

Wing - 'u Lam

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## 2 A THEOLOGY FOR THE URBAN MISSION

URBANIZATION has radically shifted the church's place in modern society. For such a tremendous change the church was ill-prepared. "When the first stone was laid for the modern industrial cities," Hoekendijk aptly put it, "the church was absent from the ceremony." Now it's a stranger in a society it did not help to build, where people manage to live without it.<sup>1</sup>

What a contrast to the church's place in the agrarian society of medieval Europe! The church was the center of town and village life. It dictated the calendar, regulated the hours, married, buried, consecrated the newborn, comforted the sick, cared for the indigent, punished offenders, organized crusades, distributed goods to the poor, exhorted to the good life. Whatever happened of importance, the church had a hand in it. The location of the church at the center of the village typified exactly its role in society. Competitors were few and not at all fairly matched.

Since the beginning of the fourteenth-century Renaissance, however, this privileged position has been undermined by the growth of science, first in conjunction with the church and then independent of it. Science, a human gift and art, has usurped the church's proud station.

Today people turn to the scientist, not to the priest, for answers to all questions of real import in human life, including questions about matters of ultimate consequence. Here is one instance. Recent-

1. Johannes C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out*, Isaac C. Rottenberg, trans., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 113.

ly an Arizona prospector who had struck it rich and left a large hoard at his death, willed his entire estate to anyone who could prove that the human soul survives after death. The judge who probated the will decided that the money should go to a scientific research laboratory. With scientists already isolating the enzyme from which human life is created, sending men to the moon, transplanting vital human organs, and even making plans for controlling biological evolution, one is not surprised to hear a Cambridge anthropologist boldly assert that scientists have a right to play God. Already they do so in terms of creativity, he contends; now they must do so in terms of morality.<sup>2</sup>

The great city has been made possible, of course, by modern science. In some ways the city represents modern science's greatest achievement, for it has enabled multitudes to live together and to enjoy at the same time the far-ranging benefits of man's creative genius. In one vast community are assembled all of the necessities and even luxuries of life — food, clothing, shelter, water, heat, sanitation, recreation, education — in endless supply. Such communities were not possible in the prescientific era. Disease could decimate a city in the Middle Ages when man had not yet learned the secrets of vaccination and sanitation. As late as the early seventeenth century, the city of London, now nearly ten million strong, had no more than 300,000 people. And more than once before that, it had seen thousands of its citizens die from dreadful plagues.

If only because the city is where the people are, it would represent our most serious challenge. But worse still, except for the Roman Catholic Church, none of the organized religious bodies have really tried to minister there until the last decade or so. The famous British statesman Disraeli said it rightly. Replying to a bishop who confessed that "the church would probably lose the city," Disraeli corrected, "Don't be mistaken, my lord, the church has nothing to lose, for she has never had the city."<sup>3</sup> In America, certainly, Protestants have glued themselves to the rural setting and then, when their people moved, to the suburban. So now they are "aliens" and "exiles," hardly knowing the language and the customs of metropolis. Even God, the God of the rocks and rills and gently rolling hills,

2. Edmund R. Leach, "We Scientists Have the Right to Play God," *Look*, December 1968, pp. 16, 20.

3. Cited by Hoekendijk, *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

seems to have died somewhere in the midst of bricks and mortar, gloomy shadows of giant skyscrapers, buzzing steel mills, untidy streets, and jostling crowds.

→ Against this background, thinking theologically about the urban mission requires a whole new perspective about the city, about the science which made it possible, and about man as the creator and controller of science. It requires, too, a new perspective about God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his relation to man's newly developed creative capacities. Only when these questions have been explored can we begin to talk about the church doing God's mission in metropolis. ←

### MAN AND HIS CITY

The city and the science which brought it about surely belong to God's purpose in the creation of man. According to the biblical view, God created man out of love in order that he might "have dominion over the whole earth.<sup>4</sup> The Psalmist seemed awestruck by man as the summit of God's creative work. "Thou has made him little less than God,<sup>5</sup> and dost crown him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5, RSV). The earth itself and everything in it was placed here for man's use.

The city, of course, would represent a vital part of man's intended dominion. God did not intend for man to be alone. The animals and other living things and, more specifically, other human beings were created to be man's "helpers" (Gen. 2:18 ff). Fellowship with God implies fellowship with all his creatures. In this respect the biblical view differs from Aristotle's. Where the latter ascribed the existence of a state to the fact that man is "by nature" a political animal, the biblical writers attributed this to God's purpose. Through fellowship with their Creator men find community with one another; together they fulfill the divine purpose—to people the earth and to rule it as their own.

4. The accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2:4-3:24 make a slightly different point here. The latter makes quite clear that man was made to acknowledge God's dominion, to be submissive. His positing of the "Fall" in eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would not imply necessarily a negative attitude toward science so much as a condemnation of man's tendency to usurp the Creator's place and deny his creatureliness.

5. The Hebrew text has *Elohim*. The shocking nature of this claim led to the replacement of this word with the word "angels" in the Septuagint version.

Unfortunately, as things now stand, man scarcely approximates, much less matches, the divine purpose. Instead of a universal community of love, there is a veritable tower of Babel. The human community has given way to a mass of cliques and factions, divided and partitioned by a multiplicity of differences. The good creation of God is twisted and distorted and turned to evil and malicious purposes. Genesis 4-11 depicts the situation a bit strongly but does not miss the mark entirely in saying that every imagination of man's thoughts "was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Murder, theft, pillage, rape, drunkenness, gluttony, covetousness, the whole lot of vices mar the real character of man.

Why? How did this state of affairs develop? According to the dominant biblical view, it resulted from man's unwillingness to accept his natural role as man. Instead of being man, the creature, he sought to be God, the Creator. "Though knowing God," Paul says, "they did not praise or give thanks to him as God, but rather they grew vain in their rationalizations and their uncomprehending heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21; author's translation).

Man's attempt to play God, a role not becoming to him, resulted in an unnatural and unsuitable relationship to the creation. Far from having dominion over it, man became its slave. He depicted God in the image of birds, animals, reptiles or even of himself, worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. This perversion produced a perversion in his relationship with himself, for he gave vent to his natural appetites to the extent that they too became unnatural, "changed the natural use into that which is against nature" (Rom. 1:26). God, of course, according to Paul, allows this to happen. Freedom and the responsibility it entails belong to man's nature. Man's "fall," therefore, is his own fault, and he is left without an excuse (Rom. 2:1).

Viewing the human situation from this point, we can see that man's knowledge and science, though by nature good, become problematic, not in isolation but in connection with his whole personal character. His reason, too, suffers distortion in its alienation from the Creator and its misdirection vis-à-vis the rest of the creation. Hence, to state the matter in contemporary idiom, man's scientific skills may be applied both to good and evil purposes. At one and the same time they may humanize and dehumanize man.

Consider as one example our advanced mechanical technology.

The same science which lightens the burden of man's toil and enables him to remove mountains with push button controls also fashions weapons of war which can destroy human life with careless abandon. Or consider as another example our medical technology. The same genius that enables science to stay the hand of death in conquering diseases and through organ transplants also has devised gases and germs to be employed in slaughtering whole races.

The city also exhibits the ambiguities of the human lot. For despite the fact that its provision for community effort has elevated the level of man's life to almost unimagined plateaus, the ghettoism which goes with it has plunged masses into unimaginable despair. In the context of their much simpler mode of life, the ancient Greeks used to think of dehumanization as becoming like an animal. In our context we have discovered that man's dehumanization may descend much lower than the animal level. Man may and does lose altogether his personhood when he becomes a "statistic" of war or a ghetto "problem." When he has lost any sense of purpose and fulfillment in life, as many have, then he has ceased to be human. Far better was the lot of the ancient beggar whose cry at the gate could be heard by passers-by than that of the multitudes who cannot be heard above the din of the city's massive industry, whirling traffic, and cloud-high buildings.

From a theological perspective the city must be seen as posing the greatest possible threat to man's real humanity in that urban life—nay, the whole scientific revolution—tends to undercut man's God-consciousness. In the prescientific era in which he lived, Paul could say that "ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived [*kathoratai*] in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20, RSV). Paul and his contemporaries still lived close to nature. But what about man in the scientific era who has at best a secondhand contact with nature? What he "perceives clearly," if I may paraphrase Paul, is *man's* creative activity, for the metropolis which he knows exhibits everywhere the genius of man.

I believe Jesuit Alfred Delp conceived and stated the dilemma rightly. A familiar theme of his *Prison Meditations* was "that man today is profoundly Godless." Not only so, Delp went on to warn, but "the malady is even more serious; modern man is no longer capable of knowing God." Certain parts of man "have become

atrophied and no longer function normally." Moreover, "the structure and constitution of human life today put such a strain on humanity that man is no longer able to express his true nature."<sup>6</sup>

Harmony and peace, an instinctive need of man, as Thomas Merton said, are almost wholly absent from our technological society.

We seek the meaning of our life in activity for its own sake, activity without objective, efficacy without fruit, scientism, the cult of unlimited power, the service of the machine as an end in itself. [Western man's inner confusion, arises from the fact] that our technological society has no longer any place in it for wisdom that seeks truth for its own sake, that seeks the fulness of being, that seeks to rest in an institution of the very ground of all being.<sup>7</sup>

When we undertake to analyze this situation in theological perspective, we might say that man's basic problem has not changed its essential character. What has changed is the magnitude of the problem. How can man, immersed in an impersonal and man-made society, find himself and his community with his fellows in the true source of his existence? Can he bring God into the picture of human life and particularly into the picture of his own existence? Somehow theological reflection must answer these questions. And in this respect our task has one more step than Paul's. For where Paul had to show men who already believed in the spiritual how to believe rightly, we have to show men how to believe in the spiritual; only then can we tell them how to believe rightly.

#### CITY TALK AND GOD TALK

In approaching the city of man with its promise and its despair, the Christian will have to learn to converse in its idiom. Because it bears witness to *man's* achievements, city talk is necessarily talk about man, his importance and his capacities. In short, the idiom is humanism.

Christianity has often been depicted as the enemy of humanism, and so it would be if one interprets humanism in the secular sense. Some assumptions of secular humanism Christianity cannot accept

6. Alfred Delp, *The Prison Meditations of Father Delp* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), p. 93.

7. Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 216-17.

are notably the two fundamental ones stated by the English humanist, H. J. Blackham: that man is on his own, and that this life is all.<sup>8</sup> Certain secularizing theologians notwithstanding, Christian theology is predicated upon the belief that man's life has real significance only in terms of a personal God and that it encompasses more than "this life." From the biblical perspective man is never considered independently of the assumption that he is a creature of a personal God who has created and continues to create. The integrating feature in the whole biblical account is God's unceasing attempt to bring man, now alienated, into relationship with himself so that he may fulfill his ultimate purpose as man.

According to this presupposition, man can only be and become man when he accepts himself as God's creation. God's mission in and to the world is therefore one of humanization.

Christian theology finds itself in agreement with two other fundamental assumptions of the secular humanist: that one is responsible for his own life, and that he is also responsible for the life of mankind. Reflective Christian thought never has been escapist. The church has repeatedly condemned dualism, the view which regards matter as evil and thus either seeks to flee by extreme asceticism or suicide or acts with utter self-indulgence. The biblical belief that "all things are good" by virtue of their creation by God allows no other attitude than one of positive appreciation for this life and the responsible use of it. The presupposition of creation by God entails proper stewardship of the things of life. By the same token the obligation of proper stewardship is universal. God is one. All things are his. Since we are his, all things are ours and fall within the range of stewardship.

On the point of our responsibility for life and for the life of mankind, the Christian and the humanist have something to talk about together. What the Christian must bring to the dialogue, to borrow Father Delp's phrase, is a "God-conscious humanism." By this I mean that he must bring more to the conversation than the secular humanist will admit. As J. H. Jacques has pointed out: "The question at issue between Christians and Humanists is this: Can we believe in man without believing in God as well? It is not impossible that the history of our own time is answering that question for us

8. H. J. Blackham, *Humanism* (London: Penguin Books, 1968).

with a resounding 'No' and so vindicates the Christian point of view, at a time when more and more people are being tempted to reject it."<sup>9</sup> While fully aware of the dangers inherent in a Christian-humanist dialogue, the dominance of science in our day leaves little alternative. We either talk the language of the day or we stay out of the conversation.

Among those who have sought to build a bridge across the gradually widening chasm between science and religion, none has offered more suggestive thought than Teilhard de Chardin. In his seminal treatise, *The Phenomenon of Man*, this brilliant paleontologist constructs a complete metaphysics based upon evolution. The evolutionary process, according to Teilhard, has proceeded through three principal stages: *geogenesis* (evolution of the earth, of matter), *biogenesis* (evolution of life from chemical fusion to one cell to many celled creatures, etc.), and *neogenesis* (evolution of man). Even at the lowest level, that of matter, there is a form of consciousness, a "within" as well as a "without" of things. The process of evolution proceeds by means of an involution, a turning of an object inwards upon itself. This involution is "from above," not from below, urged forward as it were by the pull of "the Omega Point"—the Hyper-Personal—which is the ultimate goal of all things.

Love, the "within" of things, is the way to Omega. We cannot be drawn forward by the impersonal. "But if the universe ahead of us assumes a face and a heart, and so to speak personifies itself, then in the atmosphere created by this focus the elemental attraction will immediately blossom."<sup>10</sup> The whole process will end with the ultimate involution on the Omega point.

Teilhard could express his evolutionary theory in specifically Christian terms, borrowed from Paul. The whole process of the evolution of the universe is a *Christogenesis* with the personal God as its Omega point. When the process has reached its completion, then "God shall be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

Teilhard offers an especially insightful means of bridging the gulf between science and religion, which has widened immensely since the Renaissance. He postulates three lines of advance in the

9. J. H. Jacques, "Humanism." *The Expository Times*, 80 (February 1969): 140.

10. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Bernard Wall, trans. (London: Wm. Collins Sons, 1959), p. 220.

future evolution of the universe: (1) by organization of research, (2) by concentration of research on the subject of man, and (3) by a joining of the hands of science and religion. Together, he believed, faith and science may engage in the task of seeing the evolutionary process to its completion, the ultimate unification of man in the involution upon the Omega point.

Many, both inside and outside of the church, are not as optimistic about the future of man as Teilhard was. He did not take the biblical concept of sin seriously enough. Actually, as Teilhard himself reminded us, most are inclined to view things from the brief perspective of recorded history. His optimism, on the contrary, arose out of a long look at the eternity in which the universe has been evolving.

In order for the church to play its role in God's mission in and to the world, Teilhard was convinced, I believe rightly, that it must be willing to enter fully into the human search for the "ultra-human." It must move "upward" by moving "forward." The *parousia* can only take place when the evolutionary process has reached its proper stage. Stated more precisely, the church must become fully human, casting aside its reserve regarding the human. Thus, "Faith in God, in the very degree in which it assimilates and sublimates within its own spirit the spirit of Faith in the World, regains all its power to attract and convert!"<sup>11</sup>

### THE CITY OF GOD

The Christian possibilities in the midst of an urbanized culture seem to be portrayed with particular aptness in the early Christian idea of the City of God. This concept had both Jewish and Greek, and in some respects almost universal, rootage. It expresses a universal longing of the human family.

Plato set forth his vision of the city in *The Republic*, as a place where philosophers would rule as kings and the whole commonwealth would pursue the Good—the highest of human aspirations. He believed the ideal to be attainable by means of education and eugenics. In some respects the Romans incorporated Plato's vision in their *pax Romana*. The Jews had far less optimism than the Greeks and Romans. Their physical weaknesses and failures always pushed

11. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, Norman Denny, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 268.

the ideal to the future. One day, however, they believed, God would reward their faithfulness in the sending of the ideal king, the Messiah; he would build the eternal city with unshakeable foundations.

Early Christianity picked up elements of both the classical and Jewish vision and transformed it into a present ideal by virtue of the Christ-event. In Christ, crucified and risen, they believed, the messianic age had already dawned. By the outpouring of the Spirit upon all believers the kingdom of God was already present, even though it would be consummated in the return of Christ at some later date. All Christians, therefore, are citizens of two realms—the earthly and the heavenly. As Paul reminded the Philippians, "our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20-21, rsv). Yet, he also admonished, "be good citizens [of the Roman Empire], worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27, author's translation).

Like Paul, the author of the letter to the Hebrews and the seer who wrote the Revelation saw the heavenly Jerusalem both as present reality and future hope. Abraham, said the former, "looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10, rsv). Neither he nor his heirs obtained it, but Christians have. They, he insisted ". . . have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . ." (Heb. 12:22, rsv). To the seer, too, was granted the vision of the City, the new Jerusalem, which God is building for his own (Rev. 21).

The idea of the City of God came to dominate Christian thought for many centuries. The anonymous author of the *Letter of Diognetus* probably composed in the third century, employed it graphically and with immense insight to describe the situation of Christians vis-à-vis the world in which they lived. They are not distinguished, he admitted, by country or language or customs; in these they share the life of their contemporaries. Yet, while partaking fully of the common life of their fellow men, "they display the marvellous and admittedly paradoxical constitution of their own commonwealth" (5:4).

They have a citizenship which transcends all territorial boundaries. Though "they pass their time upon earth, they have their citizenship in heaven" (5:9). Their heavenly citizenship is displayed in the

remarkable way they live and die. "Simply put, what the soul is to the body, Christians are in the world" (6:1). Though persecuted and confined in the world as in a prison, they sustain the world (6:7). God has appointed them for such a task, and they have no right to refuse it.

When Constantine adopted Christianity as his own faith and thus halted the persecution of the church, many Christians naively thought that the millennial era had dawned. The great bishop of Caesarea, Eusebius, spoke boldly about the emerging of "a new and fresh era of existence."<sup>12</sup> With the removal of "every enemy, whether visible or unseen."<sup>13</sup> Constantine himself projected the idea in the building of a new capital city on the site of ancient Byzantium, a symbol of his intention for the whole empire. From this city he sought to purge every trace of idolatry. Dominating all was the cross on the ceiling of his imperial palace, made up of precious stones set in gold, "the safeguard of the empire itself."<sup>14</sup>

Amidst less cheerful and hopeful circumstances in the west a century later, Augustine stated the idea of the City of God in a far less optimistic form. According to the great bishop of Hippo, two cities, a heavenly and an earthly, existed even prior to human history, originating in the division of the angels. From the time of Cain and Abel the two have been visible in human history, though often obscured by intermingling. The undeniable evidence of the City of God appeared with Abraham and reached its fullness in Christ. This City consists of all God's elect, those who are obedient to God and who show love to their fellow men. It is not equivalent to the institutional church, though more nearly present there than elsewhere, for until the final judgment, the latter will contain both tares and wheat.

The earthly City is composed of all who are motivated by self-service and self-love, by lust of the "flesh." It is not equivalent to the Roman Empire, however, for many of the empire's citizens are also citizens of the City of God. Only at the consummation will the two be clearly distinguished.

As stated by Augustine, the idea of the City of God appears to be singularly appropriate in trying to formulate a theology for

12. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*.

13. Eusebius, *Praises of Constantine*.

14. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*.

urban mission. On the one hand, he reminds us that it is pure folly to think that this City will be fully realized here and now. It did not happen with Constantine. It will not happen in any Marxist or other utopian society. So long as men live, there will be a mixture of selflessness and selfishness. Human institutions, even the church, will always fail to achieve the ideal. Whatever it is we aspire to, we must temper our aspirations with a realistic assessment of our human limitations, and above all our tendency to turn what is good to evil and destructive purposes.

On the other hand, the idea also reminds us of the possibilities for the church to build its aspirations and hopes upon what God is doing in and for man. No society can long survive the process of depersonalization, despiritualization, and dehumanization which has overtaken Western civilization. Christianity, representing roughly a third of the total population in the West, offers the one real hope for changing this process, already very evident, before it is too late. As Christians we must be quite clear about our stance with reference to the so-called secularization, and the idea of the City of God offers at least one point on the compass for doing so.

As the writer of the *Letter to Diognetus* would have expressed it had he lived in our day, Christians may by no means oppose *eo ipso* the scientific revolution which is building the metropolis. To whatever extent this revolution humanizes man, they must applaud what is taking place. The improvement of man's estate through provision of food, clothing, housing, recreation, medicine, and the rest, represents in a significant way the divine purpose for man. As citizens of the city of man, Christians will contribute their part to the building of a stable and prosperous society. As always, they will be good citizens, by prayer and deed helping to build a sound fabric in the body politic. They will share fully the manner of life characteristic of their time and be obedient to the established laws insofar as these contribute genuinely to the welfare of man.

This positive attitude towards the city of man in no way implies a blanket approval, as some secularizers would have it. The fundamental antipathy between the City of God and the city of man exists still wherever depersonalization, despiritualization, and dehumanization occur in the secular city. So long as these continue, the church has a mission to the city of man.

## THE CITY OF GOD AND THE CITY OF MAN

## A HEAVENLY CITIZENRY

The church is the people of God on mission in and to the world. It is not a building, not an institution, not a program, though it must have all of these. It is not even merely the gathering of Christians. The church exists wherever the people of God are, whether congregated for worship or scattered for daily life and service. The image which best describes the church is that of the pilgrim people, like Abraham, called out of their earthly home to go to a land "not knowing whither" (Heb. 11:8, KJV). In the vast domain of modern metropolis the church must be always on the move, as the city of man is on the move, for the goal of its pilgrimage which is the City of God.

The first task of the pilgrim people is to fashion a "heavenly citizenry" who can show forth the true end and purpose of man. In the face of declining quantity there is an urgent need for quality, a nucleus unequivocally committed to the mission task.

Recent discussion of the Christian mission has placed in serious question much of the churches' traditional ways of doing things. Many have asked whether, given radically changed circumstances, gathering for worship is appropriate any longer. Should we try to win adherents? Or should we simply be the church at work in the world? Gathering worked when the church was the center of community life, but can it work now?

While admitting that we have had a "hang-up" on gathering, I believe this kind of community takes on increased importance in a depersonalized society like ours. By its very nature the secular way of life causes us to turn in upon ourselves, to self-love. Urban man actually relishes anonymity. Those around him become objects, like chess men, to be moved about in the game of life. Thus it is easy to be noncommittal toward others, unless one has a particular investment in their lives. That explains why, a few years ago, thirty-eight persons could listen impassively to Kitty Genovese's anguished cries for help as an assailant plunged a knife into her three times. No one wanted to get involved. No one wanted to pay the price of involvement.

In an urban society the church may not have as much success in gaining adherents as it did in a rural one. Actually, numbers

should not ever have been and should not now be the church's aim. It's first aim should be to nurture a heavenly citizenry, who will display in the world the qualities which derive from their participation in God's gracious rule. Their first task, as was ancient Israel's, is not so much to do something as to be something. This means, above all else, to manifest the characteristic of *agape* love, the self-giving love exemplified in Jesus Christ. This love will provide the cutting edge of the Christian mission.

Christian citizenship in the City of God is not automatic. It is a gift. It is a creation of God's Spirit. The Spirit produces from the city of man the citizens of the City of God. He calls them to faith and discipleship. He sets them apart for service to God and to their fellow men. He instills the virtues of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23, RSV). He provides an assurance of man's final hope.

If God himself is building the City, then our experience of it depends upon our experience of him. Worship is therefore essential to the life of the church. Contrary to certain secularizers, who call for an abandonment of the church's sanctuary, I would urge the need for developing a worship in which the experience of God's life and mission in and to the world becomes more real. Admittedly, changes are needed. For all too long have we concentrated on gathering when the church has lost its centrality in society. Worship must prepare us to go out if we intend in any way to fulfill the divine mission in urban society. Worship is not escape. Rather, it equips us with a vision and a challenge to go.

In the context of the modern urban era there is a need, first of all, for the cultivation of private devotion. This need not take on a stereotyped character by any means. But the history of the church furnishes many instructive insights regarding Christian devotion. One obvious essential is some sort of personal discipline in prayer and the reading of the Scriptures. Its aim is not to provide a panacea for all spiritual needs, but to commune with God as Heavenly Father. We pray because God is our Heavenly Father, the Father of Jesus Christ and our Father. We place ourselves at his disposal, as it were, not expecting particular things to happen but waiting expectantly upon him. We seek awareness of his presence in and through our experience of life. We beg of him a vision of his purpose within the maze of conflicting events which surround us.

However effective our private worship may be, it can only come to fruition in sharing with others. Patterns of corporate worship are changing rapidly as a result of changing social patterns. Judging from the history of Christianity, the healthiest changes are moving in the direction of smaller fellowships. Large amorphous gatherings for worship tend to leave the faithful marking time at a secondary level of discipleship. They add to, rather than correct the problem of depersonalization. Proposals for small cell groups assume relevance again in the urban age. Small, personal groups that share in Bible study, dialogue, prayer and mission action may help to break down the mask of urban anonymity and give direction and meaning in life.

Under the grueling and frantic pace of modern life, there is a need also for retreats. The rapid escalation of drug addiction, alcoholism, and other artificial escape devices should alert us to the dangers inherent in inattentiveness to the secular drain on life. Man cannot long remain man without reflection upon who he is and what he is doing. Emotional breakdown is becoming increasingly characteristic of urban life. The retreat offers an opportunity for the faithful to stop and take stock of themselves and to reassess their purposes in life. Solitude and quiet are necessities, not luxuries, for living the fully human life in a tangled world.

#### ON MISSION

Within the city of man, Christians play the roles of "salt" and "light" (Matt. 5:13-14). Wherever they are, they let their "light" shine so that through their good character and deeds men may recognize the presence and action of God (Matt. 5:16).

Both images, salt and light, are especially appropriate today in that they assume a minority situation for the church. The minority have the task of "salting" and "lighting" the world. Specifically with the reference to the urban mission, this means that we have to help men individually and corporately to perceive a "hidden" dimension, the transcendent dimension, which makes human life whole. Though man may live independently of God, we believe he cannot be a whole man without God. Both by involving men in the fellowship we experience in the gathering of communities and by our mission activity, we seek to awaken men to the reality of God and, through this awakening, to the fullness of human life.

This conception of our missionary task involves considerable adjustment in the way we have tended to see missions heretofore. For one thing, we need to replace a decided negativism with a more positive understanding of man and his plight. Our Puritan heritage in America has caused us to lay heavy emphasis upon man's unworthiness, hopelessness, irreformability, etc. There has even been a negative attitude toward the enjoyment of life; true discipleship has been depicted as a kind of dreary flight from the world. Now in a remarkably demanding era, where the physical possibilities of enjoying life have bloomed so vividly, modern man refuses to take such thought seriously. He is not prepared to hear a tone of dread in the midst of his celebration of life's gifts, no more than he wants a funeral dirge played at his wedding.

On the other side, this negativism tends to overload a frame already straining from the demands placed upon it by complex urban society. To illustrate the magnitude of this situation, a Harvard psychologist recently pointed out that 15 percent of all Americans born after 1985 will be unable to cope—that is in terms of the complexities of the society, they will be mentally retarded. The emotional demands of this intricate way of life siphon off all human resources. The sense of insufficiency and inadequacy is immense.

To urban man, therefore, the church must cease to bring "bad news" and instead bring the "good news" which the gospel really entails. I can certainly agree with those who laud secularization to the extent that they enjoin modern man to open himself to enjoy the benefits of the present age. To our day the gospel comes as a message of freedom to celebrate God's gift of life.

This message is to come not merely in word, as Paul reminded the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:20), but in deed and in power. Just as God's Word to man came in the likeness of a man (Phil. 2:7), Jesus of Nazareth, so does it come today, embodied in your life and mine. A disembodied word, however articulately spoken, cannot awaken within the secular city an awareness of God's reality and power. God's self-revelation has always taken place through action — in Israel, in Jesus, and in the church. The embodied Word is self-authenticating. Remember, for example, Jesus' reply to John the Baptist's inquiry, "Are you the one who is coming? Or are we waiting for someone else?" Jesus gave no apology. Instead, he said to John's disciples, "Go! Tell John what you hear and see. Blind



people get their sight back and lame people walk, lepers are made clean and deaf people hear, and the dead are raised and poor people receive good news" (Matt. 11:4-5; author's translation).

Only at its peril does the church forget to embody the good news. The Roman Emperor Julian (A.D. 361-63), who attempted a revival of paganism based on imitation of the church practice, left an incisive commentary on the point. "For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg," he wrote to a high priest of his reform in Galatia, "and the impious Galilaeans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us."<sup>15</sup>

The heartbeat of the gospel is *agape* love. This concept of love implies involvement. There cannot be two answers to the question, does the gospel have a social implication? According to the biblical view, man is created for community with his fellow men. By his very nature he is inseparably tied to the human family, and the gracious activity of God merely heightens the bond. Those who choose to accept God's rule over their lives have no alternative but to identify with their fellow human beings and to accept their fellow man's cares as their own. The gospel commands not merely that we love those within our circle, but even our "enemies" (Matt. 5:44). In a word, it demands universal love.

Perhaps the most vexing question posed by the gospel's demand in the context of urban society today is, how can and should concerned love operate in an impersonal and structurally complex society? The grossest evils arise not from individual and person-to-person relations, but within the corporate whole, much of which operates quite impersonally. What we have, as Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out, is "moral man and immoral society." Within this context a social service approach, which the churches have employed effectively in the past, appears quite inadequate.

The fact is, the combined resources of all the churches are so limited as to leave us red faced in comparison with the immense sums poured in by government and other private organizations. Store-front missions, hostels, and other charitable organizations may still render some service, but they do little to touch the far greater problems of poverty, ignorance, disease, poor housing, filth, and attendant ills

15. Julian, *Collected Works*, Loeb Classical Library, III, p. 71.

which belong to an urban slum. More to the point for the churches, they touch too few lives with the effects of the gospel which makes men whole.

One thing is for sure, if we even feign an interest in God's mission in and to the world, we cannot go on walking away from the city and lulling ourselves to sleep in a suburban captivity. Since the population trend is toward metropolis, the only choice is involvement in the total life of the city. Inasmuch as structures figure so prominently in urban life, the church cannot hope to minister to its people without also addressing itself to the structures. Structures are impersonal, but they exercise an immense influence upon persons within them. Many critics of modern society, in fact, see in them the cruel and dehumanizing factor which grinds people to bits.

This explains why protest in recent years has tended to assume violent forms, resulting in large-scale property destruction in many cities. With meager resources and few channels for expressing his opposition to certain aspects of the situation, the dehumanized resident of the metropolis attacks the "system" in the only way he knows — by demonstration. He cannot employ the methods he used on the farm or in the small town. Often he has tried them, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Violent forms of protest get an immediate hearing and action, as the *Report of the President's Commission on Civil Disorders* makes all too evident.

Where do the churches fit into the picture of urban unrest and turmoil? Obviously they will have some impact through individual and congregational action. Christians in responsible positions may bring to bear upon the situation their sensitivities. Through channels accessible to them, but not to the poor, they have often produced beneficial changes. However, the problems are far too magnitudinous for isolated individual or congregational action. Concerted effort of all Christians and all men of concern is mandatory. Councils of churches and various other organizations already provide channels for concerted effort. The pooling of resources of manpower and material will enable Christians together to tackle structural problems too large for isolated effort.

In the effort to humanize urban life by various means, the church must beware of a pit into which many social activities fall. Satisfying physical needs by changing the environment and the structures will not cure the urban maladies. Human beings have

✓ to have more than bread in order to live. They have to have dignity. They have to have a sense of purpose and fulfillment. They have to see that life is more than tedious hours, concrete and brick, rushing crowds, honking cars, smog and rain. They have to see that life consists of more than the eye can measure, the ear hear, the hand touch, the head understand. If urban society is to subsist at all, in fact, the structures which compose it must somehow take on a personal dimension form which issues the love which makes man know his worth.

Now that we have at last decided to go to the city, we face both frightening challenges and immense possibilities. We must be prepared for failure; we should be thankful that we do not have to succeed in the sense that our contemporaries measure success. Our task within the vast complex society we see being built is to bring men a vision, a dream, of the City which God is building for humanity. Through its ministry as "salt" and "light" the church can awaken an awareness of the transcendent reality which pervades the whole human community. Through the lives of the faithful can flow the love which binds up and heals the wounds of the lonely, the anguished, the distraught. Through the Christian community, God's Spirit can work to effect a healing of the divisions of modern society—divisions of race, wealth, status, and the rest. Once again, we can be to the world what the soul is to the body.

In *The Agony and the Ecstasy* Irving Stone tells about Michelangelo sculpting one of his most renowned statues. Along with artists from all over Europe, Michelangelo was invited to participate in a sculpting contest. The prize was a giant marble column, thirty feet high. The artists filed by one by one. Each shook his head in dismay as he looked at the column, for in the middle it was marred by chips and knicks and scratches. But Michelangelo, the prince of great sculptors, stopped longer than the others. As he pondered, he saw in his mind's eye a form. From that marble column he carved his famous "David."

Human life, humanity's life, is like that marble column. It is not perfect. It has been marred by the impairment of God-consciousness. What is needed is a vision, a vision of what God is doing and will do in sculpting humanity. Such a vision belongs to the people of God.

William M. Pinson, Jr.

### 3. ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

✠ JESUS WEPT over the plight of Jerusalem. Paul directed his ministry to the great cities of the Mediterranean world. Augustine's *The City of God* was one of the most significant writings of the early church. Dealing with the issues, problems, and opportunities of cities is nothing new to Christians.

In the current era of rapid urban growth Christians have continued to grapple with city problems. Charles H. Spurgeon, the famous Baptist pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle in London during the 1800's, stimulated his congregation to establish many programs of ministry in the city. The church sponsored orphanages, schools, shelters for the poor, free and inexpensive meals for the hungry, homes for the aged, and low-cost books for those deprived of wholesome recreation. Spurgeon spoke and wrote against racism, poverty, economic exploitation and other problems made acute by urban life. And in doing all this he did not neglect evangelism.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, attacked the problems of the cities with a zeal which astounded his contemporaries. Under Booth's directions a many-faceted program took shape: soup kitchens, overnight shelters, missing persons bureaus, employment offices, loan agencies, clothing centers, job training, rescue operations for alcoholics and prostitutes, and efforts to secure legislation to improve social conditions. Booth insisted that the Army not only minister to physical needs, but also to the spiritual—evangelism was at the center of his mission to urban man.

Churchmen of the twentieth century have gone even further than Spurgeon and Booth in relating to the city. Walter Rauschenbusch, a famous Baptist pastor and professor at the turn of the century, called for a basic "christianizing" of the social order. He insisted