

CALLING OUR CITIES
TO CHRIST

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PREFACE

Key '73 has as its slogan, "Calling our Continent to Christ." Sixty per cent of America's population is now clustered in cities and we are told that by 1980 the figure will be seventy-five per cent. This means that if our continent is to be evangelized, churches that know and confess the Gospel will have to turn increasingly to the city as the locus of their missionary endeavor.

In the pages which follow I attempt to make a small contribution to the subject of urban evangelism from a Calvinist standpoint. My central focus is on the role of the organized church in a changing neighborhood. There is a considerable amount of historical material in the book and I explain in the first chapter why I feel this is important. I trust that the historical accounts are interesting enough to hold the reader's attention and that they will provide many useful insights into the problems and challenges of urban evangelism.

In the last chapter I suggest some major principles with which I believe most Reformed thinkers will agree but which we do not always carry

out with consistency. I present also a number of practical suggestions, among them being the goal of black, chicano and Puerto Rican Reformed churches replacing existing white, Anglo-American Reformed congregations in changing neighborhoods, which I know are controversial.

I do not consider the permanently integrated church a viable goal in most places at this time. To insist that it must be done can wreck an urban strategy. At the same time I am convinced that the minority communities in America need what the Reformed faith has to offer and Reformed churches do the Christian cause a serious disservice when they abandon old neighborhoods without attempting to leave behind a continuing Calvinist church.

Some readers may wonder why I became interested in this subject. Almost my entire ministerial career has been oriented to the foreign missionary enterprise and only recently I published a book on the subject of an urban missionary strategy for Latin America. Actually, I feel that the need today is for a worldwide urban strategy, and I believe that Calvinism in particular has a great deal to offer city-dwellers everywhere. Since returning to the United States in 1970, I have observed at close hand many of the problems which Protestant churches confront in the city. I have studied the subject with theologians and I have discussed it at length with urban missionaries who grapple with the issues day after day. Therefore, when Prof. Harvie Conn of

Westminster Theological Seminary invited me to share my views by means of a small book, I accepted his offer gladly. In distinction from a number of other Protestant traditions, Calvinism has always adapted well in the city. I regard it as a most exciting challenge to take the insights of the Calvinist heritage and apply them to the exigencies of modern urban America.

Many Third World people are shouting at us today, "Missionary, Go Home!" This does not divert us for a moment from our world-wide missionary task, but it does remind us that we have an urgent missionary responsibility at home as well and the world is watching to see what we do about it. For long we Americans have considered ourselves the agents of Christian evangelism to the towns and cities of the Third World, and God has used us in this way. Now, however, many of the city churches of our land are being challenged to apply to their own changing neighborhoods the same missionary concern which they have demonstrated abroad. Many churches are not ready for this, and consequently I feel that a book such as this is needed.

Sirens, gunshots, screams, car horns, fire engines, squad cars and ambulances: these are the familiar sounds of American cities. But every Christian knows that our cities need to hear another sound: the full rich music of the Gospel, proclaimed in every neighborhood. To that end this book is written.

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In the Bible, urban evangelism begins with Jonah's mission to Nineveh. According to the ancient narrative, God reveals his saving concern for a city and a model is laid down for a city's repentance which holds true for generations to come.

"Arise, go to Nineveh the great city," said God to Jonah, "and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." Jonah preached judgment to the Ninevites which, in view of the imminency of the city's destruction, was the most gracious thing he could have done. There was no time to lose. Wholesale repentance was the Ninevites' only hope.

No one would have predicted that the "bloody city" (Nahum 3:1) would be converted. But the unexpected actually took place. From the king and his nobles to the poorest wretch on the street the populace of Nineveh covered itself with sackcloth and sat in mourning for its sins. "Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing," decreed the king. "Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked

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way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw his burning anger so that we shall not perish?"

There is hope for cities in our modern day because the same God who showed mercy to Nineveh still lives. He still has compassion for great cities. Jonah, the early ecologist, was distressed because his plant was dying. God, on the other hand, was more directly concerned with dying people. Divine grace broke through at Nineveh and because it did there is hope for urbanites today. The God who speaks of judgment against sin is also the God who, in the words of Jonah, is "gracious and compassionate . . . slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, and One who relents concerning calamity" when sinners and cities repent.

Today, Christians attentive to the leading of the Spirit are hearing again the Jonah-mandate: "Arise, go to the city!" The supreme tests of faith and discipleship lie in the city. As we make our approach to modern Ninevehs, what should our message be? Certainly, our message is fuller and more joyful than that which Jonah preached. We have the completed Bible and the good news of Jesus' coming. We have two thousand years of the Spirit's instruction from which to draw. But there is one invariable factor. It is clearly stated in the Jonah record: Go to the city and proclaim to it only what God declares (Jonah 3: 1,2). Messengers to the city are bound *by* the word *to* the

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word. Nineveh needs to hear what God has to say.

God's word stands in judgment against sin in all its forms. Sin expresses itself in the lives of individual people and also in the institutions which people create. It is the task of God's servants to call the *whole* city to repentance, the individuals who live in the city and the society which they create and influence. More is involved here than American churches traditionally have understood.

It seems to me that the key to Nineveh's repentance was that the whole of Nineveh's society was involved. From king to commoner, both private life and civic structure, government and people together, repented before the Lord. Even dumb animals were involved as a demonstration of the city's solidarity in repentance.

That is precisely the kind of repentance which Christian witnesses in the city must call for today. Repentance is much broader than urban missionaries have commonly recognized. The good news which we are called to share with sin-obsessed cities is that God is concerned about them, even pagan cities like Nineveh, and his judgment will not fall upon cities which repent. Urban history need not end like Sodom under the rubble of divine judgment. There is a way out, and it is through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. The God of the Bible sees cities as worth saving, as worth being wept over, preached to and led to repentance. But repent they must, with Nineveh-like repudiation of all

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their past ways. Every aspect of human life must be brought under the scrutiny of God's word.

The repentance of the city is the goal of urban missions. When churches begin to see their urban mission in that light a new sound will be heard in the city. The effects of this kind of Christian proclamation will be seen in everything the city is and does. It will be visible in the lives of born again people, of transformed families, and in the growth of vigorous churches. It will be seen in the mayor's office, in the city council chambers, and in the halls of justice. Business and industry will be affected. The whole face of the city will be changed. Being who he is, God accepts no half-way repentances, neither from individuals nor from the civilizations which men corporately create. Therefore, the church may not content itself with narrow goals and limited objectives. The repentance that God demands of the city is as broad as the widest ranges of human life and as specific as the things you and I will do in the next hour. Dare we suppose that God requires less of cities and their inhabitants today than he required of ancient Nineveh?

One of the purposes of this book is to help city churches view critically and biblically the role which Protestantism has played in American cities. This book contains stories, true stories which teach us lessons. The city in America has proven to be an area in which both churches and individual Christians have had to rethink their traditional values and practices. Around the turn

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of the century, the Social Gospel arose as Protestantism's response to social issues in the cities. The Social Gospel movement was predominantly an urban phenomenon, especially in its early years. Only slowly, and in rather isolated instances, did the Social Gospel penetrate rural areas where the problems and conditions to which it was reacting were neither experienced nor understood. It is in the city that American Protestantism is put to the severest test and it is in the city that serious social conditions demand that the resident church define its position over against society.

As Christians we regard history as being important because God is at work in and through history and we believe that the historical record has relevance for today. Lewis Mumford, dean of urban historians, has said that historical study can be of assistance in laying the foundation for a qualitative improvement in urban life.¹ Applying this to Christian activity in the city, we can say that the historical study of urban missions should help us understand our weaknesses and our strengths and provide a perspective upon which to build our strategy for today.

The degree of the city's repentance and transformation will depend largely on the breadth of the Gospel which the church proclaims. A nar-

¹Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), p. 3.

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row, truncated message will produce the same kind of Christianity. When only certain types of sin are denounced, only those kinds are considered important. But when the whole Gospel is preached to the whole city, a new dimension is added to religion and society as a whole feels the impact of the church's presence.

This has not happened very often in American history. That explains why we are where we are today. Christian churches, preaching the full Gospel of Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord, hold the key to any lasting solutions to urban problems. History, if it is to be profitable for our understanding of urban missions, must be read and interpreted from this viewpoint.

Therefore, as we probe into the record of American Protestantism in the urban centers, especially during the thirty-five year period from the Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century, we are aware that our historical inquiry is also theological and missionary. We are concerned about the city, its people and its needs. We want to see how successful the church has been in the work of proclaiming the Gospel to city people and calling them to biblical faith and repentance. We recognize that divine revelation stands in judgment over all human behavior, individual ethic and societal institutions as well. The task of proclaiming God's word is still ours, and we search for ways in which to do it effectively. So we turn to the historical record before suggesting what city churches should be doing today.

Approaching the City from Three Sides

Throughout the chapters which follow we will approach the cities from three sides. From the sociological side we will examine some of the effects which urbanization exerted upon American Protestantism and also the changes which Protestantism brought about in American cities. Urbanization has brought about in the church the greatest inner revolution it has ever known. If this is true, then it follows that the changes which America's urban environment has worked upon churches are of vital importance to our understanding of American religion and where we stand today.

Few writers have recognized the similarity between the closing decades of the twentieth century and the corresponding period of a century ago. City growth and city problems characterize both of them. It was in the period between the Civil War and the close of the century that America changed from an agrarian to an industrial economy, from a rural to an urban-centered population, from an anti-colonial to an imperialistic nation, from a relatively homogeneous to a poly-genetic people, and from a system of relative laissez-faire to the first stages of governmental social control. These changes caused marked alterations in both the outward appearance and the inward thought processes of much of American Protestantism. Protestantism began to assume roles which it had never played before.

From the theological side, our study will deal

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with the various ways in which Protestant institutions attempted to relate to the urban environment. We will examine some of the motives which prompted Christians to act in certain ways and also some of the goals which religious leaders set for themselves and their churches. The city has been a knotty problem for over a century and it has challenged theologians to rethink the whole question of the church's duty to people caught in the pangs of industrialization. Scholars and laymen alike have reacted in widely differing ways. Some reactions have been biblical and constructive, while others are largely negative and even sub-Christian.

The Social Gospel movement was well under way by the end of the nineteenth century and its impact was felt the most during the first two decades of the twentieth. Its first premise was a valid one: *man in society stands under religious judgment*. An evangelical should have no trouble taking that proposition and pouring solid biblical content into it. Actually, there was nothing particularly new in this idea for it appears many times in ancient and medieval Christian thought and its value for every age and culture should be plain. But the idea had long been neglected in American Protestantism and consequently, when the traumas of the new urban environment broke upon American churches and Christians were called upon to render fresh interpretations of what it means for society to come under the scrutiny of God's word, many Christians regarded

the entire notion as being too radical.¹ Religious freedom in America and the abundant life which middle-class Protestants enjoyed were precious things, especially when compared with conditions in the rest of the world. American churches were not ready to deal critically with a social order which provided them with so many benefits. Besides this, the majority of the Social Gospel's leading exponents held a rationalistic view of the Scriptures and in the main had forsaken fundamental tenets of biblical Christianity. This fact above everything else drove a wedge between Protestants who clung to the historic faith and those who were calling the churches to pass moral judgments on social structures and involve themselves in the problems of the city. The way that the Social Gospel movement developed was most regrettable. Cut off from biblical and doctrinal foundations it led its followers on a course of humanitarian service that had no saving power. But on the other hand, conservative Protestants reacted by closing their eyes to nearly everything that Social Gospel proponents were saying, and in the end the secularists emerged as the winners.

An area which deserves separate attention and which we can touch on only briefly in this book is the impact which great American pulpiteers

¹ Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel. Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920-1940* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1954), pp. 4-5.

have made through their preaching. We will say a few things about the famous city evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, but our major focus will be centered on the institutional approach to urban religion. I do not wish to minimize for a moment the impact which men like Henry Ward Beecher and Phillips Brooks made through their preaching. Perhaps these three preachers, Beecher, Brooks, and Moody, "made far greater impact on the cities of the late nineteenth century than any other three ministers of that period."¹ They made their contribution principally through their pulpit ministries. Over and over again the church pulpit has proven itself to be the most powerful platform a man can find to influence individuals, families, and society. Therefore, it is important to watch what is happening in the pulpits in every generation. Billy Graham and Leighton Ford are two of the most influential American preachers today and the increasing concern for social issues which these men demonstrate in their preaching and writing is indicative of the growing breadth of American evangelicalism. Radio preacher Joel Nederhood of the *Back to God Hour* represents the Calvinist, kingdom perspective which not many Protestants have so far adopted but toward which a significant number are moving. Pulpit theology always has practical

¹Richard H. Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, *The Ministry in Historical Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1956), p. 262.

repercussions, and as influential preachers rise to the city's needs important things begin to happen.

On the historical side, we must search for the causes behind Protestantism's perennial urban despair. I contend that the roots of this despair lie in the nineteenth century, and for that reason I want to talk about Protestantism's first urban encounter in America. Protestant Christianity confronts a hostile environment in American cities, as much today as a hundred years ago. We seem to stand on foreign soil in the city and our missionary endeavors are frustrating and problematic. Uncertainty as to methods and goals is the common attitude. Unless we are resigned to allowing American cities, and with them the larger share of American culture, to decay morally and spiritually even beyond the point where they are now, we should be concerned to probe into this whole matter and find out why Protestant churches are so ineffective in the city.

In my opinion, church historians must take at least some of the blame for Protestantism's continued frustration in the city. Too little history has been written from the viewpoint of the church's mission in the world. Instead, the church has been "abstracted" from society and all the attention has been directed toward the church's internal housekeeping endeavors. I realize that this is an overstatement, but I believe that E. R. Wickham, a leader in urban missions in Britain, is right when he says:

The writing of Church history—and there is a lot of it—should have provided us with expert information on the effect of industrialization on the life of the churches, revealing in the course of it the nature of the ever-growing mission problem. Unfortunately, “Church history,” with few great exceptions, is invariably about the Church abstracted from society, about ecclesiastical institutions, personalities or movements, in which the world in which they are set seems quite incidental. It is itself a disturbing symptom of the preoccupation of the Church with her own life and work, suggesting at best that society is but the raw material of her work, and revealing at worst a casual indifference to the wider life of the world in which the Kingdom of God is to be established and which she exists to serve. Either view is fatal in a period in which the profoundest revolutions of history have taken place, and in which a wholly new world has been in the making.¹

If historical studies are to be of any relevance for the formation of missionary strategy, this abstracting of the church from society must be assiduously avoided. Religious and sociological data must be examined together, and we must seek to interpret the entire situation—urban,

¹E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), p. 12.

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rural, domestic, or foreign—as critically as possible under the guidance of the divine word and Spirit.

2

AMERICA'S FIRST URBAN CRISIS

For several decades following the Civil War the United States underwent a radical change from a rural and agricultural society to a highly urbanized and industrialized nation. The result of this change was a crisis in religion, the effects of which are still with us. The magnitude of urban expansion is described by Olmstead when he says:

In 1870 little more than one-fifth of the country's population lived in urban areas; by 1890 the percentage had risen to one-third and by 1900 it had reached the 40 per cent mark. There were 547 communities in the latter year with a population of more than 8000 as opposed to 141 in 1860. This drive toward the city continued apace until 1910, when it was somewhat offset by a trend to the suburbs. By this time, however, the age of the metropolis had dawned, in which the cities reached out and irresistibly drew the surrounding communities into the vortex of urban life.¹

The increase in urban population was not the

¹Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 475.

whole problem, however, for with the growth of cities came a rash of social problems with which American Protestantism was as yet unprepared to cope. It seemed to many pious observers that there was nothing good about the city. The city was the "hot-house of every cancerous growth—of new evils like industrial war and class hatred and of the older evils of pauperism and crime, of intemperance and vice."¹ Some church leaders seriously questioned whether the tumultous city could ever provide a satisfactory environment in which Protestantism might grow. Squalid slums and cold gray pavements seemed inherently hostile to a pastoral religion like Christianity.

The anti-urban bias which has characterized American Protestantism throughout the twentieth century has its roots in the period which we are now examining. Protestants have long been rural-oriented, and generally they have failed to come to grips with urban culture. Commenting on Protestantism's long standing indifference to city life, Truman B. Douglass says:

The underlying cause, I believe, is an anti-urban bias which has become almost a point of dogma in American Protestantism. Many leading Protestants genuinely feel that a permanent and deadly hostility exists between urban man and those who are loyal to the

¹Aaron Ignatius Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism, 1865-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1943), p 3

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Christian faith and ethic; that village ways of life are somehow more acceptable to God than city ways.¹

This anti-urban bias which still handicaps effective urban witness today grew its roots during the post-Civil War period. It was both the cause of, and the result of, Protestantism's early frustration in American cities. This bias is very complex in nature and is compounded of a number of elements, both religious, cultural and racial.

Expanding industry drew immigrants to the city from far and near. Immigration from Europe was very heavy after the Civil War and a great share of it settled in the cities. Some of the immigrants came from northern Europe and were Protestants. But increasingly, Roman Catholics dominated the picture. They came from the southern part of Europe and from Ireland, and their way of life was often very different from earlier immigrants. As they settled in the cities, often in distinct areas, they became a major source of irritation and anti-urban resentment among the old stock American Protestants. Job opportunities in the urban centers drew thousands of people from the American countryside as well and migration to the city thrust these country-born Americans into an environment as different, and often as hostile, as that in which

¹Truman B. Douglass, "The Church Faces the Changing City," in *Cities and Churches*, ed. by Robert Lee (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 88.

the foreign-born immigrants found themselves. Urban immigrants from either direction shared a common plight. The factories drew them to the city and their need for work kept them there, but in too many instances the factory system which then prevailed did not allow them to rise socially or economically but kept them at bare subsistence level. This was the situation which made up the vortex at the center of which the urban religious crisis developed.

Slum Society and Mass Suffering

The city, for millions, was a bitter place. As increasing numbers of immigrants arrived, vast slums sprang up in which immorality abounded, old religious ties were largely forgotten, and human life was reduced to its lowest level. Says Olmstead:

The visitor to a typical East Coast city in 1890, New York for example, would have walked through traffic-congested, litter-strewn streets lined by bleak narrow structures in which "cliff-dwellers" carried on their lonely existence in a fellowship of unconcern. He might have looked into the steaming sweatshops where refugees from eastern Europe labored long and dangerous hours for a mere pittance.¹

The tramps who walked the streets in daylight and the "fallen girls" who walked at night were,

¹Olmstead, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

in countless instances, the victims of a social and industrial system which had yet to be humanized. These were the days before labor had become organized and before legislation had guaranteed the laboring man some rights and protection. Women and children still worked long hours in the sweat shops, for wages which barely kept them alive. Humane standards for tenement housing were as yet unknown.

"The poor," said the socially-minded liberal preacher, Theodore Parker, "are ignorant and wretched and vicious not from choice but from necessity." Regardless of the theological nuances which we may see in his words, Parker was stating a great amount of truth. The majority of Protestants, unfortunately, failed to see what he was driving at, and they blamed the urban poor for their own condition. The slowness with which most of Protestantism responded to the needs of the new city poor stemmed largely from the prevailing Protestant attitude that poor people were poor because they were lazy, or because they did not manage their money well, and that their poverty had nothing to do with society-imposed conditions from which the poor could not escape, no matter how hard they tried.

Rural-trained clergymen and middle-class laymen were united in regarding poverty as simply the consequence of individual sloth, and the Christian response, equally individualistic, came in the form of charity. Protestants of mid nineteenth-century America were not yet prepared

to think of evil in terms of social forces which worked against the poor, enslaved them, and stamped out of them all vestiges of decency, morality and religion. The demons in societal structures were comfortably disguised. Insights as to what it meant to dislodge them still had to be gained.

The emerging city taught America many new lessons. Not only did structures need changing, it was learned, but basic attitudes had to be revised in the light of hard, human facts. C. Vance Woodward throws interesting light on this when he says:

The conscience of the middle class was eventually stirred to indignation and action by the misery and degradation of the city. But first the middle class had to discover what poverty was. Early humanitarians and reformers did not understand the poor—the “depraved classes,” as they called them. Attributing their plight to moral shortcomings, they sent agents of the Charity Organizations Society to discover which of the poor were “deserving.” But it was the young social workers, patiently investigating and visiting the sweatshops and tenement firetraps, who began to establish contact between the middle class and the working class.¹

¹C. Vance Woodward, “The Urban Society,” in John M. Blum, et. al., *The National Experience. A History of the United*

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On the religious scene, it took people like the Salvation Army "slummers," Jane Addams with her settlement-house idea in Chicago, and a host of Christian workers who were willing to go into the depressed areas, to share the burdens of the poor, and then report back to the churches.

Attitudes and pocketbooks are closely related, and this was sadly evident in the growing rift between city churches and city poor. During the post-Civil War years a striking transformation was taking place in Protestant churches. Membership in the large Protestant bodies was becoming almost exclusively the property of professional people, businessmen, administrative personnel, white-collar workers, and in rural areas, farmers. While at one time denominations such as the Methodists, Baptists and Disciples took pride in the fact that they belonged to the common people and ministered effectively among the lower classes, they now noted with obvious satisfaction that they were becoming churches of status, with soaring budgets and splendid buildings made possible by millionaire members.¹

According to the census report of 1890, church property in the United States was valued at 670 million dollars. The poor, however, did not need to see the report to know this. The splendid churches told their own story, with their stained-

States (2nd ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 472.

¹Olmstead, *op.cit.*, p. 478.

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glass windows, mighty pipe organs and well-dressed communicants. In the eyes of the poor it seemed that Protestantism had made its peace with their oppressors. The very men whose wealth depended on their labor, and who paid so little for it, were the active leaders in the denominations. A church might even own slum tenements, as did Trinity Church in New York, and thereby earn for itself all the ingrained hostility which the poor normally felt toward those who collect their rent.

The city church of the nineteenth century was a far cry from the democratic "meetinghouse" of an earlier America. Instead of being a center of community life and interest, the urban church was more like a solitary cathedral, estranged and alienated from the environment in which it stood. The sermons which it preached were largely tailored to the needs and interests of its middle and upper class members.¹ Benevolence was the Christian answer to the poor at the church's door. The church's entire program, with extremely few exceptions, was geared to a level which did not involve the urban masses.

Today, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, we are witnessing the steady exit of city Christians to the suburbs. They leave behind them the bewildered remnants of once mighty

¹ A. Bos, "The Social Gospel. Preaching Reform, 1875-1915," in *Preaching in American History*, ed. by Holland De Witte (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), pp. 226 ff.

churches, and the empty edifices which no one wants to buy. There is nothing new about this kind of movement. The abandonment of old neighborhoods for more socially congenial locations elsewhere was happening already at the time of the Civil War. As American cities began to grow and working class people—not blacks in particular, but whites from southern Europe and America's own rural areas—old stock Americans, moved away, they took their churches with them to the "great avenues up town." Running away from changing neighborhoods has been occurring for a long time in America, and the lower classes have not failed to get the message. By their locations, their architecture, their liturgy, their sermons, and their entire program, urban Protestant churches have conveyed the message to the masses that these churches are not for them.

Political, Moral, and Religious Anxiety

One very irritating feature for nineteenth-century Protestants was the remarkable expansion of the Roman Catholic Church in the city. Not only did the Catholic Church succeed in shepherding the waves of new immigrants from abroad, it also moved out effectively among the uncommitted masses, showing sympathy with their plight. The most important thing the Roman Catholic Church did in this early period of urban and industrial growth was to identify with the laboring class in its struggle for a better life. By so doing, the Catholic Church established

itself as the religion of the American city, which was precisely the thing which many Protestants feared. The immigrant, Catholic, urban masses were viewed with open suspicion as the advance agents of the Papacy and a threat to America's security. Protestants gradually began to feel that if something was not done to curb the trend toward Rome and to eradicate what were called the "putrefying sores" of the city, the future of the entire nation would be imperiled. Protestant urban mission work, if there was to be any at all, was designed to save America from Roman Catholicism as much as to save slum dwellers from their sins.¹

Besides giving rise to religious apprehensions, the growing cities caused social and political tensions to increase as well. The poverty, ignorance, and unsanitary living habits of many of the new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe came as a shock to old line Americans. Some may choose to debate whether the new immigrants created the slums by their own styles of life or whether the slums were the only places they could go and slum conditions were forced upon them. But the fact is that the slums became the immigrants' home and they constituted a growing social hazard to American cities. Something of the political and moral tension which mounted between Protestants and Catholic immi-

¹Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949), pp 112-116.

grants is described by Winthrop S. Hudson as follows:

While mutual animosities fostered mutual estrangement, Protestant uneasiness had its basic rootage in apprehensions concerning the changes that a continuing massive Roman Catholic immigration might introduce into American society. The existing social order, which embodied in so many ways the ideals and moralities of evangelical Protestantism, seemed to be in danger of being completely subverted. The most obvious, if perhaps the most superficial, threat was the challenge to two of the most conspicuous folk moralities of American Protestantism—Sabbath observance and temperance. The “Continental Sunday” of the immigrant groups both scandalized and spread consternation in the Protestant camp. And Protestants, long schooled in the evils of strong drink, noted with dismay that these new Americans were bringing “their grog shops like the frogs of Egypt upon us.”¹

Older Protestants resented the very presence of the urban masses. They feared the religion which the immigrants represented and they abhorred the social conditions which they seemed to create. What made it worse was the fact that political power in the cities was shifting from the

¹Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 243.

native born to the foreign born, and many of these new voters were entirely unschooled in American political idealism. Public relief funds, scanty as they were, caused taxes to increase to provide money to help the poor. And in the center of all this, the agonizing plight of the urban slum dwellers brought pangs of conscience to many hearts. One New York almshouse commissioner said sadly: "Many of them had far better been cast into the deep sea, than linger in the pangs of hunger, sickness, and pain, to draw their last agonizing breath in the streets of New York."¹ What was America to do about her cities?

Alienation of the Laboring Class

One of the greatest tragedies in American history is the alienation of the laboring classes from Protestant churches, and it took place during the period which we are now examining. Protestantism was equated with the interests of business and management and churches canonized the kings of industry as the elect of God. This attitude was not confined to conservative churchmen. Orville Dewey, a Unitarian preacher in New York, joined the ecclesiastical chorus saying: "I say, therefore, that there is no being in the world for whom I feel a higher moral respect and admiration than for the upright man of business;

¹*The Catholic Church in Changing America*, pp. 29-30, cited by W. S. Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

no, not for the philanthropist, the missionary or the martyr."¹

Coupled with this near-worship of the rich and powerful in business and industry was a contemptuous attitude for the budding labor movement. Churchmen and church journalists who, in other matters, eschewed all forms of violence called for the forcible suppression of labor unions and allowed themselves to use far harsher words than were needed to express their dislike for the laboring man's growing demands.²

Three things were occurring during the latter part of the nineteenth century, all of which affected the role of the common laborer and all of which had an adverse effect on American Protestantism. First, the population was shifting from the farm and small town to the great urban centers; second, industrialization was rapidly becoming the dominant factor in American life, engulfing millions of individuals and families in a tightly knit system to which they owed their entire physical existence. And third, traditional Protestantism found itself emotionally and financially tied to the losing side of the argument in the struggle between management and labor for a more equitable distribution of wealth.

¹Leslie Tarr, "The Labor Scene: Does the Church Know What's Going On?," *Eternity*, November, 1972, pp. 22-24. The article is taken from John H. Redekop, *Labor Problems in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972).

²*Ibid.*, p. 23.

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The Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, showed itself to be much more identified with the laboring man and his interests. Somehow the moralistic mood which was so prevalent in Protestant circles was not so acute here, and consequently the division between the urban working classes and the church which was emptying one after another of Protestant city churches did not harm the Catholic parish. This was probably due to the fact that the immigrant laborers who made up a large share of the urban working class belonged to the Catholic Church and the Church was well aware of their plight. And what a plight it was!

As compared with the employers who controlled the new industry, the workers actually retrogressed. Machinery and corporate organization utilizing immigrant labor made American capitalists, in the words of a New York merchant, as independent of American workmen "as the imported slaves made Roman patricians independent of Roman laborers." By combining in pools and trusts, the masters of capital succeeded not only in suppressing cut-throat competition, but also in imposing exorbitantly high prices upon the consuming public and slashing wage-cuts upon their employees.¹

During the 1880's, industrial conflict grew and

¹Abell, *op cit.*, p. 58

strikes broke out as the number of wage-earners nearly doubled during the decade. The economic condition of the workers, however, improved hardly at all. How American Protestantism could remain as silent as it did is hard to fathom, except when we consider how slow the church has proven to be on similar matters in other times and places. The fact is that the sight of "huge capital alongside huge misery, of over-production on the one side and starvation on the other," found most Protestants embarrassingly silent.¹ As America shifted ominously toward division between prosperous native-born employers and impoverished immigrant employees, Protestant churches found themselves on the side of the former and tragically alienated from the latter. The percentage of wage-earners attending Protestant churches slipped rapidly and the image which was created placed Protestantism on the side of the poor's oppressors.

Protestant churches are not growing well today among the industrial workers of our nation. A large part of the reason lies here in the late nineteenth century when the pattern of urban life in America was being formed. American Christianity was charged with many uncomplimentary things during the closing decades of the past century, but the most stinging of all was the failure to practice true New Testament religion

¹Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

in the cities. Most working men rejected "churchianity," says Abell, because they considered the religion which they saw practiced by middle and upper class Protestants to be a pious fraud. They had not given up Christianity, as they believed it, but they regarded the organized church as being intentionally set against them.

Characteristic of this attitude was the New York rally of workmen in the early eighties which in the same breath hissed the churches and cheered the mention of Christ's name. A committee of the Congregational Churches in Massachusetts found that, in most cases, the wage-earner voiced allegiance to the Great Galilean along with hatred of the church which in his opinion had betrayed him. If the churches "would be faithful to Jesus," he said, "no alienation would exist."¹

The story sounds all too familiar. The urban mission of Protestantism has some long-standing obstacles to overcome, and they are as much social and ethnic as religious. In a rapidly urbanizing world, where labor movements are now conducted on an international scale, men concerned about Christian missions would do well to reconsider the whole question of Protestantism's identification with the middle and upper classes and its refusal to take the demands of labor seriously. Christianity has something to say in the area

¹Abell, *op. cit.*, pp 64-65.

of labor and management. God's word is not silent on this subject. A hundred years ago, writers such as Washington Gladden insisted that Protestantism has a moral obligation to lead the fight for social justice and fair wages. For various reasons, orthodox Protestants failed to see the basic issues which were at stake. By neglecting to articulate biblical principles in relation to the burning social issues of the day, American Protestants lost the cities where these issues were coming to a head. It was left up to secular forces to fight the social battles and subsequently reap the benefits.

We cannot help but wonder: Where did American Protestants lose their sensitivity to the plight of the common laborer? And how did Protestantism become such a friend of the wealthy and powerful? The Reformers of the sixteenth century and the Puritans after that, shared a healthy fear of great wealth and warned against wealth's excesses. The law of love and a host of biblical injunctions concerning justice and righteousness in society should have pricked a million consciences and spurred them into spiritually motivated, biblically-oriented social action. But something went wrong, and there is little evidence that we have done much to correct it yet.

Protestantism's perennial embarrassment in the city has been caused in part by its failure to take Christ's universal Lordship seriously and to apply it in ways which go beyond individual ethics to the wider relationships of society. Issues

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which should have blazed across the pages of religious journals, with Spirit-directed thinking in search of solutions, were left to the secularists to consider; and often as not the religious press stood on the losing side. By following that course Protestant churches forfeited their credibility as far as the laboring classes were concerned, and ever since then urban evangelism has been an uphill fight.

3

A NEW URBAN PROTESTANTISM

At the close of the Civil War, three things were happening in America which affected Protestantism in the urban setting. First, there was a growing interest in the needs of the urban masses and a broad, humanitarian concern was developing with regard to urban suffering. This issued in the formation of governmental and other non-religious relief agencies aimed at relieving the suffering of the poor. Second, there was no small amount of fear among middle-class Americans that this urban situation was getting out of hand. Catholics were getting too numerous. They "get off the ship on Monday and vote on Tuesday," moaned one old time politician. Catholic immigrant politicians, identifying as they did so well with the needs and hopes of the urban workers, were taking over city governments. As one writer put it, "The function of the Irishman is to administer the affairs of the American city."¹ With every passing year labor unrest increased and the unions became stronger, and, to many observers, the entire economic system of the nation was being threatened.

¹Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

The third thing that was occurring was that throughout the country a genuine Christian concern was mounting to help the urban poor in the name of Christ. This was the motivation which sent hundreds of Christian workers into the slums to identify with the poor, to live among them, and to lift their burdens in a way which secular humanitarianism could never accomplish. We shall unfold at least part of the dramatic story of Protestant urban missions later in this book, but let it suffice for now to point out that parallel to the changing mood throughout the nation there was a mounting concern on the part of Christians to claim the city's poor for Christ and demonstrate the love of God in direct and tangible ways in the urban setting.

A brief word should be added concerning the element of fear as it affected urban involvement by the churches. As we have stated, the political consequences of urban slums were a deep concern to many people. At first a fear that the urban masses might prove to be the undoing of American democracy served to motivate relief work among them. Later on, however, when social workers began agitating for new and better legislation that would protect the rights of the poor, they were charged with being socialists, communists, and anarchists. American Protestantism in general turned a deaf ear to the legitimate demands of the labor movement for these same reasons. As soon as relief took the shape of economic or political reform programs which

would give the urban laboring classes more security and a larger share of the profits from their toil there were those who called it communism. The situation in the late nineteenth hundreds was analogous to that which we have seen more recently when the threat of international communism has been used on the one hand to promote foreign missions and on the other hand it has been hurled in a denunciatory way against any kind of mission work which dares go beyond saving souls and doling out charity and calls for a more just and equitable structuring of society. Fear has it both ways.

As bad as things seemed for Protestantism in the cities, there were those nonetheless who, at the close of the Civil War, joined together in proposing some solutions. Associations of various kinds were formed, probably the most fruitful of which was the American Christian Commission, inspired by James Erwin Yeatman (1818-1901) of St. Louis. The contribution made by this Commission marked the turning point as far as the attitude and approach of American Protestantism toward the city were concerned. Yeatman was perceptive enough to realize that before anything of major importance could be done in the cities there had to be a change of attitude toward urban people and their problems. A thorough study had to be made as to the actual conditions in American cities, and this information had to be conveyed to American Christians in such a way that they would be aroused to action. Be-

yond that, Yeatman realized that specific programs had to be devised which would tackle the cities' problems, problems which to a large extent industrialization had created but was not able to solve. Only a composite strategy motivated by genuine Christian concern could alter the negative stance of traditional Protestantism over against the chaotic city.

Yeatman's Vision for Urban Protestantism

James E. Yeatman was a statesman, industrialist, and philanthropist. To the soldiers of the Civil War he was affectionately known as "Old Sanitary" for his work at the head of the Western Sanitary Commission and his frequent camp visits out of concern for the soldiers' welfare. After the war, Yeatman published his *Circular of Inquiry*, which was a careful analysis of the urban situation in America, and, because it was so widely circulated and read, sparked a series of important consequences for urban Protestantism.

In his study of this subject, Aaron I. Abell points out that Yeatman, like many of his contemporaries, both loved and feared the city. In St. Louis, Yeatman was considered the "first citizen" of the city. But at the same time, Yeatman regarded cities as traps where rural folk and others might be seized by the Roman Catholic Church. He bemoaned the comparative ineffectiveness of Protestant churches as compared to aggressive urban Catholicism, and he warned that

Catholic growth in the cities might seriously threaten the nation politically as well as religiously.¹ Yeatman summarized the urban problem for Protestants as, "want of knowledge of their moral condition; lack of organization of the wealth, piety and labor which exist there; need of experimental knowledge of the best agencies and how to perfect organizations already formed; and want of trained, tried, permanent laborers in the various spheres of city labor."²

The same genius for organization which had made Yeatman a leader in the business world and in the civic life of St. Louis now bore fruit for urban missions. More than one hundred influential ministers and laymen from various denominations caught the vision which Yeatman held before them and they organized for action. Their goal was to rejuvenate American churches after the New Testament pattern in which every church is a mission and every believer a witness where he lives and where he works. Yeatman's approach was church-centered. He viewed city churches as the launching centers for strategic urban missions.

The American Christian Commission, an outgrowth of the United States Commission which operated on behalf of Union forces during the Civil War, was organized in Cleveland in Septem-

¹Abell, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

²American Christian Commission, *Document* No. 1 (New York, 1871), pp. 9-11. Cited by Abell, *ibid.*, p. 11.

ber, 1865. James E. Yeatman was the principal mover in the new organization. The first assignment of the new Commission was to collect information on whatever city mission was being done in the United States, state the need as it currently existed, and make a report upon which future action could be based. The report, which was published the following year, was based on personal investigation in thirty-five representative cities. Data was assembled which took in the need for humanitarian church work in American cities, the philanthropic situation viewed as a whole, the current activities of churches which conducted some kind of mission work in the city, and finally, the question of using women as urban missionaries. Commenting on the Commission's report, Abell says that, "Though not exhaustive, this report presented the first truly significant picture of Protestant prospects in urban America."¹

Once the report had been distributed, the responsibility for Christian urban evolvement lay openly before the Protestant churches of America. No one could plead ignorance. The problems were shown to be universal in nature, and by no means restricted, as some wished to make out, to a few eastern seaboard cities. Urban blight was everywhere, and only the most brazen indifference could ignore the fact that here was a reli-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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gious and moral situation with which Protestant churches would have to deal.

The report was only the beginning of the task which the American Christian Commission had taken on. After the investigation had been completed and the report was in circulation, some one had to stir American church leaders to become involved in the city. A Department of Foreign Correspondence was formed to learn from urban experiments in Great Britain and the Continent. A monthly newspaper, *The Christian at Work*, was founded in 1868, and through its pages the Commission promoted interest in urban mission work. Of even greater impact were the Christian Conventions which the Commission sponsored at the local, state and national levels. Through these conventions rank and file church members were reached with the message that something had to be done in American cities. Topics discussed at these conventions were visitations of the poor, the use of existing churches for humanitarian purposes, the formation of Christian associations, lay preaching, open-air preaching, the rescue of social outcasts, and the promotion of Christian union.¹ This stage of the Commission's program was of far-reaching consequence as its leaders worked to arouse American churches to concrete action. Throughout the sixties and seventies the Commission sounded the cry on behalf of America's most neglected mis-

¹*Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

sion field, its own urban centers. There were those who bitterly opposed what the Commission was doing, and at times its efforts were misunderstood and misrepresented. But its message was being heard, and gradually fruit began to appear.

The Commission itself did not undertake the implementation of the urban program which it outlined. This was the task of churches and agencies which were raised up specifically for a missionary purpose. The great value of the Commission's work lay in its realistic assessment of the city's need and the promotional work which it carried on throughout the country. Comparing the suggestions made by the American Christian Commission with programs outlined by others, Abell says that the American Christian Commission was of far greater significance, displaying the seriousness of the urban crisis in terms of immediate religious problems and suggesting social-service methods which the churches could implement. Its plan and philosophy of action were so comprehensive that all kindred subsequent movements could be but elaborations or specializations within its framework.¹

The Institutional Church

Due to large-scale shifts in population during the second half of the nineteenth century, hundreds of Protestant congregations found them-

¹*Ibid.*, p. 26

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selves located in areas of the city where poverty and suffering prevailed and where the people of the neighborhood were not members of any church. As a result of this situation there developed what is known as the institutional church, a church-centered combination of spiritual and social ministry geared to the needs of the urban poor.

The institutional church was an important adaptation to the problems of an urban ministry. The innovations which were connected with it represented creative applications of Christian principles to the real life-needs of inner city people. As neighborhoods change, the structure of urban ministry has to change too. What serves a middle-class Anglo-American community may be only partially relevant to the minority races that are moving in and taking their place. Kenneth Scott Latourette points out that in Australia the failure on the part of the English Baptist missionaries to recognize the inappropriateness of a certain kind of urban strategy in the Australian situation, handicapped Baptist growth in that country for several decades. Baptist ministers who came to Australia after having been trained by the famous London preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon, were accustomed to great "tabernacles" in the center of the city. But as populations moved away from the centers of the cities, this downtown tabernacle strategy proved ill adapted to the new situation and, by the time the Baptists in Australia awoke to the problem, the

suburban areas had been largely taken over by other denominations and the Baptists lost out.¹

The institutional church was designed to stay in an area, adapt its program and ministry to the changing needs of the neighborhood, and reach out to the urban masses in a genuinely word-deed witness. The outstanding early pioneer in this type of ministry was William A. Muhlenberg of the Episcopal Church. Already in 1845 he had founded in New York the Church of the Holy Communion where free pews were available to the poor and a wide variety of social services was offered.² For a city church to offer free seats and social services was something new in that period, and the idea soon began to catch on in other denominations. Another of Muhlenberg's innovations was the establishment of an order of deaconesses. The deaconess movement had its inception at Kaiserwerth, Germany, earlier in the nineteenth century.³ It was Muhlenberg who got it started in America. We shall have more to say about the deaconess movement later on, but it should be noted here that in America it was designed to meet a specifically urban need.

¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century in the Americas, Australia and Africa*, A. D. 1800–A. D. 1914, Vol. V of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1943), p. 154.

²Abell, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

³Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century in Europe and the United States of America*, A. D. 1800–A. D. 1914, Vol. IV of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 153.

Once the idea began to catch on that the church established in a particular neighborhood had a social as well as a religious responsibility to the surrounding community, some interesting things came to light. St. Mark's Episcopal Church in the Frankford suburb of Philadelphia, found that it did not have in its membership a single wage-earner. Led by a lay member, William Welsh, St. Mark's decided that it would direct its efforts toward the immigrants that lived in the area. But how could it do this so long as its membership was so isolated socially, ethnically, and culturally from the people of the community?

The answer came through the ministry of laymen. As laymen became personally involved with the people of the community, new faces appeared in church and attendance swelled. It was hard at first, but by systematic lay effort, first with the wives of the immigrants and then with their more reticent husbands, the barriers between the regular parishioners and the newcomers were broken down and the church won the confidence of the community. St. Mark's appointed four committees to deal with specific groups within the neighborhood: the young and old of both sexes, workingmen and housewives. Gradually some two hundred people were enrolled in Bible classes and nearly seven hundred laboring class families began worshipping at the church.¹ St. Mark's was a ministry of personal

¹Abell, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

involvement on the part of lay people which led to church membership and regular worship on the part of people who had been non-churchgoers before the encounter. The "alms-giving" approach which was so characteristic of most Protestant mission work was carefully avoided. In the case of St. Mark's help was offered on an intimate, man-to-man basis, designed to protect and restore the recipient's dignity.

The most dramatic and resourceful of the early leaders in church-centered social outreach was the Reverend Thomas K. Beecher, who pastored an independent Congregational church in Elmira, New York from 1850 to 1900. Beecher led his congregation to erect a costly building, not for their own aggrandizement as was the custom among so many churches, but for a ministry to the neighborhood poor. Among the many facilities which the new building offered were free baths for the "unclean of the congregation." Mark Twain, Beecher's brother-in-law, wrote about this project saying that "we are going to have at least one sensible but very, very curious church in America."¹

The wide variety of services offered by the institutional church was illustrated in Philadelphia, where Russell Conwell's Baptist Temple during the 1880's provided gymnasiums, sewing classes, manual-training courses, reading rooms, day nurseries, and social clubs for members of

¹*Ibid.*, p. 28.

the congregation and neighborhood. Conwell's program was staffed by hundreds of paid and unpaid workers.¹ Similarly, the Methodists' Metropolitan Temple in New York held fifty services each week during the 1890's, and the church founded an athletic association, various choral societies, a sewing school, and an employment bureau.² In some cases churches competed with one another as to what they could offer. Through it all, millions of dollars were spent and a tremendous amount of religious energy was spent. The relative balance between spiritual impact and social service was difficult to gauge, however, and as the century drew to a close the religious impact decreased. As time went on, the emphasis in most institutional churches weighed heavily on the side of charity and social reform.

Cooperative City Programs

As the institutional church movement grew, many people realized that individual churches should not try to go-it-alone. In some cases help was sought from other churches within the city, regardless of denomination; in other cases the assistance and cooperation of churches belonging to the same denomination but located outside the urban area were solicited. Much of the success of institutional work, says Clifton E. Olmstead, was due to cooperative activity of one sort

¹Olmstead, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

²*Ibid.*

or another. For example, in 1894, a number of institutional churches decided to organize what was called the Open or Institutional Church League. The League was organized on an interdenominational basis for the purpose of co-ordinating the various programs which participating churches carried on. The League's motto was "open church doors every day and all the day, free seats, a plurality of Christian workers, the personal activity of all church members, a ministry to all the community through educational, reformatory and philanthropic channels. . . ." The League's activities did much to stimulate the multiplication of institutional churches toward the end of the nineteenth century.¹

Denominational city mission work grew rapidly during the second half of the last century. Church leaders realized that the challenge of the cities should be shared by everyone, and boards and agencies sprang up to give financial assistance and direction to churches located in slum areas. The Methodists, for example, organized various church extension and missionary societies after 1866 for the purpose of raising money to help churches in slum areas erect new buildings and carry on their ministries. Additional help for the institutional church movement came from the Methodist Social Union of New York which was founded in 1887 for the promotion of mission

¹*Ibid.*

work among the city poor.¹ Similar programs were developed by the Congregationalists. For example, a National Council Church Fund was formed in 1887 which began by raising one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the construction of urban church buildings.² Cooperative efforts among the Presbyterians followed the lines set by the Congregationalists and individual city churches appealed to their presbyteries and to the denomination as a whole to help them establish and expand urban work of an institutional nature.

Surprising as it may seem, the Baptists proved to be more effective than any other denomination in their cooperative efforts in the city. The institutional church appealed strongly to the Baptists, for they saw that downtown churches which continued to use conventional methods were dying. "A man," wrote Johnston Myers, pastor of a Cincinnati institutional church, "may preach the pure Gospel in such a way as to lose even his deacons." Growth-minded Baptists recognized that all the churches in a city, not just the slum-stricken alone, had a responsibility toward the congregations and missions located in industrial areas. To fulfill this obligation, Baptist city missionary societies arose which generally proved to be successful in maintaining social

¹*Ibid.*

²Abell, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

and religious programs in slum area churches. Abell describes Baptist work in Boston as follows:

Baptists were fairly successful in associating their cooperative endeavor with institutional church work. The Boston Society wisely kept the congregations "where the needy multitudes can reach them." Its Committee on Christian Work, appointed in 1882 . . . raised in the following fifteen years seventy thousand dollars . . . for the support of weak houses of worship. At least five Baptist churches developed a high order of social service, sponsoring lectures for working people, literary unions and classes in many subjects and setting up employment bureaus, dispensaries and food depots. The Ruggles Street Church was covering the entire philanthropic field, it stressed education, the "evangel of handicraft," since the poverty of its clientele was due largely to lack of skill. The course of the Boston Society, "if followed by similar bodies, and by more of our churches," said the Reverend Albert C. Lawson, "would go very far toward putting an end to the labor troubles." Several cities did try to follow the Boston example. The Boston City Mission of New York, for example, supported the well-known Mariner's Temple, at which, besides religious exercises in three languages, Baptist folk extended relief, kindergarten, day nursery, and industrial service. The Mission carried on a three-fold program—"the

evangelistic, the educational and the institutional.”¹

By 1900, cooperative city mission work of the institutional type had reached its zenith. Christians working both within and outside of denominational structures were joining hands in one way or another to establish and expand Protestant Christianity in the cities. They were using the institutional church approach to fulfill a vision which had been held before the churches several decades earlier by the American Christian Commission. Despite the efforts which were put forth, only partial success could be claimed. The material and cultural benefits which the churches offered were received with due appreciation. But the recipients among the urban poor did not move on to church membership as had been expected. Nor was the basic alienation of the laboring classes over against Protestantism overcome. Somehow the whole Gospel never got through and the Protestant Church as an institution still did not appeal. From a humanitarian viewpoint, a great deal of good was done and thousands were relieved of physical and material suffering. Moreover, the exercise of religious concern was unquestionably of great benefit to church members themselves. But apart from that, the dream of bringing the multitudes into personal fellowship with Christ and into membership

¹*Ibid.*, p. 180.

in the church was not fulfilled, and Protestantism remained spiritually frustrated and organizationally weak in American cities.

The Deaconess Movement

As broad as the programs of the institutional churches were, they could not meet all the needs of the urban poor; nor could they monopolize all the energies which the awakened social awareness of American Protestantism set in motion. Countless auxiliary welfare agencies sprang up in the latter part of the nineteenth century and they were related directly or indirectly to the organized churches. Laymen played the leading roles in nearly all of these movements. Women and young people were especially active, and numerous brotherhoods, sisterhoods, and young people's societies arose to channel their services to the city population.

When William A. Muhlenberg first introduced an order of deaconesses he took many American Protestants by complete surprise. Traditional denominations were not ready for this European innovation, and it was not until nearly the end of the century that deaconesses came to be widely used in America. Hudson remarks that perhaps their use of quaint hats and distinctive dress militated against their popularity. "Protestant nuns" they were called in some places and they bore the brunt of many jokes. Conservative American Protestants were not yet ready to follow their brethren in Europe with their organized programs

of training and service for Protestant women.¹

The purpose of the deaconess movement was to harness the previously untapped female resources of the Protestant Church and put Christian woman-power to work among the urban poor. House-to-house visiting, work among women and children, and medical services, could all be done efficiently by women. Training schools were established in some cities and women attended classes especially designed to train them for urban mission work. Abell says that nearly a hundred and fifty well-equipped deaconess institutions were established between 1885 and 1900.² Though, on the whole, the deaconess movement did not fare well, it did serve to break down the barrier which up to this time had kept women relatively inactive in Protestant church work. From this time on women would be in the vanguard of most movements of a social and missionary nature in Protestant denominations.

The Sunday School Endeavor

In 1780, Robert Raikes, a Christian philanthropist living in Gloucester, England, initiated an educational experiment which soon became a world-wide endeavor. On Sundays, Raikes would gather a group of children whose parents were

¹Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

²Abell, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

too poor to send them to school and he would give them elementary education as well as religious instruction. By 1785 William Elliott, an American philanthropist living in Virginia, founded a similar school in Accomac County. A second school was begun by Bishop Asbury in 1786 in Hanover County, and in 1790 the Methodist Conference held at Charleston, South Carolina, took action to organize and promote Sunday schools wherever possible. These early ventures in America were not successful, however, for the children were not regular in attendance and the discouraged teachers eventually abandoned the project. The Sunday school idea was sound, but its application had to wait the growth of cities before it could really become popular.¹

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Sunday school movement began to develop in full force. From the start, Sunday schools were organized and administered by laymen, and they were separate from ecclesiastical bodies. Says Olmstead:

During the last decade of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth centuries Sunday schools were organized and operated mainly by societies and unions. The first organization of this kind had its origin in Philadelphia in 1790 and was known as the First Day or Sabbath School Society. It brought in-

¹Olmstead, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

struction to more than 2000 pupils during the first decade of its existence. In 1804 the Union Society was organized to provide for the education of the poor female children of Philadelphia. Other large cities such as Pittsburgh, Boston, New York, Albany, Hartford, Baltimore, and Charleston soon followed suit.¹

Sunday schools gave a wonderful opportunity for Christian women to be active in religion and education. They met the needs of the urban poor relevantly and effectively. Instruction was given to mothers in the rearing of children, sewing, cooking, and other womanly skills. Children who otherwise would have remained illiterate were taught to read and write. Blended with this general education was a high degree of religious instruction in which children and parents were introduced to the Bible, and religious and moral tenets were communicated. However, as the nation's public school system improved, the need for secular education offered by the Sunday schools gradually disappeared. At this point the churches moved in and adopted the Sunday school movement as something which the churches needed and could use, and Sunday school instruction became distinctively religious in character. As revivalism declined, the Sunday school took its place as the principal recruiting device of American churches. Adult classes were added,

¹ *Ibid.*

and the Sunday school program sometimes rivaled the regular organized worship service in popularity.¹

Not everyone was entirely sold on the Sunday school movement. Here and there voices of warning and protest were raised. For one thing, Sunday schools traditionally were administered by laymen, with only an informal tie-in with the ecclesiastical program. This lay and independent status of the Sunday school was both its strength and its weakness. It provided for involvement on the part of many eager laymen, especially lay women. But because of its independent character it lacked the stability which a closer relation to the churches might have given it. As revivalism declined toward the end of the century, Protestant churches were eager to use the Sunday school to recruit new members and bolster the faith of the old ones. The quality of secular education was rising, so the need for Sunday schools was in one sense disappearing. At the same time, rural-to-urban migration was increasing every year, and with it the needs of the urban poor became ever more apparent. The Sunday school movement was in a bind, and just as today, many observers questioned what should be done with the whole enterprise.

Other questions were raised also: What have Sunday schools done to change the oppressing

¹Hudson, *op. cit.*, pp 235-236.

structures of urban life? Granted, thousands of girls have learned how to sew, cook, and keep house. Mothers have learned about sanitation and child care, and small boys have been taught how to read and write. But the slums still teem with people, the tenements still reek, and wages remain low. Cannot the church, or individual Christians, devise some better way to aid the urban poor?

As recruiting agencies for local churches, Sunday schools were not the most effective. Studies of nineteenth-century Sunday schools indicate that in very many places the percentage of pupils who passed from the Sunday school to full church membership was discouragingly small.¹ The number of pupils in many city schools grew each year, but few pupils went on to become active church members. Despite all the activity, the heart-changing message of the Gospel was not getting through to the urban masses.

The cause of this failure sometimes may have been theological, when teachers possessed little of the Gospel to communicate. But more than likely it was a structural defect which lay at the bottom of the problem. Early Sunday schools had little or no vital connection with ecclesiastical bodies. Even those Sunday schools which met in church buildings generally operated as though they were an entirely separate Christian

¹ Abell, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

organization and not as agents of the church engaged in word-deed witness to the community. The gap was psychological as well as structural, and it had a bad influence. Perhaps one reason for this lack of cohesion was the laymen's unconscious resentment of the clergy and the clergy's domination of official church structures. Or maybe it was the narrowness of the church's vision to which laymen refused to be bound. But whatever the causes, in the long run the Sunday school's separate operation hindered its effectiveness in the city; and when changing circumstances forced Sunday schools to play the roles of instructor of Christian youth and chief recruiting agent for local churches, the Sunday school's impact as far as the urban masses were concerned rapidly diminished. Now, instead of being an agency by which class and ethnic barriers were crossed over the Sunday school found itself serving the needs and reflecting the culture of the very institution which felt so out of place in changing city neighborhoods.

4

CHURCHES WITHOUT MISSION AND MISSIONS THAT BECAME CHURCHES

Some city churches never caught the vision to either help materially or evangelize spiritually the impoverished masses at their doorstep. In a spirit of good-natured apathy, says Abell, many churches allowed the urban religious problem to go unsolved.¹ And sometimes the apathy was something less than good-natured.

The case of Trinity Church, New York, will illustrate what we mean. Trinity Church had the reputation of being the richest church in America. Its vast property holdings and extensive investments were inherited from a previous generation of wealthy and dedicated Christians who had left their money to the church in the expectation that much good would be done with it. With the movement of population, however, many of the buildings owned by Trinity Church now stood in slum districts and the buildings themselves had become slum tenements. From these properties Trinity Church drew high rentals. The buildings had once been the elegant homes of wealthy church members, but now they were windowless, plumbing-less prisons of squalor and stench.

¹Abell, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

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They brought in good revenue, however; and until the value of the property went up for other reasons, the men in charge of Trinity's finances were not inclined to let this source of income disappear. When Trinity Church went to court to fight a new law demanding running water on each floor of tenement buildings, the church showed how far institutionalized religion could go in its hardened indifference to the needs of the poor.

By common consensus, the tenement house was the nexus of all the evils associated with the urban slum.¹ They were dens of disease, crime, and human suffering in every form. Social reformers of every sort, religious or secular, directed their efforts toward the elimination of this monster, the slum tenement, for it was both the setting and the symbol of all that was wrong in the inner city.

From 1887 to 1895, the men of Trinity's vestry fought the government's new law. The story of their refusal to install running water on each floor of church-owned tenements makes doleful reading. Having inherited from previous generations fabulous property holdings and invested wealth, the congregations which made up Trinity parish enjoyed getting religion without cost to themselves. According to the financial statement

¹ Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), pp. 205, 81-83.

issued in 1910, which was the first public report in over fifty years, the cost of maintaining the ten churches and the schools of Trinity parish for one year amounted to \$340,870. Of this amount, the church members themselves contributed just \$18,210, and that came through pew rents. All the remainder came through the rental income from Trinity's inherited properties, most of it consisting of slum tenements and similar buildings. In other words, the poor people of New York and others who occupied buildings owned by Trinity, paid for the upkeep and operation of both the humble chapels located in poor neighborhoods and also the rich uptown churches which the poor themselves never entered. The truth was that the communicant members of Trinity Church worshipped in church buildings which they had not erected and they enjoyed the services of a church which they themselves did little to support. Music alone cost Trinity some \$63,000 a year, and this was three times as much as all the members contributed to the entire support of the church. In the church report of 1910, the parish's twenty-eight clergymen received a total of \$101,674, and the thirty-two sextons and engineers earned \$26,555. Fuel and light cost \$12,280, which was the only single item which the contributions of Trinity's members (\$18,000) fully covered. The difference between the enormous cost of maintaining Trinity parish's operations and the pitiable contributions of the members was raised through tenement

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by drawing public attention to the despicable treatment which the poor were receiving and the horrendous conditions in which they lived in lower Manhattan, New York.¹

How tragic was the church's insensitivity to human need! When a civil judge must make a decision against a Christian institution for its profit-making exploitation of the poor, you can be certain that something is wrong with some people's religion. And where, we ask, were the other churches? They might have brought pressure to bear against Trinity and either forced her to change the church's policy or ostracized her for her sub-Christian ways. But other churches were strangely silent. They may not have been so rich or so greedy, but they were no less reluctant to take a stand on behalf of the urban poor. Nor were they ready to discipline Trinity before ecclesiastical courts. A thousand subtle barriers carefully erected and staunchly maintained kept the city masses away from mainline Protestant churches, and few cared to discard such barriers. The turning of an old established church in sympathy and service toward the people of its neighborhood is a gigantic, soul-moving operation. Trinity's callousness was outstanding, but it was not essentially unique.

A Church Where the Poor Were Welcome

The tragedy of the introverted urban church

¹*Ibid.*

rentals, or in other words, from the pockets of the urban poor.¹

What happens when a religious institution begins to play the role of a soulless landlord is seen in Trinity's long legal battle with city authorities. The first clash came in 1887 when the law was passed requiring running water on every floor of tenement housing and Trinity refused to comply. In most of the Trinity buildings, tenants had to go downstairs and out of doors to get their water. When the city took the church corporation to court, the cost of the litigation was not borne by the churchmen themselves but was financed out of the rentals taken from the very people who were supposed to benefit from the new law.²

It was an epoch-making case for it decided that a private owner, for the public good, could be forced to alter a house at his own expense. Today this is commonly accepted, but that was not the case in the nineteenth century. The saddest part is that a church had to be driven through litigation to come up to the new level of decency and justice which the courts had established for the public welfare. After fighting for eight years, Trinity lost the court battle. However, in spite of itself, Trinity Church aided the cause of the poor

¹"A Study of Trinity—the Richest Church in America," a documentary written by Ray Stannard Baker, in Robert D. Cross, ed., *The Church and the City, 1865-1910* (Indianapolis; The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1967), pp. 78-81.

²*Ibid.*

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don-born Salvation Army, the product of the urban anguish and burning heart of William Booth. The Army was destined to become the foremost representative of revivalistic slum work in America and its endeavor to consistently balance soul-winning evangelism with social work was destined to effect some monumental changes in Protestant mission work in the city.

The Salvation Army began in the slums of East London where William Booth was engaged in evangelism. Booth's part of London was as blighted an urban area as the western world then knew. One night in 1865, after a long day of itinerant preaching, Booth returned to his home and announced to his wife: "Kate, I have found my destiny! These are the people for whose salvation I have longed all these years. I have offered up myself and you and the children to this great work." And as Booth himself said later, the Salvation Army was born that night. From the start it was dedicated to winning urban masses to Christ and serving their manifold needs in an organized way.

Booth had had plenty of experience with churches which refused to be missionary. During the decade in which Booth had been working among slum people in London, he had seen the dreadful consequences, both for Protestant churches and for the city masses, of the separation between churches and the poor. He had ruffled the feathers of many a church member by bringing slum people into upper class church-

es. When Booth began to itinerate as a Methodist preacher, he attracted larger and larger crowds. During his campaign in Cornwall in 1861–62, he claimed more than 1,000 converts in only four months.¹ It became obvious to Booth and to those around him that evangelism in the neediest urban areas was his first love, and when the Wesleyan group to which he belonged insisted that he confine his ministry to a regular parish, Booth resigned. Along with his wife, the former Catherine Mumford, Booth entered the independent ministry which in a few decades would make his name a household word in many parts of the world and would bring blessing and relief to countless thousands of impoverished people.

What would Booth's enterprise become? a church? a mission? or another denomination? The name, "Salvation Army," was not adopted until 1878, and during the intervening years Booth worked as an independent evangelist in charge of what he called the East London Christian Mission. By 1868, Booth and his co-workers were holding nearly 150 street services every week, and they had thirteen "preaching stations" in various parts of London with a combined capacity of 8,000 persons.

During the 1870's Booth's work continued to

¹Norris Alden Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Welfare Work, 1865–1920* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1968), p. 4.

advance. Thousands of city people were converted and new stations of operation were opened. Booth had a Methodist passion to "save souls," but he was also concerned about the physical needs of the people. The people and the needs were so numerous that he realized that a larger organization was needed. Along with this, there developed in Booth's mind an inclination toward military discipline and methods. This gradually led him to the concept of an "Army" of enlisted Christians under the direction of a "General" and his staff officers. Female workers would be called Army "lassies" and would be identifiable everywhere by their distinctive uniforms.

In February, 1880, George Railton and seven young lassies of the Salvation Army arrived in America. They were the first contingent of the countless missionary bands which, during succeeding months and years, planted the standard of the Salvation Army all across America and in many other countries of the world. The arrival of the Salvationists on American shores displeased many Protestant denominational leaders. They did not like the Army's theology, nor their methods, nor their authoritative system of organization. It was contrary to the American democratic spirit, they said, and some people likened the Army to the Jesuits.

When Railton began holding services in a New York saloon, many Protestants were horrified. A prominent eastern minister called the place "the most disreputable den in the United States, in

the worst slum of the city!"¹ Such criticism, of course, did nothing to deter the Army. The slums were their chosen habitat. That is what they had come to American cities to do, and they had faced the obstacle of official slander before.

Respect for the Army and its urban program did not come automatically, and a worse obstacle than clerical criticism was that of legal sanctions which forbade noisy marches and out-door services. The big brass bands were part of the Army's make-up; they appealed to slum folk and they were designed for public streets. Gradually, the American public came to accept the Army's presence, and slander changed to admiration and praise as reports spread about the Army's operations. Here was a Christian organization which was neither a church nor a new denomination, but which met a need in the city which had left traditional Protestantism thoroughly frustrated.

From the beginning, William Booth had been the Army's "General," and leadership was largely in the hands of the Booth family. A serious breach occurred in the United States branch early in 1896 when Ballington Booth, the General's son, resigned from his leadership of the American Army to form his own, more "democratic" organization. He called the new organization the Volunteers of America. Ballington and his wife, Maud B. Booth, had worked tirelessly to improve the Army's image among the churches of Ameri-

¹Abell, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

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ca. They and their close associates recognized the identity problem which ever hung like a cloud over their mission-oriented organization. "Our movement," Ballington Booth insisted, "is especially raised up to help those who are the lowest fallen, the most depraved and the most neglected."

In carrying out this aggressive mission, we do not, as has been said, create evil in the world, nor do we curb any man's freedom, nor do we interfere with any man's social happiness. On the contrary, we restore all these to those who through moral slavery have lost them.¹

The aim of the Volunteers was to carry out this purpose ever more effectively in America.

Like Dwight L. Moody in the beginning, Ballington Booth urged converts to join Protestant churches; and he invited Protestant church people to join his organization for mission to the city. Many did, and relations improved. Booth believed that his movement had something important to teach American Protestantism, but he saw too that good relations had to be established and maintained before this could happen. His policy of rapprochement with mainline Protestant churches began when he was still head of the American branch of the Army and it continued after he had formed his own organization. The Volunteers of America closely resembled the

¹ *War Cry*, August 12, 1887, cited in Abell, *ibid.*, p. 122.

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Army in its combination of evangelistic fervor and social outreach as well as in its military type dress and organization. Prison work became the Volunteers' specialty, though on the whole its program was as diversified as the Army's. Ballington and Maud Booth, along with a number of their original company of officers, maintained continuity of command and purpose right up to the outbreak of the Second World War.

Opposition Overcome, Slums Occupied, and Souls Saved

By the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century, Protestant churches in America had come to recognize that the Salvation Army was doing something which the churches themselves should have been doing. The collective conscience of American Protestantism was beginning to stir. The foreign origin, strange ways, and military organization of the Army no longer seemed so irksome to Americans, and from every side there came words of glowing praise and admiration for what the Army had undertaken. Stories of the Army officers' personal dedication to helping the poor, such as Railton's sleeping in a chair in the dark basement of his headquarters so that a drunk could have his cot, won the respect of multitudes. Not a few people made embarrassing comparisons between the love and self-sacrifice of the Army's slum workers and the comfort-loving ways of many leaders of established churches.

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The Salvation Army was geared for urban mission of a specialized nature. The Army developed specific forms of ministry to meet the slum-dwellers' most urgent needs. Shelters were provided for the homeless, prisoners were visited and counseled, and rehabilitation programs were undertaken for ex-convicts. Special homes were opened to assist "fallen" women and girls. General Booth's book, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, published in 1890, set the tone for many later developments of the Army's urban program. Capitalizing on the current popularity of Stanley's "Darkest Africa" and making good use of the literary talents of the social reform journalist, William T. Stead, Booth's volume graphically portrayed the "darkness" of England's urban masses. The book proved to be a pivotal event for the Army's social efforts for it systematized and gave official endorsement to the many scattered beginnings of the movement's social program.¹ Wherever it became clear that the urban poor had a specific need, the Army would try to develop a program which would meet that need relevantly and effectively. As their founder had said, the slums were their "destiny," and the needs of slum dwellers were their chosen concern.

Army lassies, working in pairs and known as "Slum Sisters," lived in the depressed areas and shared the slum-dwellers' problems. Lassies'

¹Magnuson, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

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clothes and lodgings differed from those of their neighbors only in cleanliness and neatness. They bathed babies, nursed sick mothers, counseled wayward girls, cleaned dirty homes; and by their presence, love, and words they cultivated peace and temperance in the sordid slums. All the while they were "ceaselessly preaching the religion of Jesus Christ to the outcasts of society."¹

"Souls! Souls! Souls!" shouted the headlines of one issue of *War Cry*, the Army's official paper.² And souls remained the Army's principal concern. Regardless of all their social involvement on behalf of the urban poor, the Salvation Army continued to be above all else a "soul-saving agency." Crowds everywhere followed the sound of the drum to the meeting halls and auditoriums where revivals were conducted. "Probably during no hundred years in the history of the world," wrote Josiah Strong, "have there been saved so many thieves, gamblers, drunkards, and prostitutes as during the past quarter of a century through the Salvation Army."³

The secret of this harmonious blending of evangelism and social welfare lay in the vision and single-mindedness of William Booth. Booth believed that the healing of men's bodies was on-

¹William Booth, *In Darkest England the the Way Out* (New York. Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), p. 159.

²*War Cry*, December 31, 1898, cited in Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums*, p. 14.

³Josiah Strong, *New Era*, pp. 351-352, cited in Magnuson, *ibid.*, p. 18.

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ly one part, though an important part, of the curing of the world's ills. If, said Booth, you leave a man socially rehabilitated but spiritually unconverted, you have done him no lasting good. Booth's spirit characterized the Salvation Army and the Volunteers of America for many decades and provided their workers with the motivation and willingness to sacrifice which the program needed. Booth realized that conditions in the slums were so bad, and natural prejudices were so great, that only highly motivated religious people would do the things necessary to raise the downtrodden and oppressed and bring some ray of hope to the inner city. Only a spiritually oriented kind of relief work would give the slum-dweller what he needed for body and soul. The genius of Booth's play lay in the consistent maintenance of both approaches to men's needs, and as long as both received their proper emphasis the movement which he founded served as a saving leaven in the city.

5

MULTIPLIED MINISTRIES AND WHAT THEY MEAN

Since the first urban explosion hit the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, Christian ministries in the city have multiplied in many directions. The Salvation Army has not been the only religious agency beating the drum in the city. A wide variety of evangelical welfare groups have responded to the multiple needs of the poor. Most of these have been independent or interdenominational in character, but in some cases strong church-centered programs have been developed by mainline Protestants. In this chapter I want to go back in history and describe some of these programs and then analyze briefly what the urban scene has meant to American Protestantism.

The City Rescue Missions

One night in 1868, a drunken “river thief” was lying on the floor of a tenement house in New York. Somehow his befuddled mind caught the question which a female Christian worker from the Howard Mission put to him:

“Do you know Jesus?”

“No, I don’t. Who is he?” was all the drunken man could answer.

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That brief conversation in the tenement house, however, began a process which led to the radical conversion of Jeremiah McAuley, an Irish-born immigrant who, despite some earlier bouts with religion, was at the moment of this encounter on the tenement floor nothing more than a drunk and a criminal. The story of McAuley's conversion was told and retold thousands of times in the years which followed, and it gave hope to countless others who needed to know that a new life was possible through Jesus Christ.

Several years after his conversion, Jeremiah McAuley got started in rescue mission work in New York. Beginning at 316 Water Street in a building which once had been a notorious dance hall, McAuley opened what he called the "Helping Hand for Men" Mission in the month of October, 1872. Men who were drunkards, drifters, and criminals, just as McAuley himself once had been, flocked to the mission. The "helping hand" extended to them offered spiritual, moral and vocational rehabilitation. This was the genius of McAuley's approach.

In 1876, McAuley erected a three-story building on the same property and the whole enterprise was named "McAuley Water Street Mission." In 1882, McAuley founded the Cremorne Mission on West Thirty-second Street, which was considered to be the worst area of New York. McAuley died in 1884, and his widow Maria assumed the leadership of the Cremorne Mission

until ill health forced her to retire in 1892.¹

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century no person was more influential in rescue mission work in America than Jerry McAuley. His Water Street Mission, and later the Cremorne project, attracted interest from all over the United States and sent urban Protestant mission work in a new direction. In 1883, McAuley began publishing a "newspaper" which became the informal organ of New York city missions, and in this way the accounts of what McAuley was doing on Water Street and at Cremorne were carried throughout the country. During the two decades between 1872 and 1892, more than one hundred missions of the McAuley type were opened in the United States and in other countries.²

Nothing stirs men to missionary action so quickly as the living examples of what God does through simple and honest evangelistic effort. McAuley's ministry multiplied through the persons of his converts who went on to tell what had happened in their lives and, in some cases, founded city missions similar to McAuley's. This is illustrated by the work of Samuel Hopkins Hadley, a drunken outcast who was converted in McAuley's Cremorne Mission in 1882. It is one of the injustices of historical accounting that Hadley's name is hardly known today, for, from

¹ Magnuson, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

1886 to 1906, he was regarded as one of the most prominent leaders in the rescue mission world.¹

Immediately after his conversion, Samuel H. Hadley began to evangelize others. A. T. Pierson, former editor of the *Missionary Review of the World*, considered Hadley the most successful soul-winner of this generation and estimated that Hadley had led some seventy-five thousand persons to saving faith. Similarly, A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, said of Hadley that he "had the genius of soul saving as no other living man possessed it." Hadley was placed in charge of the Water Street Mission in 1886, and he hurled himself into the work of reaching social and moral derelicts for Christ. His own brother, H. H. Hadley, was converted in the Water Street Mission in 1886, and he went on to establish similar rescue missions in other parts of the country.²

Mel Trotter, who was converted to Christ and raised from the depths of moral degradation in 1897 at the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago and later founded the rescue mission in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which still bears his name, said of Hadley that he had learned to do effective evangelism from him. For many years, Dr. Mar-

¹"Samuel H. Hadley, the Soul Winner," *The Missionary Review of the World*, XXIX (April, 1906), 295-296. Cited by Magnuson, p. 30.

²Magnuson, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-31.

tin J. Wyngaarden, now professor emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, has given his personal testimony at the Mel Trotter Mission each year on his spiritual birthday, and Dr. Wyngaarden is but one of countless men and women affected by the work of McAuley and Hadley in New York.

City rescue missions blended evangelistic fervor of a fundamental, biblical sort, with social concern which reached down to every kind of human need. The influence of the Salvation Army's body-and-soul approach was felt throughout the entire rescue mission movement. McAuley's Water Street Mission, for example, offered a wide range of practical assistance to persons in need throughout the neighborhood. The Pacific Garden Mission, which was organized in Chicago in 1877, came to be considered the most successful mission of its kind in America. The Garden combined evangelistic meetings every day and night of the week with systematic home visitation carried on by a paid staff of workers who combed the neighborhood, offering help wherever it was needed. In addition to these local efforts, several national organizations were formed during this period to coordinate city rescue mission work and the blending of social concern with evangelistic fervor characterized them all.

The Homes for Fallen Girls

Industrialization brought thousands of young girls to the cities, but in many, many cases the

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wages which were paid them were too low to sustain the girls in the city. The outcome, for thousands, was prostitution. Perhaps only a person who has known similar situations in Third World cities where girls today are caught in desperate circumstances which force them into prostitution can comprehend what happened in America. But for many girls there was hardly any choice. Booth-Tucker of the Salvation Army described them as "more sinned against than sinning," and another woman worker among the "fallen girls" of the city described them as "often not fallen but 'knocked down,' yet with like possibilities as myself."¹ Rescue workers throughout America were fervent in their denunciation of the low wage scales which made virtual slaves of urban working girls, just as some decades later Salvation Army workers played an important role in liberating slave girls from prostitution in Japan.²

The name of Charles Nelson Crittenton looms large in the history of evangelical work among prostitutes and fallen girls in American cities. After Crittenton's daughter Florence died, he himself was converted to the Protestant faith and he began to do mission work in the saloon district of New York. Crittenton was a man of wealth and ability in the business world. In

¹*Ibid.*, p. 236, citing Booth-Tucker, *Social Relief Work*, p. 16; Barrett, *Fourteen Years' Work*, p. 28.

²*Ibid.*, p. 250.

addition, he had a heart for lost and hurting people, and this led him to the inner city.

One day, while urging two prostitutes to forsake their sinful lives and begin over again in Christ, Crittenton realized that his words had a hollow ring because he had nothing to offer these women by way of a real alternative to their way of earning a living. There was no place for them to go, nor were there jobs available that would pay them enough to support themselves and their children. At that moment it dawned on Crittenton that in order to give such women a real option in religion and morals some other door had to be opened, and that too was part of the Christian's task in the slums.

Crittenton began working at this problem in 1883, and within a few years a whole series of mission homes had been erected for destitute girls, expectant, unwed mothers, and prostitutes who wanted to escape the moral slavery they were in. Gospel services were held every night in these centers, and hundreds of girls were religiously converted and socially rehabilitated through the program. Crittenton himself supervised the activities of the Bleeker Street Home in New York and he drove himself nearly to the breaking point as he and his "rescue bands" combed the neighborhood nightly, inviting homeless girls and prostitutes to come into the center and begin a new life. After six years of such work, Crittenton sought rest and recuperation through a world tour, during which he plunged

into rescue work in Great Britain. The plight of prostitutes and unwed mothers in other countries came to his attention also, and he saw the need for a worldwide program to reach destitute women. Within a decade, Crittenton's home for fallen girls in New York became the "mother mission" for a large number of such centers across America and in various other countries.¹

Some rescue homes would turn down girls who came with babies born out of wedlock and who refused to give the babies up, but Crittenton's mission would "receive all comers." Crittenton had laid down the rule from the beginning that no destitute woman would ever be turned away. Every woman, even the most sin-hardened, would be treated with patience and love. Crittenton was blazing the trail for a new Protestant attitude toward "fallen women."

White slavery became one of the areas in which evangelical mission workers attacked evil at the structural level as well as at the level of the individual involved in sin and destitution. Many workers went all the way to the highest levels of government in their efforts to correct the social system which caused women to fall into prostitution, and to keep them there once they had fallen. City missionaries knew that in many cases women were faced with the alternative of either starving or selling their virtue. Some companies paid girls as little as \$3.00 a week, and there was

¹*Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

simply no possible way for a girl to survive in the city with that kind of wage.

Charles Crittenton, the Salvation Army, and a number of other rescue mission leaders, carried their appeals both to churches and the government. On the one hand, "decent" Christians had to be re-educated as far as the poor and the fallen were concerned. There were facts about the city which they needed to learn, and the Florence Crittenton Purity and Prayer Circles aimed at cultivating new, enlightened attitudes among church members. In the halls of government, Crittenton told of a factory which paid 300 women \$1.50 per week, thereby forcing about one-half of the girls into moral ruin. As late as 1910, it could be said that "commerce in girls" in the United States "was as real as the trade in animals in the stockyards of Chicago." Slum missionaries played a large role in making Americans in general aware of these conditions and willing to do something to correct them.¹

Success with the girls was amazingly high during this period. Some city missions showed a success ratio of as high as 80%. For several decades after 1890, when their work among fallen girls really got started, the Salvation Army consistently claimed a success ratio ranging from 75% to more than 90%. The Crittenton mission in New York during its early years claimed considerably more than one half. Failure was defined

¹*Ibid.*, p. 247.

in terms of repeated sexual deviation after a girl had been helped and later inability to hold down a job. In general, such failures were rare.

The high degree of successful rehabilitation attained by the mission agencies can be partly explained by the fact that most of these girls were not hardened prostitutes, but were humble working girls from rural America and foreign countries who were caught in the fangs of the low wages paid by new and untamed industry. But there was another factor also, and that was the combination of Christian love and positive witness which these women received. Christian concern for the destitute led to the establishment of safe and inexpensive lodging-houses for underpaid girls. Christian sensitivity to what was right and just led to the nation-wide crusade to change public opinion and raise the wage scales of industry. And tangible Christian concern for the temporal and eternal welfare of destitute women motivated slum missionaries to go into these areas, to live there, and to work out solutions on a one-to-one basis which never could have been reached in any other way. It was the combination of all these factors which changed the lives of thousands of lost girls, changed the attitudes of many Protestant Christians who previously had been indifferent to the plight of such women, and, in union with other forces, paved the way for higher wages in industry.

In the last analysis, the organizations which succeeded most in the slums were not simply

“welfare agencies” interested only in social rehabilitation. Instead, they were the religious organizations whose work was successful until a genuine conversion to Jesus Christ accompanied the social restoration of wrecked lives. Slum work demands high motivation. It requires vision and activity on two levels, the personal and the structural. It is to the credit of evangelical slum workers of a century ago that they went into the areas which other people were abandoning and identified with the people in need. At the same time, they saw that beyond the multiplied evils of slum neighborhoods lay certain structural injustices which had to be eradicated and certain attitudes among Christians which needed to be changed. On the whole, rescue missions did admirably well and the pity is that more churches did not follow their example.

The Complexion of Urban Protestantism

By 1900, the die was cast. American Protestantism had had three and a half decades of urban experience and this had brought about a number of changes. In the first place, the city had made an indelible impression on the Christian consciousness. What the “world” had once meant, now the “city” had come to mean. The city was something to be feared and loved, accepted and rejected, at one and the same time. Bruised and beaten though it may have been, the Protestant Church had “hung on” in the city.

Whatever else might be said about it, this fact was clear: the urban environment had now become part of the Protestant scene, it was in the city to stay, and regardless of the problems, it meant to carry on some kind of urban ministry.

In the second place, here and there, some very effective church-centered evangelistic programs were in operation. Failures outnumbered successes, but there were at least some good beginnings. While it was obviously true that most inner city Protestant churches survived and carried on their ministry only through heavy subsidization from outside sources, nevertheless these programs were there in the city's core, and hopefully, they were adding to Protestantism's storehouse of knowledge concerning urban missions.

A third change which we should mention relates to the urban church itself. By the beginning of the twentieth century the institutional church had become a permanent feature of urban Protestantism. The urban church tried to meet the specific needs of its members with a wide variety of auxiliary organizations. There were Sunday schools, youth organizations, societies and associations for men and women, recreation facilities and training centers. In this way the organizational face of Protestantism was profoundly changed by the city and the comprehensiveness of its ministry greatly increased.

A fourth characteristic of urban Protestantism at the end of the century was the proportion of social and religious energy which was being chan-

neled, not through local churches, but through agencies and missions which were denominationally unaffiliated. The Salvation Army was the leading example, and alongside it stood the city rescue missions, the city missionary societies, temperance unions, and a host of agencies ministering in the city to specific human needs, but outside traditional ecclesiastical structures.

This said something, of course, about the urban church. It indicated that despite its wide variety of activities the urban church was unable to encompass all the energies which Christian conviction and social consciousness had released, and the stream of Christian concern found other outlets. It indicated also that there were gaps in the church's ministry which certain people recognized and which they moved out to fill.

A fifth significant development which had both theological and practical overtones, was the change in attitude toward the urban poor, and the new recognition among Protestants that the Church had an obligation to those who were held down by societal structures over which they themselves had no control. The causes of poverty were better understood by the end of the century and the rights of the laboring man received sympathetic attention in circles which only a few decades earlier would not even have discussed such questions. It had become a matter of common acceptance that Christians were under obligation to minister to men's physical needs as well as their spiritual, and this change

was increasingly reflected in the missionary enterprise abroad as well as at home.

Christian humanitarianism had become urbanized as well. Christians dominated the ranks of city social workers at the close of the nineteenth century, and Christian voices were plainly audible in the ranks of organized labor. It is important to note that these changes did not occur in rural America; they were effects of the new urban environment upon the nation's traditional religious patterns. The changes in labor-management relations, changes in urban politics, and the new labor legislation which was enacted during the early decades of the twentieth century, all were traceable, if not to the direct influence of church leaders, certainly at least to the new climate of opinion and organized concern which Protestant Christians helped to create.

Now having said all this, we must turn from the examination of the changes which the urban environment worked upon American Protestantism to the more difficult question. What effect did Protestant Christianity really have on urban life and on the masses of urban people? If studies such as this are to be of any value to contemporary urban strategists, it is important that we try to answer this question as realistically as possible. It would be all too easy to summarize the first thirty-five years of urban Protestant enterprise by claiming for it a success which it does not deserve. Success in the city for a religious undertaking ought to be measurable in some way. It

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ought to make itself visible. We are not asking too much when we inquire how many men and women were baptized, how many united with local churches, and how witnessing congregations were established through all these efforts. We all realize that the kingdom of our Lord is wider than the visible church, but let us not confuse the issue. There can be no kingdom citizenship nor kingdom activities where there are no members of Christ's church. Our Lord's words are still true: "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Therefore, when we examine the results of urban missionary activity, we correctly inquire concerning the visible increase in the numbers of enrolled disciples, meaning church members.

When the question is put in this way some less-than-favorable answers must be given. On the one hand, only a small portion of the immigrant working population was actually ministered to by the Protestant organizations at work in the city. Those who were reached, generally received more material and economic assistance than spiritual service. By the end of the century, a growing number of evangelical Protestants were expressing grave concern over the fact that despite the magnificent array of institutional services which churches were offering to the urban poor, the percentage of the recipients that became professing Christians was discouragingly small, and the majority went away with the "bread and the fishes" and nothing more.

There was charity in abundance, but permanently changed lives were hard to find among those who were benefited by the institutional churches' programs. Something was wrong, but few could put their finger on the problem. Urban society as a whole maintained its solid resistance to the spiritual contribution which Protestantism had to offer, and Protestant churches continued to be bypassed by the masses.

Consequently, by the end of the century, frustration set in and many church people questioned whether urban mission work, particularly in the form of organized church activity, was worth the trouble. The good intentions of an earlier period were forgotten, and the theological arguments of the day crept in to take the heart out of aggressive missionary effort in the city. Advocates of the "Social Gospel" were pitted against fundamentalists. The one side offered positive suggestions for improved social conditions but without the soul-saving biblical message. The other side preached the Gospel but in a truncated form which left society as a whole unjudged and unregenerated. As a result, Protestantism in the twentieth century has not been any more effective in American cities than it was in the decades immediately following the Civil War.

The Consequences of Theological Deterioration

There was a spiritual decline taking place in America during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, and this decline robbed Ameri-

can Protestantism of the evangelistic fervor which it needed to make the urban missionary enterprise successful. Revivalism was on the decline, and at least one of the methods used extensively in the city, the Sunday school, became a substitute for revivals as a means of gaining new church members. Had a religious awakening swept through the cities, things might have turned out differently.

Moreover, rationalism was working havoc in academic circles and many Protestant pulpits were no longer calling men to personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. There was more talk of the "redemption of society" than about the redemption of human beings. The old error of trying to produce a Christian culture through the ethical reorganization of unregenerate humanity was being repeated in America on a large scale, and the balance between the spiritual and the material which characterized many of the earlier efforts in urban mission was now lost. Lacking any depth with regard to the biblical doctrine of sin, repentance, and faith, much of what was left of Protestantism's urban enterprise became a purely humanitarian affair.

In the third place, two reactions set in, each in an opposite direction, and both of them hurt Protestant Christianity. On the one hand, Protestantism's definite contribution toward changing the nation's attitude toward the new urban situation was lost sight of and purely secular movements gained the benefits. The labor movement

is an example of this. Consequently, the impact which would have been an asset and a credit to American churches was lost and secular institutions reaped the fruits.

On the other hand, social action became identified with theological liberalism and evangelical Protestants rejected it almost entirely. Blind reaction to the Social Gospel caused much of American Protestantism to become introverted, and the meaning of God's Word for the whole of life and of society was ignored. Leaders and churches that were concerned about social justice, social legislation, and labor-management relations, were condemned in wholesale fashion as "liberals" and in traditional circles the Gospel was narrowed down to a one-dimensional relationship. This served to alienate Protestant churches from the urban masses still further, for the burdens of the masses were multiform and required a more complete answer than simply the promise of heaven.

Finally, the lack of continuity between the nineteenth century and its attempts to evangelize urban America and the efforts put forth in the second half of the twentieth century have robbed Protestantism of both the fruits and the lessons of the earlier period. The recent spate of literature on urban missions leaves the reader with one overwhelming impression: Protestantism still is not at home in the city; it still does not know how to evangelize urban people; the methods and mistakes of the past century are still the

basic patterns today; and despite the traditional friendliness of American culture to the ideals and institutions of the Christian church, we still have a long way to go in bringing the Gospel to bear upon the problems which afflict American cities.

To illustrate this, take the excellent book edited by Robert Lee, *Cities and Churches: Readings on the Urban Church* (Westminster Press, 1962). In thirty-six essays drawn from journals of sociology, psychology, and religion, all written by urban specialists, we are told what has been done and what ought to be done to make the city church more effective. Most of this material might have been written a century ago. The parallels between the contemporary urban scene and conditions which existed during the last four decades of the nineteenth century are simply amazing. Details have changed, but the basic patterns are all there. And it is painfully clear that Protestants in the city are still wringing their hands and wondering what they should do.

Perhaps what this means is that Wickham is right, and having refused to study (and write) Church History as we ought, we never learn the lessons which it teaches. Consequently, we advance so little over the past. This certainly seems to be true with regard to the city and the ministry of Protestants in it.

6

A REFORMED APPROACH TO TODAY'S CITIES

I want to develop this final chapter along both theoretical and practical lines, and the first thing which I suggest is this: Both presence and proclamation are essential for urban missions. You have to be there in order to proclaim Christ, yet merely being there is not enough. As Dr. George W. Peters has said, no evangelism has taken place until the good news has been told.¹ The presence of the Christian in a particular area and the Christian's sacrificial service to meet some special need are not sufficient in themselves. The ecumenical branch of today's church has made it appear that presence and service are all that are necessary. But that is not true. There must be the oral and intelligible communication of salvation's message or there is no evangelism. Presence must never be made a substitute for proclamation. Both are necessary.

The example of our Lord is relevant here. The Word became flesh, says John, and he dwelt among us. God's Son identified with us entirely. He demonstrated God's love and compassion in

¹George W. Peters, *Saturation Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1970), p. 19.

multiple ways. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and opened deaf men's ears. But he was first and foremost a preacher. Men called him "Rabbi." He was a teacher, an oral proclaimer of the good news of the kingdom. Urban strategists of the ecumenical school tend to forget this. Their programs indicate that they have no intention whatever of proclaiming the message of Christ, and they are simply providing Christian duplications of existing social agencies. This approach does serious disservice to urban missions. It turns off many Christians who are sincerely interested in the right kind of urban evangelism but who refuse to see their money used in the ecumenical way. They correctly point out that the Christ of the New Testament is not a silent Christ. On the contrary, he came preaching. He had something to say to men and women caught in the vise grip of sin, ignorance, and despair. The evangelistic mission to which Christ has called us always requires both presence and verbal proclamation.

Before leaving this subject I want to say something about the suburban church and the importance of Gospel proclamation in that area. Thousands of Protestant churches today have opted for absence from the more unpleasant parts of the urban scene, and their escape from the city has created the suburban church. In 1954, *Fortune* magazine defined a suburb as any census tract in a metropolitan area in which two-thirds of the families owned their own homes and had

more income as well as a larger number of children than the national average. But today we know that this technical definition misses some of the most significant facets of suburbia. Suburbia is more of a process than a place. *Suburbia is a reaction to the city*, particularly the so-called inner city. In other words, suburbia is an attitude, a mind-set, more than anything else.

The relevant proclamation of God's word in suburbia requires sufficient understanding of the sociological and psychological characteristics of suburbia. Geographically speaking, suburbia is a residential district separated from the central city and characterized by dwellings of about the same price. Sociologically, suburbia is homogeneous in culture. Its residents are achievers. They are on the way up socially and economically. While on the one hand they are family-oriented, they are also susceptible to serious marriage problems due to the pattern of life which they have adopted. Ministers of suburban churches must expect to do a great deal of marriage counseling for this reason.

The suburban church reflects the character and outlook of its members just as much as the central city church does. The characteristic temptations and sins of suburbia are self-centeredness, spiritual emptiness and moral complacency. In this setting the church has an important mission to perform and no one should minimize the role of the suburban ministry. Suburbia is part of the total urban scene and the

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suburban church must proclaim God's word in two directions. First, it must proclaim God's will to suburbanites, most of them recent escapees from the city, who are in imminent danger (though they would scarcely admit it) of being swept away by secularism and materialism. Its very presence in suburbia puts the church in danger, for there is the constant temptation to become part of suburbia's life style, a kind of community center where the neighborhood's secular values receive religious approval. It is the hard task of the suburban church to stand in judgment on contemporary society and act as a lighthouse of the kingdom in a highly secular and sophisticated milieu.

At the same time, the suburban church must direct its voice to the city. Political, economic, and industrial power reside among its members. The temptation is there to forget the city as far as Christian witness is concerned. The city is the place to earn money in and hurry away from. Suburban churches can easily adopt the Jonah-posture, seated on the hillside bemoaning the city and doing nothing to save it from destruction.

Suburban churches owe it to congregations located in the city to labor for the city's repentance and renewal. This is a vital part of their mission, and there are terrible surprises for churches which lack this sense of mission. For in just a few years suburban churches can find themselves surrounded by the same kind of problems which inner city churches face now. Few suburban

churches realize how quickly neighborhoods can change and fewer still prepare themselves for it. But changes can come, and there are inner city churches today which only ten or fifteen years ago were regarded as solidly and securely suburban. Suddenly blacks began to move in, younger white families began buying homes elsewhere, and the suburban church found itself in an inner city setting. Only a church with a strong sense of mission, nourished through the years by sound biblical preaching on the subject of the church's task in the world, can emerge from such a situation successfully.

Union of Word and Deed

The second major proposition that I want to suggest is that in every situation in which the church encounters human suffering, word and deed must be united in a comprehensive urban missionary program. Evangelical Christians agree that material assistance is incomplete in itself. But at the same time the verbal proclamation of the Gospel unaccompanied by the deed-witness of Christian mercy in the face of human suffering has a hollow ring. The preaching of the Gospel and the distribution of material goods should be done in harmonious union. Christians give and serve as well as preach and witness *in the name of Christ*.

As we have seen in the earlier chapters of this book, non-ecclesiastical agencies often have been more successful in this kind of program than the

organized church. Where churches moved out non-ecclesiastical agencies moved in. Rescue missions geared their program to the needs of the neighborhood and directed their appeal to the strata of society which the churches failed to reach. The Salvation Army, as we have seen, found its mission downtown. It preached to the classes which the churches ignored. The Army's bands paraded through the streets and gathered crowds to hear the message, and when structural changes had to be made they paraded to capital buildings and legislative halls as well. Army preachers stood on street corners and its "soldiers" lived in downtown barracks. Army Lassies visited the sick and miserable in their homes so devotedly that they became known as the "angels of the slums."¹ But they also knew how to make their influence felt in high places in the city when certain societal structures needed to be changed.

Insofar as the Army was successful, its secret lay in the union which was maintained between word and deed, presence, proclamation, and service. Sad to say, the majority of Protestant churches never learned to unite these elements in their neighborhood church programs. Some were carried away with social service and forgot the Gospel, while others stayed close to the historic Christian message but failed to reach down

¹Henry Kalloch Rowe, *The History of Religion in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1924), p. 144.

to the people in need. The best of intentions cannot override the negative effects of a faulty approach. Word and deed must be united or urban mission work seldom makes any progress.

Calvinism has something special to offer in this area, for ever since Calvin himself became involved in the total reform of the city of Geneva, Calvinists have realized that the whole structure of society needs to come under the authority of God's word. Calvinists have every right to be deeply disturbed by contemporary radical churchmen who emphasize social action without the Gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected. Calvin would have denounced such leaders in far stronger language than we are in the habit of using. But Calvinists should be equally disturbed by the kind of Bible-belt fundamentalism which is gung-ho on getting people converted and into the baptistry but which has no social vision or kingdom consciousness.

It is high time that Calvinists begin to distinguish themselves more clearly from either side and begin to build an urban strategy on the more solid foundations of a Calvinist world and life view. The biblical Gospel is far larger than either the liberal social activists or the traditional fundamentalists imagine. It is a Gospel which includes winning disciples to Christ, establishing churches, and building a Christian community with all its many facets and areas of concern. The whole city, from top to bottom, must be called to repentance toward God and faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ. This is the full Gospel which requires the total renewal of man and his society, and it is the only Gospel which offers any genuine hope for today's urban world.

Calvinism has more answers for modern urbanites, be they blacks or whites, than any other Protestant ideology. That is why it is a fatal mistake for Reformed and Presbyterian churches to turn away from the city and leave the urban masses to the Pentecostals, the store front churches, and the maze of sectarian groups. But even a church which doggedly hangs on to its central city location can fail in its task if it fails to proclaim the whole Gospel to the whole city. Calvinism has the antidote to truncated urban ministries. The pity is that more Calvinists do not realize it.

Practical Aspects of Urban Strategy

1. *Attitudes.* This is the most important practical aspect of the whole problem. All of us are prejudiced in one way or another, and we must recognize that prejudice generally acts as a barrier to the Gospel's free communication. Because of prejudice there are people within a stone's throw of our church doors whom we have not reached, and do not care to reach, simply because they are not "our kind."

An urban worker told me recently of an instance in which a group of school children stood in front of a church belonging to a Reformed denomination, chanting, "We want Bible classes,

we want Bible classes." Several churches in the vicinity had offered to give after-school instruction and these children had chosen the Reformed church nearest their home. After many frantic phone calls the minister's wife had to send them away with the weak explanation: "I'm sorry, but I couldn't find anyone who would teach you." This would not have happened if the children had been white.

Statements from the pulpit against racial prejudice and social pride are not popular, but they are needed. Maybe we have not noticed it, but the New Testament is filled with accounts of the Gospel's struggle against social and racial prejudice. Christ's universal missionary commission ran headlong into all kinds of entrenched prejudices and the early church struggled with the problem continually. Paul's Gentile mission and the way he conducted it were extremely unpopular, but led by the Spirit Paul persisted, and as a result the Gospel spread to the Gentile world.

Many different elements go into the formation of racial attitudes and class pride. White Christians generally regard blacks and chicanos as a threat to their personal and economic security. Churches on their way to the suburbs are concerned about the "investment" which their forefathers made in buildings, and they want to retrieve as much of this money as they can. Usually the buildings are sold to black congregations which spring up as the white churches leave. No matter what the sale price is, the complaint is

always heard that the whites have been robbed by the in-coming blacks. The same Christians who give generously to help Africans and Asians erect church buildings abroad feel grieved that the price is so low on the building which they are abandoning in the ghetto.

In addition to the financial factors there are fears over interracial marriage and the many personal, psychological traumas which white Christians experience when they are pressed into leaving a familiar neighborhood where they no longer feel secure. Positive attitudes on the part of an entire congregation are very difficult to achieve in a city situation. There will always be those who bitterly oppose interracial involvement in any way. At some point, however, church leaders must make a decision and follow it, through regardless of the fears and disappointments which certain members express. Too many opportunities for Christian witness and service are lost by default.

When the goal toward which a congregation is moving is clearly and realistically defined it is much easier to achieve a positive missionary attitude among the members. *To make your goal a permanently integrated bi-racial church is by and large foolish and unrealistic. Almost nowhere has such a plan been successful.* It is much better to recognize the fact of changing neighborhoods and look upon integration as merely a transitional stage. The principle which needs emphasizing is that of the *neighborhood church*. Churches

should be composed of neighborhood people, whatever their cultural or racial background may be. During the period in which the neighborhood around a church building is changing, integration is necessary. As blacks and chicanos increase in the housing area, so they should increase in the membership and program of the church. Whites who cannot stand the thought of this can hurry away immediately. Not all the newcomers will welcome the idea of a temporarily integrated church either. But the fact remains that eventually most inner city church buildings will be in the hands of cultural groups other than those which originally erected them. How will this transfer be done? By an abrupt and painful departure and sale? Or by a transition period of evangelism, instruction, cross-racial sharing and fellowship, and the continuation of the church's doctrinal tradition by the new congregation which has grown up and accepted it?

The transition period may be anywhere from five to fifteen years, and in some cases even longer. During this time the membership of the church ought to reflect the changing constituency of the neighborhood. The building, after all, is there to serve the religious needs of the people of the vicinity. That is why it was built in the first place. No one living today should regard himself as having vested interests in religious property. Faces change but the ministry of the church must go on so long as there are people living in the area. In each decade the member-

ship and service of the church should reflect the neighborhood in which the building is located. If there exists a gap between the changing neighborhood and the complexion of the church's membership that church is in trouble. Its leaders had better act quickly or one of these days they will be left with an empty church and a lost opportunity.

I know of seven Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Chicago which sold their buildings to black congregations in the past four years. Why? Because either by overt decision or by default these congregations determined not to become involved in the changing neighborhood nor make a major effort to bring minority groups into the church. Now the buildings which once housed flourishing Calvinist churches serve black and chicano congregations of every description. Had the attitudes of the white membership been different, there might be six or seven black Reformed and Presbyterian churches standing in those locations today. But negative attitudes prevailed and eventually "For Sale" signs went up.

Some will say, "Nonsense: blacks and chicanos have their own kind of religion and the Reformed faith does not suit their needs." This attitude, especially when expressed by people who on other subjects pretend to be staunch Calvinists, reveals a very alarming kind of thinking. Actually they are cutting the tap root of Reformed mission work everywhere by denying the

universality of Calvinism. By saying that the Reformed faith and practice do not fit the black man or the chicano in America they are making the identification of Reformed Christianity with middle-class white culture a matter of missionary principle and that is tantamount to saying that Calvinism has nothing specific to offer Nigerians, Ethiopians, or Mexicans either. It is my contention, on the other hand, that the Reformed faith and the Calvinist world and life view are precisely what minority communities need, and therefore Reformed churches located in central city areas should do everything possible to preserve and continue their witness and pass on their buildings to continuing Reformed congregations.

2. *Personal Invitations.* The power of a personal invitation should never be overlooked. City churches located in areas of rapidly shifting population should do all they can to extend personal invitations to new neighborhood families to take part in church activities. As the new wave of neighborhood residents arrives, church members should be there at the door to greet them. Regardless of their race or national background, they should be invited to attend the nearby church and enroll their children in the church's program.

The earlier the better for this kind of inviting. When there is a shift of neighborhood constituency, good relations are generally the rule in the beginning when the new neighbors make up only ten or fifteen per cent of the population of the

area. At this stage new residents are as concerned as the older people that the neighborhood not become a ghetto. That is the time for white church members to invite new people to the church. Members should explain what their church stands for and what it has to offer. The vision of a continuing church with sound doctrine and a heart for people's needs should be communicated. Black Power and *La Raza* mentality make it difficult today for blacks and chicanos to identify with white Christians. Stigma is attached to any black who attends an Anglo church. But the Gospel can change that too, and when new residents hear that the church nearest them offers something relevant to their needs, they are likely to begin attending.

Without any doubt, the toughest problem in urban evangelism is how to relate a white church to a black community. This is a more serious problem today than city missionaries confronted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when they tried, usually unsuccessfully, to integrate non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants into traditional Protestant churches. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants did not accept the Irish, Poles, and Italians back then, and they do not mix readily with blacks, Puerto Ricans, chicanos today. The pattern of abandoning a neighborhood as soon as it begins to change socially and racially has plagued urban evangelism since the time of the Civil War, and the minority races know what our old, abandoned churches say in regard to our

feelings toward them.

The only way to turn this around is through personal encounter, the one-to-one approach. More can be accomplished by laymen over a few cups of coffee than by a dozen professors delivering a ton of lecture material on urban involvement. Church leaders must take some pages from the books of rescue mission work. They need to get out among the people and find out what life is like in the rotting old buildings in the heart of the city. There they will learn about the exorbitant rents inner city people have to pay. They will hear firsthand how the poor are victimized by unscrupulous merchants and door to door salesmen. They will talk to the children who must attend over-crowded schools in decaying buildings staffed by inexperienced and inferior teachers. They will come away with some new ideas about what it means to live under the lion's paw of a brutalizing, arbitrary, and dehumanizing welfare system and to be victimized every day by both an ever rising crime rate and inadequate police protection. And even if they have never heard of Calvinism, they will probably come away firmly convinced that today's Ninevehs desperately need something more than a save-your-soul-and-go-to-heaven urban strategy.

One of the chief reasons why American Protestantism has been so unsuccessful in the city is that it does not *know* the city. In our present day, many Protestants frankly admit that they are afraid of the city; and the less they can see

of it the better. None of us can be introduced to the city as a whole. We can learn to know it only by personal contact with individual people, and that is where we have to begin. In one of the most enlightening articles I have ever read on the subject of inner city evangelism, Dr. Howard G. Hageman writes:

The longer I live in a city the more I am convinced that concern for the person is something which the Christian community is uniquely able to give. The school teacher in the city often does not know the names of all the members of her over-crowded class. The welfare worker can do his job merely by delivering a computerized check. There is almost no one to listen to the person as a person and hear him. That could be our great opening.

I must observe, however, that if it is to be, we Christians will have to learn better manners. So often we have the answer even before we have heard the question. Again I point to Ezekiel who kept still for seven days and listened before he began to speak. The Church could be much more effective in the city if it could only learn to listen.¹

3. *Adjustment is two-sided.* Churches located in changing communities should realize that adjustment is two-sided. As you adjust to new

¹Howard G. Hageman, "Inner City Turbulence and the Church," *Calvinist Contact*, June 12, 1969.

neighbors, they will adjust to you.

Blacks and chicanos do not like the traditional staid worship services of the average white Anglo church any better than most whites appreciate the high emotionalism of some black and chicano churches. But neither is everyone in either of these categories fully satisfied with what his church has traditionally done, and there is room for adjustment and accommodation from both sides.

One way to adjustment and understanding which is being experimented with in a few places is that of inviting minority groups to hold their own services in the building owned by the established, white Anglo-Saxon church. The philosophy behind it is that the building should be used to the fullest extent by the Christians resident in the neighborhood, and rather than force the newcomers into a building program of their own it is better to share the existing building with them. The plan may not fit in with our ideals as to how integration ought to work, but it is a start and it faces the problem of adjustment realistically. Both groups get to know each other and the message is conveyed to the neighborhood that this is a church which is interested in them.

The black man, the Puerto Rican, and the poor in general, have been turned down so often over the years that they will not come to the middle-class Anglo-Saxon church unless something is done to convince them that we are sincere.

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Contrary to many people's opinion, white skin is a handicap on the street for the first three days. After then you are known for what you are and you are either accepted or rejected on that basis. Church members who begin to move out into their changing neighborhood with a sense of purpose will discover opportunities to testify for the Lord and assist men in their need which they never expected to find. The whole experience will mean a revitalization of their personal religious life and in many instances it has brought spiritual revival to tired old churches.

One approach which has been successful in a number of churches is that of the Nursery School, conducted during weekdays in the church building. In contrast to Day-Care centers which come under State requirements and are generally more expensive, Nursery Schools are easily within the range of most churches' budgets and they have many attractive features. A Nursery School is a relevant, church-centered service to the families of the neighborhood and it puts church members in daily contact with neighborhood people. A small monthly charge can cover the salary of the director, and mothers of the congregation can serve as volunteer teachers. Potluck suppers once a month draw newcomers to the church. Neighboring families begin to look upon the church building as a friendly place, as a meeting house of Christian people who care. Nursery School children are taught

Bible stories every morning and special programs bring a positive Christian witness. Minority families of the more aggressive kind are generally interested in this type of program for they are concerned about the education of their children. From the church's side, the Nursery school offers one of the best opportunities for members of the congregation to become acquainted with people of the neighborhood in a context of mutual concern and interest.

Not all Protestant churches support the Christian day-school movement, but some of those which do have discovered that the three-pronged approach—home, church, and school—brings a surprising response among minority groups. Ninety-eight per cent of the children in a certain Chicago area Christian school are now black. Energetic, forward-looking black families were looking for better educational opportunities for their children and they were willing to pay the high price of Christian School tuition in order to get it.

A central city church should not try to do everything that needs to be done. City dwellers are troubled about many things: drugs, housing, child care and education, security, jobs. Churches should pick a particular area or two and specialize there. Most of the barriers dividing people are affection barriers. People in every direction are crying silently for love, for recognition, for someone to care for them as people. Christians with the compassion of God in their hearts

should have no trouble relating to these needs.

1. *The Role of the Deacons.* In Reformed churches, deacons generally take care of the church's money and concern themselves with the physical and material needs of the congregation. Officially their work includes a great deal more, but practically it is limited to financial matters. However, for more effective urban mission work churches should mobilize their deacons for ministry on a much broader scale. Here is where the successful wedding of word and deed witnessing will be put to its sharpest test.

Most white churches today have more money in their benevolence funds than they require for their internal needs. On the other hand, funds are usually short for the kind of inner city mission work which would make a real difference in people's lives. The comment is often made, and rightly so, that the Federal government has poured millions of dollars into the city and still has not been able to relieve existing conditions effectively. But the Federal government is not a church, nor is it equipped to operate on the spiritual-physical level upon which a Christian community can operate. Church monies, discreetly used and personally applied, can accomplish a thousand times more than government funds administered on a massive scale.

City churches need deacons who are more than young men sharp with figures. They need spiritual men burdened for the needs of others, men who will approach suffering families in the

name of Christ and in the name of the church.

The New Testament concept of deacons is more than simply money-counters. A finance committee can do that. Deacons should be freed from many of the mundane tasks to which now they are generally tied, and should be let loose in a spiritual ministry of mercy in the name of Christ and the church. There should be no muffled testimony, no vague humanitarianism. Deacons are not mere social workers, counselors, do-gooders. They represent the church whose head is Christ Jesus. They visit the poor and lift up the weak in the name of the Lord. The Salvation Army, the city rescue missions, and the homes for fallen girls, tied the two together and so should the neighborhood church. For this very purpose deacons were given to the church, and the city cries for their ministry.

Concluding Thought: The Influence of Religion in American Cities

This small book has been written in the interest of the organized church and its evangelistic task in American cities. It has been my conviction all along that the local church plays a far greater role in determining the social patterns of the community than many urban scholars have been willing to admit. Therefore it was with supreme pleasure that I discovered Professor Gerhard Lenski's book, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics, and Family Life* (Garden City,

N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961, 1963). The book is based on some of the most extensive sociological studies ever conducted in an American city with a view to determining the degree of influence which religion exerts on the daily activities of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. The study was made in the city of Detroit, Michigan, by the Department of Sociology of the University of Michigan. Professor Lenski weighs the striking findings of his survey among Detroit's religious groups against historical, racial, and class factors, and he discovers that religion has more influence than any of the other factors in determining the thinking patterns and life styles of the urban community. I regard the central finding of Lenski's study to be so important that I want to quote it verbatim:

From our evidence it is clear that religion in various ways is constantly influencing the daily lives of the masses of men and women in the modern American metropolis. More than that: through its impact on individuals, religion makes an impact on all the other institutional systems of the community these individuals staff. Hence the influence of religion operates at the social level as well as at the personal level.

This is devastating evidence against much that religious positivists have been saying about the marginal influence of religious commitment and religious associations in the urban setting. Lenski

presents ample evidence that the religious orientation of an individual, a family, and even a neighborhood, determines more than any other factor their potential for upward social mobility, their success in work or business, their desire for the higher education of their children, and their concern over the moral, social, and political issues in the city and the nation. In other words, *if you want to improve the quality of city life, get at the religious factor; and that means basic, New Testament evangelism.*

Personal discipline, honesty, self-denial for the sake of higher values, positive attitudes toward work and duty, self restraint: these are all parts of the Protestant Christian ethic, often identified with Calvinism. These values are not altogether missing in Catholicism, but their influence is decidedly less. They are weakest in black churches and in the denominations to which some Protestants would consign the minority races and inner city people. Lenski's study shows conclusively that the nature and quality of a person's religion has a decided influence on his outlook on life and his daily performance. Theologians have always preached this but here is a sociologist saying that he has found it to be a decisive, observable fact in modern urban life. For church leaders concerned about the city this should spark new ideas in many directions. The conversion of city people to healthy, biblical Christianity is absolutely essential for the qualitative improvement of urban life; and the establishment and

growth of churches having a unified Christian *Weltanschauung* is equally important. This brings us back to basic urban missionary strategy and the pivotal role which the established church plays in it.

As Christians, we share a mutual concern for what is happening in our nations's cities. When we reflect upon the abject poverty in which thousands of our fellow Americans live and when we sense something of the meaninglessness and futility of their lives, we feel moved to action, to missionary action, in America's cities. There is nothing new about this, as we have seen. But perhaps today we are in a position to make a fresh start, to make our practice catch up with our theology and do a new thing in our day.

If the quality of urban life is to improve, the Christian faith must be proclaimed with greater confidence and with broader vision than American churches have displayed in the last one hundred years. Ideally, city churches should occupy key positions in urban missions. Geographically they stand closest to the unevangelized, the miserable and the despairing. Theologically they know the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the power of God to transform men and society. But racially and culturally the majority of our city churches are far removed from the very neighborhoods in which they are located and are ill prepared for effective urban missions.

Can cross-cultural mission orders be formed to handle this problem and leap the social barri-

ers with the Gospel? Can individuals and churches be found that will halt their flight to more congenial neighborhoods because they realize that the city which they are leaving behind is made morally and spiritually weaker due to their departure? Can inner city churches in sufficient number be motivated to plan and labor early enough for a continuing Reformed witness in their changing neighborhoods? Can evangelistic passion be blended with relevant social action in order to lift men physically and spiritually from the agonies of the modern urban world? I do not know the final answers to these questions. But I am convinced of this: If Protestant Christianity cannot succeed in the city, our continent is lost as far as the Protestant faith is concerned.

Key '73 has offered us an occasion for rethinking our entire missionary strategy. I trust that Reformed and Presbyterian churches from New York to California will take a fresh look at America's growing cities and ask themselves whether we are doing all that the Lord expects of us in calling them to Christ.

