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Book Review of The Underclass by Ken Auletta

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New Church. While the first Bryn Athyn community took Swedenborg's words as divinely revealed, the newest group understands them to be interpretable in the same double sense that Swedenborg interpreted the Bible—a natural and a spiritual meaning. The earlier group sees the writings of the Swedish mystic as inspired, but not literally the word of God. The Lord's New Church is also headquartered in Bryn Athyn.

Meyers's book is about the second group, the only viable "separatist" religious group based on the millennium. She compares the Shakers, who are almost extinct, and the Mormons, who have expanded into the world, with a strong missionary movement. While the latter now number over 5,000,000 the New Church numbers in thousands. Only recently has there been a real effort at missionary outreach and much of this outreach remains the distribution of literature that has gone on since Swedenborg's death.

The author gives the history of the community and its development. The faith of these "separatists" gives the group its cohesion. Most of them work in the world and most of them move out to complete their education in the last few years of college. They are not separate in the sense of vocation or travel or the amenities of life. Their separateness is a sense of their own identity as the new people of God. The Old Church of Christianity and earlier dispensations, such as the Israelites and the pre-Flood and post-Flood peoples, are seen as concerned with self rather than working with the Lord. Meyers describes their settlement on the land and surrounding areas, gives a detailed account of the building of the cathedral, the authority of the community and its religious leaders, and the modern threats to the structure of the faithful community.

At one point in the early history, there was a tendency to prescribe rigid norms, such as no birth control or abortion and pietistic ways of life. This moderated, however, when the bishop realized, on the one hand, that no woman could have a child every year for 25 years and remain in good health, and, on the other, that people were called to liberty of conscience as each person stood before God. Since each person differs in the development of his spiritual life, conscience becomes a guide in faith and morals, even as the standards of faith are upheld.

Social cohesion is also aided by many shared rituals and social occasions, as well as by traditional worship, a common language, and a shared world view. The flexibility just noted has been a major help in adjusting to the changing world. The younger people have been allowed leeway in expressing views, a leeway that did not always change the power structure, but in some cases did allow for alternate expressions of worship or life style. The latter still tends to the wealthier side of American life, and Meyers notes that this group thus stands in sharp contrast to the usual definitions of "sect" as involving the discontented lower classes.

Henry O. Thompson

Ken Auletta, *The Underclass*, New York: Vintage Books, 1983, pp. 348, no price indicated.

This complex, richly detailed, and surprisingly well-balanced portrait of the "underclass" (often through their own eyes) is an important work which merits close attention. The debate over the definition, causes, and cures for the problems of the underclass is heavily influenced by ideology. Is the individual to blame (laziness, family); or, is society to blame (racism, structural unemployment, the nature of capitalism)? Ken Auletta carefully sorts out ideological prejudice from fact, and finds both the left and the right wanting in their views of the underclass.

Auletta studied the underclass by extensive research, interviewing, and most importantly, an in-depth look at the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a nationwide program sponsored by the federal government, the Ford Foundation, and others. The MDRC was designed to provide assistance to the underclass. While MDRC

was generally successful, the program is now likely to close due to budget cuts by the Reagan administration.

The underclass is not simply “the poor,” but consists of the approximately 9,000,000 people who comprise the chronically unemployed, those excluded from the mainstream of society, those who exhibit chronic antisocial behavior, those at the very bottom of the economic ladder: the hard-core of America’s poverty-ridden population. Auletta places them into four groups: (1) *the passive poor* (long-term welfare recipients); (2) *the hostile* (street criminals, drug addicts); (3) *the hustlers* (those who may not be poor, but live off the underground economy); and (4) *the traumatized* (drunks, drifters, the homeless, “shopping bag” ladies, released mental patients).

In the course of his investigation, Auletta discovers certain “facts” about poverty: it has become feminized; family dissolution is a major factor in poverty; the poor—most of them—are not locked into poverty; the size of the underclass has been increasing, but the underclass is still a minority of the poor; an underclass threatens to become permanent; poverty is becoming urbanized; increasingly, poverty is linked with welfare; the income of blacks and Hispanics continues to lag behind the income of whites; the underclass is prone to exhibit abnormal behavior; and the obstacles for upward mobility are greater now than ever (pp. 265-268).

Auletta examines three approaches to dealing with problems of poverty and the underclass: (1) *the wholesale approach*, an optimistic approach which means that poverty can be largely conquered. On the left, wholesalers call for greater government involvement, on the right, they call for a greater reliance on private industry and charity; (2) *the laissez-faire approach*, a pessimistic view which suggests that neither public-government nor private efforts to solve the problem of poverty can cure “innate” lower-class behavior; and (3) *the retail approach*, which suggests that, while we cannot “solve” the problem of poverty, we can make some incremental progress. The approach one accepts, Auletta believes, depends in large part on one’s ideology, and one’s view of human nature.

Can the underclass be helped? Auletta expresses guarded optimism, suggesting that the “supported-work program (e.g., MDRC) was a success, and that the Federal government should support it. I don’t believe in pink pills and panaceas, but I do believe in trying. I came to believe members of the underclass could not succeed without practicing self-help, but I also believe they usually need a government helping hand” (p. xvii). While he doesn’t come out and say it, Auletta sounds like a *retailer* who sometimes leans toward the *wholesale* approach.

After a “war on poverty,” which helped bring about steady if undramatic progress toward reducing poverty, we are now witnessing a “war on the poor” in which social welfare programs are being cut or abolished, where the number of people below the poverty line is increasing, and where the Reagan administration calls for more cutbacks in antipoverty programs. Auletta laments the Reagan cutbacks which choke off MDRC type programs. These are, Auletta cautions, no simple answers, for this is not a simple problem. “Accept complexity,” Auletta suggests. And try.

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Michael S. Bassis, Richard J. Gelles, and Ann Levine, *Sociology: An Introduction*, second edition, New York: Random House, 1984, pp. xiii + 608.

The authors of this volume believe that an introductory text in sociology should accomplish two objectives. First, it should provide students the basic sociological perspective—theory, methods, and concepts. Second, it should enumerate the cumulative knowledge