Emerging Adulthood in a Changing World

Potential and Vulnerability

A talented young man, recently graduated from an outstanding college, still trying to heal from his parents' divorce, and somewhat at a loss for next steps in his search for a meaningful place in the world of adult work, is asked by his dad and stepmom, "When you think from your deepest self, what do you most desire?" To their surprise he quietly responds, "To laugh without cynicism."

Having been admitted to a top-tier law school, but uncertain about that path, a bright young woman deferred admission for a year "to give myself some breathing room" and took a job to try something new as a community organizer in a nonprofit working to improve the quality of K–12 education. Three years later, she says, "It was hard. I learned that recruiting and training volunteers was time-consuming and emotionally draining. But it was amazing to see people you recruited lobby their elected officials, speak eloquently at a school board meeting, and show up five thousand strong to rally at the capitol. I'm increasingly interested in education policy, and though I'm uncertain about my next steps, I'll never regret not going to law school three years ago."

A young man from Guyana, twenty-six years old, is the proud owner of a small flooring company and a part-time student at a community college. One of his teachers observes that though last term he only occasionally slouched into class, he seems to have made some kind of decision and now attends regularly, alert and ready. "His papers have improved by about 200 percent, and he contributes to the friendly, thoughtful tone of the class. He is

obviously working very hard both for class and in his business. He has dyslexia, and writing is very labored for him, but he has shown a tremendous amount of thought, effort, creativity, and truly beautiful insight—especially in a paper he wrote about being a young father. He is someone I really, really respect and am generally rooting for."

A college student remarks with candid self-awareness that she and her peers are in a "self-centered" time in life, busy with identity and vocation questions, and aren't yet thinking in terms of larger questions about justice or meaning. She is neither apologetic nor precluding that her perspective will change.

A class of undergraduate business majors is invited to divide into small groups and share their values. One student after a bit concludes, "I don't have any." He's asked, "Well, why are you here?" He responds, "To make money—like everyone else." Another student in the group comments quietly, "But there has to be some meaning, too."

A freshman in her spring term at a state university remarks that she wishes she could find a "church home," longing for what she had in her hometown three hundred miles away. She says she is coping in the meantime by attending an off-campus evangelical college youth group, where there is a lot of warmth, singing, and community. She also participates in a small, challenging study series offered by the campus ministry. What's missing is a kind of wholeness or integration she can't quite grasp.

In the bowels of the university physics lab, a sophomore, raised in Middle America and steeped in a mainline conventional faith, has discovered that the lab is a good place to learn how people from the Middle East and Asia make sense of today's world. It is his perception that the faculty is not aware of this conversation.

A young woman graduating from college offered to work for free for a start-up tech company to show what she could do as a Web designer. Three years later, with a full-time job at the heart of the organization grown large, she says, "I got here because I've worked hard, I'm a leader, and it was inside me. On the other

hand, it is bizarre to be in a position of enormous responsibility. But like others my age, I know the whole scene better, I'm quick, I'm on it, I grew up with it. I fell into it. As my astrologer says, I can move on if I want with a certain amount of material whatever—but not necessarily have it define me for the rest of my life."

A young woman, twenty-seven years old, confessed, "I'm told I have lots of potential and can go anywhere. I don't know what choice to make next. I'm paralyzed by opportunity."

A recent college grad, twenty-six years old, intelligent, and well traveled, declares that her life is "a daily struggle" between "Am I becoming what was given—inherited—or really creating my own life?"

A twenty-something comments, "You have to remember that I have lived in a different environment every year for six years. So have most people I know. Nothing is stable and we switch between worlds all the time. We go from having money to being broke . . . from being surrounded by friends, to being lonely, to having friends again. . . . Those kinds of major transitions would make anyone refigure the way they think about the world, especially if they are already grappling with issues of identity, career, and life-goals."

A guest blogger writes, "Admittedly, some of us are resistant to settling into the 'traditional cycle' of adulthood, but is this because we are sloughing off responsibilities or because we are waking up to a new set of responsibilities?"[1]

For each of these young, emerging adults—and for all of us— there is much at stake in how they are heard, understood, and met by the adult world in which they are seeking participation, meaning, purpose, and a faith to live by. This book is dedicated to a reappraisal of the meaning of emerging adulthood and the crucial transformation it harbors for all of us.

In varying roles (including professor and researcher), I have taught, counseled, studied, and learned with young adults in

college, university, and other professional and workplace set-
tings. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, I witnessed the power
of young adult energy to sway a society. I wondered at the appar-
ent disappearance of that energy once the Vietnam War ended
and the television cameras had departed from campus.

Over subsequent decades, however, I saw that same energy
reconfigure and weave itself into the fiber of our cultural life. In
the eighties and nineties, I watched emerging adults—particularly
in professional schools—seeking a place in a new global commons
that ambivalently welcomed, encouraged, exploited, and dis-
couraged their participation.

Now, in the early part of the twenty-first century, I continue
to watch young adults—both in North America and abroad—
reach for a place of belonging, integrity, and contribution that
can anchor meaningful hope in themselves and our shared
future—while the tides of globalization, cynicism, polarization,
and consumerism, coupled with an uncertain economy and a
shifting social-political milieu, play big roles in charting their
course. I have observed among some of the most talented many
who simply have been lured into elite careers before anyone has
invited them to consider the deeper questions of meaning and
purpose. Others are fiercely determined to find a distinctive path
and to make a difference in a complex maze of competing claims
and wide-ranging opportunities. Still others are simply adrift and
yet others feel themselves essentially locked out of viable, mean-
ingful choices.

A New Era in Human Development

Across forty years, my scholarship has been primarily in the fields
of developmental psychology and education, leadership and
ethics, theology and religion. Insights drawn from these domains
have served as useful interpreters of emerging adults, as I know
them. At the same time, young adults themselves have continu-
ally prompted me to notice that even some of the "disciplined"

interpretations of emerging adulthood are misleading. By young, emerging adults, I mean people typically between eighteen and thirty-two years of age—the *twenty-somethings*.

When I began my initial studies, there was some recognition of theoretical awkwardness in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, but this period was typically described as "prolonged adolescence," a merely "transitional time," a "moratorium," or "regression." Cultural assumptions allowed that some might go through a period of idealism soon to be outgrown yet generally implied that adulthood begins, or should begin, with the completion of formal schooling, entering the world of full-time work, and establishing a family—around the traditional age of perhaps twenty-two or so (if not earlier). Later, such popular descriptions of young adults as Generation X, Generation Y, and more recently Slackers, Millennials, and Boomerang Kids extended the time-frame. But these attempts to describe and normatively define twenty-somethings in media-manageable terms have primarily served to cast them as a market while finding them resistant to categorization.

Since 2000 or so, particularly through the work of Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and his colleagues but notably others as well, this postadolescent-not-yet-full-adult era that early on Kenneth Keniston described as *youth* (1960) and I described as *young adulthood* (1986) has become more visible to scholars and the general public.[2] Currently the designation *emerging adulthood* has gained considerable traction, but other terms also such as *the odyssey years*, *failure to launch*, *preadulthood*, *quarter-life crises*, and *waithood* signal the growing consciousness of this "new" era in the human life span that challenges both scholars and popular culture.

Keniston named this postadolescent period *youth*, which is problematic in obvious ways.[3] I have previously used the term *young adult*, which is both appropriate and problematic in other ways. As the term *emerging adult* is useful within the growing scholarship exploring this developmental era (though more

problematic when speaking directly with twenty-somethings), I am choosing here to use both terms but to privilege the term *emerging adult*. *Adult* connotes a sense of responsibility for one's self and others—*emerging* connotes the exploratory, ambivalent, wary, tentative, and appropriately dependent quality that is characteristic of early adulthood.

Bewildering Ambiguity

When does one cross the threshold into adulthood? The response of North American culture is, indeed, ambiguous. Chronological age does not serve as a consistent indicator and the rites of passage that might mark that threshold are various: obtaining a driver's license, social security card, or credit card; sexual experimentation; reaching the legal drinking age; graduation from high school, college, or professional school; marrying or partnering; full-time employment; establishing one's own residence; parenting a child; becoming eligible to vote; becoming subject to military registration; becoming subject to being tried as an adult for criminal behavior; financial independence; capacity to be responsible for one's own beliefs and actions; and to make responsible life decisions and enter binding legal contracts. Each of these serves to some degree as a cultural indicator of adulthood, yet the legally established age for these passages ranges from sixteen to twenty-one (and beyond in relationship to some financial contracts and health care) and is not uniform from one jurisdiction to another.

In this maze of contradictory cultural signals, it is difficult to have a clear sense of what to expect of either oneself or others. Establishing an occupation, finding a mate, and starting a family all endure as indicators of adulthood. But as the human life span has been extended and as a postindustrial, technological culture has made it both easier and more difficult to make one's way into the world of adult work and other commitments, the twenty-something years take on new significance.[4]

Thus even an indicator such as "becoming established on one's own" no longer seems useful when some eighteen-year-olds are "on their own" because they have left dysfunctional families in search of healthier ways of life; when others who would have been expected to "leave the nest" by the age of at least twenty-five have moved back home, even though they have graduated and may be working full time; when professional education may extend into one's early thirties; when it is common to change jobs or careers several times in one's twenties—and across a lifetime; and when what is important to learn and incorporate into one's adult identity becomes increasingly complex and controversial.

In this changing milieu, many parents find themselves surprised, if not dismayed, and ponder whether and for how long it is appropriate to provide financial support. Corporate planners are challenged by the fluidity and short-term horizons of young adult ambitions. Financial magazines feature young entrepreneurs earning "adult" salaries who are appearing to bypass higher education altogether. Many emerging adults themselves, even those who have achieved some of the traditional markers of adulthood, wonder when and if they really are "grown up." Young mothers with partners who do not yet seem ready to be fathers have few guidelines for determining what they may ask, claim, or demand—and at the same time young women are experiencing more professional opportunity and personal latitude than previous generations were allowed. Young men are discovering that their traditional roles—procreate, provide, and protect—are being significantly recast in new gender role assumptions, an overpopulated planet, a globalized economy (in which increasingly "brains" trump "brawn"), and the changing conditions of warfare.[5] Governments and other authorities may be irritated when emerging adults mount a protest against a perceived injustice. Correspondingly, however, established adult culture feels at least mild uneasiness if its young seem passive, dependent, "not pulling their weight," oriented to absolute security, and bereft of idealism. All are bewildered if the sort of

self-confidence, aspiration, and commitment that are associated with movement into adulthood are not as evident as they expected.

Three Central Questions

Thus, embedded in this question of when one becomes an adult are three central questions: What is the key marker that defines the threshold and shapes the tasks of emerging adulthood? What are these tasks and the timeframe these tasks imply? What kind of environment best serves the tasks of young, emerging adulthood?

Twenty-somethings do many things. They seek work, find jobs, change jobs. They party and play. They earn undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and professional degrees. They have a yen for travel—from one country to another and from one company to another. They create art, claim adventure, explore and establish long-term relationships, form households, volunteer in their communities, become parents, initiate important projects, and serve internships. Sometimes they protest and make demands. They try to become financially independent. Some go to prison. Some deal with major health and other physical and emotional stresses. And some emerging adults die too young.

It is my conviction that the central work of young, emerging adulthood in the cycle of human life is not located in any of these tasks or circumstances per se. Rather, the promise and vulnerability of emerging adulthood lie in the experience of the birth of critical awareness and consequently in the dissolution and recomposition of the meaning of self, other, world, and "God." In the process of human becoming, this task of achieving critical thought and discerning its consequences for one's sense of meaning and purpose has enormous implications for the years of adulthood to follow. Emerging adulthood is rightfully a time of asking big questions and crafting worthy dreams.

What is the timeframe this task requires? It takes a while.

I was in conversation with a young woman who halfway though her sophomore year of college reflected, "I have been thinking lately a lot about thresholds. When does one become an adult? When we graduate from high school? Or college? Can a piece of paper signify that we are adult? It seems at times that it is easier to meet new adults who recognize me as I am now than to be with adults who see me as I used to be." Later, when I expressed appreciation for her comments, she added, "It seems to me that one becomes an adult when *you know that you have a life*. Do you know what I mean?"

When we shift from just "being a life" to "knowing we *have* a *life*," we achieve an undeniably different form of consciousness. New possibilities and responsibilities appear for both self and world. Whether or not this transformation occurs and how a young adult is (or isn't) met and invited to test this new consciousness will make a great difference in the adulthood that lies ahead. We are helped to grasp the potential significance and scope of this shift in consciousness—and why it takes a while— by an understanding of the development of human meaning-making in its most comprehensive dimensions, the development of "faith."

The Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith

We human beings are unable to survive, and certainly cannot thrive, unless we can make meaning.[6] If life is perceived as utterly random, fragmented, and chaotic—meaningless—we suffer confusion, distress, stagnation, and finally despair. The meaning we make orients our posture in the world and determines our sense of self and purpose. We need to be able to make some sort of sense out of things; we seek pattern, order, coherence, and relation in the dynamic and disparate elements of our experience.

As we will see in Chapter Two, this capacity and demand for meaning and purpose is what I invite the reader to associate with the word *faith*. For most of us, this represents a shift from the

usual connotations. Faith is often linked exclusively to belief, particularly religious belief. But faith goes far beyond religious belief, narrowly understood. Faith is more adequately recognized as *the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience*—that is, *faith* is as much a verb as a noun. Faith is a broad, generic human phenomenon. To be human is to dwell in an ongoing process of meaning-making, to dwell in the sense one makes out of the whole of life—what is perceived as ultimately true and trustworthy about self, world, and cosmos (whether that meaning is strong or fragile, expressed in religious, multireligious, humanist, naturalist, or secular terms). This understanding of meaning-making and faith provides a comprehensive lens through which we may perceive and interpret the multifaceted and often tangled features of emerging adult lives. The twenty-something years are especially ripe for vital transformations in meaning-making and the re-formation of faith.

To become an emerging adult in faith is to discover in a critically aware, self-conscious manner the limits of inherited or otherwise socially received assumptions about how life works and what counts—and to compose more adequate forms of meaning and faith on the other side of that discovery. But we don't do it alone. The quality of this recomposition and its adequacy to ground a sense of purpose and a worthy adulthood depends in significant measure on the hospitality, aspirations, and commitment of adult culture as mediated through both individuals and institutions. Understanding the potential significance of the re-formation of meaning, purpose, and faith in the twenty-something years may deepen our appreciation of the courage and costs of the journey toward a mature, adult faith, and encourage us to reexamine our assumptions about the formation of adulthood, our participation in the lives of emerging adults, and our own capacity to live meaningful adult lives. Indeed, because the future of our planet may depend on us all becoming more conscious, critically aware, mature adults, we may see that a resilient and

vibrant society finds its orientation, in part, in its commitment to the formation and flourishing of emerging adults.

A Disciplined Inquiry—A Developmental Perspective

Within this broad, comprehensive frame of meaning-making, insights from constructive-developmental and social psychologies assist in revealing and interpreting key features of the work of emerging adulthood. Increasingly, as the human life span has been extended, human development is understood as a complex process that includes changes in biological, cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual, and moral dimensions. As we shall see in Chapters Three through Six, when we trace the process of the development of critical thought and the reorientation to authority and community it requires, we can discern an era or stage in human becoming that has its own work, its own strengths and limitations, and its own integrity.

The perspective described here has taken form in dialogue with several psychosocial theorists (Piaget, Erikson, Perry, Levinson, Keniston, Kegan, Gilligan, Belenky and her colleagues, and more recently Arnett and his colleagues, along with others). This work also stands within and critically elaborates the interdisciplinary study of faith development pioneered by James Fowler.

But the primary dialogue that shapes my thinking has been necessarily with young adults themselves. They have continually challenged my assumptions about human development, the formation of faith, and educational-professional practice. Listening carefully to emerging adults grappling with the particular stresses of making meaning in these complex times continues to prod me to amend those theories (including my own) by which young, emerging adults are interpreted.

Developmental theories have primarily described the movement to mature adulthood as a three-step process whereby conventional (or adolescent) meaning-making develops into a

critical-systemic faith (or order of consciousness), which then evolves into a mature adult form of meaning-making that can hold both conviction and paradox. Encouraged initially by the seminal work of Kenneth Keniston and informed by my own observation and research first published in 1986 as *The Critical Years*, it is my view that this developmental journey is more adequately grasped as a four-step process. That is, I believe there is a distinctive emerging adult way of making meaning in the often murky and overlooked territory between conventional faith (adolescence) and critical-systemic faith (adulthood). In the years from roughly eighteen to thirty-two a distinctive mode of meaning-making can emerge, one that has certain adult strengths but understandably lacks others. This mode of making meaning includes (1) becoming critically aware of one's own composing of reality, (2) self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth, and (3) cultivating a capacity to respond—to act—in committed and satisfying ways.

Role of Imagination in Human Intelligence

Further, in Chapter Seven, I will draw attention to the relationship between how we know and what we know, that is, to the difference between the cognitive form or structure (for example, critical thinking) and the *content* those structures hold. Though constructive-developmental theorists have concentrated primarily on describing the formal structures of each stage or "order of mind," careful consideration must also be given to the formative power of the content: the images and concepts that our structures of mind hold and to the role of imagination in human intelligence. Moreover, as these are the stuff of the young adult "Dream"[7]—an imagination of one's best future—they inevitably play a vital role in both informing and inspiring the formation of adulthood.

From this perspective, we can see this under-recognized territory as the birthplace of adult vision and can recognize how

every feature of cultural life potentially shapes or misshapes the narrative offered to the imagination of emerging adults. And this brings us to our third central question: What kind of environment, social milieu, and culture best serves the tasks of those in the twenty-something decade?

Mentors and Mentoring Environments

Emerging adults embody a postadolescent quality of new strength yet are at the same time appropriately dependent on others, particularly the presence and quality of mentors and mentoring environments—educational, economic, political, religious, and familial. They are ripe for initiation into big questions and ready for access to worthy dreams. Emerging adults are, therefore, especially vulnerable to whether or not such questions are posed and how their dreams are seeded, assessed, and nurtured. They are vulnerable to if and how they are recognized, supported, challenged, and inspired. They are vulnerable to promises—made, broken, and kept.

As we will see in Chapters Eight and Nine and in the Coda, within a distracted, indifferent, or exploiting culture, emerging adulthood may be squandered on dreams too small to match the potential of the emerging adult life. In the good company of thoughtful mentors and mentoring communities, however, emerging adults can navigate the complex tasks at hand and galvanize the power of ongoing cultural renewal.

For many reasons, the practice and wisdom of mentoring has been weakened in our society. We compensate for this loss with a professionalism that is too often delivered without the "life-giving, caring field once provided by elders."[8] This has contributed to fragmentation and loss of transcendent meaning for which no amount of professional expertise can compensate and has spawned assumptions that tragically widen the gap between generations. Restoring mentoring as a vital social art and a cultural force could significantly revitalize our institutions and

provide the intergenerational glue to address some of our deepest and most pervasive concerns. Thus this book is for all adults who directly and indirectly are investing themselves in the promise of young adult lives, and it is for those who yet may be persuaded to do so.

Becoming Adult in a Changing World

We live in "cusp time"—one of those great "hinge" times in history. The young adult task of composing and recomposing meaning and faith now takes place in a culture making its way through a similar task, as now we are all negotiating a turning point in the flow of history. This threshold time is shaped by new technologies that have spawned accelerated, permanent change and unprecedented conditions prompting reconsideration of every feature of life. In the intensification of our experience of an interdependent global reality, we increasingly recognize that we must birth a new cultural imagination on a planetary scale. This larger, dynamic context is a primary catalyst in the growing recognition of emerging adulthood as a discrete era in human becoming. The tasks of emerging adults are a microcosm of the transition we are now making as a culture, as we move into the reality of a new global commons.

The New Commons

The commons is a powerful image buried deep in the core of human experience. In ancient societies, it was and remains the crossroads at the center of the village. It has also taken the form of the great plazas and squares in cities around the world. In New England, it was the classic patch of green where everyone could pasture a cow. That commons was framed by an ecology of institutions—the general store, town meeting hall, school, church, bank, post office, the doctor's house, newspaper office, an inn or pub, the sheriff's office with the jail, and a flock of

households with the farmlands beyond. People gathered on the commons for commerce and communication, play and protest, memorial and celebration, and worked out how they would live together over time.

The commons is not a pristine, idyllic, romantic image. Whether in the form of Main Street or the wharf; the church, synagogue, or mosque; the bodega or the stoops of the brownstones; the marketplace or the ball field—the practice of the commons always embraced a mix of the best and the worst of human life. But the notion of the commons always presses toward inclusion, and the experience of a commons anchors a sense of a shared life within a manageable frame.[9]

Today our shared commons is global in scope and personal in impact. Travel, communication, and nuclear and biological technologies along with a growing environmental consciousness have spawned a global market, a collision of cultures, and we are all cast into a new global commons, increasingly more keenly aware that we are a part of a vast tissue of life—a shared life within an *un*manageable frame. In this new commons, society has become yet more complex, diverse, and morally ambiguous. As addressed in *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*, there is an enormous need for an understanding and practice of human development that prepares people to become citizen-leaders in this new commons, able to engage the great questions of our time and to participate in discovering and creating responses to challenges both new and ancient. Democratic societies are dependent on a complex moral conscience—a citizenry who can recognize and assess the claims of multiple perspectives and are steeped in critical, connective, and compassionate habits of mind.[10] Recognition of the importance of emerging adulthood and a reappraisal of the relationship between generations and the work we need to do together throughout our culture are essential elements of this challenge. Emerging adults require an initiation into viable forms of meaning, purpose, and faith that can orient and undergird their

response to our new reality. Our capacity as a culture to provide this initiation is a critical feature of our vocation as a species on the edge of a new cultural landscape (Chapter Ten).

The Distinctive Role of Higher Education

In its best practice, higher education is a vital expression of that vocation, playing a primary role in the formation of critical thought and consequently in the formation of viable, adult meaning-making and faith. Higher and professional education is not the only context where critical awareness can be cultivated and informed, but it is distinctively vested with the responsibility of teaching critical and connective-systemic thought and initiating young lives into a responsible apprehension, first of the realities and questions of a vast and mysterious universe, and second of our fitting participation within it. Higher and professional education is intended to serve as a primary site of inquiry, reflection, and cultivation of knowledge on behalf of the wider culture—and a privileged place of formation in the process of human development.

Invariably, issues pertaining to the development of character and conscience—cognitive competence, integrity, freedom, responsibility, skillfulness, empathy, generosity, professional courage, wisdom, and fidelity—will be threaded through society's expectations of the purpose and life of the academy. All are qualities associated with exemplary citizenship, leadership, and the best of the intellectual life. The fate of these qualities is embedded in our assumptions about the formation and claims of adulthood. How these qualities are formed and re-formed in the lives of emerging adults appropriately shapes educational goals, cultural aspirations, and the conditions of accountability for students, faculty, administrators, supervisors, and all who interact with twenty-somethings. Though this is contested territory, there is renewed awareness that these concerns belong at the center of the life of the academy.[11] As such, institutions of higher educa-

tion hold a special place in the story of human becoming, particularly in the process of becoming an emerging adult in the imagination of "faith." Creating and stewarding mentoring environments—formal and informal—are primary means by which faculty, administrators, and the many others who are directly and indirectly related to emerging adults inevitably, by intention or default, play a formative role in their lives. Seen from this perspective, every subject, discourse, and methodology in the curriculum of higher and professional education and every class, program, lab, dorm, and athletic team (as well as their analogues in the related contexts of adult work and the wider society) potentially contributes to the formation and transformation of emerging adult meaning-making.

It is enormously difficult to make meaning, to compose a faith, within the intensified complexity of today's commons, but it is particularly appropriate to do so in the institution charged with teaching the value and practice of critical reflection. It is especially difficult, however, if the practice of critical reflection stalls out in mere unqualified relativism, without engaging in the ongoing hard work of discerning the terms and conditions within which fateful choices—both personal and collective—must be made within an increasingly complex, diverse, morally ambiguous world. Some would argue that meaning-making and its moral, ethical consequences are not the business of higher education, that its proper task is to discover and teach empirical truth, and that issues of meaning, purpose, and one's take on ultimate reality are more appropriately dealt with elsewhere in society. Yet society itself has not always made this assumption.

At the beginning of the story of American higher education (the founding of Harvard College), we find this statement of purpose: "After God had carried us safe to New England and wee had our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear'd convenient places for God's worship and settled the government: One of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity: dreading

to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust."[12]

For these forebears, learning and faith were integral to each other. Moreover, both were at stake in the establishment of higher education. The little college, which was at once a divinity school and the seed of one of the world's finest universities, was charged with preparing people who could responsibly nurture human faith—that is, viable meaning-making relative to the whole of life—on behalf of future generations.

Today, as our social reality has become dramatically more complex, higher education has become a multi-institutional reality composed of colleges, programs, institutes, centers, laboratories, and graduate and professional schools—all invested in related professional sectors. Further, every college and university is linked to a vast network of trustees, alums, parents, funding agencies, and other members of the wider commons who have a stake in what we know and how we learn to become citizens in the twenty-first century. Within this dynamic complexity, the questions of the relationship between the extraordinary knowledge development of our time and the questions of purpose, meaning, faith, and ethics have become both more difficult and more urgent.

This book, therefore, is addressed in a particular way to those who directly affect the lives of emerging adults within higher and professional education: faculty, administrators, trustees, counselors, chaplains, coaches, residence hall staff, and others. But higher education no longer dwells in any kind of reality separated from the fabric of our society as a whole, and emerging adults, whether or not they are engaged in higher and professional education, are affected by work supervisors, parents, older adult friends and relatives, and a wide range of professionals, including policy makers, business executives, religious leaders, attorneys, social workers, and all who shape the media—musicians and other artists, directors, producers, publishers, commentators, and webmasters. Thus, while giving particular attention to the experience of emerging adults in the context of higher education,

this book recognizes the mentoring role of all who affect the lives of twenty-somethings (see especially the Coda).

A Complex Call

In 1990, Kotre and Hall observed that if a new stage of life is emerging, it is

> confined primarily to the middle class, but that is where childhood and adolescence first took root. Wider recognition . . . will depend on the prosperity and educational demands of society at large. If young adulthood becomes accepted as a season of life in the twenty-first century the way adolescence did in the twentieth, it would be the second stage to fill the widening no-man's-land between the biological and social markers of adulthood. Twenty-five extra years of life . . . have stretched the lifeline. . . . Much of the resulting tension is being felt between childhood and adulthood.[13]

Now two decades later, there is growing evidence that society is beginning to create a larger cultural space for twenty-somethings. How this cultural space will be used remains the critical question.

This book offers a complex call—across all sectors of the new commons—to those who would mentor the next generation. It is offered also to relatively older emerging adults themselves who, having traveled some of the terrain described here, may find confirmation of their own struggling and aspiring integrity and affirmation of their finest and boldest dreams. As today's generations must make meaning in the midst of an intensifying personal and global complexity and an expanding universe, and as both younger and older adults stand on a new frontier in the history of human meaning-making, it is an invitation to all of us to recognize with new strength how emerging adults and their mentors serve to fuel the power and promise of cultural resilience and renewal, seeding an imagination of a worthy adulthood and the promise of our common future.