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The Church in Community Organization

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

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SOME PREFATORY OBSERVATIONS

A modern city, H. G. Wells once remarked, looks like "something that burst an intolerable envelope and splashed."¹ The unsightliness of our urban jungles has grown even worse since, and the process of disintegration runs on apace. The Bureau of the Census estimates that some 135 million Americans now live in metropolitan areas. By the year 2000, it predicts, 80 percent of our 330,000,000 citizens will be a part of our urbanized communities, which are expanding at the rate of 3,000 acres per day. All this goes on without benefit of comprehensive planning in terms of moral and spiritual values.

In a sense, living in cities is not a new experience for men. Urban life seems to have made its appearance some 5,500 years ago; but cities then were small, and they were surrounded by sizable rural areas. By

¹ Quoted by Paul H. A. Noren in "City in Crisis," *The Pulpit*, XXXVI (April 1965), 15.

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their very size the urban agglomerations of our day have changed the whole quality of life. Large metropolitan areas have become "muscle bound by their own rituals" and, in many instances, have degenerated into chaotic mazes of social and antisocial enterprises, where those very factors of life which might be referred to as human are not only being eroded but also totally perverted. While cities of the past were usually able to civilize the people who moved there, the fragmentation and depersonalization of life that have taken place in urban centers which are already conglomerations of social structures have rendered this task impossible. A huge metropolis like New York, some one recently observed, cannot be governed, it can only be administered. Contemporary metroplexes cannot carry out the refining role that cities have played in past centuries.

The decay of our cities represents one of the two major failures in our recent past as a nation. The other one is our neglect in making free men out of the great mass of the descendants of emancipated slaves. These two problems have joined forces to create a situation that tends to defy solution. For the color of one segment of the population is like the isotope in the blood stream of our society; and by various devices of segregation we have turned the

very centers of our largest metropolitan centers into "the other America."²

THE OPTION OF FLIGHT

Instead of serving as the architect of a new order of things, the church has permitted herself to become victimized by forces of oppression and disorder. All too often, in John Harmon's telling phrase, "fear has led the city church into the safe function of an ambulance for the establishment."³ In many instances our Lutheran churches did not even stay around long enough to hear of the illness; they simply fled to what seemed to be the safer environs of the suburbs.

Flight is one option that is always open to churches. It would be tempting to conclude that, given the chaotic conditions prevailing in many of our modern American cities, Christians ought to withdraw from the contest and, like the monks who fled to Ireland when pagan invaders laid waste vast areas of Britain, concentrate on preserving the institutional strength of the church behind walls high enough to keep out those germs of disruption which have infected the very vitals of our urban culture. Such a course of action, however, would be unrealistic and can only be called irresponsible. The church was not created to hide out from

² This phrase is patterned after the title of Michael Harrington's significant book, *The Other America* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963). For the size of the problem and a description of various attacks on urban evils, see John R. Fry, ed., *The Church and Community Organization*, papers for The Consultation of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (December 1964).

³ John J. Harmon, "The Church and the City," *New City*, III (Oct. 15, 1964), 18.

the problems of life. Furthermore, in the immortal words of Li'l Abner, "No man is an Ireland!"

We have, therefore, chosen to call our presentation, "The Church in Community Organization." For reasons that will be spelled out later, we are proceeding on the conviction that churches must be involved in the vital contest of creating some kind of new order out of the chaos that threatens the fabric of our society at its very center. To provide an intelligible sequence for our discussion it will be helpful to provide a general description of the concept of community organization before moving on to a somewhat detailed statement of the church's role and resources in reshaping the life of our urban centers.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS

Before taking up the subject of the church's place in community organization it will be useful to set forth the assumptions which lie at the base of our presentation. We are presupposing that—

1. The problems created by the urbanization of society do in fact present a creative opportunity for the church to mobilize her resources for the task of humanizing the centers of our life as a nation;
2. This conference has been called to deal with the matter of a *Lutheran* approach to the needs of community organization;
3. This conference is interested in determining what *Lutheran* theology may be able to contribute toward a fuller orientation to the issues and needs of our new urban frontier.

These basic considerations are spelled out here to indicate that we propose to

speak from within the theology and traditions of the Lutheran Church. What we say proceeds from the firm conviction that Lutheran theology alone has the resources to keep the approach to community organization from turning into the temptation to attempt the creation of neighborhood theocracies. Furthermore, our theology alone contains the principles that make an open society possible. These are large claims, to be sure; but we hope to support these convictions by the present discussion of "The Church in Community Organization."

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION?

What is meant by the term community organization? The phrase is used to designate various methods and programs which attempt to create maximum opportunities so that the largest possible number of people in our cities can develop their individual capabilities in such a way as to establish an open society, where life is enriched by respect for a hierarchy of values in which human needs rate highest. The aim of community organization, in short, is to prevent our urbanized culture from becoming a wasteland. Howell S. Foster describes community organization as a "process by which a community identifies its needs, seeks to develop the confidence and resources to deal with them, and, in the action taken, develops collaborative and co-operative attitudes and practices in the community."⁴ As early as 1961 President John F. Kennedy provided a major impulse for this movement when he recommended to Congress "the estab-

lishment of an effective and comprehensive planning process in each metropolitan area embracing all major activities, both public and private, which shape the community."⁵

Government encouragement and interest is, however, only one of many strands woven into the thread of community organization. Others are the civil rights movement, the social work profession, organized labor and religion.⁶ In essence, community organization is a political undertaking that proposes to gain a voice for the less fortunate in those processes by which decisions are reached that affect society or, at least, metropolitan centers as a whole. It proceeds on the assumption that, if America is to become politically what it already is economically and intellectually, there must be political institutions and structures through which community resources can be mobilized and directed in the interest of creating and maintaining a responsible society.

It is obvious from the foregoing statements on community organization that its proponents operate with the assumption that human beings and the communities they inhabit have the capacity to deal with their problems in such a way as to shape their common life along constructive lines. Its advocates, moreover, believe that changes produced by the participation of the individuals involved in the problem have a significance which an imposed pattern does not have. That is why the individual citizens should have the opportunity to share in the basic decision-making pro-

⁴ Howell S. Foster, "Current Approaches in Community Organization" (a paper submitted as part of an M. A. thesis at Roosevelt University, Chicago, Ill., 1964), p. 2 (mimeo).

⁵ John F. Kennedy in *Journal of Housing* (1963), 25.

⁶ Lyle A. Schaller, *Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation* (mimeo), pp. 32 f.

cesses which determine the direction of life in a community. It is also assumed that men can be taught the necessary techniques to solve the problems of their respective communities.

From a Biblical point of view this is a rather optimistic evaluation of man's capacities. We might note this in passing without further comment. For the moment it is enough to record the basic assumptions of community organization and to proceed toward a description of the three types of approaches used in this field of endeavor as they are discussed by Foster.⁷ There they are given in terms of major objectives and are called respectively the general-content, the specific-content, and the process approach.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

The first of these, the general-content approach, is seen in those communities where a group, association, or council—such as the Community Welfare Council—sets out to achieve the coordinated development of existing and potential welfare services. The second type is found where an agency or association becomes concerned about some needed reform and develops a program to achieve its specific goals. To this category belong the activities of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The process approach sets out to develop the means whereby various groups and individuals in a given community are involved, through their representatives, in identifying and taking action with respect to their own problems. While this approach still includes some of the emphases of social work, it is gradually shifting to methods of planning, as ACTION-Hous-

ing's neighborhood extension approach in Pittsburgh illustrates.

All types of community organization propose to create strong neighborhoods. Some of the more notable attempts of this kind have been described by James V. Cunningham in the May 15, 1965, issue of *New City*.⁸ These are large-scale, sophisticated efforts and are mentioned here mostly to provide some inkling as to what is going on today. Cunningham lists the following four: (1) the neighborhood-conservation approach of New York City; (2) the social-invention approach of new city-wide urban organizations supported by the Ford Foundation; (3) the self-determination approach of the IAF, with its principal test area in Chicago; and (4) the neighborhood urban-extension approach of ACTION-Housing in Pittsburgh.

In both the neighborhood-conservation and social-invention approaches, the focus is on urban resources. Their power base is money and government control. The neighborhood-conservation approach comes directly out of city hall, while the social-invention method derives its strength from a private, nonprofit civic organization closely allied to city hall. The self-determination and neighborhood urban-extension programs put their emphasis on citizens becoming alert, organized, and able themselves to locate and to draw on the resources needed to build their neighborhoods. The former draws on church denominations, labor unions, and government contracts; the latter receives support

⁷ Foster, pp. 7—9.

⁸ James V. Cunningham, "New Approaches to Creating Strong Neighborhoods," *New City*, III (May 15, 1965), 5.

from philanthropic foundations, corporations, and government contracts.

One factor which, more than anything else, has affected the whole field of community organization in the recent past is the huge investment of funds made by the federal government in this area, especially under Title II of the Economic Opportunities Act of 1964. The very size of these allocations and the conditions under which they are made available make it unlikely that any kinds of community organization will survive except such as are designed to create a process by which the community itself becomes involved in the task of identifying its own problems and proceeding to solve them. Federal legislation is drawn up to accomplish just this kind of neighborhood responsibility, largely because the poverty community that has grown up in America is centered not in special cases but in large groups such as the Negroes and in large areas such as Appalachia. Moreover, the results of specific-content approaches, such as those of the IAF, are much too ephemeral to be significant except for purposes of calling attention to specific, and sometimes secondary, issues. General-content programs tend to level off and become part of the forces determined to maintain the status quo and so defeat themselves in time. When we therefore discuss the church in community organization, we have in mind the dynamic and continuing confrontation with the need for that kind of planned social change which evolves from the management and direction of community forces. These forces operate within the context of rational decision-making and in the interest of creating and maintaining a social order where human resources are valued most highly.

In this kind of context we must keep in mind the massive program being organized by The Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty, of which Walter Reuther is the national chairman and Richard Boone the executive director. Nothing so challenging to "the establishments" has ever been undertaken in our country. This crusade envisions training centers for thousands of people in our big cities. To these centers will come men and women out of the Peace Corps, or from the militant student bodies, and from unions. After some months in these training centers, men and women will go out to intern in some program or operation in the field. Then they come back to the training center for the final wrap-up sessions.

We mention this as an example of vision and initiative. Here is a program not just for tomorrow but for 15 years of tomorrows, involving the organization of some 35 millions of our fellow citizens. This is the kind of bold planning and execution which churches would do well to emulate.

At this point, then, we come to the question of the church's role in community organization. As Lutherans we shall need to guard against giving gospel answers to law questions as well as the reverse error of formulating law solutions to gospel issues.⁹ Moreover, we dare not lose sight of our theology of the cross. Nor can we afford to overlook the fact that it is the earthly, institutional church which God has chosen for the proclamation of His Word and the administration of

⁹ See the very concise and illuminating article by George W. Forell, "Lutherans in the Ecumenical Movement," *The Lutheran World*, XII (1965), 257-263.

the sacraments.¹⁰ These three matters constitute the very heart of our Lutheran heritage and help to furnish a base from which we can properly determine the place of the church in community organization.

NOT ONLY IMPROVEMENT BUT REDEMPTION

Hendrick Kraemer makes the pertinent observation that "the task of the church of the present hour is to formulate a new doctrine of man and a theology of common life."¹¹ We shall here be engaged in attempting the less ambitious project of examining one of the facets of our common life as we confront it in today's urbanized culture. The major thesis of our study will be that the church exists to help not only in improving the social order but in redeeming it. The goal which we have set for ourselves is that of attempting an answer to the question, "What does it mean for the church to have been given the task of helping to redeem society?"

Without a doubt the church is a divine society; yet it is at the same time a society immersed in history and must always live in action and reaction with the society which surrounds it. The church comprises the people of God. But how does such a community relate to what we call the secular forces in the megalopolitan centers of our decade? That is the primary question we propose to answer.

There are several ways in which one might come to grips with the issue. The most effective way of taking on the sub-

ject is to work at it in terms of the Biblical understanding of the conflict raging between the realm of darkness and the kingdom of God. Such an approach will help us to reckon with that one major factor in the problem which is often overlooked in the scanty theological materials available on the subject of community development and organization; namely, the dimension of the demonic.

We shall help ourselves a great deal in the task of focusing on the church's role in community organization if we remind ourselves that the forces of anarchy and confusion, of injustice and tyranny, always lie just below the surface of any social order. They are ready at any moment to break through and engage in violence and destruction. The riots in the Watts area of Los Angeles served to write this lesson very clearly into the records of our national experience.

Someone who was an eyewitness of these riots was moved to observe, "But this is crazy!" It is not "crazy" at all. It is the kind of thing one might expect where a measure of might is still available to the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Such an outbreak of disorder, in reaction to years of poverty and oppression, is one of the evidences we have of the rift that runs through the universe, through society, through history, and through our own hearts.¹² Such violence and the raw exploitation that helped prepare the conditions for such an outbreak often turn out to be an incarnation not only of man's alienation from his Creator but also of his rebellion against his Lord.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hendrick Kraemer, *The Bible and Social Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965 [Facet Books]), p. 15.

¹² See John Mackay, *God's Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 29-36.

A GOD OF ORDER AND JUSTICE

We begin, therefore, by recalling that the world, as God once created it, was a place of order. Out of chaos the Lord determined to construct a universe that would glorify Him as the God of order and justice. But, by wanting to be like God, man reintroduced the "reign of chaos and old night." For, as St. Paul reminds us, all of creation was taken up into man's revolt so that, to this day and everywhere, "whirl is king." Right along the front of community disintegration, our generation is face to face with these very powers of primordial confusion, let loose among men to destroy them by cruel and capricious social structures. That is one of the chief reasons why the church must be involved in efforts to push back those forces of disorder and injustice which are determined to reduce our urban centers to the level of wastelands.

God is the God of order and justice. Between the Fall and the Parousia, He has chosen to restrain the powers of darkness by certain orders of preservation—the institutions of government, of marriage, and of the economic practices developed by a given society.

Government is invested with power to restrain the forces of evil and to pursue the ends of justice and freedom.¹³ It belongs to God's kingdom of the left hand. Its structures and forms differ from age to age; but until the end of history its chief function remains that of establishing and maintaining what the Lutheran Confessions call "civic righteousness." In our

¹³ See the detailed discussion in Helmut Thielicke, "Ethik des Politischen," in his *Theologische Ethik*, II, 2 (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958).

kind of society such righteousness is compounded of that political climate, of those structures, methods, and attitudes that make freedom possible. It is a quality of life which is determined to preserve a wholesome balance between order, freedom, and justice.

The institution of matrimony exists both to transmit the gift of life from one generation to the next and to provide an intimate laboratory for practicing the art of living with other persons in understanding and love. Economic practices are devised by men in order to create opportunities for work, gain, service, and support.

Just how the church relates to the orders of political and economic structures is a subject to come up for discussion at a later point. In that context we shall also consider the fourth instrument of order, the church's work as an institution. Just now we must move on to note that our Lord intended something more than the mere control and limitation of the powers of chaos. He undertook nothing less than the task of subjecting the forces of anarchy and oppression. To this aspect of His rule we apply the term redemption and call it the kingdom of His right hand.

THE KINGDOM OF THE RIGHT HAND

The sequence of events by which God planned the redemption of the world, after man's "first disobedience . . . brought death into the world and all our woe," began, in its strict sense, with the creation of Israel. Here is where the gradient of the parabola of our redemption dipped deeply into the circle of our history. For at that moment God raised up among the nations of the world a community designed to be the

place of His presence among men. Very significantly it is at this juncture that the sacred records begin to use the word "kingdom" to describe God's liberating actions among men. (Ex. 19:6)

The selection and creation of Israel was certainly an act of God's grace. It was an event by which God manifested Himself as One who cannot look above Himself, since there is none greater than He; or next to Himself, because there is none like Him. The only place He can and did look, as Luther observed,¹⁴ is below. To the lowest among the peoples of the earth God looked to choose them as His own precious possession.

We must recall that it was a nation which God chose as the instrument of His redemptive intent. His people did not comprise a mere aggregation of individuals. All the interpersonal relationships within Israel, and all her social and political structures, fell within the scope of God's gracious will.

It was in Israel that God chose to dwell. The whole second half of the Book of Exodus is devoted to a description of the tabernacle as the place of His presence. While God's rule in power over the whole world continued without interruption, Israel was to know that, as far as she was concerned, God dwelt in the institutions of her worship. Among this people God's will was to be done in terms of judgment, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and suffering. Here there emerged for the first time in history the most paradoxical of all figures: the suffering Servant, who would achieve wholeness and victory by being despised

¹⁴ In Luther's preface to the Magnificat. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 21 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 299—300.

and rejected of men. He was called to the task of being exposed to evil and of absorbing it in order to overcome it. Never again was God's people to be able to escape the long reach of this figure, particularly as it later became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

For centuries the center of God's acts in grace and judgment remained in Israel, exposed as she was to all the vicissitudes of history. From this people God proposed to move out to other nations that they, too, might know Him and live. Later Jews took this hint as justification enough to proselytize among the nations for the purpose of winning adherents to the cultic practices prescribed in the traditions of the elders. They were sure that God's reign centered above the stone of the foundation in their holy of holies on Mount Zion. To this place the nations of the earth must come and would come to worship the God of Israel.

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

But did God really expect the Gentiles to become Jews in order that they might share in the blessings of His rule? Was a system of external sacrifices as a way of being admitted and readmitted to God's commonwealth really adequate to deal with the radical nature of transgression and trespass? These two questions troubled the prophets in their day; and these issues became particularly acute after the atoning sacrifice on Calvary and the creation of the church as the community of forgiveness. The church's answer to both questions was a resounding No! In so saying, she became the successor to Israel.

The pattern of God's work, however, did not change. Like Israel, the church came into being by God's grace. As soon

as our Lord began His public ministry, He began to gather around Him the faithful remnant to have it serve as the nucleus of a new and universal rule of grace. In Jesus the Word became incarnate and "tabernacled" among us (John 1:14), but not as a religious genius, holding Himself aloof from men and their problems. He chose rather to become one of us. He asked to be baptized into His mission of involvement and identification with us. Lest this work come to an end, He arranged to have God's presence established among men wherever two or three would thenceforth gather in His name. (Matt. 18:20)

His food, Jesus said, was to do His Father's will. He Himself had come to be the true Israel, to be obedient where the old Israel had rebelled. He chose His followers to carry on after Him as the new Israel, a people living in obedience under the terms of a covenant sealed with blood from the cross. From then on they were to constitute the sanctuary of the living God. (2 Cor. 6:16b)

Every demon under heaven saw the issue for what it was, a contest for the control of the world. Every word and every act of Jesus they understood to be an attack by the Holy One of God on all of their own dark designs. Every miracle they looked upon as another victory for the kingdom of God. They gathered their own forces at the white-hot center of time, and in wave after wave they assaulted the Lord of all creation and the source of all redemption.

The early morning hours of history's long and fateful day had been taken up with the call of Abraham and the choice of Israel. The time of Joel's grasshopper plague, of the return from captivity, and

the rebuilding of the temple represented the late morning hours. The day of the Lord had its noon in Christ's advent into the world, there to be impelled relentlessly toward the Cross and the Resurrection. That day's afternoon was completed when the Spirit of Pentecost came rushing in with the sound of a mighty wind to prepare the church for her running contest with the kingdom of darkness for as long as history would be permitted to run its course.

The new Israel, sanctified on the 50th day, has never ceased confronting the assaults of these same demonic forces during every moment of her experience as she moves forward to undo the works of darkness. At some points the church faced them in especially strong concentration. Such moments called for particularly vigorous counterattacks; and the Spirit was with her to provide strength and endurance to wrestle with complex social and cultural issues. There was a degree of ambivalence in the work of the church, for her people still belonged also to the old aeon. Yet her life in the new aeon brought a new hope into the lives of men.

Since the economy of the Roman Empire depended heavily on slave labor, the church with her "good news" of freedom had to face this problem early in her history. Among the Jews slavery was forbidden on the Biblical grounds that Israel had once been set free from the house of bondage in Egypt. But the Roman Empire was not run on such principles. Slavery prevailed as a means of providing income and leisure for Roman citizens.

Those were crude and cruel days. In the first century B. C., Spartacus had advocated rebellion, but his movement had ended in disaster. The church, by way of contrast,

taught a quality of life referred to in the English texts of the Bible as "subjection," an act of faith by which the needs of others, including masters, were rated higher than the desires and inclinations of the individual himself. Moreover, Christian masters were reminded that they, too, had a Lord, to whom they must give account. The Lord's Table was open to master and slave alike. All distinctions of social caste were eliminated in filling church offices. Wherever there was unjust suffering, men were reminded of their Lord's example. Concerning Him they were taught that "when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but He trusted to Him who judges rightly." (1 Peter 2:23)

A LEAVEN IN SOCIETY

In this way a leaven was released in a declining social order. In time it effected at least a partial restructuring of the value-system of both public and private life in the empire. As things were being made anew, an unknown Christian author made bold to say: "What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. . . . Christians are kept in the world as in a prison, but themselves hold the world together."¹⁵

As early as A. D. 251 the church at Rome had some 1,500 widows plus other distressed persons on her charity rolls. Antioch supported 3,000 persons and Constantinople 7,000 at the close of the following century.¹⁶ After the Council of Nicea, Constantine had brought in the bishops of the church to help draw up the kind

of legislation that would reflect Christian concerns. As a result, the manumission of slaves had become easier; prison conditions had been improved; breaking up families when estates were disposed of had been forbidden. In short, the demonic powers behind the structures of Roman injustice and inhumanity were driven back. They did not fully surrender, of course. They moved to other fronts to continue the struggle as the church moved out from the Roman Empire proper to contend with the satans of raw paganism.

In both the Christianization of Roman culture and the conquest of Europe by the Christian faith we have striking examples of what Hendrikus Berkhof in an arresting phrase has called the Christian disintegration of society. Commenting on the words of Paul, "Through [Christ God chose] to reconcile all things unto Him, having made peace through the blood of His cross—through Him, whether it be things on earth or whether it be the things in heaven" (Col. 1:20), Berkhof observes:

The ineffable reality behind these words is best illustrated when we give attention to what happens when the mission (of the church) breaks into a pre-Christian or extra-Christian culture. A complete disintegration of social life, which previously was ruled by certain Powers, takes place. Life is stirred up, desacralized, 'de-deified,' in that the new Lord makes His entry . . . The enemies of the Christian mission have a sharp nose for such things . . . When Christ's rule has come on the scene, there is no 'return' . . . The desacralizing of the world cannot be undone. The Powers once dethroned cannot return as if nothing had happened.¹⁷

¹⁵ "The Address to Diognetus," 5, trans. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), pp. 278—279.

¹⁶ S. L. Greenslade, *The Church and the Social Order* (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 22.

¹⁷ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 47—50.

To convince oneself of the transforming power of the Christian religion it is only necessary to contrast Gregory of Tours' description of Gaul under the Merovingians with his statement on conditions in the empire of Charlemagne. Here is a change that cannot be explained by technological advance. Christianity did not convert the barbarians and transform their lives as a mere vehicle of ancient culture but as the informing spirit of a new civilization to prepare for the time when men would move to a new part of the world, to our hemisphere, another region which needed to be brought under the sway of an authority greater than that of "powers and principalities."

Men like Timothy Dwight saw the Christianization of America as a recapitulation of Israel's conquest of Canaan.¹⁸ We may well smile at such naive theological exuberance. However, when we reflect on the beginnings of our nation, we must concede that something mysterious was at work here, a force that can be subsumed only under the category of divine blessing.

We properly deplore the violence connected with the white man's conquest of the Indians. Yet there was established here a civilization that was strongly infused with thoughts of "righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come." In fact, when Baron Alexis de Tocqueville wrote his classic, *American Democracy*,¹⁹ he came to the conclusion that the source

of this nation's strength was to be found in the fact that her pulpits flamed with righteousness.

While de Tocqueville's analysis could hardly be called authoritative, there can be little doubt of the fact that, in the course of their history, voices in the churches of America were raised against the powers of economic oppression, industrial exploitation, and racial segregation. Such men saw that certain demonic forces had chosen to lodge in these social malpractices. In each instance their concern for justice and freedom contributed to the elimination of some of these abuses and to the modification of most of the rest. But the front in the conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the realm of light keeps moving. So frequently does this happen that Harvey Cox has suggested we ought to call this phenomenon "the floating crap game."²⁰

TECHNOPOLIS: THE NEW FRONT

Just now the main action is to be found in Technopolis. Bishop Paul Moore has pointedly suggested that "since the city is the symbol of redeemed humanity and the heavenly Jerusalem, the unredeemed city is more demonic than any other social grouping, because it is perverted good."²¹ In fact, city life is at times so distorted that, when a group of clergymen came to Chicago some years ago to have a look at the fruits of city rebuilding, they were moved to ask: "Could Job have been thinking of Chicago when he wrote: 'Here are men that alter their neighbor's landmark, . . . shoulder the poor aside, conspire to op-

¹⁸ In Booth Tarkington, *The Conquest of Canaan* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1935), which was an attempt to provide for the New World an epic such as the *Iliad* was for Greece.

¹⁹ See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 304-307.

²⁰ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 125.

²¹ Paul Moore, *The Church Reclaims the City* (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 38.

press the friendless. . . . A cry goes up from the city streets, where wounded men lie groaning . . ."²²

Today only 6.8 percent of our population lives on farms, as compared with the 60 percent to 80 percent that once resided there. Since the Lutheran Church in our nation often concentrated on these areas rather than on the large cities, we were caught almost totally unprepared for the major shift in population that has taken place within recent decades. Now suddenly we are face to face with the host of unresolved problems created by urbanization. Among these we must include the demonic structures that threaten to reduce our cities to a vast jungle. Here is the front in the present contest. Here you will find the devils of depersonalization, anonymity, irresponsibility, oppression, exploitation, brutality, transiency, frustration, and delinquency—just to name a few of the minions of Beelzebub. Into this cauldron advocates of community organization propose to move.

Now if we return to the question of the role of the church in attempts to develop within Technopolis a way of life that is orderly and open to the future, we must conclude that the church really has no option but to engage the enemy. The other alternative of standing by while secularism, nihilism, and totalitarianism move in to dehumanize the very centers of our national life, would doom the church to complete meaninglessness. It is folly, in such a context, to speak of the restoration of things to what they were. Our cities cannot return. The full tide of history is rushing headlong the other way.

²² Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 5.

With Harvey Cox we should distinguish between secularization and secularism.²³ The process of secularization may have the effect of "defatalizing" history, thus producing the desirable practices of pluralism and tolerance, yet a totally secularized order of life has no center. While it may create a certain tolerable equilibrium, this balance is extremely unstable. The scales can quickly tip toward secularism, which is, for all practical purposes, a new religion, comprising a faith of a single dimension that tends to close our universe by destroying an awareness of and interest in what is transcendental. When this happens, life may even be reduced to the level of nihilism, whose basis is a disbelief in any and all powers and whose only product can be a spiritual desert of unending void. The only hope remaining at such a juncture is the desire to keep a tolerable equilibrium from being upset lest man's breathing space break down and he suffer what the Scriptures refer to as leanness of the soul. (Ps. 106:15)

At first blush, nihilism may look heroic in its posture of defiance. It may, in fact, enable men to hold out for a long time. But there lurks in man a hankering after a greater purposefulness, after faith in some inspiring and unifying idea. The success of communism bears eloquent testimony to this need of a sense of direction and a longing for something besides loneliness. Where other powers have been expelled, totalitarianism with its demons of rigid and imposed structures moves in to fill the vacuum. And the last state of such a man is worse than the first. (Luke 11:26)

There is only one way out of this narrowing of life, and that is the "Christiani-

²³ Cox, pp. 20 f.

zation of the powers," as Berkhof has chosen to call it.²⁴ This implies the rejection of totalitarian ideologies and the limiting of the state and the economic order to being the means of staving off chaos. Their function, then, is seen as the ordering of human relations in such a way that social and technological developments will tend to serve rather than to exploit men. In this way alone can our civilization continue to provide what the prophet Jeremiah calls a "future and a hope." (29:11)

THE CHURCH'S WEAPONS

How does the church play its role in this kind of undertaking? Our reply must consist of an attempt to describe the weapons which the church has at her disposal. This we propose to do as we consider the church from two points of view. On the one hand, we must reckon with her as an institution, as an association before the law, to use the legal terminology of our day. On the other, we must think of her as a redemptive and redeeming community. In other words, we shall be engaged in an effort to consider the church's role in community organization from the point of view created by the familiar Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel.

We begin our consideration of the church as an institution by taking issue with the current cliché that the church ought to get over being an institution and return to the cell operation of her earliest years. Such a radical assertion is a gross oversimplification of a complex issue, which often overlooks the fact that in her earliest years the church owed much to the *synagog* as an institution. It is very

doubtful that Saint Paul could have moved out into the cities of the Roman Empire as effectively as he did if there had not been local *synagogs* to provide bases of operation. Whatever "cell life" there may have been in the church of those days, it must have found much of its strength in the existence and previous experience of the *synagog*. The pattern for that kind of religious life had already been worked out in the Jewish dispersion and was by no means as loosely organized as the advocates of the cell operation would like to have us believe.

Like the *synagog*, the church is in the world, although she is not part of it. This means that she has to be an institution of some kind as she goes about the business of making plans for the future in terms of dealing with the other institutions that are part of any culture. The church cannot possibly become formless and disincarnate. She would be untrue to her mission if she did. We may need to correct some aspects of her institutionalism, but being an institution is an aspect of her existence.

AN INSTITUTION AMONG INSTITUTIONS

To support the argument for an institutionless approach to church life, it is said that church life in our cities has no future unless it follows some such pattern of activity as the one established, for example, by the people who comprise the Community of Christ in Washington, D. C. This project, sponsored by The American Lutheran Church and led by the Rev. John Schramm, worships in homes and intends to stay in homes or rented places instead of saddling itself with a building. The project is described as one "small step to find a faithful structure that relates to an

²⁴ Berkhof, pp. 47—50.

urban area."²⁵ Here is a creative approach to developing new methods and structures. But we must note that the institution of The American Lutheran Church stands behind this venture. In a day of expanding institutions it may be sheer nonsense to talk about getting rid of the church as an institution. In point of fact, a strong case can be made for strengthening church organizations by heavier investments in downtown office space, in staff personnel at metropolitan centers, and in terms of increased help for the individual congregation.

The reference to downtown office space does not intend to suggest that denominations should compete with each other in purchasing such properties. On the contrary, the future will compel denominations to share their facilities and jointly to carry the costs for such institutional operations. Such a development will derive its impetus not only from a growing appreciation of the ecumenical character of the church but also, and perhaps especially, from the economic facts of life, which render it almost impossible for most denominations to make an investment large enough to be meaningful.

SYMBOL OF INTRUSION

At any rate, it is as an institution that a church plans for the future on the basis of past experience. It is as an established organization that a church projects her needs in terms of professional personnel, adequate facilities, effective planning, and useful supplies. To deny these institutional facts of life is to make the mistake of offering a Gospel answer to a Law issue.

²⁵ See Arthur Simon, *Inner City*, II (September 1965), 1.

For as an institution the church belongs under the Fourth Commandment.

In light of these various considerations it will be well to take such talk about returning to the cell operation of the first century with no more seriousness than it deserves. As an institution the church, simply by being there, serves as a symbol of the fact that ultimate meaning for life and lasting solutions to the problems of existence come from outside the historic process. The relevance of this symbolized presence may be seen from the fact that this is one way to prevent the rise of ideologies; and that, in turn, is a way of helping in the task of neutralizing the demons that threaten to enclose the world in the tight circle of secularism.

As an institution the church is a political entity like other such structures. In this capacity she serves best as a symbol of the divine intrusion into our world if and when the principles of justice and order are practiced within the establishment itself. When she allows for less than the full application of these principles, she surrenders part of her power to help humanize society. In fact, she may, by her own malpractices, aid and abet the very demons that threaten the social order in our megalopolitan jungles. Her business is to witness to values beyond the here and now.

SYMBOL OF CONTINUITY

As an institution the church also serves as a symbol of continuity. This is the horizontal counterpart to the vertical dimension of intrusion. The church, let us recall, has a history of her own. While her life touches on and sometimes even meshes with the chronicles of men, she nevertheless has a life all her own. The

forms of her organization have varied from time to time, but the substance of her institutional life has carried on from generation to generation; and the story of the church's adventures is an exciting one. Its very telling helps to subdue those demons bent on absolutizing each moment, no matter how brief, with a view to creating the conditions of loneliness, frustration, and despair.

The church, on her course through the broad annals of men, has fallen heir to the revelation of a set of moral principles which come to men from outside their own history. Accordingly she has also become a symbol of an authority that transcends the secular. It is just possible, we might note in passing, that much of the clamor against her institutional aspects has its roots in man's persistent inclination to resist authority wherever it exists.

SYMBOL OF JUSTICE

On the basis of God's law, which was revealed as an expression of those moral principles that are valid and operative at all times, the church, in her continuity with Israel, has also become the beneficiary of the prophetic insights of the Old Testament.²⁶ When, therefore, she has been most true to her own traditions, the church has displayed a social sensitivity which, as we have seen, helped to transform whole cultures, exposing those very powers and principalities that delight in creating structures which tend to sanction rather than to discourage man's unrelenting drive to exploit others. Accordingly, the church remains as a symbol of justice, that virtue which is the proximate expression of love

²⁶ It should be noted that using these prophetic insights involves more than teaching a proclamation. It implies action as well.

in complex communities. As such she represents an awareness of that Archimedean point, that point of leverage above society, to which reference should be made when combating the kind of injustice devised by men who, "More haughty and severe in place Than Gregory of Boniface,"²⁷ rush to mount a vacant throne and who defy their own consciences as they set out to establish a tyranny more irksome than that of any ecclesiastical predecessor.

The story of the church as an institution has its tragic chapters, to be sure. Yet her contribution to civilization has been inestimable. Her strength has always been found in the fact that the means for correcting her own excesses and her own inertia could be found among her own resources. Power tends to corrupt; only when its exercise comes constantly under review in light of moral principles can it be contained and corrected. While the church has at times been remiss in applying prophetic principles to her own life, somehow the voice of prophecy never remained silent for very long. It sounded repeatedly, rebuking the church and calling her to repentance and renewal. Having the law of God, the church is in the privileged position of undergoing such prophetic and critical review.

REDEEMED COMMUNITY

But we must not linger too long over the church's role as an institution. It is even more important to think of her as the community of the redeemed, destined from all eternity to be the locale of God's presence in grace. In this capacity she has the task, first of all, to proclaim those mighty acts of God which are witnessed

²⁷ Greenslade, p. 121.

to by the Scriptures and which He undertook to set men free.

The story behind the creation of the church as "the sanctuary of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16) is a long one. God's intent in this respect reaches back at least to that time in David's life when he proposed to build God a temple. The prophet Nathan had received a word from the Lord to discourage the king in this matter (2 Sam. 7:1-14). The Lord would rather make David a house, said the prophet, as he spoke of descendants of David that would be devoted to the service of the living God.

The birth of Solomon was God's first installment in keeping this promise about making David a house. That son set out to build a house of God's presence, but he himself became idolatrous. The temple he had erected remained. David's house, however, declined. God's promise lingered on in Israel; for, when once His Word has been given, it cannot be broken. Many centuries later Gabriel was ordered to proceed to Nazareth with a message to Mary, who was of the house of David. The angel was to speak to her about a Son that she would have who would occupy David's throne forever. And of her was born the great Son of David. One day in the temple this Son, Jesus of Nazareth, announced that that magnificent building would be replaced by another, His body. And that body, the final sanctuary of God, is the church to which you and I belong. Saint Paul does not hesitate to apply to us as God's temple the very words spoken by Nathan the prophet to David the king: "I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters." (2 Cor. 6:18)

As the Jews believed that God ruled the

world from the "stone of the foundation" which protruded three fingers' breadth above the floor of the holy of holies, so we have been assured by the apostle Paul that our Lord extends His kingdom from within and by His church. This is part of the burden of the Letter to the Colossians. There our Lord Jesus Christ is presented as both the Lord of the universe and the Head of the church. Christ's lordship over the world is at work in the church as the sphere of His present activity,²⁸ offering men the reconciliation and peace accomplished by the Cross and in the Resurrection. Of Him we read that He has divested principalities and powers of their authority and made a public example of them in His triumph on the cross (Col. 2:15). The consequences of His victory are still hidden; yet they are assured.

The church, then, is that community under Christ, its Head, which offers men continuity in depth. Its human component consists of men and women who assemble around Word and Sacrament. In the proclamation and in the observance of the redemptive acts of God, they are taken up into that sequence of events which represents the realization within history of that kingdom which God designed in eternity. By this Word the demons of meaninglessness and futility are not only neutralized, they are overcome; for here men, in dire need of a history and a destiny to provide background and direction, are given a share in the age to come. The Christian community, therefore, is an open society offering its understanding of life and history to men groping for meaning and pro-

²⁸ See Eduard Lohse, "Christusherrschaft und Kirche im Kolosserbrief," *New Testament Studies*, XI (April 1963), 203-216.

viding them an altar to which they may bring their broken and fragmented lives so that they may be made whole. Her role in community organization, therefore, is derived from something more profound than the insight that she is the most universal form of a neighborhood-based institution in our society.²⁹ She is, in fact, the bearer of God's revelation about the meaning of existence.

THE RECONCILING WORD

In the worship services of the church men hear God's reconciling Word and in turn function as a craft of priests engaged in intercession and forgiveness. In such surroundings men and women once more become persons. They live and serve with others in a climate of reconciliation, which helps to exorcise the various satans that threaten to reduce men to being mere digits, "the quotients of one million divided by one million."³⁰

In *The Secular City* Harvey Cox has indicated that the switchboard and the cloverleaf may well be thought of as the proper symbols of our age. The latter of course represents our mobility; the former serves as the symbol of all the means we have in daily life for contact with an almost endless stream of people. Most of these relational moments are brief and fleeting. They take place primarily in terms of service for single occasions. Very few of them occur in depth. Somewhere in all this mobility and transiency men must still be offered the dimensions of community

²⁹ See John R. Fry, *The Church and Community Organization* (National Council of Churches Consultation, 1965), p. 142.

³⁰ Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphne Hardy (New York: Modern Library, 1941), p. 261.

in depth. This is the very special province of the church. Her offer of life under conditions of personal relations constitutes a potent weapon in the battle against the demons of depersonalization, irresponsibility, and delinquency that stalk our streets and atomize our communities.

Here we see the church from another point of view. She is a fellowship of men, a community created to lead a radically different kind of life in the interpersonal relationships prevailing within herself. In this kind of context we can with some profit talk about a ceil operation. Forgiveness, patience, and charity must be practiced wherever people are, without benefit or burden of an institution. In this area of her responsibility the church serves as a channel of grace rather than as an organization devoted, among other things, to justice. Relationships within the communion of saints are lived on the primary level of love rather than in the secondary dimension of justice.³¹

THE VIRTUE OF SUBORDINATION

It is especially in this capacity that the church carries on her task of not only improving but redeeming the social order. While she contributes as an institution to the task of keeping society open toward principles that intrude from the outside of history, it is as a redeemed community that she provides strength to suffer injustice and a willingness to bear the burdens of others. Belonging to the community of God's saints, the individual Christian puts into practice the virtue of subordination, which consists of ranking himself under

³¹ See Walter Kloetzli, *The Church and the Urban Challenge* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961), p. ix.

the needs of others in all of life's relationships. Such living towards others develops in him a keen sensitivity to suffering and injustice. While he himself, in imitation of his Lord, sets out to absorb and in that way to stop the injustice and deprivation to which he himself is exposed, he will be quick to note the requirements of justice as they apply to others. That is to say, as a citizen devoted to the interests of justice he is motivated primarily by consideration not of his own rights but of those which belong properly to others. From a position within the redeemed community he carries on his contest against the disruptive demons of pride and ego-centric insistence on one's own rights. Thus he assists in weaving the fabric of a strong social order.

SPECIFIC METHODS

We have now discussed in general the nature of the conflict in which the church engages in any program of community organization. We have also given thought to the weapons available to the church for this particular contest. We conclude with a section devoted to specific methods of attack against the demons that haunt our cities. We would certainly stop short of our full responsibility if we did not spell out some of the important steps that need to be taken by the church if she is to make her maximum contribution to various forms of enterprises by which men propose to humanize our urban centers.

It may be well to begin this part of our presentation with some suggestion as to the institutional potentials presently available. We have already noted that the church has the task not only of proclaiming the Gospel but also of teaching and

living God's will, although of course in such a way that it does not strengthen people in their native *opinio legis*, their confidence in their ability to save themselves by works of the Law. That will of God includes the law that contains the moral principles on which an orderly society is constructed and by which it is sustained.

INSTITUTIONAL POTENTIALS

When it comes to the matter of community organization, therefore, congregations in a given area would do well to offer their facilities as training centers on the subject of moral principles and human values. A congregation's own personnel can present the moral factors which go into the creation of an open society. That this can be done without compromising anyone's specifically religious convictions has been demonstrated over and over again by an undertaking begun in the military services almost 20 years ago. The Lutheran Church is in a uniquely strategic position on this issue just because she has learned to distinguish between Law and Gospel and to understand civic righteousness as a concept which belongs to the kingdom of God's left hand.

Let us take the matter of liberty itself. Political freedom rests on two working assumptions: that there is a God and that there is a moral law. But what course in civics teaches this? Where does one deal with these fundamental considerations if not in the church as a training center for responsibility in a responsible society? Again, what institution is in a better position to fill in the specifics of that higher law to which our courts appeal in the interest of justice? And how can the consciences of individuals be made sensitive

to order and justice more effectively than by the church's teaching of the Ten Commandments and all that these imply?

Social order is a strong ingredient of civic righteousness. In fact, order itself is God's handiwork and one of the blessings we include in the petition "Give us this day our daily bread." This aspect of the matter is often overlooked by men who propose to use conflict as the basic instrument in community organization. While there may be times when it becomes necessary to "pluck up and destroy" (Jer. 12:17), such radical action must be undertaken only in the awareness that civic order is a blessing which can easily be lost and should never be taken for granted. Order is the product of God's continuing benevolence toward His human creatures and may not be despised or destroyed with impunity.³²

This major consideration, it would seem, needs to be kept in mind when the question of civil disobedience comes under discussion. Granted that a citizen has a right to test a law if it seems unjust, such misgivings about a law must be serious and may not be used as a channel of insubordination. Such powers of government as exist are part of God's way of sustaining order. Prudence suggests, therefore, that a Christian engage in acts of civil disobedience only in a full awareness of all his responsibilities, with a willingness to accept all the consequences of his

³² It should be noted that the concept of civil order does not intend to suggest a static situation. Every social order has its tensions. A free way of life provides the opportunity and suggests the method by which such tensions may be discussed and implemented in an orderly way.

action and after careful consultation with other responsible groups and individuals.

SPURIOUS RECONCILIATION

What has just been said must be balanced by the other consideration that any forms or words of reconciliation which hide out from the real issues of life tend to become spurious. There are times and occasions when power structures either fail to act adequately or choose to move in the wrong direction. In our kind of society it is the responsibility not only of individuals but also of institutions to help in preventing that kind of injustice which derives from a failure of established structures to act responsibly.

We suspect that the problem of dealing with power structures troubles Lutherans of German extraction more than many other religious groups. There is a strong dose of quietism in their thinking on civic matters. Except for the Scandinavians of the Dakotas and Minnesota, Lutherans have commonly left the issue of power to others. We need to be recalled to the realization that power is an element in all human relations. Power as such is amoral. Its moral tone is derived from the situation in which it is used, the way it is applied, and the ends for which it is employed.³³

We must also keep in mind that power can express itself by inertia. A failure to act may in fact be an act of power in the wrong direction, perpetuating injustice and exploitation. This simple fact of life has made it necessary to raise the question of the use of conflict in community organization. There seem to come moments when methods of cooperation and competition

³³ Fry, p. 160.

are inadequate. May the church, then, condone the use of conflict?

Let us note that putting the issue in this way is not the equivalent of supporting the noisy and often boisterous approach of the Industrial Areas Foundation. The question we are asking is the troublesome issue of using conflict for the purposes of community development. To this problem it should be said, first of all, that resorting to conflict may be a dangerous course to take. It could lead to the disruption of civic order and loose the very demons of anarchy we are trying to contain or to exorcise. On the other hand, power being what it is, inaction on the part of local power structures may be of such a kind as to demand a degree of counteraction which is stronger than competition.

Each instance requires a large measure of sanctified judgment. Some problems can be dealt with through demonstrations. Others may require more radical approaches, such as coming to grips with entrenched power structures that feed on the exploitation of the poor. In fact, it has been suggested that what we need most just now is a theology of revolution to provide some guidance for extreme action against oppressive establishments.

Generally speaking, any theology of revolution ought to begin with a description of the benefits of civic order. This statement is not intended to minimize the place of justice. It does intend to suggest, however, that problems of justice and freedom can be attacked more effectively, as a rule, where there is civic order than where chaos reigns. From such an appreciation of order our theology should proceed to suggest that everything possible must be done to correct the situation under attack by means

short of revolution. But what if such methods do not remedy the evil? Then, first of all, we must recall as Christians that no social order is devoid of injustice. It is simply not possible to create a society where no one suffers unjustly. From that point we proceed to remind ourselves that, if we ourselves are the victims of wrong, we have our Lord as an example of one who endured suffering as He commended His cause to Him who judges righteously. At the same time we keep in mind that any such injustice which may be our lot in life offers an opportunity to share in the sufferings of our Lord.

But it is not our own suffering that should concern us. It is the injustice which others must endure that ought to rouse us to action, even radical action. Does this include revolution? Certainly not in its usual sense of attack on properly constituted authority. For methods such as these would certainly fall under the condemnation implied in the words of Paul: "He that rises up against authority sets himself up against God's institution" (Rom. 13:2). The apostle's observation, however, provides no encouragement for quietism. The voice of prophetic criticism and judgment still belongs to the church's resources; and the exercise of this responsibility on the part of the church can and must go beyond mere words, important as these are.

How about the pastor in all this? Does he have the call to join demonstrations and other activities designed to improve the social order? It would seem that, if a pastor can persuade his congregation of the seriousness of the issues involved and of the need for corrective action, the pastor would be wise to refrain from taking a personal part in direct action. He will

be well advised to have the congregation represented by persons chosen from the church to take part in such activities. The pastor's own participation would normally be understood as an action representing the congregation of which he is the pastor, and singling out one type of action would hardly do justice to the variety of interests and opinions held in and by the congregation.

But in the exercise of his prophetic office a pastor may not be able to arouse his congregation to proper action. Then it may become necessary for him to take part personally—possibly as a citizen—in remedial procedures. He may need to do so to manifest the concern of his denomination in such matters. Or the sheer magnitude of the injustice, brutality, and disorder confronting an area may prompt him to give expression to his moral indignation in this way.

FEW CLEAN CHOICES

The issues of life rarely confront us as clean choices between black and white. As a rule we must choose a position that seems to be less gray than another course of action. All this is another way of saying that most problems, especially those of society at large, are very complex and that we can hardly afford to oversimplify them. We need rather to see them in all their complicated patterns and relationships.

The central issue on the battlefield of our urban centers just now is the preservation of order and freedom as a way of providing the opportunity for people to be and remain persons. To be human they must have the occasion of choice. Such an environment can be created only where two insights are assumed and applied: that there is a God and that, as a corollary,

there is a moral law. For only where these two presuppositions of an open society are accepted is it possible to develop that sense of responsibility which is the correlative of freedom.

The overemphasis on environment as the source of human strength or weakness, so characteristic of much recent thought, needs to be corrected. Again and again we have been assured that men will become better to the degree that they are better off. This contention has been challenged by the view of others who insist that man is hardly more than the product of his heredity. Both of these positions represent half-truths at best. The factor of individual choice cannot and dare not be overlooked. While environment and heredity ought not to be depreciated, each individual is still the product of the choices he makes, in whatever surroundings he may live and whatever defects he may have. An awareness of this aspect of life helps to create the basis for structuring personality for that kind of responsibility which contributes to any campaign against the demonic structures of an impersonal social order. An understanding and appreciation of the nexus between responsibility and freedom as the opportunity of choice can be created and grow best where men will take the time to learn and to teach that Law of God which the church has received as part of her heritage. Working in this way, the church provides the fourth order of preservation, the institutional church.

LET THE CHURCH BE THE CHURCH

Obviously the church also has the assignment to proclaim the Gospel in a meaningful way. We have heard a great deal on this subject within recent years.

In fact, we might say that the matter of relevance has been discussed *ad nauseam*. Sometimes these elaborate presentations seem to suggest that it is man, the creature, who has the right somehow to determine what he should like to hear. Moreover, much too frequently we have looked for our remedial means in fields outside the church's own endowments. We have gone to psychiatrists, to politicians, to sociologists, to experts on management and city planning and have asked them, "Do you have the Word?" Of course, they do not. Despite this negative experience we still tend to overlook the weapons that lie close at hand in the church. We do not propose to decry certain insights that other professions and disciplines may provide, but we must insist that among the most potent instruments of relevance for any age is the church's own theology. Other professions may indeed raise crucial questions and offer careful analyses, but Law and Gospel were revealed to provide answers to basic issues.

Where it is permitted to speak for itself, God's revelation still provides guidance. How can one address himself to the threat of loneliness more directly, for example, than by proclaiming the church as the community of the redeemed? How does one combat the atomizing forces of our social order more effectively than by treating man within the total context of his life? How does one come to grips with those principalities and powers which create the feeling of meaninglessness and frustration if not by proclaiming the good news of a continuity with the past and of a hope for the future offered in the redemptive acts of God? The church has occasionally neglected those very resources which are cen-

tral to her own existence and responsibility.

What we have failed to do at times, particularly as Lutherans, is to see the necessity for churches themselves to become involved in the problems of society. What has done us infinite harm here is the notion that the church is exclusively invisible. This idea has its roots in a false dichotomy which sets out to divide life into the realms of the real and of the ideal, a point of view which owes more to Greek philosophy than to the Biblical revelation. Lutherans have shown a tendency to make the very mistake against which the Apology of the Augsburg Confession warns us; we have turned the church into a kind of Platonic state.³⁴ With such a view of the church it was possible, for example, to rationalize away the evils of racial segregation on the grounds that in the "invisible" church these injustices did not exist, as though the church consisted of an aggregation of disembodied souls that were unrelated to time and place. Actually it is the real, earthly, visible, and institutional church which God has chosen to use for the proclamation of His Word and the administration of His sacraments.

REMEMBERING THE INCARNATION

Such idealization as we at times engaged in tends also to reduce the significance of the Lord's Supper as a sharing together, on the horizontal level, in the body and blood of our Lord. Its intimate relationship to the Incarnation as our Lord's way of identifying Himself with, and meeting the

³⁴ "We are not dreaming about some Platonic republic . . ." Apology of the Augsburg Confession, VII and VIII, 20, *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c. 1959), p. 171.

problem of, our need was often overlooked. We lost something of the dimensions expressed, for example, in the prayer after the consecration of the elements given in the Liturgy of Basil the Great:

Keep in remembrance, O Lord, this congregation here present, and those who are absent for reasonable cause; and have mercy upon them and upon us, according to the multitude of Thy mercies . . . Set at liberty those who are vexed by unclean spirits; voyage with those who voyage; journey with those who journey; defend the widows; protect the orphans; free the captives; heal the sick . . . Be Thou Thyself all things unto all men, O Thou, who knowest every man, his petitions, his abode and his need. Deliver, O Lord, this city and land . . .

To the altar, as Bishop Moore has reminded us,³⁵ are brought this created world, its broken lives, and our fragmented society of men. From the altar God's people go forth to bring loving action into the world. By such doing we incorporate ourselves into the work and ministry of our Lord as ways of healing what is ill in and among men.

CORPORATE ACTS

This is an appropriate place to bring to mind the many symbolic acts that have become part of the church's life and practice over the centuries and of which we unhappily have all too hastily stripped ourselves. The rite of baptism lends itself to the kind of action by which the congregation is reminded of her communal responsibilities. The very act of baptism at the entrance to the nave of a church building captures some of the privileges of belonging to a redeemed community. We could

³⁵ Moore, p. 35.

learn much in this field from Eastern churches. Their practice, for example, of assembling during the evening of Holy Saturday and engaging in processions through the city streets in such a way as to greet the resurrection at dawn, as the doors of their churches are opened to the sound of many choirs, is a most poignant way of underlining the responsibilities of the communion of saints as it dwells in the community of men. Such processions, by their very formation, might constitute something of an antidote to some of the parades and marches that tend to disgrace our city streets, because these are undertaken for purposes of selfish gain or in some shallow protest over some issue of the moment. Symbolic acts of the kind described could help to redeem society by limiting the disruptive power of the demons of irresponsibility, fragmentation, and delinquency.

In the re-creation and use of some of these corporate acts, which serve as reminders of the community aspects of church life and of our Christian faith, we shall find resources more effective than the highly individualistic convictions with which the evangelicals of our day face the present social predicament. Their solutions to the problems of our age are spelled out in summary as follows:

1. The Christian Church's distinctive dynamic for social transformation is personal regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the proclamation of this divine offer of redemption is the Church's prime task.

2. While the corporate or institutional church has no divine mandate, jurisdiction, or special competence for approving legislative proposals or political parties and persons, the pulpit is responsible for pro-

claiming divinely revealed principles of social justice as a part of the whole counsel of God.

3. The most natural transition from private to social action occurs in the world of daily work, in view of the Christian's need to consecrate his labor to the glory of God and to the service of mankind.

4. As citizens of two worlds, individual church members have the sacred duty to extend God's purpose of redemption through the Church, and also to extend God's purpose of justice and order through civil government. Christians are to distinguish themselves by civil obedience except where this conflicts with the commandments of God, and are to use every political opportunity to support and promote just laws, to protest social injustice, and to serve their fellow men.³⁶

We ourselves have been able to practice a kind of sanctified irresponsibility in social questions not only because we were content to limit ourselves to such an individualistic approach but also because we remained unaware of the dimensions of the incarnation of our Lord as it is functionally extended through all of history by the church as Christ's body. Perhaps it will be helpful to remind ourselves once more that Jesus was baptized as our Messiah precisely for the purpose of being involved in and identified with our needs, and the church was created to follow her Lord into the middle of the contest with the kingdom of darkness not only in general terms but particularly when this battle breaks out in such special forms as the disintegration of community life.

³⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, "Evangelicals in the Social Struggle," *Christianity Today*, X (Oct. 8, 1965), 11.

WANTED: NEW STRUCTURES

As men's problems change, therefore, the church must devise new methods and different structures. Here the Lutheran Church has the special advantage of being indifferent to form as a *sine qua non*. God may be at work "in, with, and under" many kinds of organizations and structures. Our church sees some point, for example, in establishing places of refuge and refreshment in shopping centers or in the churches of a metropolitan area, where men and women can, for a brief moment at least, find relief from the harshness of life. Specifics are less important than the responsibility to find space, moreover, from which to carry on our common contest against poverty, injustice, irresponsibility, and delinquency. When churches undertake creative solutions, the Lutheran Church insists that Christians carry on such work with a motivation quite different from that of other men and institutions. In her case, for instance, social work will not be merely casework but will constitute a ministry for which God provides strength. Her care for the needy will not degenerate into mere charity in the secular sense, for she knows that a person must give of himself to practice love.

Perhaps a special point ought to be made of this. Everywhere it is being said very glibly that what we must all do is practice love. On the surface such exhortations sound genuine; yet, as far as the church is concerned, Jesus Christ always proposes to stand between the persons involved in such a relationship. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once reminded his readers, "What love is only Christ tells us in His Word. Contrary to all my own opinions and convictions, Jesus Christ will tell me

what love toward the brethren really is. Therefore spiritual love is bound solely to the Word of Jesus."³⁷ The quality of such *agape* is quite different from what ordinarily passes for this virtue. It is always prepared, for example, to be betrayed. Moreover, it never asks whether the other person is worth the effort of one's love. God Himself never raised the question whether we were lovable enough to be entitled to redemption. The church exists to practice her Savior's kind of love as she involves herself with the needs of men and identifies herself with their problems. Any concerns she has for the secondary relationships created by the needs of justice are always affected by the more primary claims of love. Part of the humanizing process of the social order, therefore, consists of tempering justice not only with equity but with a large measure of charity. The kingdom of God is like yeast that leavens the whole lump. (Matt. 13:33)

One of the major reasons for our church's reluctance in taking on the challenge of participating in efforts at community organization, as we have previously indicated, derives from an awareness that such involvement necessarily brings on a confrontation with the phenomenon of political power. It should be conceded at once that, while the process of community organization is a method which stresses the development of human resources, it will rarely fail to introduce the problem of dealing with existing political structures. Let us keep in mind, however, that power pervades all human relationships. We do not really have a choice as to whether the church may or may not reckon with the

factor of political power. We simply cannot escape this responsibility.

QUESTION OF METHOD

The question before us is that of method, not of need. The latter has been answered by the very existence of the church as an institution. What we must face is the issue of proper methods to be used in creating desirable social change. We have already entered something of a demurrer against the wholesale use of conflict. We have done so on the principle that the church, representing a God of order as well as of justice, cannot properly advocate as normative a deliberate recourse to the means of creating disorder. Two other possibilities remain: working for change through cooperation or by competition. In the use of either the church will of course be dealing with the problem of power distribution. On the basis of what has been said, it is perhaps enough to repeat that the church's concern for order, justice, and freedom, as well as her call to be the redemptive agent of God's love, not only justifies but makes imperative her participation in the special kind of activity we call community organization. She has a kind of flexibility, when she is true to herself, that keeps her from being identified with a given order.

In becoming involved, the church will often have to choose between the inadequate patterns of the past and those with an uncertain future. She will inevitably get caught in processes of change which may seem to threaten her very life as an institution. What is more, she may have to make a choice between the goals of progress, social justice, and freedom when some kind of incompatibility develops

³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 35.

among them. Whatever selection she makes must be made in the conviction that she has been given her life to lose for the sake of others. She has taken up her cross to follow the Lord who created her.

A THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

One of the contributions the church can make at this point is her awareness that no society will ever succeed in eliminating all problems. There will always be room, at least, for the so-called "gap services," which are carried on when other resources fail. Knowing this, the church will continue to proclaim that suffering is part of life as well as an instrument of refinement. Moreover, she remains mindful of the fact that such experiences do not constitute God's last word on these issues. In this connection, the church would be well advised to reconsider some of her attitudes toward charitable work. We are puzzled, for example, by an assumption, which seems to be widespread, that poverty is always humiliating.³⁸ To the contrary, the church must affirm that human need may provide the occasion for both redemptive action and response.

Poverty is often a matter of degree. There is no absolute standard with which to measure this phenomenon. Injustice at times also carries within it a degree of ambivalence. But both may serve as means of spiritual discipline and personal growth, for there is more than a casual connection between such items and the kingdom of God. It is folly to try to diminish the contrast between the message of the Gospel and the judgment of the world. Our

³⁸ Fry, pp. 121—122. The NCC Consultation on the Church and Community Organization seems to us to reflect this attitude in part.

Lord speaks to those who are poor, that is, to those who suffer from poverty and privation, of whatever kind these may be. To those who are unfortunate in the eyes of the world He announces the joys of the Kingdom. As the Messiah, Jesus came in fulfillment of promises which described His characteristic mission as consisting of bringing happiness to the afflicted. The church continues in this liberating work.

NOT TO CONQUER BUT TO SERVE

Since community organization concentrates on selected geographical areas, the church can find here the chance of returning to rather sharp parish lines as a major part of her technique in dealing with social problems. She needs to do so not to resort again to conquest but to be of greater service.³⁹ Where community organization becomes necessary, therefore, the various churches in the area under discussion will become most effective in their aid if they work together in providing the moral basis and the spiritual motivation for such an undertaking. Again we do not intend to suggest that the respective pastors of such churches become directly involved in such efforts. The spectrum of community needs is too broad for any clergy staff to cover. In this field, as in others, pastors serve best as enablers of the laity in carrying out the task of the church.

At this juncture we would take issue with the demand to establish nondenominational churches. There is no evidence at all that this kind of inclusiveness strengthens congregational life. A certain amount of competition among churches in a neigh-

³⁹ Martin Marty, *Second Chance for American Protestants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 140—145.

borhood can be wholesome, creating the possibility of providing services for various segments of society.

WHOLE REGIONS ARE INVOLVED

In addition to expressing community-wide concerns and so focusing on the problems of a total neighborhood, any church that engages in community organization will soon discover that the problems it confronts keep transcending the individual community. Most of the issues are so large and complex that they cannot be solved on the parish level but need attention on the part of whole regions. It becomes imperative, therefore, to work within a regional plan or structure, within diocesan structures, if you wish, for the sake of coordinating all church efforts in a given region. Put very simply and bluntly, this means that we, as Lutherans, must work out ways of relating to the various levels of structure created by the presence of other denominations, particularly also by the operation and interests of Roman Catholic diocesan organizations.

The need for action at community and regional levels confronts us with a serious problem as Lutherans. Prof. William Lazareth says:

"For this reason, it is most unfortunate—almost disastrous—that our Lutheran churches are organized for action at almost every social level *except the community*. . . . In other words, American Lutheranism has no organizations which are community-wide in scope, with a budget and a staff which would permit an effective attack on the spiritual and material problems of the community. . . ." ⁴⁰

⁴⁰ William Lazareth, "Congregationalism as a Problem in the Exercise of Christian Social

The Roman Catholic Church does not suffer from this lack of community or regional organization. Generally speaking, our urban centers are strongly Roman Catholic in religious complexion. With her diocesan organization, that church has understood the nature of political contests and has never withdrawn from them. In every diocese it is structured to operate at many levels of power. Our job, it would seem, is to develop personnel competent enough and numerically strong enough to offer our services in such a way that we do not compromise our beliefs, while at the same time we can add to the overall resources of a region in combating the demons that haunt our city streets and alleys. In this way we would be serving notice that we have some understanding of the problems of our sprawling cities and are willing to help combat the powers that threaten to reduce our urban areas to the level of a human wasteland. We do not on our own have resources in sufficient supply to do more than help. We happen to have been largely a rural church and were hardly prepared by our recent past for the kind of struggle we must now take up.

NEED FOR COMMON PLANNING

It must be said, too, that as Lutherans we cannot possibly continue to want "to do something" along three separate denominational lines. We must have in every metropolitan region a plan which will spell out what each of the Lutheran bodies proposes to contribute to the total effort. This will mean a greater emphasis by our

Responsibility Within American Lutheranism," a paper delivered at the Lutheran Consultation on Community Organization in Metropolitan Areas (1965).

respective denominational headquarters on joint regional development, and that, in turn, implies a reduction in centralized control.

I suppose nothing would inspire most Lutherans more than an announcement to the effect that the heads of the larger Lutheran churches in America intended to come together for the purpose of laying the groundwork for a comprehensive plan designed to come to grips with the problems created by the "terrible freedom"⁴¹ that is offered men today by the secularization and urbanization of life all around us. Humanly speaking, there is no other way for the Lutheran Church to survive and to live long enough to offer the men and women in the year 2066 the joy that comes from knowing that God is gracious and long-suffering, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.

Some of the most potent weapons in combating the demons that lurk in our urban structures are those available to the church. The salvation we proclaim is worked out and lived within this world. Accordingly faith is no optional superstructure to be superimposed on secular relationships and institutions. Instead it is a power which must touch life seven days a week. Service to a world that grows ever more interdependent and complex is really the only concrete way in which the church can act today in the task of helping to redeem the social order. She has the resources to do so.

Let her take on this battle, then, as she once set out to breathe a new spirit into the culture of the Roman Empire, as she once civilized the barbarian and later the American continent. She is not just the

conscience of a nation, educating, inspiring, and motivating individuals to go out as Christian citizens. She is not just an institution that must bring her power to bear where it will make the greatest impact. She is also, and especially, the symbol of God's order and justice and, what matters even more, she is the redeemed and redeeming community of the Lord. In the secular city of our day she has a very special opportunity to help set and keep men free, provided of course that she is ready to bring the sacrifices this task entails.

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