her mentally incapacitated adult son, and she also took responsibility for a friend debilitated by multiple sclerosis. Clare, confined to a wheelchair since childhood, brought laughter and wise counsel to all, especially the handicapped.

In daily life the Newfoundland pilgrims have reason to feel they exemplify the roles and values of motherhood sanctified at Ste. Anne de Beupré. The world of traditional Newfoundland women has recently been portrayed by Dona Davis (1983). She found that the most valued role of womanhood is being a good mother and housekeeper, achieved through hard work, resourcefulness, thriftiness, and devotion to others. As in the world of Ste. Anne, status and self-esteem are achieved through self-sacrifice. Davis indicates that women have a favorite self-portrayal as long sufferers.<sup>12</sup>

Dedication to home and family is the focal point of these women's lives. Women are thought to have the special character and patience necessary for child care. Middle-aged women constantly worry about their children and grandchildren, and grandmothers often care for grandchildren on a full-time basis. The husband-wife team is regarded as an enduring social-affective team, with divorce and extramarital affairs almost non-existent.<sup>13</sup>

Devotion to others is extended to friends, relatives, and the needy throughout the community. Women are regularly involved in formal and informal community work, providing affective and practical support to others. Daily telephone calls and visits to friends and relatives are still fairly common. Baby and wedding showers are thoroughly enjoyed community-wide events, providing practical and affective support for wives and mothers. Community fund-raising to obtain specialized medical treatment for the severely impaired or disfigured is commonplace.<sup>14</sup>

It is these deeply-rooted traditional values which are currently under

siege. The pilgrimage is for those who still would adhere to older moral strategies, who feel themselves in, but not of, the metropolitan culture, sharing more with their outport sisters than with many of their urban neighbours. From their place in social and cultural space, the Women's Movement is viewed not as an emancipating force but as an assault on the self-sacrificing values and roles which have infused their lives with meaning and purpose. The May, 1979, "We Women" column in the *Annals* was dedicated to reaffirming the role of motherhood in response to current devalorization:

Mothers have had to hear a lot of downgrading of their role in recent years. It has not been good for overly-sensitive full-time mothers. It is not easy to hear your role maligned as "incomplete" and "unfulfilling." There has been too much talk about atrophied talents by people who are unable to see those talents are interwoven in the fabric of flesh and blood and soul offspring.<sup>15</sup>

In the marginal world of rural Newfoundland, where there are few prestigious socio-economic opportunities as defined by metropolitan culture, it is likely that an older culture will continue to provide the motivational focus around which women's lives revolve. For the foreseeable future, the Newfoundland pilgrimage will continue its successful recruitment, offering a kind of renewal which invisibly shields orthodox women from devalorizing change. On the visible surface there is little of Newfoundland in the gaudy shops and the wax museum of the little town they visit in Quebec — this is an outing into the wider metropolitan world, even if it skirts the metropolis itself. But under the surface there is a righting of imbalances. How can that be?

## TWO MORAL STRATEGIES

Womanly devotion and manly sacrifice have been two pillars of the Roman Catholic family system, idealized by the Church and broadly realized in practice, for generations without number. The same model for the conjugal relation has been widely if not as dogmatically shared by Protestant churches. "Christian marriage" seems an appropriate label for our purpose here. Portraits and caricatures of this institution abound, ranging from dull to clever to vicious. The devout will have one view, the Freudian another, the Marxist or feminist an epitaph. Delving into the vast and varied literature on the topic is not to our purpose here. In *The Life of Reason*, George Santayana provided a fairly dispassionate apology; we refer the curious reader to the case he makes for regarding old-style Christian marriage as a balanced system.<sup>16</sup> Narrowly "bourgeois" the structure he discusses never was, and considering the beating the western family system has withstood under the upheavals of Santayana's long lifetime, it is hard to fault his estimate of its strength as a design. The problem is that history everywhere has run away from those times and that world. The balance in the family which made it so tough is gone or going. We find that our question about righting an imbalance through the symbolic action

of pilgrimage requires us to model marriage at a deep level of structure. We focus on the private moral strategies men and women have worked out within the frame of the Christian family with its already named "two pillars" — womanly devotion and manly sacrifice. The case and the particular circumstances of interest are set in Newfoundland in the 1970s. But we mean to use our case as a touchstone for dealing with the more general phenomenon.

The masculine side of a Christian marriage complex was imaginatively discussed for a sampling of working-class men in Boston by Richard Sennett in *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, co-authored by Jonathan Cobb.<sup>17</sup> Notions of "hidden injury" and "sacrifice" advanced in that book refer to the way these working men emotionally relate the life of work to that of husband and father. The time is the 1960s. Here is the Christian family in a stable manifestation, at the peak of its cycle. The wife is a homemaker, the children still under her wings. The man is sole breadwinner. Yet he is not proud of — he is hurt by — the sacrifices he must make to keep wife and children in a style he hardly dreamed of in his own youth. We mean to use that study as representative of an institution, the family, which hundreds of lay writers today consider to be under threat. We find that even in this working class and metropolitan case the root cause of the hurt is devalorization. These are men (and women) who have struggled up. They belong to a new and secure working class but somehow seem to have missed gaining a sense of dignity from their rise. We'll take an occasion later to look at Sennett's rather different line of explanation. Ours is the erosion of older by newer and more strongly supported values. But we find, all the same, that the balancing function of manly sacrifice, seen from the point of view of a family system, was still largely intact.

Men in Sennett's study tended to regard themselves as over-committed to wife and family. They found themselves working hard (and with a will) to supply family income, but with insufficient recognition. They were making the manly sacrifice by going without small but valued luxuries an unmarried and otherwise unfettered man might have commanded from the same income; yet they realized no clear gain in self-respect. In the accounts they gave the sociologist it is as though a man actually felt diminished by his responsibilities, as though his family standing did nothing for him. Sennett did not try to assess a subject's moral career except as it was tied to job and class situation. We do not learn much about the rewards these working men expect from marriage or the values they cultivate as parents. But we do learn they are likely to remain undeterred in pursuing the class-typical goals of comfort and security, with a "better future" for their children, even where this must seemingly be done at the cost of manly self-respect.<sup>18</sup>

Considerations of personal belief can hardly be irrelevant but seem all the same to go beyond Sennett's concern (75) with the social validation of self-worth in everyday life. We would say that where our concern is with moral

strategy, his concern is with tactics. Oddly, he fails to remark that his working men appear, at the level of strategy, undaunted by their tactical failures in the struggle for social recognition. We think the reason is that their fundamental values are confirmed, despite Sennett's demurrers, in the private lives they lead. Private lives are hard to study. The most successful studies of families have focused on parenting and socialization, and not on the emotional involvement of man and woman in what is normally a common enterprise. Sennett's work touches frequently on the emotional concerns a man brings from work to his family, but cannot follow into the private sphere. Yet we find that the motivational stability of the men toward family life implies a good deal about it. In being able to provide for their dependents, their manly virtues are, on balance, vindicated. The "hidden injuries of class" which are the centrepiece of Sennett's interpretation of the Sennett/Cobb interviews are then by comparison superficial wounds.

In our reading of Sennett's work we are taken with the prominence of the strategy of manly sacrifice in the men he has interviewed, and we argue that his material should be assessed in the light of devalorization theory. We picture his subjects as committed to a traditional — indeed, a nearly universal — moral strategy, which we have described as one of the pillars of the Christian family. It is in the search for confirmation of virtue in a grossly disconfirming metropolitan world that his subjects take the bruises which, in co-author Cobb's brief dissenting opinion (265), ripen into self-righteousness.

An analysis of womanly devotion, aiming for the kind of insight these sociologists' field interviews offered into manly sacrifice, is overdue. The man-centred character of observational studies has only been strengthened in recent years by a preoccupation with social class, as the structure of the Christian family has always made class a mainly masculine province. It is chiefly in small-community studies, where the social structure is embedded in the household itself, that spousal relations have been dealt with in their social and cultural contexts. The Newfoundland outport literature would allow us to sketch the problem in terms which parallel Sennett's "tactical" analysis, with an intact family system. But our special concern is with the moral dimension on which a person may yet be firmly committed to a lifestyle which, in tactical perspective, proves to be poorly rewarded. It is natural to turn here to Elizabeth and George, the couple Wadel gave us in *Now, Whose Fault is That?*

One of the ironies of stable working-class family life is that both spouses can regard themselves as over-committed and under-appreciated in what common sense regards as one relationship. In a Christian marriage the danger of chronic conflict from this routinized duplicity is usually reduced if the two roles can be kept to a clearly complementary pattern. Applying metropolitan jargon to the outport, George is supposed to be the breadwinner, Elizabeth the homemaker; George is supposed to initiate common action in the public view,

Elizabeth sharing in the decision-making process going on back stage.<sup>19</sup> Wadel shows that the studies of Szwed (1966), Faris (1966), and in explicit terms Chiaramonte (1971) confirm his own findings that unilateral decision-making by a male "household head" is avoided whenever possible and is in practice quite unusual. George's vulnerability as a failed breadwinner is never exploited. Husband and wife consistently skirt the issue. Elizabeth knows "that the husband in George's situation has to be supported in his role more for what he is than for what he does" (Wadel 57).

Sennett's study and our own cases suggest that even couples living reasonably well by the moral strategies of sanctioned Christian marriage do engender resentments which can find no adequate expression in the marriage but gnaw instead at the soul. The authoritarianism of his working men toward their children could be read as vindictive and even mean. It is hardly necessary to argue the point that we are here dealing with symptoms, not merely variant custom. Few keen observers of any western culture have described the emotional world of marriage as a steady state, yet the institution has survived almost everywhere, at least into our time. What mainly seems to account for the relative stability of a proverbially difficult institution is the weaving together of masculine and feminine moral strategies, yielding a tough form of dyadic moral involvement. Paradoxically, even a turbulent past, if it was rich in mutual experience, can draw a couple together. Typically in the relatively stable social systems of past and near-past times, quite generally for North America, marriage comes in earliest adulthood. The free dreams of youth are being hardened into moral strategies for coping with mature responsibility.

By modern middleclass standards, all our pilgrims married early and matured only *with* or *in* marriage not before it. They never seriously considered a moral career apart from intimate dyadic involvements with husband and children. From the end of childhood, self-interest was conditioned by the kind of moral consciousness such involvements generate, first as adolescents in their parents' home, then as adults in their own. All of their marriages were "for better or for worse" — never brittle. The extremes of better and worse are both represented well enough in the confidences of our pilgrims as they were passed from woman to woman, but a middle ground is more typical. What is typical, however, in the way a life of womanly devotion was played out is not — just by reason of its normality — motivationally simple.

## RELIGION

We have not yet had much to say about the "hidden injuries of religion," though our use of Sennett's book as analytical sounding-board invites the phrase. Some feminists are voluble on the harm Christian morality has done.<sup>20</sup> The possibility cannot but have occurred to certain readers of Sennett's

provocative study that the teachings of the working-class churches and the ancient consensus they represent, though manifestly meant to promote peaceful family relations, are sufficiently one-dimensional that in the contemporary context they actually exacerbate family problems. We find that the very doctrine of virtue through manly sacrifice and womanly devotion tends to augment a sense of overcommitment which generates "hidden injury" and sub-surface resentment for both genders. Sennett makes it plain that his working-class male informants, by going without this and that luxury item, perceived themselves as sacrificing *class* points. However well their wives may have played the part of devoted mate, they could only dress but not redress the wounds their men brought home. Of course, if that is the case the next step in the drama is the curtailed, double-income family. In retrospect we may even want to blame Sennett for failing to see that coming. Class in our metropolitan society lives from the marketplace.

In our special sample, Newfoundland women are not unaware of class but are comfortably oblivious of its demands. Dona Davis makes it clear that her subjects enjoy not only special but high status in (what we take to be) a typical version of outport culture (162-4). In the tradition of the housewife in western folk cultures, they are not achievement-oriented — their concerns are domestic. In their marriages they have not sacrificed class but another dimension of self — womanly devotion serves husband and children alike, and realizes its object in vicarious reward. If man and child are well-fed and healthy, woman is fulfilled; if she is nibbling at junkfood all day and has nervous symptoms no one understands — well, there is perhaps something amiss but she was not put in the world to tend to herself. Considerations that (to follow Sennett) can make a *man* think of class as a true measure of human worth are likely to make a *woman* think more directly about the consumer values she and her neighbours may find within reach. Her role prompts her to find goods in the market and incorporate them into the lifestyle of the family; her field of operations is not polarized by the Myth of Success — what Sennett calls "class." Take the value she puts on comfort: notice in her house the big lounge-chair she never uses herself. The children freely use it when the husband isn't there. Yet you know she is the one who bought it. The *a priori* asymmetry of the mother-child relationship has been extended in accordance with doctrine to the marital tie. In such a scheme a woman's life can be good, but only while the domestic structure survives, into which she has poured herself.

The danger in an old doctrine is greatest when, in spite of it, the world where it flourished begins to slip away. But the new doctrines which flow into the vacuum, being locally untried, can bring new insecurities along with their delights. For pilgrims, the doctrines of their church, though no longer supported from above and below in the way they had been in a remembered past, seemed more friendly than the counter-doctrines coming to them through the mass

media or from their own younger generations. Pilgrims were not blind to the attractions of new styles and freedoms in the consumer culture; they saw in their daughters' lives the functional connection between fewer children and more elegance, more creature comforts. But the older women also saw that the new style bespoke a new doctrine: secular and seemingly bound to tie woman to an anomalous future of near interchangeability with men.

In the Newfoundland context it makes sense to distinguish masculine moral strategies from feminine in generic terms. Wadel shows that a man who cannot "work" — hold a breadwinning job or pursue a breadwinning calling — where he is not defeated is yet much diminished. Our case material shows that where a woman's grown children, most particularly her daughters, fail to confirm her own values in their lives she is morally diminished in a similar way. Though women today often do work outside the home, the job identity is a supplementary one. As a man's sense of success is drawn from the outward lifestyle of his family, a woman's is measured by the inner qualities of their life. The man is supposed to make the one, the woman helping, and vice versa. This gender difference is neither necessary nor permanent, and the direction of culture change seems to be to diminish or even erase it. But for the present study the generalization holds.

In principle, the two moral strategies are complementary, and the Christian formula is a sound one for establishing a stable family structure. But as modern men and women begin to expect companionate values in marriage, dropping the old complementarity of their roles, they are bound to discover that community of taste and common values have been jeopardized by the gender disparity which has dominated their socialization. Functional complementarity is also found, and can work smoothly, in the master-servant relationship: it does not make the participants peers. The crowning irony of traditional Christian marriage is that the two ethics of manly sacrifice and womanly devotion have always led down different and divergent moral paths.

## STRUCTURES OF EXPERIENCE

Sennett's summation at one point (180-81) reads as follows:

Calling people's dignity into question is a means by which a class society can create new classes of limited freedom as the old classes disappear. The change of class is portrayed in the society as a matter of improvement, of success, of upward mobility: the frustration and resentment threatened by the gap between promised reward and continued constraint of freedom is diverted into a problem of the self, so that ...anger at the "system" is undercut because inwardly [the worker] blames himself for not making something of his opportunities.

If you can ignore the arrant sociologism in this passage, what it says is that workers swallow their frustration, converting it to a sense of inadequacy, thus settling into a new class structure just as their fathers had settled into an older



one — and so it is that structures change but class remains. Sennett's work was justly celebrated in its time for this insight. The puzzle of the book for us was why informants so very sick at heart kept working hard at unrewarding jobs — why "sick at heart" did not directly translate into motivational loss. Another way of setting the puzzle would be to ask why role-commitment to work remained high, independently of feelings generated within the sphere of self-as-object: feelings with all the qualities of a tight motivational knot.

Our subjects display the smooth surface of a fulfilling life but covertly find it defeating. Sennett's men complain that their private virtues publicly go unrecognized. Our pilgrims carry an increasing burden of doubt that the private structures they have built through their lives will remain to justify their devotion. On the sociological map those men and these women are worlds apart; but they do have in common a broadly sanctioned family structure undergoing the kind of stress we have called devalorization. To draw the worst case: the men feel they have worked their tails off and, by recognized standards of the marketplace, got little for it; the women know they have worked devotedly, doing without so that loved ones could thrive, and feel in the end they are left with a handful of dust.

We think the reason this does not spell disaster is that in both situations the family system, in spite of all that has been said and all that might have been, is working. Because values are not surface phenomena, though they are tugged this way and that by surface events, the commitments of men and women are more stable than their feelings. Perhaps in the professional world of the metropolitan upper-middle class the network of ties a man or woman builds at work can be meaningful enough on the plane of moral commitment that family relationships should be treated as emotional "extra"; but for most of metropolitan St. John's and Boston they cannot. It is within the family that most of us build our more enduring structures — they are what Erving Goffman calls "structures of experience"<sup>21</sup> and they result from the steady pursuit of a coherent moral strategy. The family is a troubled institution, failing or faltering by almost every objective measure, but vital nonetheless.

A stabilized family is a closed community. Inside it, "outside" status doesn't count. When a Newfoundland wife concedes rank to her husband, as she does in the way she has furnished and controlled the use of her living room, her kitchen, her floors, and her closets, she has invested herself in a way of life with a known value. She has not conceded rank on behalf of womankind to persons of male gender. But when the moral boundedness of a domestic group declines, the same concession becomes reckless.

Sennett does not tell us what happens to his men when they are out of work — his study was of affluent times. Decades before, in the 1930s, E. Wight Bakke had found that working class families in New Haven underwent severe destabilization when beset by chronic unemployment: unemployment of the

"breadwinner" male. In terms of the present argument, that would be because those newly-urban, immigrant families had not attained a coherent motivational structure. The self-confidence of the man depended on bringing home money; in the urban context he could find no alternative strategies, and the respect and support of his wife and children were lost when he could no longer work. Might the more "metropolitanized" Boston worker fare a bit better just because he does measure worth on the scale of social class? At least the blame can be put on failure of the larger economic system; he does not have to shoulder it all himself. We could wish Sennett had found his own George and Elizabeth.

In our subjects' culture neither husband nor wife stands within the home on the sort of pedestal from which a person can fall. Many or most of our Newfoundland pilgrims had to scrape to get the money ahead for their fares and accommodations; they all knew the insecurities of life on the Atlantic Fringe. Bertha's husband was alcoholic; two women had been abused if not actually battered; yet for all of them the worst wounds knitted again. The values of a family system built around only sacrifice and womanly devotion remained intact. We do not want to suggest that sweetness and light account for this. Structural rigidity usually has other sources. We only assert there is no sign that the chronic social and economic troubles which these men brought home broke down the moral compact undertaken with the sacrament of marriage. The logic of Bakke's cases does not apply. But neither is there any sign that the separate moral careers of man and wife ever merged.

In the pilgrims at Ste. Anne de Beaupré we have found clues to a pattern of lifelong motivation. We have chosen to see it as a contingent structure, a "structure of experience," not a matter of mere use and wont laid down in childhood or otherwise dictated by church and culture. The study has led us to an inquiry about family: how it works, what home is about. Family life normally offers men of the old and no doubt moribund breadwinner tradition a benign setting for combing out the sort of motivational tangles which work relations, or life without them, can generate. For women in the same tradition the home, considered as a moral structure, is something they make. When they are older, it becomes something made and needing to be kept as a source of pride in self.

We think Sennett's informants (though he leaves the matter unexplored) can't quit working hard because their work role is massively underwritten by personal commitments at home. These commitments are generated by the kind of mutual moral involvement men and women (used to) undertake in marriage and child-rearing. For Sennett's working man, they are gambles whose connection to the job is simply unseen by any informant, but which nail him to the job and to the felt sacrifice of self as surely and as voluntarily as Christ was nailed to a cross. For these men of the new working class we take the position that hidden injuries, inflicted by a devalorizing consciousness of class, are

turned to ennobling wounds at home. Wifely devotion is an essential part of that picture. Do men yet complain to the sociologist? Christ let Thomas feel the wounds.

For our pilgrims to Ste. Anne de Beaupré the same sort of symbolic transaction is possible, though home no longer redeems them by confirming their strategies of self-respect. Partly the failure of home as source of moral energy is a function of the domestic cycle itself, inexorably producing its actuarial quotas of separation and death. But partly, too, the relative failure of the family in our case derives from devalorization of an old, accepted way of life. Sons and daughters who used to gather round are less often able or inclined to do so. When they do visit they are as apt to be critical as supportive. The metropolitan system, represented in a structure of wages, rents, taxes, class expectations, and state welfare cheques, does not put children in position to take charge of their parents' needs. True to their commitments, the pilgrims did not complain. They worried and prayed. They have always accepted the masculinity of Christ even while accepting his (womanly) submission to suffering. Women in this dispensation are not told to climb glory trees. Their kind of aspiration and sacrifice is less public and "tactical" than a man's and also less vulnerable to secular standards of judgement. An old moral strategy re-emerges in a woman's conception of herself as pilgrim, devoted to the welfare of a "home" still intact in spirit form. Projecting the domestic world upon a cosmic screen, the pilgrim finds in her retreat from the here-and-now that she can transform even loss and loneliness into strength.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Faris. The antipathy of the people of Lumsden toward *all* "anthropologists" probably was spurred by a casual but biting piece in the *Evening Telegram* by the comic columnist Ray Guy on publication of the book; but the tenacity of the hostility cannot be explained on that ground. Still less can one derive an explanation from sober analysis of the text. The subject wanting scrutiny is the social position of the intellectual in Newfoundland culture.

<sup>2</sup>It is Hechter who dubbed the phenomenon "internal colonialism." Canada, lacking an explicit history of "external colonialism," might yet be said to merit the phrase in respect of a Newfoundland taken over as a "colony" from Britain.

<sup>3</sup>Principal sources for sphere theory are Barth and Brox.

<sup>4</sup>Fieldwork by Cheryl Brown. The main reliance was on direct observation as a participant with two groups of pilgrims. Interviews were extensive, informal, and case-oriented.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Victor Turner 1973, 1975; Victor and Edith Turner; Fernea 1965, 216-48, 1975, 261-82; Gross; Della Cava.

<sup>6</sup>This stress is eloquently portrayed in Cohen.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Turner and Turner 10-11; Babcock 297; Munn 592; Berger 20.

<sup>8</sup>Asselin 559.

<sup>9</sup>Lefebvre 1977, 19.

<sup>10</sup>Lefebvre 1977, 13.

<sup>11</sup>Lefebvre 1975, 56-7.

<sup>12</sup>Davis 64, 74, 104, 113.

<sup>13</sup>Davis 61, 69, 90, 122, 124, 125.

<sup>14</sup>Davis 73, 75, 103-4.

<sup>15</sup>Schumacher 151.

<sup>16</sup>Santayana's work was published in 1905-6 and reflects ideals of the Victorian age as well as Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. His views of family life are grotesque by today's standards but were current in the culture where the marriages of our pilgrims were made. We cite two passages from the one-volume edition of his work, freshly published when their absorption in family life would have been at its climax:

The family is one of nature's masterpieces. It would be hard to conceive a system of instincts more nicely adjusted, where the constituents should represent or support one another better. The husband has an interest in protecting the wife, she in serving the husband. The weaker gains in authority and safety, the wilder and more unconcerned finds a help-mate at home to take thought for his daily necessities. Parents lend children their experience and a vicarious memory; children endow their parents with a vicarious immortality. (104)

The effect of women's emancipation might well prove to be the opposite of what was intended. Really free and equal competition between men and women might reduce the weaker sex to such graceless inferiority that, deprived of the deference and favour they now enjoy, they should find themselves entirely without influence. In that case they would have to begin again at the bottom and appeal to arts of seduction to regain their lost social position. (113)

We cite such writing not to inflame but inform. Santayana reflects old norms, but old people predicated their young lives on them and may continue to judge those lives by those norms.

<sup>17</sup>Sennett and Cobb. Cited passages (in fact, the entire argument) of the book are attributable to Sennett.

<sup>18</sup>We may anticipate that when the time comes most of the Irish, Polish, and Italian ethnics among them will be buried as "good Catholics" — Sennett does not deal with ethnic heritage or church affiliation, but it is not hard to recognize social types in the people he has talked to. Some will die in the confident expectation of receiving after death the recognition they were denied in life. It would have taken a sociologist with a different research agenda to have explored this side of a worker's concerns with self-worth. In the best of all possible worlds our knowledge would be whole.

<sup>19</sup>Wadel 56. "I wish to emphasize that Elizabeth in no way seemed to be dominated by her husband; within the confines of the outport wife role, she behaved freely and with great confidence." Nothing in our material suggests that the same formula did not apply *normally* to the marriages of our pilgrims. But neither Wadel nor we should be construed to argue that sweetness and light have generally prevailed in outport or St. John's working-class marriages. We want specifically to abjure a "functionalist" reading of our discussion of structure: norms and facts are not the same, passion is the enemy of routine. Very often, as with unemployment, strains in the macrostructural sphere are felt most acutely in the private emotional interaction of the family.

<sup>20</sup>Mary Daly's exhibition of injuries to women by "phallic religions and ideologies" in what she calls "sadosociety" is a chamber of horrors we dare not enter here; but we'll risk saying it seems to begin with the instillation of "false guilt" (59). Dorothee Soelle reflects on the distorted meaning history has attached to Mary, epitomized by her image in the grotto at Lourdes: "The inevitable reverse image of the madonna is the whore" (43). We have no data on a guilt-and-submissiveness syndrome among our pilgrims but can confirm (what is not the same thing) that acceptance of suffering was a prime virtue.

<sup>21</sup>13. In his view, but not in ours, these are ephemeral structures. We agree that they are not "social structures."

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