

THE VOICE



Mennonite Brethren Bible College
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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

The Pastor's Challenge

The rapid urbanization of the Mennonite Brethren Church membership is only one aspect of the Canadian situation which requires the exercise of more extensive pastoral care. By pastoral care we understand the ministry which is always the proclamation of the Word of God addressed to the real human situation.

Few pastors would claim to have a thorough understanding of the human situation as it confronts them. At times one senses that pastors feel overwhelmed about this turbulent era of shaken standards and uncertainties. How can one meet the challenge with a sense of assurance and hope?

The way I see it, it is more the stance one takes then the quest for a confidence resting upon knowing all the answers. The pastor's confidence should rest on a stance of openness to seek an understanding of the current situation; in the strength of a personal experience of the grace and power of God in daily decisions; in the exercise of love to one's brother and the experience of the love of brethren (a kind of Christian camaraderie); in the hope that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God can lead a brotherhood in our present situation. Without intensive brotherly love, without hope and with little faith there can be no leadership! Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* has defined pastoral authority in this way:

Genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is carried out. Every cult of personality that emphasizes the distinguished qualities, virtues, and talents of another person, even though these be of an altogether spiritual nature, is worldly and has no place in the Christian community. The desire we so often hear expressed today for "episcopal figures," "priestly men," "authoritative personalities" springs frequently enough from a spiritually sick need for the admiration of men, for the establishment of visible human authority, because the genuine authority appears to be so unimpressive. There is nothing that so sharply contradicts such a desire as the New Testament itself in its description of a bishop (I Tim. 3:1 f). One finds there nothing whatsoever with respect to wordly charm and the brilliant attributes of a spiritual personality. The bishop is the simple, faithful man, sound in faith and life, who rightly discharges his duties to the church. His authority lies in the exercise of his ministry. In the man himself there is nothing to admire."

CONVERSION, BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

by Henry Voth *

The question has been raised: what, in our time and under prevailing conditions, is the right order and the right time interval between conversion, baptism and church membership? The church has not always answered this question in the same way. Are then such matters as sequence and time interval in these fundamentally significant steps in a Christian life open to expediency or are they influenced by circumstances? Or is there really a Biblical pattern or order which ought to be followed at all times? Further, if there is not such an order, in which way can we structure these steps so that they will be most helpful and meaningful in our times?

It shall be the purpose of this paper to attempt to answer some of these questions. To do so, we shall look, very briefly, to Biblical and church history sources, as well as examine what the real situation is in our time. On the basis of this examination, a suggestion will be made which, it is hoped, will be both Biblical and relevant.

The Apostolic Pattern

The New Testament speaks much about baptism but not so specifically to the questions we have raised above. The "Great Commission," of course, suggests a very definite sequence: 1) make disciples (conversion), 2) baptize and 3) teach them **to observe all** that I have commanded you (church membership). There is here, however, no indication as to time interval between these successive steps.

Another passage that speaks clearly on this subject is Acts 2:41-42. Here again we find the same order: 1) "received his word" (conversion), 2) were baptized 3) "and there were added" (church membership). In addition, though, to a listing of the order, there is here a word as to the time interval. Luke says specifically "that day," that is, conversion, baptism and church membership all in one day. There is no suggestion here of a testing period or of a period of preparatory instruction.

Again we find recorded in Acts 8:12 that those who believed (were converted) when Philip preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." There seems to be here no

significant interval between baptism and conversion. Here the adding to the church is not mentioned, although it would seem implicit. There was a gathered body over whom the Jerusalem delegation prayed and on whom they laid their hands for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

In the same chapter we find the account of the meeting of Philip and the eunuch. After the eunuch believes, he is baptized immediately. Again, church membership is not mentioned, most likely because for the eunuch this was not possible.

Paul's conversion and baptism seems to have followed the same order, Acts 9:1-19. Although the time of the process of his conversion seems to be somewhat extended (3 days), when Ananias visited him "he rose and was baptized" (v. 18). The next verse tells us that "for several days he was with the disciples at Damascus" (church membership). Peter's experience in the house of Cornelius again confirms this pattern. As Peter preaches the gospel, the Holy Spirit falls on the assembled persons (a sign that conversion has taken place), and then "he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." Then followed a fellowship which continued for some days.

There are more such examples in the Book of Acts. There is the account of the conversion of the Philippian jailer who together with his whole house, was then immediately baptized, (Acts 16:33); the revival in Corinth which linked belief with immediate baptism (Acts 18:8); the twelve at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). Different men, (Peter, Philip, Paul) functioned as God's instruments of proclamation, and yet the pattern followed, as to sequence and time interval, was the same.

Among those who were thus converted, baptized and added to the church there were those who had a good grounding in the Old Testament Scriptures, but there were also those who were converted from raw heathenism, and these could hardly have known much about the Old Testament, and therefore would not have had a very specific and detailed understanding of what they were committing themselves to. Were there then extenuating circumstances why these (the Samaritans, the Philippian jailer, the Corinthian converts) could so immediately be baptized and incorporated into the church? Or did these apostles act in this way because they had not yet seen the dangers that were inherent in this procedure? Are there actions normative for us in our time, or do we find in the Book of Acts merely a description of what they did? It would seem from the development of the church, that they at least considered the pattern of Acts as more descriptive than normative.

The Epistles do not yield much additional information as to sequence and time interval of conversion, baptism and church membership. We should say here though, that even though they do not do so explicitly, by elaborating the meaning and signifi-

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cance of baptism (Romans 6, 1 Peter 3, etc.) they do clearly indicate something about sequence, namely, that baptism follows conversion. The teaching concerning the church as the body of Christ and the individual believer as a member of this body, again indicates that church membership follows conversion and baptism. Throughout, the prevailing emphasis is that the messianic age has come and that now both Jew and Greek can enter it by faith, the proof and expression of which is the acceptance of baptism. To be baptized meant that one had entered the new creation, that one had been initiated with Christ into His death and resurrection. Baptism also initiated one into the new organism (1 Cor. 12:13), the Body of Christ of which the local church was the local manifestation. There is here, though, no clear indication of any preparatory instructional period or interval in which one could test the sincerity of the personal commitment.

The Second/Third Century Pattern

As we move on into the second century in the history of the church, there emerges a picture of a changing pattern. Baptism no longer appears as the spontaneous response to the act of profession, but rather as something which is regulated according to certain stipulations. For one, there is evident a tendency to limit the times at which the church baptizes. Two specific times seemed specifically appropriate for this rite: Easter and Pentecost. It was felt that at Easter, heavenly grace was more abundant. Further, it was felt that if baptism meant the identification of the individual with the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3, Col. 2:12), then Easter was an especially appropriate time to baptize. In the light of the development of the church, Pentecost, too, seemed particularly appropriate for baptism. Later some other seasons were added: Epiphany and Christmas. The important thing for us to note here is that by restricting baptism to specific seasons, there was a discontinuance of the immediate, spontaneous baptism.

While, in the above change, there seems to be little indication that these restrictions were made because of the ones who were to receive the baptism, there is this suggestion in another development, that is, the development of the catechumenate. Professing believers were gathered together for instruction in classes. Such instruction was offered at regulated times and was designed to prepare a candidate for baptism and church membership, to live out the implications of his faith. This arrangement, of course, fits in well with the limited times of baptism.

The catechumenate, that is, the period of preparation for baptism and church membership, seems to have its beginning early in the second century. From the New Testament records it would appear that the early gathering of the disciples were

freely open to all who might wish to come, including unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:23-25). But when the church had reached a somewhat more developed, established form, it seemed quite natural that those who wished to enter it should be required to go through a course of instruction as to the specific character of its life and hope, and the demands which it made upon its members.

The instruction was usually more practical than doctrinal in nature. When it is realized how new the Christian life was for many of the converts, this is not surprising. Those who came from a Jewish background would understand the need for preparatory instruction, having witnessed it in the preparation which a convert to Judaism, a proselyte, would have to undergo. Some theologians have seen in such Old Testament passages as Psalm 15, Psalm 24:3f. and Psalm 34:13-15 evidence for Biblical exhortation to an initiatory instruction.

It is evident from the writings of the early church fathers, (post-apostolic) that the church felt a need for greater care in admitting converts to baptism and church membership. This awareness arose out of practical experience. The church soon saw that there were those who after an initial profession of faith, relapsed into their former way of life. There were also those who joined the body of believers from false or unworthy motives.

At the same time there appears to have arisen a deep concern for the seriousness of sins committed after baptism. It was expressly taught by some that to sin after baptism was apostasy and such apostasy could not be forgiven. One of the prevailing views was also that one could lose the benefits of baptism but one could not, or should not, repeat baptism. This then led to a practice in some parts of the church of postponing baptism as long as possible, sometimes till just before death.

There is early evidence for greater caution in admitting converts to baptism and church membership in Justin Martyr's writing. In his first apology, dated about 150 A.D. we find the following descriptive passages:

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God . . . As many as are persuaded and believe what we teach and say is true and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them. Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the Universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water (ch. 61).

Justin certainly reflects a much more developed procedure than we can read out of the New Testament. The church stands

in the preparatory and initiatory rites with the convert. The church has devised ways in which that which the convert professes and undertakes is set forth, not only in teaching by word, but also in symbolic action. The church here, possibly much more so than the N. T. church did, sees itself as the guardian and the custodian of the gospel and the body that grew out of obedience and faith in it.

The post-apostolic church was deeply conscious of the significance of baptism and church membership as is indicated by the way they felt led to prepare a convert for them. These were insights integral to the gospel and these they therefore held in high regard. However, there seems to have been quite a sense of liberty as to the way in which they exercised their responsibility and care. There was here no rigid adherence to an appeal to a prescribed apostolic pattern of practice. There was, rather, a readiness to invent, to add (not yet to the gospel itself) to the practice of the church as seemed advisable to the church. This liberty of action is already evident in what is generally believed to be an even earlier document than the apology of Justin, namely, **The Didache**. Here we find instruction on a number of issues, mostly practical, and among them these instructions concerning baptism:

Now concerning baptism, baptize thus: Having first taught all these things, baptize ye into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, in living water, and if thou hast not living water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water thrice upon the head in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. (Philip Schaff translation.)

Two things are evident from this quotation. The one is that there was teaching before there was baptism, "having taught all things." This teaching, as has already been mentioned, was primarily concerning the Christian way of life. The other thing that is evident here is the flexible character of the practice. There is here no insistence on only one way, but rather, while there is a preferred way, alternatives occasioned by limited resources are also acceptable. Such liberty, when carefully guarded and used, can be a real asset. It goes without saying that it can pose a real danger when used too fully, without careful deliberation.

When we consider the somewhat later writings of Tertullian (but still second century) we find reflected a still more elaborate ritual in baptism. He too, indicates that there must be a period of preparation in which the convert engages in frequent prayers, fasts, vigils and confession of sin. When finally the convert comes to baptism, the church has added some new elements to the ones we encountered earlier. There is the invocation of the

Spirit upon the water by means of which it was held the baptismal waters became spiritually significant for those who were baptized. Then followed the ceremony in which the candidate renounces the devil. Following this the candidate was immersed three times in the name of the Trinity, accompanied by a confession of faith, in response to interrogation. Following this there was an anointing and laying on of hands with prayer. The whole group then observed the Lord's Supper, after which the newly baptized, dressed in a white garment, joined in prayer with the brethren, and was subsequently given milk and honey. For one week, following this ritual, such persons abstained from the usual daily baths.

The purpose of citing these few examples and details here was actually twofold. It demonstrates again the early church's understanding that it was at liberty to alter practice when such alteration would serve its purpose more adequately. The second reason for drawing out the practice of the early church was to show that changes appear to have been initiated and additions made to make the meaning of baptism and church membership more transparent and the rites more significant to the persons involved.

On the basis of the practices of the second and third centuries it would seem right to make the following conclusions:

a) The N.T. provides us with descriptive accounts of the relationship between conversion, baptism and church membership. These accounts tell us what was done, without indicating what should, in matters of practice, be always and everywhere done. We do not find in the N.T. prescriptive guidance how these significant steps in the Christian life should be regulated in practice.

b) The church felt at liberty to adapt, to add to, to modify the pattern of action as it came from the New Testament church and these changes were introduced to preserve the church from corruption and to guard the candidates from unknowing commitments to that which they had not fully understood or the implications of which they had not seen. The church acted to meet what they considered to be the needs of the church or of the individual. We may not now agree with their analysis of the needs (e.g. the invocation of the Spirit upon the water was, so it is said, occasioned by a growing belief that somehow the water itself effected certain spiritual results in the candidate).

Possible Current Patterns

The absence of specific prescriptions in the New Testament and the example of the post-apostolic church should then encourage us to check our practice with respect to the situations in which we live and work. We, too, should not come to consider what was done in the past as always and everywhere binding upon us. We should feel at liberty to reexamine what we are

now doing in the light of our needs and problems, but also in the light of the unchanging objective of the church: "until we all attain to the unity of faith and of knowledge of the Son of God, to the mature manhood, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" Eph. 4:13. Such re-examination is no reflection upon the spiritual insight of the brethren who went before us. It is most likely that their practice in their time effected precisely the goal stated in the epistle to the Ephesians. The question we must ask in our time is: Is this still so?

What is our situation today? From infancy, children in the homes of our members are influenced towards acceptance of the Christian faith, with varying degrees of consistency and intensity. The child early becomes aware of the desire of parents that he too should embrace this faith and become a member of the church of which his parents are members. In such a situation it is often easier for the child to profess conversion and to undertake the subsequent steps than it is to refrain from doing so. If this is so, could we then at the moment when the first such profession is made be reasonably convinced and sure, that a real work of grace has taken place here. Can we at that moment determine how much the child really understands about what he is professing or how valid his motives are doing so are?

Or take the situation of an adult. In our day, at least in certain circles, membership in a church is still considered a mark of respectability. For the most part such membership does not bring with it rejection and overt persecution. In fact, often quite the contrary is true; the person may actually become more acceptable. Thus it is entirely possible for an adult to seek baptism and church membership without having really experienced the new birth of which baptism witnesses and which makes church membership a natural step.

When conversions meant a radical change in the outward circumstances of life, as well as of inward loyalties, as it did in N.T. times when for both Jew and Gentile it meant that one was espousing a way of life which almost certainly would involve open persecution, if not martyrdom, then one could be much more sure of the genuineness of that which had happened inwardly and hence baptize immediately. The likelihood of an unknowing or insincere profession, under such circumstances, was very remote.

But because the situations in our time are as they have been described above, a waiting period between profession and baptism seems to be a practical necessity. A person who has been baptized and received into the membership of the church will not benefit by that experience if it turns out later that he was mistaken about the reality of his conversion. The steps which the church would have to take in such an event might put up barriers to a genuine experience which are hard to remove. Or

if he does experience a genuine conversion while in the church, what does he do then? Does he go through the experience of baptism again?

A waiting period may also be necessary because of the early age at which professions of salvation are made by children (5 - 10 years of age). A child at this time would not seem to be ready to assume the responsibility of church membership. And yet there is the persistent feeling that children who make a profession should somehow stand in a rather definite relationship to the believing community, a relationship which the church as the believing community acknowledges and which bind it to certain responsibilities towards such a professing person. The way things now stand the church makes no distinction in status between children or adults who believe and those who do not, as long as both of them are not baptized and members of the church.

One possible correction of this state of affairs is to separate baptism and church membership. Certain denominations have done this, especially in mission situations. Persons who make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ are baptized immediately upon such a profession. Membership in the church is, however, postponed until through a consistent Christian walk the person gives clear evidence of the work of God in his life. We too could adopt such a practice, i.e. we would baptize both children and adults and thereby acknowledge that we have heard their profession and accept our responsibility to nurture them in their faith towards that maturity which will permit their full participation in the life of the church. I have for some time felt that this might be the better way for us.

On further reflection on this practice, I believe, one would have to come to the conclusion that this is not merely a change in the form of our procedure, but also a change in meaning. From the N.T. we learn that baptism is to be an outward expression of an inward process, a visible witness to what the invisible Spirit of God has done within. If we practice baptism as an acknowledgement of a profession which may or may not be real, we are not sure, than we are making baptism something else. If we make it a sign of our responsibility towards a certain person concerning whose inward status we have no firm assurance, we again make baptism say and mean something other than the N.T. meaning. We endorsed earlier the action of the church in changing practice when changing situations call for this. However, the church must always be careful to insure that such changes do not alter the meaning of what is being done, e.g. the church's practice of baptizing infants.

And yet we somehow feel that something should be done to help the young, professing believer and to assure him that as such a professing believer he stands in a very special relation-

ship to the church and that the church acknowledges this relationship and accepts the implicit responsibilities. In the post-apostolic age the church established the catechumenate. Persons who professed faith and were preparing for baptism were called "catechumenoi." The church acknowledged its responsibility towards these catechumens in a specific way and sought to prepare them for church membership by joining with them in specific acts of worship, by uniting with them in fasting and prayer, and by providing them with special practical and doctrinal instruction, and in general watching over their spiritual life.

Could this be the way for us? The catechumenate was not, at least in its initial stages, an automatic way to church membership. The church observed the life of the catechumens for evidence of the new birth. It was really both a time of instruction and a time of testing. Should we seek the contemporary equivalent of such a status? Would this impress upon the total church a more specific awareness of responsibility and relationship? Would the person concerned not also more specifically feel the supporting and sustaining presence of the community which has heard his profession and takes it seriously and has accepted him for nurture and care. In a certain sense he will feel that he belongs to this community. Practical suggestions as to how this relationship could be nurtured and kept dynamic and meaningful would need to be worked out. An evaluation of this suggestion is welcomed.

TO BE CHRISTIAN IN THE "SECULAR CITY"

by Leonard Siemens *

Traditionally we have been a rural agricultural people. Most of our traits, habits and thought patterns that we call characteristically Mennonite were conceived in a pastoral European environment that remained essentially unchanged through several generations.

Having successfully resisted the 'pull' to big cities during earlier decades of this century, Canadian Mennonites are presently the fastest urbanizing religious group in Canada. And in Manitoba Mennonite Brethren are moving to cities in larger proportionate numbers than other Mennonite denominations.

Life in the big city is fundamentally different from country life in several respects. The city is the birthplace of new and exciting ideas and behaviour styles, and offers lots of freedom for its people to engage in thoughts and activities that were once effectively banned in the rural community. Furthermore, the city confronts the individual, the family and the church with clusters of both problems and opportunities not known in the village setting. Living abundantly in the modern metropolis requires that we understand better both the individual and the group tensions as well as potentials that this environment generates. Having come to understand better the forces from which we cannot escape and within which Destiny has placed us, it remains for us to formulate a philosophy and to devise a life style that enables us to live happily and redemptively so that we might also show others The Way.

This will be an attempt to do so from one perspective only, namely the sociological. The following responses will include

I. THE RURAL TO URBAN DIRECTION OF HUMAN MIGRATION THROUGH TIME

A. The Bible offers a prophetic clue to the nature of the geographic shift in human settlement patterns. The Bible begins with a garden and ends with a city. Furthermore, all the Heavenly word pictures of Scripture depict Heaven, our eternal reward, as a city: the new Jerusalem, the city of God, where the streets are pure gold, etc. The scriptural direction of man's movement through time, then, is from the garden, the rural, to the city, the urban.

other dimensions, particularly as they relate to the Christian community in action.

B. Urbanization is the inevitable consequence of man exercising dominion over God's Creation. Through learning, man came

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better to understand the mysteries of nature, and by means of technology he was able to harness the natural energies and resources to serve his own ends. As man claimed dominion over creation through learning and technology, people became specialized in their social functions; all people were no longer grubbing all the time for their next meal. Those who specialized in food production remained on the farm; those specializing in the satisfaction of other human wants settled in towns and eventually in cities. Some writers today refer to Western Europe, the United States and Canada as the "Urban World" and to Asia, Africa and Latin America as the "Rural World." About 70% - 80% of the population of the U.S.A. and Canada lives in cities, while from 75% - 85% of Asians and Africans live at "subsistence level" in small farming villages. Urbanization, thus, is directly related to the level of learning and industrial development of a country; it is related to the extent to which man has exercised dominion over "the land, the sea and every living thing" as God commanded him to do. Hence, in one sense, urbanization is the consequence of man's obedience to Divine injunction. If this is so, then surely God has a blueprint for an abundant and joyous church and family life in the city and the suburb, as well as in the countryside.

C. Urbanization continues to reshape the social landscape of the world.

In countries like India, the modernization of agriculture together with a continued population explosion has resulted in predictions of cities like Bombay and Calcutta before long reaching populations of 20, 40, and 60 millions. Similar predictions might apply to other countries.

In Western Canada, population of farming communities also continues. In 1954, one farm worker produced enough agricultural products for 19 persons. In 1967, one farm worker supported 39 persons. Farm labour efficiency more than doubled in 13 years. Hence, surplus farm families continued to move to towns and cities. In 1941, only 32% of Prairie population was listed as urban; by 1961, 58% lived in cities. Wartime and postwar research, technology and prosperity affected this drastic shift. A consulting firm analyzing agricultural problems in Manitoba recently predicted that Manitoba will lose half of its farmers within the next 10 years. Inevitably, Mennonites of Western Canada have been caught in the cross-currents of this technological and social revolution.

D. Urbanization of Western Canadian Mennonites

Mennonites are now the fastest urbanizing group in Canada. However, traditional values, such as "the good life on the land," yield but slowly to change. In 1961, the Mennonites, with only one-third of their people living in towns and cities, were still the most rural of the 20 largest religious groups in Canada. But

the times have caught up with us (or we have caught up with the times), as Mennonites are now passing through the greatest urbanization process of any ethnic group in Canada.

Urbanization is a style of life as well as a place of residence. Most new fads, fashions, ideas, customs and values are born in the city. City life has a style about it that was once very different from life in the country. In recent years this difference has almost disappeared. Instant communication by daily paper, movies, radio and television, together with good roads and fast cars bring the new city ideas and fashions into the rural hinterland as fast as they are generated. It is important for our future considerations that this aspect of the "urbanization" of the entire countryside be underscored. There are few, if any, purely "folk" or "rural" areas left in North America. Most, if not all, rural communities, have been rendered partially urban in their habits, styles and thought patterns.

II. FEATURES OF LIFE IN THE "SECULAR CITY"

A. The Justification For a Positive Attitude

The first essential for coping successfully with a difficult situation is a positive attitude. Constantly fretting about the unpleasantness of city life and what it is doing to our cultural, moral and spiritual life is negative, defeatist and unwarranted. Did Norman Vincent Peale not teach us about The Power of Positive Thinking? Let us consider a few of the reasons why a positive outlook is justified.

1. The city is the symbol of cultural and technological progress. The city is the natural consequence of man's exercising dominion over the raw material of this world as God commissioned him to do.

2. Any number of North American surveys will show that urban life provides opportunities for health services, education, employment, cultural enrichment and religious participation well beyond what is offered in most rural areas.

3. For the Christian, the city presents the best opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ to the aged, the dispossessed, the despondent, the lonely, the sick and the needy. To be in the city is to be in the world—in the marketplace—where the action is—where the people are. Are we not called to be the light and the salt of the world? Light and salt removed from where they are needed are of little value.

4. If we believe that God has been leading and guiding the movement of our people through time, then God is now calling us (some of us, not all of us) into the metropolitan mainstream of modern life. Rather than denounce and deplore, we should celebrate this achievement.

Having then, asserted a generally positive and optimistic approach to our topic, let us now consider a few of the most

immediate aspects of urban life with which we need to come to terms.

B. Group Experiences and the Quest for Meaning

1. Groups that relate to the whole person.

Most people find a measure of ultimate purpose or meaning for their lives from engaging in activities such as religion, philosophy and the arts. But as social creatures, few of us would count life complete and worth living without the deep and intimate personal relationship that we enjoy with a few select groups of people around us. These people know us as we are; we can hide nothing from them, neither would we want to; they appreciate us as whole persons, for who we are, not for what they can get from us. These group experiences serve as ends in themselves; they are the means to no other ends apart from the joys and satisfactions derived from people fellowshiping together. Sociologists refer to these groups as Primary Groups. A German sociologist called them *Gemeinschaft*-groups.

This type of group experience is characteristic of farm or rural life, where everyone knows everyone else; where people interact with each other in most daily contacts as whole persons, because they know each other intimately and care about the total welfare of one another. In the village, going to the store, or the post office, or the garage is as much a social experience as it is a business experience. In such a setting, loneliness is seldom known. One has a sense of being appreciated and accepted by the people around him. Such a feeling meets deep-seated human needs; gives a person a sense of self-worth and is a powerful factor in maintaining mental health. But the essential quality of *Gemeinschaft*-groups that truly satisfy, is that they provide one with a feeling that life is worth living; that it has a worthwhile purpose; that there is a meaning to it all. Where such an inner assurance is lacking or is weak, people may find themselves in serious difficulty.

2. Groups created to meet specialized needs.

The urban metropolis is usually characterized as a place where people are less friendly, more formal and often more lonely and less happy than are people in the country. While this need not necessarily be the case, there are social forces at work in big cities that can create such an environment.

Whenever thousands of people decide to live and work and play together within a small geographic area, they need to organize all of their daily activities to a high level of efficiency or else there would be total chaos, and human needs would go unmet. And since most human activity, be it family, church, club, work or play, is carried on in group situations, the city consists of many networks of specialized groups that are formed for specific purposes. They are created to get jobs done: to

manufacture in a factory, to provide municipal services, to sell groceries, to heal the sick, to educate children, to teach the Bible, to entertain, to rear children, etc.

Unlike primary groups, these groups are said to be end-oriented rather than person-oriented. In these groups persons are secondary; getting the job done in the most efficient manner possible is the primary goal. Hence they are called secondary or *Gesellschaft*-groups. Persons in these groups are not recruited or accepted on the basis of their being nice and desirable people but according to how much they can contribute toward reaching the goal of the Company, the Agency, the School, the Store, and perhaps the Church. People in such settings are means to ends. As such they are often insecure, tense and uncertain, lest they fail to measure up to expectations. Frequently members of secondary groups interact with other people at very superficial levels and not as whole persons. They will relate to other people only with small segments of their personalities; they will relate either as a customer, a patient, an employee, a church member or a student. Because of the highly organized and extremely specialized nature of modern society we can no longer interact as whole person to whole person with the friendly corner grocer, the family doctor or the village school teacher, all of whom in earlier days were more or less permanent members of the community and friends of the family (primary group relationships). This trend toward shallow, functional, inter-person interaction is continuing at the same rate as is further specialization in education, manufacturing, medicine, merchandizing, recreation, etc. I'm not suggesting here that one would want to or that one should try to become intimate and personally involved with all the people we relate to during the course of a day. This would be quite impossible and indeed undesirable. But the fact remains that many urban people have but few close friendships, few people around them in whose presence they can be completely at ease, uniquely themselves and still feel appreciated, loved and accepted. Having the feeling that one is fully accepted and loved by those people with whom one identifies closely is the substance of life's meaning and satisfaction; it is the most basic human need. The real tragedy of many folk today is that their family and church life has also taken on the functional, *Gesellschaft* nature of the secondary group. The greatest personal need for some of these people then becomes that finding for themselves a meaningful and satisfying orientation for their lives.

3. Man's need for meaning in life.

Many books have been written on the dilemma of man in Modern Society: **The Meaning of Persons and Escape from Loneliness** by Paul Tournier; **The Lonely Crowd** by David Riesman; **Escape from Freedom** by Erick Fromm; **The Search for Meaning** by Ungersma and **In Search of Meaning** by Victor Frankl. The

famous psychiatrist, C. G. Jung, says, "About one-third of my cases are not suffering from any clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and aimlessness of their lives." Likewise, the Austrian psychiatrist, Victor Frankl, submits that even the search for power and wealth are being superseded in the contemporary person "by the hunger for meaning and for a satisfying interpretation of the end and purpose of his predicament and suffering." Frankl interprets this hunger as a need for God. The famous theologian Paul Tillich wrote, "The anxiety of meaninglessness is anxiety about the loss of ultimate concern, of a Meaning which gives meaning to all meanings. This anxiety is aroused by the loss of a spiritual centre, of an answer to the question of the meaning of existence."

When recently I asked a good friend of mine how his son was getting on he replied sadly, "He's looking for purpose in life; he's joined the hippies." The entire hippie movement is a morally negative over-reaction to the superficiality and rootlessness of unfulfilled and directionless lives. How else, in part, can one also explain the increasing rates of mental illness, suicide, divorce, juvenile delinquency, crime and general lawlessness?

Is there then no balm in Gilead? Is this the inevitable end-result of modern living? Can we do anything other than wait and watch our own people fall prey to these blighting effects of modern urban life? Was the Abundant Life of which Christ spoke not meant for the urban era of the human race? Is it possible for the Christian today to be in the world without being overcome by it? What, then, is the message of God to man in his present predicament?

III. FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE URBAN INDIVIDUAL

Ultimately we are concerned with individuals and the quality and fulness of their lives; and at the very centre of the good life, most would agree, is the cardinal value of freedom.

A. Man's Eternal Quest for Freedom

The human desire to be unshackled from limitations and boundaries on behaviour was not long in finding expression. Adam and Eve were not content until they claimed the freedom to move into the one area that was denied them. They defied authoritative constraints and became completely free; but at their own peril and at the peril of all succeeding generations. Time and again we read in Judges, and other books of Scripture, "And every man did what was right in his own eyes." Just as often, after their perfect freedom had brought them to utter ruin we read again, "And they cried unto the Lord and the Lord heard their cry."

The universal cry for freedom still rings forth from all the

corners of the earth. All human migrations in history, including Mennonite migrations, have been undertaken in the name of freedom. The theme song at the funeral of Martin Luther King was, "Free at Last." Industry cries for more freedom; the pornographic press and movie industry wants complete freedom; university students want the freedom to run (or ruin) their universities. The hippies have claimed the freedom to go unwashed, unfed, undisciplined, unloved. Their total freedom has brought about their total destruction.

Obviously, for his own spiritual, moral and indeed physical survival, man must learn that total freedom and total chaos and ultimately self destruction are not far removed from each other. This is a lesson we need to remember today. The other side of the coin of freedom must always be responsibility. Primitive tribes lived by far more rules, ruthlessly enforced, than we give them credit for. The rural *Gemeinschaft* communities had scores of unwritten but well-understood behavioural do's and don'ts in their way of life.

B. The Terrifying Freedom of the City

The city offers terrifying freedom to those who want it. (This is the essence of Erick Fromm's book **Escape from Freedom**). The city is a place of many values reflected in as many groups or associations of people who share these values, and whose lives are directed by them.

A young person or young couple coming into the city has a wide choice of life styles from which they may select the one best suited to their desires. For each life style there will be a group of people within which they will find acceptance, status and a measure of meaning and fulfillment. (Remember that the village consisted of essentially one homogenous group; there were no choices.)

1. Freedom to Choose *Gemeinschaft* Group

In the city a person is a member, at the same time, of many different groups: family, neighbourhood, church, club, Home and School, work, recreation, etc. But the life style of the individual will conform to the values of the primary or *Gemeinschaft* groups within which he most desires acceptance and status (personal fulfillment). The hippie, whose closest buddies are hippies, will first consider what his fellow hippies will think or say before he decides whether or not he should wash, or get a job or trim his hair. His hippie gang is his highest ranking "reference group." Having found approval and status in this group, he can afford to offend all other members of the community because his belonging needs are satisfied. The same principle applies to the teenager and his street corner gang; to the Communist and his party cell; to the Christian and his church fellowship; and in part to the child of a happy, close and harmonious family. One aspect of urban freedom then is that

one has a wide value and behavioural spectrum of human associations from which one can select, and within which one can seek those things that make life worth living. But there are still other aspects of individual freedom in the city.

2. Anonymity

Unlike the situation in the folk community where one's chief reference group completely surrounds one at all times, city life for the most part frees one from the constant pressure to conform to group standards. The city is big enough to permit the hippy to sneak away from the flower children for a day or two and become just a bit square if he chooses to do so. The church member living in the suburb or in the big apartment has the freedom to mow his lawn or wash his car or go golfing Sunday morning if he so wishes, because his neighbours whom he doesn't even know couldn't care less. He is nameless, anonymous, alone, most of the day. Only when he consciously decides to meet with his fellowship group is he obliged to "put on" his expected behaviour. This freedom of anonymity allows people to veer off the straight and narrow from time to time; to taste just slightly of the forbidden fruit without getting caught. Having tasted, some people get feelings of guilt, misery and anxiety. Others may indeed decide to switch primary reference groups—from the church to the club or whatever it may be. Anonymity, namelessness, then offers a measure of freedom. But the city provides for a third dimension of freedom, namely that of mobility.

3. Mobility

Suppose the neighbours do care about the off-beat behaviour that goes on at the Black residence; suppose the church members got wise to Mr. Black's "anonymous" behaviour; is he now stuck, has he now no choice but to repent and come to terms? No, there remains for him another escape hatch to freedom: he can move. He can move to another community in the city; he can transfer his church membership within the city or to another church in Ontario or B.C., and if that is not enough, to the United States, and start over again. Mobility is a part of our way of life. Industrialization and specialization of jobs requires a constant movement of people from city to city. It is estimated that the average Canadian family now moves once in every four years. In the traditional rural society much pride was taken in keeping the same farm and home in the family through many generations if not centuries. Mobility, then, is another weapon in the urban arsenal of freedom.

What then do we make of all this? Is urban freedom a bad thing? How is the Christian family and church to adjust or respond to this measure of freedom? Should the church have to depend on the crutches of "group pressure" to enforce its Way of Life upon its members?

THE CHURCH IN THE "SECULAR CITY"

by John Wall *

The life style of the secular city is a threat to the life style of the Christian Church. When members of the church succumb to the blight of loneliness, anonymity, and purposelessness, the situation contradicts the essential nature of the life of the church. The call for remedial action comes from many corners with increasing urgency. How can the Church rise to the challenge?

The popular notion that the problem is inherent in the present order of things (the establishment), and any solution must come by way of changing or adapting the structures, is in my opinion an approach that mistakes a part for the whole. Yes, there are patterns of church life that need to be changed. However, the solution to the encroachment under consideration, I submit, must be sought in the recovery of that **quality of life** demonstrated by the early church as a committed, caring and witnessing fellowship. Such a recovery, to be genuine, must necessarily be the work of God through His Spirit. At the same time, it will become a reality only to the extent that we exercise a concern about what happens in our personal, family, and congregational life, and manifest a willingness to walk in new ways into which God may lead.

"Wholeness" in Personal Life

There must be a concern for the development of "wholeness" in a Christian's personal life. There are three aspects of the Christian life that are basic and become the ingredients for "wholeness." These three aspects are commitment, fellowship, and service. The absence or mediocrity of any one of these renders the Christian particularly susceptible to a sense of futility and inadequacy which is quickly compounded by even more vicious strains of the same disease so rampant in our contemporary secular world. Many Christians, having heard that Jesus Christ died for their sins, rose from the dead, and is now Lord of all life, have committed themselves to Him and may even be experiencing close fellowship with other believers, but they are not active in any kind of relevant or sacrificial service to others. On the other hand, some people may be deeply involved in service, and occasionally in fellowship, but they have never

* The Rev. John Wall is pastor of the Fort Garry M.B. Church in Winnipeg. This response emerges out of a deep concern for Christians in the city and benefits from a prior exposure to a family camp situation.

responded totally to the claims of Christ in terms of a personal Christian commitment. This kind of incompleteness leaves them with something less than the abundant life Jesus came to bring. Subjected to the demands of today's secular urban society, this kind of deficiency shows up very quickly. It was because of the "wholeness" in their personal lives that the early Christians demonstrated such a sense of dedication, confidence, and purpose in a world that appeared to be falling apart.

Family Fellowship

There must also be a concern for the enhancing of "quality" in Christian family life. The Scriptures make it very clear that God intends the family to play a strategic role in the development of Christian personality. One of the vital contributions of the Christian home is a spiritually and socially supportive ministry to its members. It is to serve as a base of operations from which one may launch out and to which one may return. Success in such a function calls for something more than a form of religion that exhausts itself in routine talk about the church and congregational affairs. It demands that particular quality that becomes noticeable when the presence of Jesus Christ is reflected in the lives of its members. Where Christ is present, there will be found security, confidence and purpose in life. Such a home will be enhanced by a respect for parents and children, a sense of fellowship and family unity, freedom for proper self-expression, sympathy, good counsel, hospitality, and mutual confidence. Evelyn Duvall says, "When you feel loved, accepted, appreciated and closely related, you can feel yourself lifted up to the challenge that is presented."

In our contemporary society which frequently projects the individual into a very lonely role and in which the stresses and cross-currents militate against a sense of Christian confidence and purpose, the supportive ministry of the Christian home becomes as crucial as never before. Though it has always been the work of the church to serve families through preaching and teaching ministries, and by way of pastoral care, the needs and potential role of dynamic Christian family life need to be brought into sharper focus. Whether this calls for the conducting of family-life work shops, family forums or family counseling sessions, all of which could be useful, will need to be determined locally. But certainly the starting point for any effective effort must be a deep appreciation and concern for the spiritual qualities and the spiritual functions of family life which today stand in jeopardy.

Small Groups

Finally, there must be concern for the recovery of "community" in the congregational life of the church. The complaint that congregational life is becoming more and more impersonal and that relationships tend to be very superficial cannot be

ignored. Lawrence O. Richards, in a series of articles entitled "Tomorrow's Church Today" available from the National Association of Evangelicals, makes the observation that the church today is a "society." In a "society" individuals live peaceably with each other, but are separated by basic differences. They are bound together by exchanged goods and services but not by intimate personal relationships. The basis for unity is organizational interdependence rather than a common life and common purpose as was true for the New Testament Church.

A vehicle that can be useful for the recovery and the nurture of community within a congregation is the small group. Small groups have received considerable attention in recent years. They have been feared and they have been applauded. But small groups are really nothing new. They have a firm foundation in the Scriptures as well as in Christian history. Besides that they are not really so foreign to our congregational pattern. I, for one, believe that they are built right into the existing structural arrangement in the form of Sunday School classes, Bible study and prayer groups, men's, women's and youth groups etc. Our need is to capitalize on these for far greater effectiveness. To do so will mean to clearly define specific needs and purposes. This could, predictably, lead to the amalgamation or restructuring of some of the groups. Present proliferation is hardly compatible with the need to keep the family unit more clearly in focus. It will also call for a clear understanding of basic requirements or ingredients necessary to recover community. A further observation by Lawrence O. Richards is applicable here: "People do not develop a sense of community apart from frequent, regular, social interaction with one another. They have to spend time together. They have to get to know one another—well. They have to share, to dig deep into their own lives with God and openly seek together His answers to their problems and needs, and His direction and power for their lives.

If interaction is to produce a shared identity and purpose, it requires a strong desire on the part of members to involve themselves in the lives of one another. And, finally, the interaction must focus on the values which the community professes to hold in common, and which it seeks to make real in the lives of its members. They must share deeply, of the Word and of the Spirit of God.

Only by this kind of interaction can the church become a community where members will be guided in spiritual growth."

Can the church rise to the challenge of the day? Yes, it can. When the Lord said, "I will build my church," His promise was not conditioned by time or circumstances. He is building the church—and He is building it in today's secular society. The part you and I will have in it is determined by our willingness to walk in the ways He leads.

THE URBAN MENNONITE BRETHREN COMMUNITY IN ACTION

by Herbert Brandt *

Can the urban Mennonite Brethren Church rise to meet the challenge of the secular city? In spite of the complexities of our present-day cities, with their mobile populations, their high-rise communities, their violence, their cultural and technical instruments of power, and their baffling contradictions, I believe it can.

Mennonite Brethren, in the process of urbanization, succeeded in adjusting in areas of economics, social and business, but failed in meeting the demands made upon them as the urban church in the secular city. Over the years Mennonite Brethren have established rural churches in urban centres. These have been fairly successful in maintaining a program for the church family, and in attracting the major portion of the influx from rural churches. But, has the secular city been affected?

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

As the Church of Christ has moved into the world, undergoing structural changes through the decades, so also the Mennonite Brethren Church must be prepared to accept and initiate changes. Change has been looked upon—urbanization included—as an inevitable and negative factor in the welfare of the church. If we are to rise to the challenge of the secular city, this attitude must change.

THE ADHERENCE TO THE UNCHANGEABLE

On the other hand, let us not be carried away with the doctrine of change. More things are constant on earth than some radicals care to consider. The cry is loud for change with regard to religion, institutions, and even the very Word of God. Change is inevitable, but some changes would be ruinous. The church must adhere with firm conviction to the unchangeable; otherwise its efforts in the secular city will be futile. God, His love, and His Word do not change. "There is evidence that we are not as certain as we once were, that the ultimate concern is for every person to be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ."¹

RECOGNITION AND REDISCOVERY OF ESSENTIALS

What is needed in the church today, if its urban work is to be accomplished in a way consistent with its divine commission,

* The Rev. Herbert Brandt serves the Killarney Park M.B. Church in Vancouver. His interests in local church outreach have key priority in his concept of the church in the secular city.

is a recognition and recovery of essentials. The believer, by his life, will have to restore or create a sense of dignity, holiness, and meaning to his faith. Mennonite Brethren have operated in an atmosphere of unreality in their orientation to the social and spiritual needs of the city, particularly the inner city. Failure to identify with the outsider has locked him out, not merely from the church buildings, but from the lives of the believers. "The key fiction here is our thinking that we can truly minister to those whom we have rejected, or left behind, by returning them as a remnant."²

Further, it must be recognized as mere sham to give witness to racial, ethnic and social problems until the church has become, within itself, more fully what it should be. Of immediate concern in its attempt to meet the need of the secular city is therefore its own corporate life. The secular city would receive the impact of the church more forcibly if the church did no more than simply integrate what most nearly belongs to itself, by involving, in practical terms, its entire body of believers. But here lies the basic problem. How can the church collectively, and through the individual, translate its life and theology into practical terms? Such integration means involvement, and involvement will almost certainly mean rethinking the regular church program.

PRACTICAL INVOLVEMENT FOR EFFECTIVE CONFRONTATION

1. The family unit. The church in the home will once again have to become a reality. The family, rather than the congregation, must be the basic unit of growth. It must become the focal point and develop clearly-defined ministries of love and concern in the neighborhood by belonging to and participating in its life, and witnessing to the hidden Christ.

2. The community fellowship groups. Since members from any one denomination do not make up the entire totality of believers in an urban community, all believers should form fellowship groups through a natural process, rather than through an official decision of a church body. "Each believer sees himself as a Christian, one indwelt by Christ with all the rights and privileges and responsibilities pertaining thereto . . . the believer accepts all the functions of the Priesthood . . . his is the responsibility of the ministry, not some paid cleric . . . In community church the common life of all believers, not their doctrine, constitution or denominational affiliation, becomes the basis of togetherness. A common purpose, a common life, a common experience becomes the true criteria for validity."³

3. Home prayer and Bible Study groups. Occasionally, it would seem advisable for believers of a local church to band together to meet in homes for prayer and Bible study instead of resorting to the church building.

4. The church in the house. The metropolitan centres are becoming huge apartment cities which are almost entirely free of the influence of the church. The urban church will have to encourage Christians to take up residence in these apartments for the purpose of "church in the house ministry." Apartment owners, with the vision for a man's need of Christ, might well provide for a spiritual ministry through facilities and personnel.

5. Inter-Church Evangelism. Denominationalism has created barriers to effective evangelism. Urban churches must band together to show the world that there is love, unity, a common cause and a mutual concern among believers.

All of the above approaches would be the Church in the community doing the work of evangelism. Curriculum for Bible study and instruction in community penetration, and for effective witness would be provided through the educational program of the church and would be a major concern of the pastor.

THE MINISTRY OF ALL BELIEVERS

Mennonite Brethren have quickly adjusted to the concept of a professional church in which one man is paid to preach the word, visit the sick, evangelize the community, and lead the believers in worship, fellowship, and organization. "The result of today's clergy-lay distinction has all but obliterated the functioning of gifts held by all believers."⁴

The task of evangelism that the secular city presents will not ever be tackled unless the ministry is given back to all believers in a shared ministry where the expressions "professional ministers" and "I'm just a layman" will be foreign to the corporate membership of Christ's body.

THE BELIEVER SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Richard Halverson says that "the church has succeeded in pulling Christian men and women out of the world, out of society, out of community and civic affairs."⁵ If the urban church is to be salt in the secular city, the Christian will have to get back to where the people are. Donald Buteyn put it well when he said, "Too often the work of the church gets in the way of the church's work."⁶

The urban community provides unlimited opportunities for positive and challenging involvement. Why not join the local P.T.A. and become a member of the executive, or the Red Cross, the auxiliary at hospitals, or the volunteer help needed to run the community centre? Usually such action conflicts with church meetings. Halverson says, "If P.T.A. met on Wednesday evening, it was understood that prayer meeting would be the choice of the dedicated Christian. It was unthinkable that a good member would let Rotary or Chamber of Commerce or a Union Meeting or a public school function interfere with his attendance at the church meeting."⁷

The Mennonite Brethren have, willingly and effectively, carried on a welfare program abroad and to people within its own ranks. Although this should not be neglected, the urban church should have an agency that would relate itself specifically to social and welfare problems. Frequently, the church itself could be the welfare agency directly, but in the present welfare state it could serve effectively as a referral ministry, giving guidance to the needy and assisting them to get the benefits that are available to meet their needs. This agency, made up of various professional people, could find ways to help the community solve their social problems.

CONCLUSION

The church's task is always and everywhere, as also in the secular city, simply to present and not to deny the Gospel. Not until the church studiously takes the first step of teaching and believing itself to be the body of Christ, Christ's life, the extension of God's life in and through time, will the church be able to bring to the city's situation the redemption that is in Christ. This includes bringing our theology to bear upon the current problems of the day. It demands that we confront the world with the presence of God, the truth of the Scriptures, the reality of Christian living, the power of a witnessing church, and the judgment of a patient and loving God who is bringing history to a climax.

FOOTNOTES

1. Myron Aug sburger, "Christan Mission in a Crisis Age", Commencement Address at Tabor College, May 23.
2. Nathan Wright, "An Approach to an Urban Minitry", *Christianity Today*, June 7, 1963, p. 28.
3. R. L. Boxburgh, *Pattern For Change*, Calgary, p. 5.
4. R. L. Boxburgh, *Who Needs Laymen?* Philadelphia, April, '68, p. 2.
5. R. Halverson, *Why in the World?* Word Books, Waco., 1966, p. 5.
6. Donald Buteyn, quoted in *M.B. Herald*, Jan. 24, 1969, p. 13.
7. R. Halverson, p. 5.

THE SECULAR CITY AND THE CHURCH COLLEGE

by Vern Ratzlaff *

Mr. Siemens presents a clearly-outlined approach to our situation. Some of his presuppositions could be examined more closely (e.g. that Biblical theology mirrors our urbanization by the transition from a **garden** in Genesis to a **city** in Revelation;

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this is an interpretative question which need not concern us here, especially since it is not pivotal to the article).

Basically, Mr. Siemens says something like this:

Premise 1 It is a God-given mandate to subdue the earth.

Premise 2 Subduing the earth has been accomplished by technology.

Premise 3 Technology is necessarily accompanied by urbanization.

Conclusion Obedience to the mandate has resulted in urbanization.

Again, we might question whether "subduing the earth" has, in fact, been accomplished by technology; whether the waste, the pollution, the despoiling by technology have, in fact, failed to "subdue the earth" as God intended. But again, we can grant that while our technology may not be the one best suited to "subduing the earth," it is still the only one which the painful millenia have produced and we must, as selfish and ego-centered men, function with what is given.

And what has been given, as a result of man's attempts at subduing the earth, (attempts marred by pride and avarice) is urbanization. To state that urbanization is the necessary concomitant of technology is to remind ourselves of a truism, although the relationship appears to be more environmental than logical.

It would also have been helpful if more specific information, or at least sources, would have been cited to support the claims for rapid Mennonite, particularly Mennonite Brethren, urbanization.

What are the implications of this article for, say, the church or more particularly, the college?

First, the college, training people for the institutional-work of the church (pastors) and encouraging people in their penetration of society ("laymen"), has for its students those who have been shaped by the city and who will in the overwhelming majority of cases continue there. Thus any college (and colleges have throughout history emphasized cosmopolitanism while usually having as major components of their student-bodies parochial elements) will be able to speak more immediately to students; the need for ideological translation may be lessened. There is, then, greater homogeneity in staff, student body and constituency, and this should make easier the articulation of aims, purposes and interests.

Second, the curriculum will have to reflect awareness of the new forces which shape the graduate's congregation. Urbanization, with its proliferation of vocations, presents challenges of moral-decision making opportunities at more levels from more perspectives than did a single vocational-frame-work. So while,

as I mentioned earlier, there is a sense in which urbanization creates one kind of homogeneity (i.e. a common "hanging-loose," an attitude or approach to life), it creates diverse situations demanding perception for correct analysis and solution. The college curriculum will have to see how it can prepare its graduate to work with his parishioners through a wide variety of issues: the social worker who counsels his client to separate from the spouse, the doctor who performs a "therapeutic" abortion, the political activist whose concept of a pluralistic society leads him into actions which appear to nay-say his convictions, the students whose questions threaten a going off of the "shallow end," the women who feel neighbourhood pressures a threat. And to all these, he is to speak meaningfully. Obviously, the college cannot give answers to each specific problem, awarding the graduate a manual properly indexed and cross-referenced. But curriculum will have to be viewed (and perhaps it is adequate already for the tasks imposed on it) from the perspective whether, in fact, it equips the graduate for the tasks he is to bend his energies to.

Third, for the church at large, the wide field of "choice" will have far-reaching implications. In a time when technology in the northern hemisphere continues to grant us benefits denied those in the southern, the concept of stewardship or accountability is raised on a sheer humanistic and pragmatic level, let alone from the theology of compassion Christ calls us to. Perhaps the church can recapture some of the "style of life" which freed the seventeenth century Dutch Mennists for responsible action to those in need; the life of simplicity, of separation, from overweening preoccupation with things, can be a part of urban practice as it has been for some historic groups.

Fourth, if anonymity provides an escape hatch for overt behaviour, this is because our Christian faith has been identified too closely with action and not with essence. Anonymity is welcomed by those who play roles to the extent that they forget the essence of the person slipping from one role to the other. The church must through trust, forgiveness, patience and discipline (as seen in its widest perspective) convince its members of the true nature of biblical ethical living—the inner-restraint which derives its content from the biblical interpretation of the congregation and its strength from the Holy Spirit.

Urbanization, then, presents possibilities for a renewed interest in a revitalized college program equipping people for the multiple ministries of the church gathered/scattered, and for a focussing on the essential nature of what Christianity means for individuals in the expression of their faith through life.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος.
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς
τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν
ὁ λόγος. οὗτος ἦν ἐν
ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν.
πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο
οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ οὐ γέγονεν.

THE PREACHING LAB

conducted by J. Regehr

Text: Luke 5:1-11

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them and were washing their nets.

And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught.

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

Preliminary Perusal

1. Most preachers get hung up on "Launch out into the deep." Perhaps we should look elsewhere in the text.

2. Peter is a business man, or something like that. He is in partnership in the fishing industry.

3. Jesus first requisitions Peter's means of making a living. He wants to use the boat for his own purposes, namely letting men hear from God. Then Jesus goes a big step further: He

asks Peter to leave his occupation in order to invest himself personally in Jesus' ministry.

4. This gives the story a new relevance for Christian business men, craftsmen, tradesmen, professional persons, etc., in our day.

5. There appears to be a development in Peter's relationship to Jesus:

- a) He has an interest in Jesus and his teaching.
- b) He is willing to let Jesus use his means of livelihood.
- c) He is willing to leave his occupation in the hands of others in order to move on and with Jesus to serve mankind.

Deliberate Digging

1. v. 3 - Jesus takes the initiative. He does not wait until Peter comes up with a solution to the problem. He pushes his way into Peter's means of livelihood.

2. v. 6 - God demonstrates his power when Peter acts in obedience. He cannot prove himself as long as he sits around debating the rationale of the command.

3. v. 8 - Peter senses that the miracle is a claim on him personally, not a way to easy living. Peter Siemens would have read the miracle as God's approval on his way of life. (And by the way, that is not a bad deal: Jesus uses the boat for two hours, and Peter gets 2 boatsful of fish!)

4. v. 10- - Jesus speaks to the deep concerns which his claim has awakened in Peter:

- a) Will my family have sustenance?
- b) Will this new life have value? (He was accustomed to measuring life in boatsful of fish.)
- c) What if people reject me now, and I achieve no success?

(Note: The miracle speaks to all these concerns. It causes fear, but it is designed to help Peter to "stop being afraid.")

5. v. 10 - Peter is to "catch men alive." Only one who has recognized his own sinfulness and can accept grace is capable of "catching" men without coercing, manipulating, or smothering them. The sinner can let men be what they are. The self-righteous man can not. (This may require careful explanation).

6. v. 11 - As a result of Jesus' marvelous deed in the context of Peter's occupation, Peter makes a decisive move, a radical turn.

Cautionary Considerations

1. We must not be compulsive about using everything which

we find in the exegetical digging. Be prepared to shelve some, but enjoy the morsels for yourself.

2. We must be careful that the sermon does not deteriorate into a lashing out at the Christian business man, or some other occupational stratum against which we harbor some negative feelings.

3. The sermon must not narrow its thrust to certain specialized segments of our congregation. The others may enjoy a harangue against a business man or a medical doctor. That enjoyment we dare not give them. God in Jesus Christ must confront all those who hear us.

Sermon Structure

A truth is sharpened by contrast. Let us set Simon Peter on one side, and Peter Siemens on the other (Try the German pronunciation of Simon, and add an "s" to Peter).

Let Peter Siemens represent all of us in our occupational pursuits.

Final Focusing

1. Jesus wants men to hear from God.
2. He claims our means of livelihood to make this possible.
3. In our occupational pursuits Jesus proves himself God, and thereby places his claim on us personally.
4. He may call us away from our occupation in order that we may catch men alive. (Age 45, 50 or even 60 is no guarantee that the call will not be issued).



BOOK REVIEWS

WHEN YOU PRAY by Harold Lindsell.

THE CREATIVE ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH TODAY, by John L. Castul (ed.).

New York: Association Press, 1968. Pp. 221. \$4.95.

This book of essays focuses attention where the action is. And the action is where the New Testament style fellowship is being recaptured in the form of interpersonal groups. The most dynamic part of the personal and church renewal movement is associated with small groups.

We, the children of the left wing of the Reformation, stand in the position that the church is the *fellowshipping*, forgiving, witnessing body of believers. This book is one of a growing number which describes how that spirit of *koinonia* is revitalizing individuals and churches in widely diverse denominations. The essays do not present sure-fire formulae or "ten easy steps to a revitalized church, or 'soul-winning'". Rather, as the blurb on the dust cover describes, "15 specialists draw upon the latest findings of the behavioral sciences and upon practical experience in and outside religious settings to show how interpersonal groups can be organized and conducted to enrich participants and strengthen the church."

"If the church is to be made new, there must be freedom for persons to explore and try out new approaches" (p. 38). Here are living examples of the rediscovery of healing for persons and new life for churches.

Allen R. Guenther

NOTHING BUT THE GOSPEL, by Peter Eldersveld.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966. Pp. 162.

Eldersveld was radio speaker from 1946-1965 on the Christian Reformed church's **Back to God Hour**. **Nothing but the Gospel** (also the title of his first radio address) is a collection of nineteen sermons delivered in that role, ranging from "The Purpose of the Pulpit" through "Christ or Christmas" to "The Value of Your Vote." (The sermons were selected from those preached since 1960.)

Since the sermons are left virtually unedited from the radio scripts, they lack the scope and development most works evidence which are intended for readers rather than listeners. But the sermons are readable and contain key ideas which are excellent

for discussion-group topics. E.g. he recognizes the principle of church/state separation involved in the Supreme Court decision banning prayers in public schools: the answer lies in Christians establishing their own private Christian schools, rather than supporting "a hodgepodge of sectarian beliefs" (p. 113). He has a concern for current labour problems and the totalitarian attitude of international unions ("The Right to Work"). Eldersveld points out that man is called to be a "brother," not a "keeper" of his fellow-man (p. 129). His strong Reformed theology becomes particularly obvious when he says in "For Children Only," "Perhaps you were baptized when you were a baby. Do you know why? Because your parents, if they were true Christians (underlining mine), believed that you belonged to God—that you belonged to Him then already" (p. 159). Also, the strong view of election and reprobation comes through repeatedly in the sermons "The Gift of Faith," "The Aim of Redemption" and "The Power of Grace." I am puzzled when he states "The fact that (God) gives faith to some and not to others may seem arbitrary, but it certainly is not unfair" (p. 33).

But for easily-read sermons on contemporary issues, **Nothing but the Gospel** is a good selection. Vern Ratzlaff

FOR THE PASTOR

Who Will Answer? by David Shank. Scottsdale: Herald, 1969, Pp. 95, \$1.65.

This is a series of five talks on spiritual renewal by a missionary to Belgium. The talks, dealing with crises of our time such as loneliness, guilt, eros (sexual lust) and conformity, present the biblical approach; excellent illustrations for sermons and talks are found in this treatment.

Hospital Pamphlet Series by John Drescher. Scottsdale: Herald, 1969. \$.33

Hospital visitation can extend beyond the few supportive minutes spent at bed-side; it can continue via the distribution of these sixteen-page pamphlets. There are eight different titles in the series, written especially for older people, for the new mother and for general convalescence. Each pamphlet contains five to six meditations, relating Christian faith to the needs of the reader.

Meditations for the Newly Married by John Drescher. Scottsdale: Herald, 1969. Pp. 141.

This is an excellent gift for the pastor or church worker to give the couple at whose vows he just officiated. Consisting of pointed two to three-page meditations, this book touches on practical issues for the couple in the context of scriptural searching. Vern Ratzlaff

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Coming in the April, 1970 Issue

The Theology of the Resurrection *Herb Swartz*
The Resurrection Life *David Ewert*
The Resurrection and Historical Fact *Vern Ratzlaff*