Church and Community

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CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE CITY

MODERN CITIES ARE A MAJOR CHALLENGE TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, just as the cities of the Roman Empire were a challenge to the Church in the first century. Today, the Church is called upon to muster all of its resources in penetrating the modern cities of the world. The great cities of Asia dominate the contemporary situation in their nations. It is within Tokyo, New Delhi, Bangkok, Djakarta, Rangoon, Manila that the future of Asia is being shaped; it is within these cities that the cultural foundations of the new Asia are being laid. And it is within these cities that the church faces the major challenge to its existence.

WHY IS THE CITY IMPORTANT TO THE CHURCH?

GREAT CONCENTRATIONS OF PEOPLE LIVE IN CITIES. Never before in history have such large numbers of people been packed together in cities. Rapid urban expansion has marked the history of the past half century. Urbanization has often been associated with the West—

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with Europe and the U.S.A.—but today urban growth is characteristic of all continents, and particularly of Asia. Within the past fifty years Asian cities have been growing at a very rapid rate; and they are becoming tremendous in size. In fifty years, the number of Asians residing in cities of more than 100,000 in population has multiplied five times, from 19.4 million in 1900 to 105.6 million in 1950. That urbanization is as much an Asian phenomenon as a western one, is seen when we look at the location of cities of over 100,000 inhabitants. In 1950, there were 289 cities of this size in Asia; 261 in Europe; and only 116 in North America. In 1961, Asia had 37 metropolitan areas, each with over one million inhabitants; but there were only 7 areas of this size in North America.

The Asian city is important not only because of size, but also because of the role it plays in the political and economic life of the nation. Government offices tend to be located in one administrative center; no doubt, this is a carryover from the country's previous colonial or imperial structure. The capital city tends to outstrip all other urban areas of the nation in population. The primate city is usually five to ten times the size of the next largest city; and it has first call upon the resources of the nation. In the Philippines, Manila draws to itself the best professional skills, the best technicians, the best managerial skills. In turn, Manila influences the rest of the country through the policies it makes, the styles it sets, the money it invests and the people it educates. Thus the urbanization of the Philippines reaches far beyond its borders into the remotest barrio.

The first challenge to the Church is to see the impact which the city is having upon the nation's life. It is for the church to understand the force urbanization has upon the people and to plan to minister to them within their new situation. As times goes on, more and more people will be-living under urban conditions. The Church will continue to see its members leave the barrios and go to the cities. Will it be prepared to minister to them in their new situations?

URBAN SOCIAL PROBLEMS

THE CITY IS A PLACE OF URGENT SOCIAL NEED. The rapid growth of Asian cities, has taken place through natural increase and through migration. A research team, jointly sponsored by the United Nations and the Philippine Homesite and Housing Corporation, estimates that 40,000 new persons move into Manila each year. The majority of these people are of the rural poor. They leave the typhoon areas of the

Visayas and the depressed areas of Luzon and go to Manila in search of a better life. Most of these new residents join their relatives or town-mates in slums and squatter areas. Because of this constant migration, the squatter population has grown from 23,000 in 1946 to 374,000 in 1963. If the tide of migration is not stemmed, or if adequate housing is not found for these people, the UN-PHHC report predicts that by 1973, 30 per cent of the population of greater Manila will be living under slum or squatter conditions. This would mean that 1,3000,000 persons out of 4,100,000 would be living under these conditions. Thus the city becomes it own major problem. It attracts people to itself faster than it can provide the facilities for the new residents.

The second challenge to the Church is to see its mission in relation to the social needs of the city. This means understanding its task as Christ's servant in the world. The church does not exist for its own life, it exists for the needs of the world. The rapid growth of the city will bring suffering and social disintegration to many people. Will the Church be faithful in seeing its life as a means of service to those caught within urban problems?

URBAN CULTURAL TENSION

TREMENDOUS CULTURAL TENSION EXISTS IN THE CITY. It is within the city that the values of traditional culture and the goals of a modern society came face to face. The Asian city is a complex mixture of rural patterns and new urban ways. It is an agglomeration of rural villages or barrios gathered together around a place of work or a municipal center. Rural people who move into the cities seek residence near persons from their same region. This fact, together with the easy access to Manila from the rural provinces of the South and the North, means that Manila maintains a rural flavor. In "rural" Manila, the lives of the people center in their families and in regional loyalties.

At the same time, there is another side to the life of Manila. The drive to become a modern city is apparent in the commercial, industrial and residential expansion of the city. The urbanization process is most noticeable in an area such as Makati. Here the Ayala Urban Development Corporation has planned the integration of industry, business, shopping, recreation, education, and residence within one community. A person living in this planned community operates according to the concerns of an urban society. The urban family organizes its life around its outside activities: father becomes the organization man; mother becomes the club woman; the children adopt school loyalties; friends are

chosen by business and social association, rather than by regional or family loyalty.

Within an urban society the family will bear the brunt of the initial change. The locus of loyalty is no longer the family and its extended obligations; loyalty tends to be focussed in the individual, his immediate family and his place within the organization. This tension is particularly apparent among the Filipinos who are new in urban society. One pastor told of a young couple whom he recently counselled before their marriage. Both were college graduates; the young man was an employee of a large Manila business firm. In order to save their earnings to carry out future plans, they decided to rent an apartment. But the parents of the young couple made it clear to them that their brothers and sisters were to live with them, while they were studying in Manila. The young couple faced the tension of deciding between sacrificing their savings for their own future in order to pay for their brothers' and sisters' education, or breaking their family ties, by refusing to meet this obligation. These are tensions which Filipinos will continue to face in a society that is in transition.

The third challenge to the Church in urban society is to provide a Christian dimension to this tension between the values of the traditional society and the goals of an urban society. Will it have the humility not to give easy answers? Will it have the courage to seek new patterns of Christian obedience for an urban society?

NEXT STEPS FOR CHURCHES

THERE IS NO ROAD BACK FOR THE CHURCH in this day of growing urbanization. Each year the societies of Asia move relentlessly toward the urban society. The Church turns away from the challenge of urban society, at its own peril. To face the challenge means to reassess the mission of the Church in the city and to take seriously the changes which are demanded of the church. What are these changes?

First, there is need for a united approach to the city. The resources of individual denominations are too limited for them to carry forward any serious encounter with urban culture. For the most part, our churches barely hold their own in the cities. While the *Iglesia ni Cristo* and the Pentecostals have built their congregational strength from among the new urban workers our ministry to this group has been non-existent. The total congregational life of all non-Roman Catholic Christians composes less than 3 percent of the city's total population. This is our situation in the face of a vast city, which becomes more complex

every year. There is an urgent need for joint action for mission in the city. Self-satisfaction can only result in debility of the Church in the city.

There is need for wider cooperation and discussion among denominational leaders concerning a total strategy for the Church in the city. During the past two years, local urban pastors from various denominations in Manila have been discussing issues facing urban churches in the Urban Pastors' Monday Morning Seminar. An average of 30 urban pastors, seminarians ,and missionaries from six denominations have participated in each of these discussions. It now becomes necessary for those on the upper administrative levels to plan cooperatively for their responsibility within the urban areas of the Philippines.

Second, there is need for an inter-church social ministry in the city. Our Churches should combine their resources in serving in areas of social need. The number of Manila churches of all denominations which carry on a social service program can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Yet the number of squatters and slum dwellers continues to grow each year. As an integral part of the city's life, our churches have responsibility for the development of urban community. The problems of Manila are the problems of the whole metropolitan region. Social disintegration in any part of the region affects the social and economic well-being of the whole region. In the same way, all of our churches are tied together in their ministry to persons in need in the city. The magnitude of urban social problems makes an inter-church social service ministry imperative.

One area in which an inter-church social service ministry could take immediate action is the squatter problem. The Government, through the PHHC, is involved in a program of squatter resettlement. The program is two-fold: first, the settlement of squatters in rural communities, such as Sapang Palay; and second, resettlement of squatters and slum dwellers within the city in low-rent, multi-story tenements. The United Church is involved in the squatter resettlement in Sapang Palay. Through the action of the Urban Strategy Committee in January 1964, Manila churches have participated in organizing the Inter-Church Community Center in Sapang Palay. Program plans include a medical clinic, a children's program, a youth program, a community development project, and a worship center. The task of establishing a community program in Sapang Palay is greater than can be met by the resources of one denomination. It is hoped that an inter-church program of assistance to squatters who are resettled in rural areas can be set up through the National Council

of Churches. In like manner, an inter-church ministry to the new multi-storied tenements has been proposed to the Church World Service Committee of the National Council of Churches.

Third, there is need for the churches to take seriously the conflict between traditional culture and the modern society. Urban churches are caught in the midst of cultural tension. Their members bear the brunt of the transition from the close interpersonal relationships of traditional culture to the impersonal relationship of a modern city. The church has a primary responsibility for helping its people live creatively in this time of change. The church has the opportunity of drawing from this tension a deeper understanding of the claims of the Christian faith upon the individual. In many ways traditional society has restricted the development of the individual. It has compelled the members of a family to respond to demands of other family members, whether or not these demands were justified. In this time of change, when the authoritarian structure of the traditional society is being challenged by urban society, the Church needs to help interpret the meaning of the freedom and responsibility of the Christian in society. This is not to say that the Church will decide either for the traditional or for the modern way. It is to say that our urban churches can provide ground for a more fruitful encounter with the challenge of urban society as they see modern life in the light of the gospel within the fellowship of the Church.

CONCLUSION

CHRISTIAN FAITH HAS FACED THE CITY BEFORE. The resurrected Lord sent his disciples out from Jerusalem to the cities in the uttermost parts of the world. Paul spread the gospel from city to city through the Roman Empire: Ephesus, Corinth, Thesalonica, Philippi, Rome, heard the redeeming word. The cities of the Holy Roman Empire held back the Muslim onslaught of the Moors from the west and the Turks from the east. The Christian culture of the cities of Europe was spread by missionary journeys, commercial ventures, and military expeditions to the cities of Asia. Today when the furthermost frontiers have been reached and the missionary penetration of Christianity seems to have spent itself, the modern city calls the Christian faith to the same resolution, the same zeal, the same sacrifice with which its apostles, prophets and missionaries faced the distant lands and unknown frontiers of the past.