The destruction and suffering of Indo-China became so utterly senseless and morally obtuse that America's sense of "mission," which was a crucial part of our national self-identity, is virtually shattered.

As the disastrous effect of our military might was impressed upon us, Watergate exposed the sordid quality of our political life. Richard Nixon was elected in 1972 with the largest electoral mandate in American history, and his overwhelming victory was due in large measure to his ability to seem to represent publicly all of the values that many Americans held dear. In less than two years he was forced to resign.

These assaults on the national psyche—and the pace of them—during the past fifteen years have been devastating. The result is that today we are a nation in a state of shock. Numbed by recent events, confused and uncertain, no one was quite sure what the Bicentennial was designed to celebrate.

I

Actually, this was a particularly appropriate mood in which to celebrate the American Revolution. A close study of the Revolution indicates what a perilous undertaking it was, the vast potential for failure, and the real possibility of defeat. With some relief and amazement, John Adams observed at the end of the war that the Revolution was the accident of thirteen clocks striking at the same time. Similarly, our Centennial celebration in 1876 took place against the aftermath of the Civil War, the end of Reconstruction, the scandals of the Grant Administration, political deals in the Presidential election of 1876, agrarian and labor protest, and the rise of virulent racism. It is perhaps small comfort, but a Bicentennial celebrated in the midst of confusion and uncertainty was strikingly faithful to the "spirit of '76." Our nation was born in adversity, not in triumph or self-confidence.

Given the current mood, to talk of a continuing revolution seems faintly ridiculous. But it may be that one way to begin reconstructing our national life involves a new appreciation of the ideas and principles of the American Revolution. By understanding why Americans fought and died in the Revolution, by trying to grasp what the architects of the government tried to build, we can receive some resources to meet the difficult and agonizing problems that lie before us, as a church and as a nation. Particularly important to the Revolution and crucial to our crises today is the revolutionary understanding of power, liberty, and justice.

II

In 1818, thirty-five years after the end of the Revolution and forty-three years after the battle of Lexington and Concord, John Adams wrote to a friend, "What do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments, of their duties and obliga-