

earlier and have children earlier. They are far more dependent on each other economically, and it follows that the financial consequences of divorce can be far more damaging. There are nonemotional elements holding their marriages together, and divorce is seen as more consequential, as are extramarital and premarital sex.

This group comprises many social conservatives, a small but powerful social cohort. They are powerful because they speak for traditional values. The chaos of the more highly educated classes can't be called values yet; it will be a century before their lifestyles congeal into a coherent moral system. Therefore social conservatives have an inherent advantage, speaking coherently from the authoritative position of tradition.

However, as we have seen, traditional distinctions between men and women are collapsing. As women live longer and have fewer children, they no longer are forced by circumstance into the traditional roles they had to maintain prior to urbanization and industrialization. Nor is family the critical economic instrument it once was. Divorce is no longer economically catastrophic, and premarital sex is inevitable. Homosexuality—and civil unions without reproduction—also becomes unextraordinary. If sentiment is the basis of marriage, then why indeed is gay marriage not as valid as heterosexual marriage? If marriage is decoupled from reproduction, then gay marriage logically follows. All these changes are derived from the radical shifts in life patterns that are part of the end of the population explosion.

It is no accident, therefore, that traditionalists within all religious groups—Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and others—have focused on returning to traditional patterns of reproduction. They all argue for, and many have, large families. Maintaining traditional roles for women in this context makes sense, as do traditional expectations of early marriage, chastity, and the permanence of marriage. The key is having more children, which is a traditionalist principle. Everything else follows.

The issue is not only cropping up in advanced industrial societies. One of the foundations of anti-Americanism, for example, is the argument that American society breeds immorality, that it celebrates immorality among women and destroys the family. If you read the speeches of Osama bin Laden, this theme is repeated continually. The world is changing and, he argues, we

are moving away from patterns of behavior that have traditionally been regarded as moral. He wants to stop this process.

These issues have become a global battleground as well as an internal political maelstrom in most advanced industrial countries, particularly the United States. On one side there is a structured set of political forces that have their roots in existing religious organizations. On the other side, there is less a political force than an overwhelming pattern of behavior that is indifferent to the political consequences of the actions that are being taken. This pattern of behavior is driven by demographic necessity. Certainly there are movements defending various aspects of this evolution, like gay rights, but the transformation is not being planned. It is simply happening.

THE COMPUTER AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Let's look at this from another perspective, that of technology. As the American Age opens, the United States has a vested interest in the destruction of traditional social patterns, which creates a certain amount of instability and gives the United States maximum room to maneuver. American culture is an uneasy melding of the Bible and the computer, of traditional values and radical innovation. But along with demography, it is the computer that is reshaping American culture and is the real foundation of American cultural hegemony. This will become extraordinarily important in the next hundred years.

The computer represents both a radical departure from previous technology and a new way of looking at reason. The purpose of a computer is the manipulation of quantitative data, that is, numbers. As a machine that manipulates data, it is a unique technology. But since it reduces all information—music, film, and the written word—to a number, it is also a unique way of looking at reason.

The computer is based on binary logic. This simply means that it reads electrical charges, which are either negative or positive and are treated as a 0 or a 1. It uses a string of these binary numbers to represent things we think of as being very simple. So the capital letter *A* is represented as 01000001.