

FROM THE VILLAGE TO THE CITY

(a Grammar for the Languages We Are)

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Parable with Many Points

Not too many generations ago our fathers were villagers living in German colonies in Russia. They spoke Low German most of the time. It was not a refined language; its rhythms suited the rhythms of the earth and its vocabulary expressed the common business of work and home. It was crude without being dirty though in translation it often appears to be both. It is almost impossible to capture its essence in translation. It is "earthy," with a constant tendency to topple over into the comic. It abounds in pithy sayings and old saws. It embodies the folk wisdom of peasants. Because it was an unwritten dialect it could change easily, growing and contracting with the experience of those who used it, changing from region to region and even, more subtly, from village to village.

They also spoke High German. This was their Latin, the language of literary culture, insofar as they knew of it, and of prayer. Its use was liturgical, elevated and ennobling. God spoke Luther's High German. And so did they, especially on Sunday and in school.

They did not go to school to learn Low German. No one goes to school to learn his mother tongue. It was absorbed with mother's milk and was as joyfully received, for both bring growth and being. No teachers were needed because all taught all. And no one resented being taught his language rather than some other.

They went to school to polish their High German. Of course they already knew a good deal of it. The language was known but the grammar was not. They could converse freely but their vocabulary was limited. At school they studied its grammar in order to purify their expression and they learned its vocabulary to enrich the content of their speaking. The rules of grammar were names for structures they had already internalized and the words were names of things and ideas for which their minds already had the spaces.

The adults who came to America could not so easily absorb English. Most of them picked up English words which they fitted into the German structure. But they did not learn the structure of English. They thought in German, translating as they went. They always had to think what they were doing while doing it, and that is hard work. And they could not pray in English. Prayer is the concentration of oneself in single-hearted address to God. And he who must translate himself is never a single being. Those who became fluent in English worked at it systematically.

Schools were set up to teach it to the children. But these schools were not extensions of the teaching of the community as fully as they had been in the old country. The immigrants saw themselves as the bearers of a higher culture setting up enclaves in a pagan land. But the heathen language had to be learned, and so they were free to hire native informants to help them with this second language.

Second languages cannot be learned in bits and pieces or be picked

up in stray moments. It took time, and many drills, for the new structures to become natural. School was this kind of intensive experience, for it both taught English and the teaching was in English.

But America was not Russia. The new language became more precious to the growing children than the old had been. New possibilities were opened up, new ways to be and think, new vantage points outside the German. And so the unexpected happened. The native informant became the missionary and the compound enclosed increasingly restive natives. (The new English school-teacher in **Peace Shall Destroy Many** won over the Mennonite elders in Wapiti by putting on a superb Christmas program. But within the hour she was discovered to be the seductress of young men.)

Now English is our mother tongue and few of us learn another. Many of us studied a language in school, devoting to it an hour or two a day for two years or more. In that time we learned to name grammatical forms and we memorized a respectable vocabulary. But we could not speak it and in a few years we forgot the little we knew. We did not suffer that total immersion which brings "language shock" and the breakthrough that is the internalization of the new structure. Once the general structure has been grasped (or, better, has grasped us) the learning of rules and vocabulary becomes enjoyable. Then it can be done anywhere and in snatched moments.

Those who study languages find it easier and easier to learn new ones. Once the mental stranglehold of our mother tongue is broken, new ways of speaking and seeing come more quickly. (A way of speaking is a way of seeing.) There is both great danger and promise in this. The danger is that one may lose the sense of having a mother tongue. Like an actor who loses the sense of a continuous self in his playing of many roles, so a linguist may become the embodiment of the result of Babel. Or else this relativization of all given languages may help the linguist to transcend them all even as he penetrates to the deep structures that underlie and unify them all.

B. Culture As Language

Everything that has so far been said can be applied to a larger reality. We will use the word "culture" for the whole coherent way of thinking, talking, working, playing, living that is done by distinctive peoples. Like languages, cultures can be grouped into families. Some cultures are as different as Chinese from German. Within a broad culture grouping there may be many dialects. Also like languages, any culture can be analyzed in terms of content and structure. Behind the different foods, songs, courtship patterns, and other contents of a culture lie differing patterns. One may learn the vocabulary of a new culture and yet wholly fail to understand it. To "go native," internalizing the structure of a culture, requires a prolonged immersion and a deeply unsettling culture shock. No one goes to school to learn the structure of his own culture, though he may do so to learn the "ennobling dialects" of the upper classes.

There was a Mennonite culture in Russia. That way of life is being lost in America as surely as is the German. We Mennonite Brethren now "speak" several cultural "languages" and a host of dialects. We will not solve any of our problems unless we come to terms with this. We will not even understand each other unless we grapple with these structures,

for our view of things, our expectations, our "answers" depend upon the structure we have most deeply internalized.

We have experienced, and are now experiencing, three quite different "ways of life." It is not easy to translate from one to the other, for each has its own structure. And each imparts its own world-view. Two people sitting side-by-side on Sunday morning may actually be living in different "universes." Even when they use the same words, they mean different things.

Our peasant forefathers lived in a village culture. Several dozen houses were clustered together and the men walked out to till their fields. The children ran freely about the village and fields, or all looked out for all. Much of the work was done together, the entire village gathering to make a celebration while helping a family kill a pig or build a barn. And at the center of the village was a church.

In America the immigrants lived on their own land and built towns that looked like other towns. American town culture embodied a different structure and is the result of a different world view. Families are more isolated. Mothers take care of their own children. People do their own work; and there are many more occupations, for work has become specialized. At the center of the town are businesses.

Both villages and towns help man to overcome his helplessness. Both attempt to give man some measure of control over the natural world into which he must fit and over the future which is his fate. But there is a fundamental difference in the sort of control that each makes possible.

Village-man makes the best of things by learning how to fit in. He learns from experience what works and what does not work. His "way of life" is distilled from the trial and error of countless generations. His strength is the united strength of his group.

Town-man creates his good things by learning how to make nature serve him. He discovers laws from which to deduce systematic and all-encompassing theories as well as greater works. His "way of life" is judged and shaped by timeless principles. His strength is the strength of tools which are extensions of his own arm and hand.

A village is still tied to the rhythms of nature. Its world-view is organic and finds expression in cosmologies. Its philosophy is vitalistic. A town is tied to the repetitions of machines. Its world-view is mechanistic and finds expression in scientific theories. Its philosophy is rationalistic.

Different peoples have developed different technologies and different sorts of towns. Those which were most impressed with soul force and saw personality behind all movement developed techniques to bend the will of other men and of the spirits which are supposed to lie behind non-human acts. These developed the technology of magic. There are still many who plant by the moon and who use gestures or prayers to "cross themselves." Secularized techniques of soul-force can be found in any good manual on salesmanship.

But the technique which transformed our villages was more materialistic. It was based upon a physics of lifeless matter driven by chains of cause and effect according to Newton's laws of motion. It was the theoretics of the assembly line and of the tractors and reapers that they turned out. Mechanical repetitions replaced organic rhythms; qualitative differences were analyzed in terms of quantitative changes. The unit and the individual were ripped from the web of earlier reality and fitted

into new contexts, becoming functions of new processes aimed, hopefully at higher ends. The contemplation of machine power could raise men to religious rapture and God became the great watchmaker in the sky. Efficiency was next to godliness.

Even "truth" changed its meaning. In the village truth value is granted to that which has endured. "The ways of the fathers" are true precisely because they have worked. These bodies of truths, like languages, are modified by new experience and are reinterpreted in the light of new contexts. But because these processes are usually slow, and because little is fixed by being written, villagers are not aware of the continuous change and they receive these truths as religious and social absolutes commanded by divine powers. Village knowledge is embodied in isolated truths—wise sayings and old saws. It is age-old peasant wisdom that rules the village.

In the town old saws are replaced by theories and wise sayings, by philosophy and theology. Town-man reasons from basic axioms which he holds to be self-evident, and truth value is granted to those propositions which fit in with them. "Truth" is granted more to the "space" of coherence than to the "time" of experience. On the one hand, this simplifies the search for understanding. Truth has become a coherent structure with parts that all resonate with each other. And new truth can be deduced from known principles. On the other hand, knowledge becomes more complex. So rapid are new discoveries and so great is material progress that there is an explosion of knowledge and a new host of specialized occupations. The mentality of businessmen rules the town.

The success and the virtues of the village make possible the town. And the success and virtue of the town have created the city. The economics of the town led to larger factories and international commerce. Immigrants from many lands were brought in to supply cheap labor. And so many cultures coexisted in the city, each in its own village ("ghetto"). The ambitious left farms and small towns to bring the town to the city ("suburbs"). But I do not know whether the city is a third kind of culture or a collection of cultures. Certainly, it is a new kind of reality. And when the old cultures weaken, children in the ghettos and suburbs grow up experiencing no single way of life. Or perhaps a new way emerges. Modern forms of communication are making a city of the entire globe.

There is both great danger and great promise in this. The danger is that the modern man may lose the sense of having a culture of his own. So many styles are available to him that his life may become more a trajectory of roles than the evolution of a self, and he will find that he has no name but Legion. Or else this relativization of all ways to be may help the true sophisticate to transcend them all even as he penetrates to the deep structures that underlie and unify them all. In the first case he ceases to be meaningfully human. In the second case he becomes—almost a god.

(Note: The "city" will be discussed later in greater detail. The preceding discussion of "village" and "town" is not meant to be entirely historical. There is no village that does not already carry within it the seeds of a town. And there is no town which altogether forgets the village. What I have done is to describe tendencies as if pure types. And these tendencies do tend to realize themselves.)

II. CULTURES AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A. Acculturation in A Christian Village

1. **Children.** The church was the center of the village. Whether or not the village way of life was more idolatrous than ours, it was still the case that knowledge and action and faith were integrated by the underlying cultural structure. This structure was absorbed by the growing child. "Elementary Christian education" was the inculcation of this general structure. Since it was always being done, there was little need to set apart special times and places for doing it. It was being done whether the content was religious or not. Of course, there was religious content. But it too was "everywhere."

"No one paid much attention to us," my mother once said. Little was organized for them. Indeed, organized forms of Christian education were just beginning. Her father started the Sunday Schools in two of our churches. And she specifically mentioned that no one said anything to them to prepare them for, or bring them to, conversion. Nor was much demanded of them. They were expected to grow up. And then they were expected to become converted, join the church, and to become active within it. It is my impression that this "becoming visible" took place about the same time as courtship and marriage.

But my mother would have been quick to agree that this was a half-truth. In another sense, almost everything the children did was "in the church." Nurturing went on constantly. Both at home and at church and at school "our way" was being absorbed. Just as a child begins school only after having absorbed his mother-tongue, so the young person formally "entered school" (the church) after he had already picked up the language of faith. In those days "Christian education" was "adult education."

This older pattern had obvious advantages. The "Christian" structures for life and thought were fully internalized. It was almost as natural to live "Christianly" as it was to speak one's mother tongue. Moreover, where the entire community taught what each family taught, the authoritative character of what was taught was taken for granted. And since "all taught all," exceptionally good and successful children could regularly come from singularly inadequate homes. Indeed, the home was less isolated and less responsible—and less guilty—than is now the case.

Children then were free to grow up without being overly conscious of family and community pressure. It was there, of course, but the child no more felt it to be overt control to learn their "way" than they resented being taught German rather than Chinese. Children were allowed to be children. They did not have to endure the agony of being the anxious objects of adult attention: "Oh, dear, what shall we do with (for) our youth!" They were left alone to enjoy both the virtues and naughtinesses of childhood.

At the same time they learned that it was a supreme privilege to grow up and become an adult. The higher privileges and joys began with adulthood. They did not feel that adolescence is the best part of life and that after eighteen life is all "down hill." So also the focus of the church was on the mature, not the infantile. Even a service that had "nothing for him" taught the child that there are higher levels and that they are better. Of course, there was something for him in the church. Stories were used for adults more so than now, and the

child could listen in and appreciate them as stories. The one-room school was the school of the village. There also the child could listen in to many levels and see the same subject matter approached in different ways.

The disadvantages were largely the other side of the advantages. A structure so fully internalized could hardly be recognized for what it was. Specific wrongs as aberrations could be seen and deplored. And individuals could rebel against specific content. But the structure itself was taken for granted. Since no other structure was a live option, it was not judged in the light of higher principles. And so sub-Christian forms could be carried along within it. While maturity was an ideal, and real sainthood could be achieved, such an unselfconscious system had strict limitations. It could stimulate practical wisdom, but it could seldom aim at intelligence. It could produce good people, but few understood what goodness was in any depth.

Because such a culture is not aware of its own deeper grammar, it cannot protect itself from unwelcome change. It cannot distinguish between those novelties that can be assimilated in the old structure and those that carry with them a subversive, alien shape. Thus our grandparents did not know that to live on their own land in America was deeply subversive of the communities they hoped to recreate.

This was also true for the individual. When taken out of his supporting culture, he was often lost. For he had learned to go along with mores and morals presumed to be right because everyone he knew held them. Where they were not taken for granted, he often found it easier to go along with a new set. What he had learned in the village was not principles. He had really learned to fit in. A village may have high morals, but it has little ethics. And so our fathers discovered that in America they could not take the Christianity of their children for granted. Too many of the youth were being lost to the church.

2. Adults. One need not discuss youth programs in the village. It is almost true that there were no youth. Childhood lasted longer, and the passage to adulthood was mercifully brief. Until modern times, adolescence was a prerogative of the upper classes.

One then arrived at adulthood having absorbed the structure of the faith. The language could be used but knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary was limited. Indeed, one could become a true saint and yet "know" very little. The locus for higher education was the church. And the textbook was the Bible.

As far as they were concerned, the Scriptures were written in German. Even those who knew about the Greek and Hebrew found that fact profoundly irrelevant. The deeper structures of their way of life provided the principles by which they interpreted, and they simply took for granted that they shared their cultural language with the biblical peoples. Therefore they could all be exegetes and their Bible studies could be completely existential. All of their real problems could be brought to the discussion and solutions could be read out of Scriptures because the basis for them had first been read in. Having ingeniously read themselves into the Bible, they could innocently discover themselves there.

Because they agreed on the essential structure and on its presence in the Bible, they were free to disagree and to argue. Even in their disagreements each understood the other. They all shared the turf they

fought and loved upon. Nor did they fear to argue with the text. They could challenge it because they so profoundly trusted it. They had not heard of higher critics and were not afraid the Bible would fall apart in their hands. Within the limits of their deeper grammar, they were free to explore and to grow. Their experience taught them how to read, and their reading helped them to interpret their experience. This dialectic was their "higher education." It was truly their "liberal arts." For the original meaning of "liberal" is "liberating" and what frees one depends not so much upon the sorts of texts used as on the way one uses the texts.

For this reason the basic exegetical method was the allegorical. They believed the stories happened just as they were written down, but they were certainly not "literalists." Meanings shimmered behind every detail and applied as much to them as to Moses or Paul. I remember a sermon preached by an old lay minister on "they let out four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come." He identified the anchors with virtues like patience, hope, faith and preached an admirable sermon, weaving together personal experience with practical applications. But he could probably have preached the same sermon, with equal validity, out of some passage from *Sindbad the Sailor*.

No. Surely that last statement goes too far. Though their method was arbitrary, I would argue that their results were not. It is too simple to say that they cut Scripture to their own measure. They could discover their lives in Scripture because at the same time their lives were being shaped by Scripture. My grandmother read the Bible through over and over again in her later years. It was her main textbook. No one can avoid being shaped by the shapes he moves among constantly and openly. I believe that she became more profoundly "biblical" than I, though I knew much more about the Bible than did she. The old patterns were limited, but out of them came people whose saintliness must move us to profound humility even as we acknowledge that their road is not for us.

We may also hazard the guess that the structure of their lives was closer to those of the biblical peoples than are ours (closer, at least, to some of them). If God created nature and man, may we not suspect the deepest structures of both to be in harmony? And is it then not possible that lives more closely tied to nature may be nearer to them? Peasants speak to peasants across the millenia, and I suspect that our forefathers could resonate with the Old Testament in ways that we cannot. Does it not often happen that those who throw themselves into the here and now of nature and of life end by being driven beyond both to the source from which they spring and the mystery that sustains them?

B. Being Educated in the Town

The Mennonite village could not maintain itself in the new world. The old mix of village culture (Low German) leavened by "town" elements (High German) gave way before the imperialistic culture of the town as our dialects gave way to English. This change, like all great changes, came pregnant with blessings and curses.

Those of us who come later have not felt personally the limitations of the village. But some of us know well the limitations of the town. It is difficult for me to appreciate the town, though it is easy for me to

romanticize the village. And I both love and hate the city. To correct my bias, I intend to stress the positive aspect of the town. But I have not yet so far outgrown the town that my feelings are as objective or as appreciative as I would wish my thoughts to be.

1. **Adults.** When I was a child, the "old people" in the church spoke German and remained villagers at heart. They hardly understood their children, who were setting the old structures aside, and they resented being treated as irrelevant. But they could take comfort in their Bible classes. The old *Bibelbesprechungen*, with their allegorizations and applications, continued in spite of the new quarterlies and the age-graded slots into which they were now fitted.

2. **Young Adults.** We must remember that we are talking here about our parents and grandparents when they were young adults. An age like ours which romanticizes revolutionaries could give our immediate elders their due. It is they who over-turned centuries of tradition. This does not mean that the new began with them. Indeed, I suspect that the creation of our church in Russia was strongly influenced by the emergence of a bourgeois ethos. But it was they who persevered until the new structures and content could be handed on to us as our mother tongue.

No great revolutions can be serenely carried out. Some of our parents could still cherish the old. But others could only plunge into the new after rejecting what had gone before. The vehemence of their rejection added a driving force to the already great energy sparked by their new love.

Many from this generation abandoned their community and church, whether motivated by ambition, indifference, or anger. Others remained as the teachers of the new way. Some of them went out to alien schools so they could better master the new shapes. Some returned to organize the old content into the new structures. The more radical hoped to bring in new content as well.

They brought back new ways to do business and to farm. And they organized schools. But whatever sort of school it was, it was organized according to the new structure. And so these schools became the locus for the revolution. From them, succeeding generations went on to towns or cities or back to join those who were making the home village into a town. At the same time, they were places for the serious study of Scripture and for "higher education."

We must therefore analyze "school" rather than "community-centered-around-the-church" as the key to becoming and to the arts that liberate. "Family" was placed in an ambivalent situation. On the one hand, it became more important than ever. With the loss of village homogeneity, the family stood alone as the place for the inculcation of village values. But it did so without the support given it in the village. On the other hand, the family in the town lost much of the support for its authority. It became a mere adjunct to the school for the "higher" training in the way of life inherent in the town. So far as this new structure was concerned, no mere parent could hope to override the omniscience of the teacher. Meanwhile the adolescent-young adult revolt against his own childishness and its forms was necessarily conceived as a revolt against his parents and home and had for its justification the "higher" culture he was mastering.

But a second language is learned differently than is the first. It

comes with effort and demands a complete immersion. The American school system provided this immersion. It was created to teach this American way. It was the evangelistic arm of the town, the means to convert and homogenize the ethnics.

The content of the teaching was the skills needed by the way of the town. But content was not enough. The school itself was organized according to the same structures that underlay the content. It was the equivalent of teaching English in English. And so the fundamental metaphor for education was the orderly flow of the factory and the successful business firm. "Education" ceased to be seen in terms of the growth and flowering of a seed, as in the village, but was seen as a "process" which "turns out" a "product." School itself was an assembly line, carefully age-graded, and geared to inculcate the grammar of—assembly lines. So also knowledge was broken down into bite-sized bits to be learned one at a time in the order of simple to complex. And students were seen as "atomic individuals" who could be trained for new "functions" according to "laws" of stimulus-response.

The new town-men were in charge of society, and they could not rest until all had been harmonized in terms of the new language. The one-room school, that vestige of the villages, was fought by the town as if a heresy. Indeed, it was a heresy. And it was defended in our communities by the same people who felt the tug of the village, whether or not they were also fighting to keep the German alive.

It was those of our grandparents and parents who were converted by the gospel of the town who brought "school" to the church. The need to give attention to Christian nurture was real. And their desire to help their children was strong. But the zeal with which our elders organized Bible classes and Sunday schools was also due to their own need to reinforce their mastery of the new forms and to their desire to legitimize their Christianity by recasting it into the forms of the town.

They organized Christian Education so that its programs became the central focus of church life. And what they organized itself had the structure of the new form. They used English, developed age-graded curricula, and used all the applicable techniques discovered in secular schools. There were schedules and reporting forms and colored stars for everything. This was the vehicle by which the culture of the town altered the shape of the church. The most conservative of our churches, those who clung longest to the village, resisted it longest. A few churches (mostly in Canada) held out quite a long time, but by now the "new" is the old and has become our established conservatism.

Enormous energy was poured into the effort. Indeed energy was, and remains, one of the chief characteristics of that generation. The release of energy is always one of the results of the discovery and growing mastery of new ways of becoming. And so the organizing itself, as channel for energy, was a basic reason for creating the organization. There was pleasure in it of the same sort as is experienced by anyone who repeats skills newly mastered. Those who became very good at it did more and more of it. Regional and state and national associations were formed. Publishers spent millions to work out curricula commensurate with the effort.

This language is no longer new for those of us who grew up with it. It has become our mother tongue. Our elders succeeded so well that their children or grandchildren either take it for granted or are in re-

bellion against it. But meanwhile, wherever there are adults who are trying to master this ethos, there one is likely to find the old fervor—and even buses circulating on Sunday morning. For where a language is not fully mastered, or has only recently been mastered, there is still great satisfaction in repeating its forms.

The new culture also changed the way the Bible was read in our churches. Because the village Christian could assume that the modes of his existence were identical with those of the biblical characters, he could read the Bible in a fully existential manner, receiving whatever insight or guidance was needed in the occasion. And the sense of the truth-value of this insight was granted by its perceived appropriateness to their entire situation and was tested by comparing it to the memory of what had “always” been said (“tradition”).

But this way of reading the Bible was fundamentally incompatible with the new ethos. The new man was looking for axioms so fundamental that their truth was self-evident. And he was looking for laws by which to relate all truths to these timeless Master Truths. Whether Calvinist or Arminian, our fathers shared the expectation that spiritual reality, properly understood, would look like the geometry of Euclid. Indeed, Newton had already done this for physical reality.

For the village the past was alive because it and its truths were always present. For the town, the past was relevant only as locus for the revelation of the timeless truths. The effect was to diminish the importance and use of the Old Testament and even the Gospels. More and more, these were mined for stories for children. The wisdom literature was largely ignored, and the Psalms came to be less used, even for **Einleitung** where their use had been almost automatic.

For the rationality of truths the town developed systematic theology. For the rationality of times the appropriate structure was a dispensationalism. We gloried in charts that presented even times in the forms of space. It came to be a simple axiom that one does not begin to study the Bible with Genesis or with Jesus. The new man resonated best with Paul and it became axiomatic that one understands the Bible best when one begins with Romans. And so the Bible itself was atomized, with its pieces organized into the structures of theologies. Entire passages were seldom memorized. The emphasis now was on the memorization of individual verses connected thematically.

3. **Children.** One must always take the bad with the good. But I do not want to end this section by dwelling upon the unfortunate side-effects of the way of the town. For, on balance, I believe that many of us who were children during this period of our history were fortunate. Despite all attacks upon it, the way of the village was still present in sufficient strength that its values were a leavening influence. And we shared with our elders in the excitement of discovering and mastering a larger way of life. As the objects of so much adult energy, we were in grave danger of being spoiled. Perhaps we were. But I think not. The new forms had not been perfected and for that reason they had not yet become routine. But more importantly, we sensed that our elders were discovering a reality that was greater than they. And we participated in their awe. They were becoming a new sort of person, and their teaching was in part an expression of gratitude to God. They showered advantages upon us and we profited from them. And yet we learned that God, not we, was the purpose of it all. Our lives focussed around

school but "school" was the new focus for the higher becoming of all in the community who were "progressive." Finally, we took our place among the adults while still quite young. We had the advantage of learning the new language as our mother tongue, and it was not long until many of us were able to outdo our teachers. And yet, not even then did we suppose that we were the object of all that machinery. We understood, at least dimly, that we and they were serving a larger cause and that the borders of the Kingdom were being enlarged.

C. Growing Up in the City

The towns have become cities. And it is the city that reveals the power of the town, both for good and for evil. The way of the town makes the city possible. And the city threatens to destroy the town.

1. **Adults.** Here again I speak about myself and about those of us who were children when our communities were being converted to the mind-set of the town.

Some of us have continued to accept the world-view of the town. We can scarcely imagine that there is any other. Its political and social and religious wisdom continues to be our "truth." So far as our **thinking** goes, we have no problem imagining what the church and the world ought to look like. But even for many of the most sincere of us, there has come to be a problem with **practice**. We know we ought to be reading the Bible more and having a family altar. We know that we should be active in Christian education and witnessing. But increasingly many of us have to force ourselves to do the little that we do. We believe that others should be brought in, but our consciences are satisfied with a yearly attendance drive. And even that is less often done. We know the importance of witnessing, but it is more satisfying to organize a community campaign with "name" evangelist (here again the structuring is an important reason for the effort). We want to be informed by the Scriptures, but either we fall back upon reading for "inspiration" and instant relevance or we expect a Bible expert to do it for us in a class or a sermon. Some of us suffer from the apathy of those who have given up the attempt to master their language. Others of us suffer the malaise of those who have outgrown their language but who do not know it.

We do know, however, that our language is being denied by many, perhaps even by our own children. We know that we sit next to other brethren who may use familiar words but who do not seem to mean the same things. We also know that the world we helped to build appears to be collapsing. Somehow the principles that made possible the town and the city seem no longer to apply.

And so we are no longer confident. We react defensively, interpreting new things or new ideas as threats. We cannot understand how the present complexity has grown naturally out of the earlier simplicity. And so we blame it on communist spies and outside agitators. Even city dwellers do not automatically understand the city. The inner-city has a large population of villagers who were pushed out of the country and the towns because they had not mastered the language of the town. The suburbs are filled with those who have mastered the town but are still trying so close their minds to the meaning of the city. And we flee to the church for comfort, demanding of it religious sanctions against the

threat of the city. Therefore, the church also is defensive. It fights with the special fear of those who do not understand the enemy they face.

But those who are being shaped by the city have discovered that there is no single language and no single way of life. The city encompasses many languages and even the town way has many dialects. There are alternate ways to live and to understand. There are different human "universes," and each one has its own way of perceiving and its own criteria for judging truth. The meaning of the city is Babel, and no language can be assumed to be truer than another.

We have become educated and sophisticated. This too is what the town made possible. The result for some of us is that education has brought us to the point of seeing through it. And the result is that we are becoming increasingly doubtful of the very education that has helped give us the power to doubt it. But let me speak for myself. I have become increasingly sceptical of the present usefulness of the forms of Christian training and education that have served reasonably well in the past. Nor do I any longer believe that "school" can remain the central model for what it means to be "church." I will focus these doubts around the question of our present use, and abuse, of Scriptures.

There is no apparent problem about the reading of Scripture in the church so long as all or most of us share a language that we take for granted. We then possess a common intuition of the shape of reality and can pick out a particular passage or a topic and explore it. We can also make applications from the biblical text to our own experience. To the extent that the shape of our language is in harmony with the biblical shapes, we will be able to interpret and apply it in ways faithful to it.

Of course, the process can work both ways. Where the church is "higher education" and where the Bible is the main text, there its grammar can get worked into our lives in ever more faithful fashion as we are steeped in it. But ever since the rise of the school as the locus for becoming, it has been harder for Christians to do it this way. We read and live too much among alien shapes. We cannot become biblical simply by reading the Bible.

In fact, we read it less and less. Most of us who mastered the technique of the town in our secular lives, did not make the effort to learn the theological presuppositions required for a comparable understanding of the Scriptures. A sprinkling of us developed a taste for charts of the future based upon the prophetic writings. But few of us learned enough theology to be able to fit passages of Scripture into a presumably larger coherence. Those of us who did go more deeply into theology were often intimidated by the unwelcome directions it seemed to be taking us. Here too the style of the city intruded. For we discovered many theologies. And this led to more and more critical methodologies. And many of these seemed to lead to heresy. And so, for one reason or another, most of us have become content to allow professionals to exegete for us. Or else we have gathered some friends to read the Bible together without the burden of all that learned baggage.

But I am sceptical about the current popularity of such "sharing groups." I do not doubt the validity of sharing. And I certainly believe that we ought to read the Scriptures together. But I am more impressed with the mischief that can result from the one-sided subjectivism that seems to be implicit in the practice. The sharing of "what God is doing

in my life" that is not balanced by profounder attempts to discover "what God has revealed which judges my life" will quickly leave the text far behind. And more and more it is the good feeling, the "inspiration," that intimacy brings that comes to be the goal of such meetings. Where inspiration is sought for its own sake, there the demonic will soon appear. I believe that godly inspiration is an almost unexpected by-product when it is God that is sought, however frightening or difficult that confrontation may at first appear to be. It is growth in sonship that brings joy, but that growth cannot take place without a painful dying to less adequate levels and simple understandings. But I suspect that this profoundly difficult re-education is seldom aimed at. We are too like the large crowds who found it "inspiring" to follow Jesus and to listen to him. But these fell away well before the end. The resurrection appearances were only for those who had left all to immerse themselves into the way of Christ and who had suffered the shattering of their old expectations based upon old patterns. To these was given the new way, a new language for life and thought.

In any case, "sharing" is a form with its own rhythms and it is seldom profitable when it is forced within the time limits of Sunday school. Real problems can be introduced, but there is no time for their resolution. And so, after the ringing of the warning bell, formula answers are arbitrarily trotted in. But a formula answer to an existential problem is no answer at all. The formulas were well known to all, and the discussion of the problem would never have begun had they been felt to be adequate.

What does fit the Sunday school time slot is a lecture. And much can be gained from listening to someone who has mastered the text. Unfortunately, a serious Bible teacher cannot anymore take for granted that teaching the Bible in Sunday school does more good than harm. So long as people were shaped by village or town patterns, they could take hermeneutics for granted. But when city became a reality, then hermeneutics (the way one reads the Bible) became a problem. In the city many ways of perception lie side by side and there is no easy way to prove the superiority of any one of them. And so we become relativists. We learn that every statement must be judged in its context, that is, the cultural language within which it makes sense. But this also forces the realization that the languages of the biblical peoples are not our languages. If we are to understand the Bible, then we must make an effort to understand it that is at least as great as the effort to learn a second language. We must immerse ourselves until we "crash through" into the biblical structures. This sort of immersion could come unconsciously to some in the village. But we spend so much of our time with modern forms that only conscious and sophisticated effort will help us master ancient ones. That is, we must use every technique that scholarship can offer to bring ourselves to the point that we can leave behind the modern shapes that underlie our scholarship.

No one can be expected to learn the biblical "languages" in forty minutes a week. And so our modern modes of thought remain untouched. We continue to read in our terms, and to feel more and more that either the Bible has nothing to teach us or that it is a strange book that is closed to us. If one of the meanings of "pagan" is "to think and act in unbiblical modes," then we are pagan even when we make our dutiful little dips into the biblical stream. If the water is the right temperature,

we swing our feet in it and are "blessed." But we are almost incapable of imagining what immersion would be like and we shudder back from the cold shock we may receive.

I realized this during a class on I Corinthians that was team taught in our church last year. I had been assigned chapters 7, 11, and 15. On chapters 7 and 11 I did a fair amount of work and had at least begun to appreciate the fact that Paul's comments on women and on sex made no sense until one could discover the shape of the first century questions to which he was giving answers. I found that neither questions nor answers made sense until they were seen in terms of first century views of man. And it was clear to me that those views of man were, at crucial points, quite different from ours. And so I attempted to explain those views. No doubt I did it poorly, for I was only beginning to work with these concepts. But I was excited at the new light I was receiving. On Easter Sunday I was to talk about chapter 15. I prepared happily, for now that this view of man had been understood, Paul's doctrine of the resurrection would also make sense. But it soon became clear that the class was interpreting what I was saying in the light of our view of man instead of Paul's. And so they were confusing our notions of immortality with Paul's understanding of resurrection. I tried to back up and repeat the gist of the earlier lessons. But the attempt failed, and I knew that I had projected confusion instead of Easter joy. The reason for failure lay neither in my own nor in anyone else's stupidity. The failure lay in the setting of Sunday school itself. In forty minutes a week one cannot change a way of thinking; one can only work within it. It became clear to me that other things may be attempted in Sunday school, but biblical understanding ought not to be. Serious Bible scholars have no right to try to do what must be done in settings where it cannot happen. The same problem afflicts much preaching, which also has taken its cue from "school" and has often become more of a lecture than a proclamation. Even Christ succeeded only with those few who were willing to allow the shape of his life to alter the shape of theirs. The early church was clear about this. Conversion meant immersion; it was the learning of a new grammar for life as well as a new vocabulary, it was conversion to "the way."

Once the basic structures of a language are learned, it becomes possible again to utilize shorter periods for extending our knowledge. and then the Sunday school might again be productive. The problem is that Sunday school and other forums basically similar to it are all that the church offers. In making "school" the place for growth, the church lost its role as the place for continuing becoming. Insofar as it too became "school" it was forced by the limited time available to it to become "elementary school." "Higher education" was turned over to peripheral institutions: Bible schools, colleges, and seminaries. And so it has ceased to be a place for the liberating arts. One now goes away to school for a specified time to "get" the "liberal arts." The modern graduate certainly does not expect any stretching of the self to take place in the church to which he returns.

Many adults now find that their hardest "stretching" is done in secular settings. Why is it that community activities, hobbies, extension courses, and sports command greater enthusiasm than church? I think part of the answer is that we get excited about those activities that stretch our capacities and that the church no longer demands growth

of us. We go to church to flee complexity, not to master it. So long as this is the case, I believe that church people are moved by a true instinct when they look elsewhere for fulfillment. The result is that they come to a sophisticated understanding in other levels of their life, but they remain babes in their faith. One is not to admit "the weak in the faith" to "doubtful disputations" (Romans 14:1). But since when have our churches probed for truth at such a depth that it proved necessary to exclude "the weak"? The pleasures of consensus are dearly bought when its price is the failure to go beyond the lowest common denominator.

2. Children. Those of us who grew up in the village or the town began with a "mother tongue." We may be living in the city, but our strength is still derived from the earlier reality that molded us. I often feel that I am living off an older spiritual capital that I am not replenishing. I began there, when village was becoming town, and have moved to here. Where do my children begin? And where will they move? Here also I will treat trends as if they were the whole of reality. Even if my descriptions prove illuminating, no individual is likely to fit them wholly.

Our children begin with the city; they are growing up with Babel. They are surrounded by a multitude of languages, no one of which becomes a mother-tongue. From no single one of them is derived an initial sense of identity. In the village, and to some extent in the town, the child could see the same world that his parents saw. He saw the homes and businesses and fields. He saw adults at their tasks and he assisted at those tasks almost as soon as he was able to walk. Of course he saw it all with a child's eyes; but, nonetheless, the whole was present to his perceptions. In the city the world presents itself to the child as blocs of matter which come as if from different universes. And he receives only glimpses of many of the packages. For example, he has little sense of what adults do at their jobs. The adults he meets most are the mothers, baby sitters, and teachers who have defined their task as that of taking care of him.

The modern child does not sit down to a coherent cuisine at the table of life. Life comes to him as a progressive dinner in which a wild variety of special dishes are each served up in its own context or are hopelessly jumbled together. What this teaches is that each aspect of life has its own place and its own content. All "truths" come in sets that are relative to their contexts. To survive, one must learn to adapt to the shape of each context.

Not even at home does the child experience a single language. For we adults also live after Babel. We put on various faces and speak different languages for the different roles we play. Some of us are fully confused by the babble that surrounds us and is in us. Others of us do not experience the full effect of Babel because we still have the sense of a mother tongue and of the community that formed us. We have a sense of what an absolute is, at least in the sense of a something that can be taken completely for granted. And so we can "authoritatively" verbalize the "truths" of that ethos. But our lives actually reflect other patterns and other "truths." Our children are sensitive to all of these levels and eventually project the confusion which we do not yet recognize in ourselves.

Christian Education is one package among many others and is, very

often, the least of these, for it comes in brief time periods linked by no discernible thread. Even in church our age-grading insures that the child seldom hears adults telling each other what adults tell them. Here too the child interacts meaningfully only with adults appointed to him and with those his own age. The paradoxical result is that in both secular and religious spheres the modern child is more than ever "looked after" and "done to." And yet he is more deprived and at "loose ends," for he sees only disconnected fragments, never the whole of things.

Even within our church packages, our children meet confusion. Neither the biblical content nor the biblical shape are presented in their own terms. As already mentioned, we have isolated the stories and arranged them to be presented to children in terms of our notions of the child's "readiness." Adults study the epistles and, sometimes, the prophets, but seldom imagine that there is anything in the stories that they did not adequately grasp when they were children. We age-grade even the Bible. Here too context determines content. No one gains an impression of the biblical whole within the church.

Another result is that the biblical shape is distorted. Our curricula have been shaped by the town. To the mind-set of the town, stories (even Bible stories) exist to illustrate truths and to make these truths more palatable by clothing them in ear-catching form. Older people are ready for meat and do not need to waste time with fictions (even "true" fictions) but can receive the "truths" directly, in the form of doctrinal abstractions. But the truths appropriate for children are defined by us as those that affect behavior. Therefore, the purpose of those Bible stories is to communicate a moral truth. Two things follow.

In the first place, the moralisms tacked on by the curriculum writers come through as entirely arbitrary. Recently I taught our third and fourth grade Sunday school class for a month. All the materials (Scripture Press) were skilfully and beautifully done. And every lesson ended with a tidy moral point. And every point was false. They were not bad as moral points. Rather, every story had to be twisted to make it bear the point. Every one! Let me share two examples. The story of Isaac's wells was told as an example of the charitable and patient non-resistance that God will bless. But a middle passage that shows him to have been simply running scared had been tactfully left out. In fact, that story was highly unedifying and probably appears in no curriculum. And Jacob's theft of the blessing was naughty-naughty of course, but since it implied the spiritual leadership of the clan, he was really motivated in this by his desire to be a (sort of) preacher. May we all aim for such high service! I was not surprised at the sly scepticism some of these pupils were already expressing. Nor is it odd that their attention flags as soon as the moral is launched.

In the second place, and worse, the original intent of the biblical accounts was not even understood. Stories were not included in Scriptures merely for their moral value. Stories have shapes as well as content and those who reflect upon those shapes in their imagination receive more than information. The Bible stories could not be idealisms, therefore. They had to reflect reality—man's reality with man and with God. The final result of our mixture of modes is that neither our truths nor the Bible's come through authentically. What does come through is our modern pluralism and confusion.

Under these conditions our religious and moral teaching in the home and church achieves the precise opposite of what we intended. It hardly matters that the home and church blocs purport to carry ultimate truths and sure moral standards, for even the manner in which these are taught underscores the contextual character of all "truths."

That we have "good" children is no great comfort. It may be that a given child is really learning goodness. Or it may be that he is learning to adapt to his home and church contexts just as he is adapting to other contexts. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." No doubt. But this was more of a comfort in a village context than in our present world. For the actual training we give is not what we think it to be. Nor does it help to insist on "our" truths, to assert them more earnestly and more often. They still remain one set over against other sets. And "obedience" is not necessarily "principled." It does not always mean that there has been a change in "character" when a child later adapts to contexts we think to be evil.

I could still sense that my parents were serving a larger cause when they created schools for me and taught me in the home. They had been grasped by a larger vision of what life could mean, and their actions were directed more to God than to me. Because my father's attention to me was a by-product of his attention to God, his act did not place him within my childish world. Rather, his attention lifted me beyond my world to his larger one. He did not stoop to my level to become my "pal." He raised me to his so that, before God, I could become his "brother." Not all were as fortunate. Some of my father's peers became neither pals nor brothers, but were so caught up by the lure of success or by their devotion to the "higher cause" that they made one or the other of these their idol and sacrificed their children to it.

And so I learned more than the shape and the content of the town. I learned also to expect the unexpected, to wish to grow beyond the place I stood, to live in awe and trust of a God who brings us larger visions. The absolute lay above and beyond me, not in ways of life so fixed that they could be taken for granted.

But most of us adults have mastered the town; we have explored, and appropriated, its promise. It no longer stretches us beyond ourselves. When we turn to our children, we create for them a version of our world that we imagine to be suited to their comprehension. And so our act of stooping is not lifting; it is condescension. The child is not brought into the adult world. He meets adults who have made it their vocation to fit into his.

But the true citizens of that world are the children. All has been shaped to the child's dimensions, and he has become the all-important center. Adulthood is perceived as existing for the sake of serving childhood. The special arrogance of modern children should not surprise us.

Paradoxically, these "paradises" we create for them come more and more to feel like hell. More and more they are forced to resent our skillful service. For, secretly, it is our kingdoms that we serve, and not theirs—or God's. We have possessed our land. We have shaped its contours. And we wish to pass it on intact. We are preparing our children to maintain and perfect our creation. We intend to give them

our world as their birthright, and we expect to be honored for our creativity and praised for our generosity.

But for them its blessing has departed. Indeed, why should they want to grow up at all? To become an adult is perceived as a move from the center to the periphery. And very few adults live lives so joyful and meaningful that a child would want to grow up for very envy of that blessed status. We are defensive and afraid, for we wish to guard the town we willed to create and we do not understand the city that we unwittingly made possible. Nor do we find our purest joys in self-liberating communion with God and with our brothers. We do not anymore transcend the fragments of ourselves in a higher vision. We come closest to singleness of self in regression to earlier states, reverting to the physical and the sensate and to the things that we possess. Our purest sentiments are discovered in a nostalgic recovery of our childish innocence as we vicariously relive it through our children. Disneyland was built by and for adults who turned to cartoon phantasies because they lost the capacity for visions.

And so our children have become the vehicle for the recovery of our lost meaning even as we groom them to justify our creations by gratefully inheriting them. In so doing we destroy their innocence, and we rob them of the one joy that should be supremely theirs: the joy of becoming a man and a woman. It is both tragedy and simple justice that they turn upon us. The only option apparent to them is to accept the world we have offered them and to die or to smash it in the hope that a real one will emerge. And so they imagine that negation of the adult world is the beginning of creation. And soon they discover a new set of adults, seductive adults who are happy to grow rich by feeding their resentments and their hopes. Thus emerges the subculture of the youthful pack.

3. **Youth.** With adolescence comes the need to find oneself and the beginning of the ability to do so consciously. At the same time our children are revealed to us as strangers. The child must now break out of the world that has been created for him and cease to be a child. And so the battle with the adult world is joined in earnest. It has always been difficult to pass puberty, but it seems never to have been so difficult as now. In the village the passage was smoothed by established rituals. The community supported the change to adult status and controlled the passions that might be released. In the town, the passage took longer. "Adolescence" was created. But it was understood to be a time of disciplined preparation for success. One was not expected to enjoy it, but the sense of mastery that would come—and the promise of success—made up for all the waiting and the work. A higher goal was aimed at; and, necessarily, the number of casualties increased. In the city the passage is still more difficult, and it is not so clear to the youth that the effort will be worth it. With little help from the community (what community?), the youth must begin by coming to terms with himself and with his parents.

Some have already given up. They may easily drift into "adult" roles without apparent trauma. They continue to adapt to the local contexts even as they learned to adapt to the worlds of childhood. They may sow some "wild oats," but even this is a form of adaptation. Curiously. We think of these as the "good" ones.

A few are strong enough that they can move to maturity with

minimal fuss. Some love their parents and community enough to fight it out however hard and long the battle lasts. Others run away, hoping to spare their families and themselves the continued confrontation. Some of us were able to hang on long enough to find acceptable ways to run away—college, the draft, and voluntary service.

The modern youth tends to develop into a different character type than did his parents. The presence of many “languages” and the great press of numbers force the youth to develop the qualities of sensitivity and empathy. They also are more likely to develop their aesthetic capabilities. With their greater openness to other sorts of realities, they are also more open to the spiritual and the occult than were previous generations.

The other side of all this is that the quest for “good vibes” and “good relationships” permits dangerous experimentation. They have made of their lives a laboratory for the discovery of values that “town” adults too often have neglected. But many of the safeguards that village and town cultures erected to make good feelings and relationships a continuing possibility are experienced in the city as irrational taboos that hinder more than they help. And our refusal as adults to rethink these taboos or to make relative distinctions between them justifies their impatience. In any case many youth are all too ready to try new life styles. So far as they can tell, the best will not be discovered until all the possibilities have been worked through.

When we adults do confront them on questions of morals, neither is able to understand the other. Because of our sense of a “mother-tongue” and because of our “town” appreciation of the axiomatic character of “truth,” we adults simply “know” that there is an ultimate foundation, and we are convinced that the formulas we repeat are absolute expressions of that absolute. To our profoundly relativistic children, these formulas sound intolerably egotistic and maddeningly naive. Since it is usually easy to prove the inadequacy of any formula, the youth assume that they have won the argument. Since no rhetoric has touched the adult’s assurance of the felt foundation, he feels either that he has been tricked by verbal cleverness or that somehow the youth have refused to “listen.” In fact, the argument moved on different levels and could come to no satisfactory conclusion. In the making of moral judgments, the adult proceeds from “principles” while the youth seeks to enhance the relationships (“love”) and good feelings within any given context. And each goes away justified in his own eyes.

The problem is made more difficult by the differing expectations of the future that are held. The youthful suspicion that adult life is a rat race in which the valid ends of life have been sacrificed to a neurotic concentration upon means is not unjustified. Added to this is a lack of hope that the world has any future. The ecology crisis tells them that the success of the technology of the town has mortgaged the sustaining power of the earth. Wars and rumors of wars tell them that Armageddon may be near. And if the ravaged earth and corrupt governments hold together long enough, it may still be useless to study long and hard, for the career they aim at may be all filled up—or nonexistent—when they are finally ready. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising if they are sure that any immediate pleasure is more real and more desirable than unlikely and remote joys.

Moreover, they are “quick studies,” trained in the school of mo-

der pluralism to adapt quickly and easily to many languages. They have learned the art of grasping new situations and have played at the acquisition of many skills. But their grasp of any given skill or language is apt to be more facile than profound. The result is that "city youth" have much more experience and sophistication than do "town youth" and yet will be unable to go as far. They are good enough at so many things that they will seldom concentrate on any. They are less likely to put up with the years of discipline and hardship that true mastery of the arts and sciences demands. Nor do they have the same hunger to climb. With our success assured, we adults are left with a feeling that we may, after all, have missed out on too many of the other things that enrich life. They are more likely to be left with the uneasy feeling of never having risen to the top of anything.

4. **Young Adults.** An increasing number of youth remain "at loose ends" until well into their twenties or even longer. Another stage in life prior to full adulthood seems to be emerging. The "young adult" is the invention of the city even as "adolescence" was the creation of the town.

No doubt there are many reasons for this, but basic to many of these are the social and economic structures of the city. Basic also is the psychological effect of modern life. There is that in us which is not content with plurality. We wish to discover and to project that "one" which lies within and yet transcends the fragments and the varied patterns in ourselves. But the effort to discover a "single heart" and to perceive with a "single eye" must take account of complexities undreamed of by earlier generations. So much more must be assimilated that integration takes longer.

The church has not reckoned seriously with this phenomenon. We have not even begun to come to terms with the fact that it will be necessary to provide moral and financial support as well as to find new social-religious structures for youth who may remain "youth" until into their thirties. That this is so will astonish villagers and will be appalling to town-types.

Though we did not consciously intend to do so, we Mennonites have actually been experimenting with such structures. Our motive was service to God, but one of the side-effects of MCC and other forms of voluntary service was that we set up socially acceptable ways to postpone "settling down." Graduate studies gave some of us the additional time we needed.

But it is not clear that these service forms are serving this function as well as they once did. In the past, most of us were sufficiently in tune with the current ideals of the church that we could enter such service with relatively clear motives. Or perhaps we have just forgotten the many who could not and who looked elsewhere for fulfillment. It was during my service that the pluralisms of the city began to call my town ideas into question. But by now the more perceptive of our youth have discovered the city long before they finish college. The result is that they have been led to question or even to deny convictions and attitudes that the church has made prerequisite to service. Thus the support of church structures is denied them when they need it most. Nor as they sense, is "service" really appropriate, at least not as so far defined. One must find his own soul before one presumes to save the souls of others.

But where, after college, does one go to find one's soul? In the far

past, one could go to a monastery. The town substitute for the cloister is the seminary. Though the structures of the seminary are strictly "town," the professors are often able to empathize with refugees from the city. For they have been forced by their scholarship to deal with plurality and with relativity. They are not shocked by the modern condition. And so "seminary" is becoming "cloister" for a few. It is again a place for searchers and not only a place for the further preparation of those who are sure that they have already found. But not all who need to search would fit into a seminary. It may even be unthinkable to those whom the city has shaped more deeply. They are in flight from the city and the church of the town has built no other refuge to receive them.

And so they are forced to invent structures of their own. Strangely, or perhaps not strange at all, it seems to be the village that many of these youth are trying to invent. Perhaps it is best that we who have town-minds do not interfere. For the town "not to be productive" means "not to have the right to be." And the town has not done well with another class of people it defined as non-productive and forced to live "at loose ends." The communes and the old people's homes are the age-graded villages spawned by our cities and towns.

5. **A Footnote: Beyond Babel?** So far I have assumed that the city is Babel. This is, so far, an exaggeration. Elements of the village live on; and, despite their growing paranoia, the people of the town still believe that they will inherit the earth. The city as Babylon is here for some, but for most of us that discovery lies still in the future.

But there are observers who insist that a new mother-tongue is emerging, one that will be superior to all old languages. They urge us not to be misled by the barbaric yawps of its beginnings. I am sceptical, but that could be the result of my unwillingness to "listen." Allow me to argue for it despite my own lack of conviction that it is so.

Despite their ability to speak in many voices, let us postulate that modern youth resent Babel. The burden of multiple consciousness is so great that those who see no hope of overcoming it come to prefer the loss of consciousness. These are the ones who drown themselves in sex, in willful ignorance, in pointless wandering, in drugs, and, eventually, in death.

Those who are stronger, or who have yet a glimmer of hope, cannot accept this dehumanization as the final truth about themselves. They participate in the same "mind-blowing" acts, but it is not loss of consciousness that they seek. It is rather a new consciousness that they hope to discover. It is not the primitivistic as barbarism that they desire; they are looking instead to the primitive for basics. They seek again the foundations that our over-developed culture has lost sight of. It is a minor thing to refuse to aim at the top when it is to the bottom of things that man must go again.

Thus one can recognize in their music the attempt to get beneath all complex structures to basic rhythm. It is appropriate that they have chosen the wordless language of music in which to begin to communicate. One must not take the lyrics too seriously. They express the city meanings the music struggles to deny. The driving monotony of the basic beat in early rock represents a desire to rediscover, and be enfolded by, the heart-beat of the universe. It may be subhuman and the wish to experience it may be atavistic, but it is anti-human only for those whose

protective sac has been pierced and who drown in the womb it creates. There are those, however, who are strengthened; the rhythms are worked so deeply into their being that they can take them for granted even as they mount over them, mastering instead of only being mastered. And then they can discover all the subtle possibilities any language implies. And they can work into its shapes the contents of all the musics that have been. The baroque and the classical merges with ragas and gamelans. Some forms of "rock" are already nearing the subtlety of the most advanced musical styles. Those of us who have not permitted its beat to reorder us fail to "hear" it when it is not stressed. And so for us the later forms become as incomprehensible as the earlier was repulsive. And some day, perhaps already for those who can hear, truly human words will emerge to fit the music.

In addition to a basic shape, the primitive as content must be re-discovered. What emerges here are not bare facts or abstract principles, but personal relationships as the place to begin. Taking nothing for granted and paying attention to no taboos, they seek to discover their humanness in each other. In so doing, they rediscover many of the structures and meanings of the village.

Finally, they are in search of power, the power of the integrated self to mount up and soar over the merely material and natural. They wish to overcome the inability to act that plagues the city. And so they experiment with spirit and the spirits.

Of course, the road is narrow that leads to the higher way, and few will find it. Most who begin will fall away. Many will be destroyed. But, say those who celebrate the new possibility, no cost will be too great. Though we may not yet be able to recognize the elect, they will gradually institute a new civilization where love will replace hate, creativity will replace destruction, nature will be more important than machines, and man will study war no more.

Meanwhile, the young have not gone to the smart men of the town for help in their search. They have gone to various holy writings and to shamans and gurus whose claim it is that they have gone into the forest or the desert, following a discipline that penetrates again to the fundamentals, and have come out with a new song and a true shape for life.

These patterns are true also of those who have discovered Jesus. They too reject the modern languages, even the languagees of the church, as demonic. And they work to reconsturct the kind of setting and to rediscover the kind of language in which an authentic word can again be spoken.

They too wish to discover the basic shape of reality, and they have turned to Scriptures, reading the old King James with literal devotion. But their reading is not like the literal reading of the town which aims at truths. They read it for its shaping "music." The Bible is almost all they read, as if (like grandmother?) they expect thus to be molded to its structures. Their reading, their prayers, and their Jesus words have the character of incantation, something like the mantras chanted by other devotees: "Hare Krishna, Hare, Hare."

They too seek the truth in personal encounter. They seek Jesus, yet here too they are quite different from those of us who also claim his name. The church of the town is uncomfortable with their "Jesus." We say "Christ" and mean the revealer of truths. Our Christ is the eternal

Logos. They say "Jesus" and mean the personal presence, the healer, the super-guru. This presence is invoked, and realized, in fellowships which recreate the structures of the village.

They too are in search of power. The primitives and the sophisticated among Christians have both discovered the Holy Spirit as the source of the power they so desperately need. Power is sought in personal discipline and concentration and in a worship which seeks release in a holy orgy of the spirit.

Here too there are many who fall aside. Where the Spirit is, there the spirits find a fertile field. Where there is the promisee of new life and the power to heal, there the sick will gather—and will often distort what they have found. Here also may be the elect who will fashion a new church.

Such are the arguments that one may give. I would even like to be convinced. I agree that there is hope here. I do not deny that God is at work. But I do not yet see the superiority of this new beginning to previous beginnings. I rejoice that God is acting. I am also sad that He must begin again on so primitive a level. And yet, is it not at the beginning that we must begin? Not all cities in the Bible are Babel and Babylon. There is the promise of a new city composed of those who have been "born again" and who have begun as "little children."

So, let us celebrate what is happening, be open to new beginnings in ourselves, and then move on. For it is not enough to move backward however far one must go. I must honor my immediate elders as well as my remote ones. I cannot reject the truths of the town or any of the many languages that the city contains. The wickedness before Babel was fully as great as that which followed. The absolute and the ideal lies ahead of our cities, not behind them. We must go through these earthly cities to the new Jerusalem.

III. THE HUMAN IDEAL

A. Introduction

Every coherent culture possesses an image of what man ought to be, and those who come closest to realizing that ideal become models to be imitated. By being what they are, they teach the young what it means to be human.

If the ideal is simple, then a large number can attain it. If the ideal is a rich and complex one, then the attainment is rare and there are a number of stages in the process of becoming an authentic "hero." But this also makes possible a whole series of lesser images, each of which focusses some aspect of the larger ideal. In time, individuals may become so ingrossed in the partial modes that they lose sight of the original vision. It is probably true of any culture that its coherence is broken at the same time that it reaches its greatest richness—and becomes city.

The ideal villager was a master of the practical wisdom that had been handed down from the elders and which was supplemented and confirmed in his own experience. He had learned how to read the sky and the earth, moving in harmony with the rhythms of nature. And he had learned to read the hearts of men, sensing their joys and their hurts and responding appropriately to their condition.

He had an almost mysterious power in him, the strength that comes

from being in tune with the creating and sustaining power of the universe. He was "right" about things and about people, though he was largely unable to explain why he was right. He was not a scientist, and yet his fields prospered. He was not a psychologist, and yet he was a master of the soul. He was not a philosopher, and yet he seemed to know what life was all about. He was not a theologian, but he could converse with God.

It took time to attain these virtues. Like the magnificent oaks that grew in the village, these men had to withstand many storms and enjoy many sunny days. Nobility, like truth, was a function of time; and to become old gracefully was to be honored. The hero of the village was a sage. And yet, to our town-city eyes, he seemed a limited and ignorant man.

The ideal townsman has gone to school to master the technical expertise that is needed in business and the professions. He has learned to impose his own rhythms on the natural world and to "manage" people. He is full of energy and, in the world of things, he knows how to translate energy into power. He is a scientist breeding better plants, a psychologist analyzing the self, a philosopher constructing a system of truths, and a theologian who imagines himself to be thinking the thoughts of God.

The townsman can do all of this before he is out of his twenties, for his concepts have been rationally organized. For him, knowledge is truth and power. And his hero is the man who has invented something new or who has built something big. And yet, such men are raping the earth and destroying their fellows.

But what is the ideal of the city? There the grand image splinters, and the man who is admired is the virtuoso who can move easily from one context to another. He is more an imitator of heroes than a hero. And he is always "cool." The city breeds, and discards, celebrities, "pop heroes." Finally, when the disintegration becomes too apparent, those with eyes to see embody their mockery in the creation of anti-heroes: Alfred E. Newman, Dustin Hoffman, Joe Namath. The comic strips, those grand mirrors of man's image of himself, once featured supermen. Gradually these are being replaced by figures like Charlie Brown, Born Loser, Doonesbury, and Andy Capp.

B. Our Christian Heroes

A man or woman may possess every virtue and every grace and be a universal genius as well and not be a hero. Heroes exist in the eyes of admirers. There were some great men and women in the village-towns in which I grew. But they were not my heroes. I was over thirty before I even realized that they should be admired. I am still a little angry that I have learned so late, angry at myself and angry at a culture that failed to point them out to me.

My elders were mastering the town, and their heroes were the celebrities of the town. It was only natural that these should be my heroes too. I do not need to discuss the secular heroes, the Edisons and the Fords. What needs to be looked at are the religious heroes of the town. I remember two sorts who were held up to us.

The first sort were famous Christian laymen. They were business tycoons, sport stars, and reformed entertainers. That is to say, they were not held up to us because they were profound Christians but because

they were already admired for other reasons and happened also to be Christians. One's next-door neighbor might well be more saintly than any of them and not be considered special at all. So far as a Christian ideal was concerned, these celebrities were worth precisely nothing.

The other sort of hero was the "full-time Christian." For various reasons, the kind of American town religiosity into which we moved glorified the fiery evangelists and missionaries who swept many into the Christian way. But again, it was not their Christian quality that made us consider them great. They were known because they produced many converts, not because they displayed any of the more personal fruits of the Spirit. Indeed, those who had the gift of evangelism usually concentrated so much upon what needed to be known about the beginning of the Christian life that they knew little about the deeper nourishment needed by maturing disciples. They often were, and are, adolescent in personality type and spiritual development. Yet these were the heroes, not the older men of God in the laity and pastorate who were helping saints to grow more saintly and who were themselves growing daily in the wisdom and power and love of God.

When we grew older, another sort of Christian leader became apparent. At higher levels, the religion of the town glorified organizers. At still higher levels, a certain kind of theologian began to appear. But almost all of these were men of the town, with the strengths and weaknesses that that implies.

The "heroes" that were held up for me were representations of an ideal which any bright youth could already fully understand and begin to imitate. Unlike my mother, who was expected to grow up, we were expected to begin to do the work of a Christian when still quite young. And that was logical for a Christianity that had been reduced to a level that could be understood by adolescents.

An observer might easily infer from many of the churches of the town that the role of adults is to organize the church so that it can educate the children who will become the energetic youth who are their ultimate ideal. Because the quality of a mature ideal is scarcely imagined, this is even logical. For it is quantity of production that the town admires and youth is the time of life when energy is greatest.

It did not take me long to reject the heroes of the town. It has seemed to me that its great ones had lost their humanness. They had too little empathy for others and almost no ability to laugh at themselves. They had much energy, but little liveliness. They were very successful, but had little depth. They had worked hard to gain the world and they were sure that they had deserved it, but they had lost their own souls.

On the other hand, the celebrities of the city had wit and polish. They could sympathize with the faults of others, but they had ceased to expect greatness of anyone. They could laugh at themselves, but the laughter was a mask to hide behind. They were "alive," but they had little staying power. They were accounted successful because they had inherited the earth, but there was nothing in the world or above it for which they would be willing to die. And therefore they carelessly threw their lives away.

At long last, there are two sorts of heroes that I have found. There are the very few who have mastered the town and the city and who have transcended them. And I have been surprised to discover that there were spiritual giants in the churches from which I came. I

learned that my father was more profound than those he thought he should admire. Within our village-town tradition there were men like H. H. Flaming, men who also knew the town but who had earlier been formed by the wisdom of the village. They did not know the theoretics, but they had a sure grasp of practical wisdom. My father had worked to learn the religious language of the town. But H. H. Flaming had been his truest teacher. I once asked my father what the word *Gottesfurcht* had meant to our elders, and he wrote:

Gottesfurcht. Fear of God—of the Lord It did not so much have [the concept of dread It rather had the concept of a deep reverence of the exceeding greatness, power, holiness, righteousness, justice, and judgments of God. It bespoke a way of life. **Er wandelte in der Furcht Gottes.** It was reflected in his reverence toward the ministry, the Church, . . . his fellowman, . . . government, law, etc. It gave the individual a poise, sobriety and dignity. Do you remember Rev. H. H. Flaming? He was an embodiment of this whole concept.

And then I asked for a description of H. H. Flaming.

Brother Flaming moved with his parents to Oklahoma and settled in the pioneer community there. He was able to get a fourth grade education, but he was always interested in learning more. He was a diligent student of nature and read whatever he could lay his hands on. It was most interesting to be out with him in the field or at night under the clear sky. He knew the wild plants and animals, their habits and their uses. At night he could point out the constellations and tell the myths connected with them. He loved Psalms 19, especially the first part, when he stood under the heavens. He was also a horticulturalist and experimented with many plants He was a homespun philosopher and a great thinker, a lover of men, very practical, humble, and a great leader. He led in such a humble way that you never feared approaching him and never sensed at the moment that he was leading you Many times at conferences, after the theologians and professors had come to their wits' end, someone would turn to Brother Flaming and ask him what he thought. In his very humble way he would say, "I think it would work this way . . ." and it would work. . . . He was a very able leaderHe brought the Corn church to its zenith.

I cannot return to the conditions of yesterday, but I have come to see that the authentic great ones of my youthful past were more like village sages than like town celebrities. And I have come, almost too late, to honor them. I had always been told that Jesus Christ was the final embodiment of what it meant to be a son of God. But that vision cannot exist in splendid isolation. While we grow toward it, we need lesser embodiments, heroes who give content to the ideal. St. Paul knew this, and he urged people to imitate him. In this imitation growth takes place and greater insight so that who He is can be more perfectly imagined. Really profound understandings depend upon a hierarchy of Christ-like embodiments. And, in the end, these saints point beyond themselves, so that we learn to imitate their imitating of Christ.

I am angry at myself when I realize that I grew up with home-made rye and whole-wheat bread and came for awhile to prefer the fluff that can be bought in any grocery store. And I have not wholly forgiven my church for forgetting its H. H. Flamings while pointing to celebrities and

organizers. We still have profoundly Christian men and women among us. But we seem to have lost the capacity to recognize them and we never show our youth who they might be or hint at the long road the great must travel. And so they lose any truly profound sense of who Jesus Christ was. They are forced to image him in the light of their celebrities, and he becomes a pop hero too—"Jesus Christ, Superstar."

IV. THE ADVANTAGE OF BEING ETHNIC

A. The Background: On Being American

1. **Introduction.** We Mennonite Brethren who came to North America were Russian Mennonites who spoke two dialects of German, ate peculiar dishes, and settled as communities. We were ethnics. But we were not narrowly ethnic. Already in Russia we took much of our inspiration, our theology, and even our church structure from neighboring Baptists and pietistic Lutherans. We were willing to be taught, and we were already committed to a greater mastery of the town.

We came to the American frontier and were both excited by the promise of the new land and horrified by the barbarism of many of our neighbors. But we soon learned that the American heartland was dotted with other ethnic groups. We usually stayed away from them, for they were too like us to be safe. It was also sprinkled with people who were trying to discover something like a village. And we stayed away from them, for we could take that art for granted. And we found many who, like us, were trying to learn the secular and religious language of the town. These, we were sure, were the real Americans, and we were unable to stay away from them. They were the models for those who brought in the English language and the way of the town. Their churches were the fruit of the revivals that helped to Christianize the new frontier. Their heroes were men like Dwight L. Moody, and Billy Sunday, and Gypsy Smith.

2. **The Religion of the "Bible Belt."** Revivalism was not the whole of the religion of the American heartland, but it was so important an aspect of it that the present shape of the town religiosity of which we count ourselves a part can not be understood without it. It seems to me that two quite different forms of revivalism flourished. One type was suited to the religious needs of displaced villagers; the other type assisted those who were seeking to master the town.

The frontier forced isolation upon many people who were not ready for it. Many of those who filtered west were village types who had been cast loose or were primitives who had not mastered even the forms of the village. For such people, the experience of the spiritual often comes in ecstasy that involves the loss of self-consciousness. Purer village cultures develop rituals in which the entire group moves as a single entity, as if possessed by a single mind—or spirit. In his ecstasy, the American also ceased to be an individual, but he tended to remain an isolate. He needed the evangelist to focus the emotion that was magnified by the crowd so that he could "let go" and let "the Spirit" take control. But the shouting and jumping that then occurred was a solo performance.

Town-types have always been horrified by these religious expressions and some of their criticisms are justified. The experience begins with a decision to let go of the deciding self so that ecstasy may follow. The experience produces a sense of purged well-being, the feeling that one

"fits in" with the power and harmony of the larger reality. But it need not lead to a changed life. A person has been mastered, but he has not necessarily learned mastery. And so his life may be cyclic, dependent upon the evangelist's return for his periodic purgations. Another criticism is that the line between the Spirit and the spirits is a fine one. The emotions of the experience are not wholly unlike those released by the spirits that come in bottles or that are set free in sexuality. Indeed, both alcohol and sex were regularly present at revival and camp meetings.

At least the earlier forms of Pentecostalism derived from this "holy roller" revivalism and Pentecostalism appears to be appropriate whenever village entities have broken down. But the new isolates produced by the city are discovering that something like this answers to their condition too. There is here a permanent human need that must be answered, but those who do not go beyond these primitive forms to moments that combine the sense of being mastered with the power of a higher mastery betray by this a failure to mature. (Part of the controversy over glossolalia in our churches may be due to the failure of town-types to distinguish between the "primitive" and "Pauline" forms of it.) I think that early adolescence is the natural time when the self feels most strongly the primitive pull of this experience. The rock festival is a modern version of the camp meeting for the new barbarian of the city. Here also drugs and sex are present. And here also the teenybopper is the most ecstatic devotee.

The evangelism which was appropriate to the discoverers of the town was much more sedate and respectable. It was intended to move the will, not the passions. It called for decision, not for ecstasy. It led to heightened self-consciousness, not to its loss. Of course there were intense emotions here too, but the revivalist intended them to lead to the decision to change one's life and thought. The act of conversion gave a joyful assurance of God's acceptance and forgiveness and focussed the strength of the individual for the moral self-discipline and the hard work that were essential to the town definitions of religious and secular success. Conversion called for a new start, with a dedicated and disciplined self that could deny immediate desires for the sake of long-range satisfactions. It was the mobilization of all one's powers in the service of a higher goal.

The demonic also attends this second form. Where the emotional temperature has been raised to flash point, there the sensitive have often been permanently scarred. This evangelism is suited for those whose egos are well enough developed that they can make the decision demanded. But the pressures generated by the campaign may be most strongly felt by those, whatever their chronological age, whose self is not sufficiently formed to make the authentic decision ostensibly demanded. At the same time, these are the ones most anxious for the approval and solidarity of the group, and the evangelist can easily simulate success by compelling them forward.

To its rituals of solidarity, every church should add occasions for the heightening of individuality and its dedication to the Lord. And the church must not be too afraid of the emotions appropriate to each. But it seems to me that later adolescence is the appropriate age for the disciplined mastery of the modes that constitute the town. This is the age when the logical and mathematic shapes that underlie it can best be learned. And this is the age when our farthest-reaching decisions

are made. It is a crisis time, and there is a need to crystalize the crises. But those who continue to return to this experience betray by this their failure to go on to mastery.

3. Town Religion in the City. That which begins with the joyous discovery of new truth moves gradually toward the boredom of old truisms. That which was begun in the passion of creation must, at last, bring on the ennui of maintenance. The new, uncharted field for human becoming turns out, in the end, to be a prison to the questing spirit that has searched out all its corners. So it is always with success. So is it also with the way of the town. The town succeeded so well that cities appeared. And now the adherents of the way of the town are seen to be still immature, and narrow, and afraid. So is it also with the religion of the town.

a. The Religion of the Town as Adolescence. By now it is becoming possible to see that the most unfortunate result of revivalism may not have been its excesses and distortions. The deeper problem is that frontier revivalism could not be one or two of the means used by a developed church to express aspects of its faith and life. Revivalism did not serve a church that knew much more. Instead revivalism itself had to create and sustain the Christian community. And this meant that the church thus created tended to remain fixated around the emotions and the doctrines of its beginnings. The most demonic result is that the success of the movement has tended to limit its descendants to that level of human need which it was designed to satisfy. Its victory acted as a brake on Christian maturity. Churches created by revivals have found it almost impossible to break free from the moods and the ideas appropriate to adolescents.

The worship ritual that develops is a more subdued version of the original revival meeting so that the worshippers can relive and celebrate it. The original consuming fire is partially rekindled so that it becomes a warm glow in the weekly fellowship. For a long time the service continues to climax in an altar call, even when those who go forward are an occasional child and membership transfers.

The theology also focusses around the act of decision, and all the members are constantly urged to be soul-winners. All the gifts in the church serve this purpose and all are supposed to have this gift. Conversion is conceived of as a ticket to heaven and while waiting for heaven the reason for life is the giving out of more tickets.

Of course, there are also exhortations to live out in daily life the shape of the new vision. Details must be mastered and there is much work to be done in increasingly efficient ways. But no higher visions and no profounder shapes are expected. The Christian who feels that he has "arrived" thinks of his Christianity as "possession," not as "pilgrimage."

b. the Narrowness of the Churches of the Town. The frontier was a new place, and both new places and new churches attract similar personality types. Renewal movements focus on particular needs and those who join the group think and feel alike. In the revivalist and the free church tradition it continues to be taken for granted that those who join will be very like those who already belong. Although the "language" of such churches has the same basic structure, congregations come, in time, to use slightly varying dialects. When an individual moves to another town, he will first visit congregations belonging to the denom-

ination of the group he has left. But if these congregations reflect cultural-educational-religious levels different from his own, as is possible within several generations, then he shops elsewhere until he finds a group that "talks his language." If a member outgrows the level in his church, he rarely stays to help others to mature with him. Individuals are "upwardly mobile" by moving through churches rather than by belonging to a group that changes or that contains many levels. The result is that although Christianity as a whole encompasses many culture types and levels of maturity, the member of a church in the revivalist tradition usually grows up with an extremely narrow understanding of the Christian faith. His models are all cut in the same mold and even the closeness of the fellowship acts to reinforce the behaviour and the beliefs that were implicit from the beginning.

The paradoxical result is that although each congregation remains static, the whole Christian scene is constantly agitated by individual shifting and by new movements of renewal. The problem is that individuals develop new needs and even the old needs must find more complex answers. Indeed, the very fact that a group organizes to meet a particular need in a particular way guarantees that attention is diverted from other needs and in a short period of time the cure of an old hurt has given rise to a new one. It is as if we are the inhabitants of a house, each room of which possesses a special power which is necessary for the continued health of the occupants. But the occupants do not live in the whole house. Each one picks a certain room to camp in. And so they grow sickly. Then one day someone breaks out of his room and discovers the power of one of the other long-neglected rooms. He rushes back to his old room to proclaim that the key to health has been discovered. He convinces some to come with him and, verily, a new bloom appears on their faces and vigor returns to their enfeebled limbs. But now they lose what they once possessed and in time the cycle is repeated. The members of each room stubbornly insist that they are what is true of the whole house. The rooms give the appearance of total fixity. And yet the halls are full of frantic confusion.

Because the new need is acutely felt, the new solution quickly attracts those who need it. And so the new group grows dramatically. The spirit of triumphalism takes over and the statisticians among them point out that if each one continues to bring one at the present rate, it will not take long before the whole world will have joined them. But soon they come to the end of the pool of prospects with that need and the more plodding pace of maintenance takes over.

Since the youth have grown up in a particular room, it is they who most clearly manifest the morbid symptoms inevitably produced by that room. And because adolescence is a time for new decisions, they are often the ones who first explore the shape of the new obsession. It is easy to be a church prophet in America. One need only keep a practiced eye on the newest adolescent upheaval. But it is getting harder to keep up with the quickening pace. For the narrower the felt need, the more extreme is the solution, and the more quickly the position is exploited and abandoned. Unfortunately, many are religiously burned out by the end of adolescence. Having outgrown the narrow Christianity they grew up with and having moved through several fads, they often imagine that they have outgrown Christianity altogether. And the church, its

eyes fixed firmly upon the next batch of children, does not much notice their loss.

c. **The Growing Paranoia of Town Christians.** As already described, liturgy becomes ritual, truth becomes truism, and the new life style becomes a familiar rat race. Even worse, the success of the movement brings a series of fresh threats against it. It is not surprising that older Christians become suspicious, resentful, and afraid.

The mood of worship changes because it becomes harder to rekindle the old glow as the originating experience recedes into the distant past. The members must work harder to fan the embers, and they begin to feel guilt that this is necessary. Because there is nothing in their teaching to help them to understand what is happening, they grow increasingly uneasy. Meanwhile, the leader more and more lashes out critically, for he discovers that his people like to be spanked. Their sense of guilt is appeased by punishment and their confusion is overcome while old truths are being fervently repeated. The catharsis of punishment now provides a distorted version of the old-time warmth. Because it leads to no resolution and no progress, this pattern also becomes cyclic.

Meanwhile the virtues stimulated by their conversion have helped the members to succeed financially. They have moved into different contexts and have thereby discovered the variety of the city. More and more their secular lives reflect the varied forms of the city, but their church and its theology proclaims only the structure of the town. Because their religion cannot reflect this variety and their theology cannot explain it, they compartmentalize their "secular" and "sacred" lives. And so added strains develop.

The growth of the group also slows. It even ceases to be desired though this may not be admitted. For the shape of a group is also a function of size and the addition of numbers begins to change the nature of what was intended. It is often true that success has disturbed most the original members who worked to make it possible. For planting and tending are different sorts of things. Experienced church planters know well how important it is to begin with a certain kind of core group—and how important it often is to set them aside gracefully once the church is planted.

And there is always the vexing problem of the later generations. The one thing these parents cannot do is to reproduce their own experiences and perceptions in their children. For their children have always spoken the language their parents had discovered as a second, and higher, reality. Even the meaning of conversion begins to change, becoming a ritual affirmation of what one is rather than the liberating acceptance of a profounder shape.

The success of their chosen way has pointed to alternative ways just as surely as the successful town produces the city. Because they are unable to recognize the validity of other ways and other structures, they cannot distinguish between Christian maturity and heresy, and all other Christian expressions are lumped together and damned. And so the mood changes. The crusaders who joyfully turned outwards in the confidence of victory turn inward to become suspicious faith-defenders. In all too many of the churches of the town the old ones, who ought to be the models of the faith, have ceased to represent even the adolescent "ideal" they never outgrew; and their most feared enemies are members of their own household.

B. The Foreground: On Being Ethnic

1. **Beyond Revivalism and Adolescence.** Is this the kind of Christianity we wished to acquire? Well, yes. Of course, no one intended these results. To be fair, we must admit that what I have described is not the whole reality of any actual congregation. Much that was and is positive has been left out. Yet I think it to be true that results like these are inevitable if the way of the town is allowed to cast the whole into its image. And I believe that, to a considerable extent, this is what has happened. But even if all this is so, I would insist that it was not wrong to want to master the town way. This needs to be stressed, for many people, turning in horror from the effect of the town upon our nation and our church, have imagined that town itself is evil. It is not, no more so than is adolescence.

The problem was that the conditions of the frontier provided no larger context that could put the way of the town "in its place." No wise "establishment" was there to construct a full society with a hierarchy of structures, each one confined to the sphere it could serve best. And no genuine aristocracy was there to embody higher levels of human greatness.

We mid-western Mennonites moved into a young country. But we did not experience the effect of the frontier in the same way as the "Americans" did. For we brought peoplehood with us and much of the ethos of the Russian village-town. There came a time when our elders rebelled against the provincialism and the oddities of our Mennonite culture. Though in a different way, we too were narrow. For our parents or grandparents, the way of the town was a liberation. And so we came to be ashamed of who we were. For a long time we have chastised ourselves, comparing the worst aspects of our ethnic ethos with the best that the town could offer. I think it only fair that I continue my counter-exaggeration, adding to my tale of the town a celebration of ethnicity.

We Mennonites were saner than our neighbors, with the possible exception of other ethnics. We had a context that held extremes in check and made possible a subtle blend of levels of development. And we produced aristocrats like H. H. Flaming and saints like my father. Even when we turned away from what we were, we could not quickly erase the effects of the older mother-tongue. We were better than the rhetoric we adopted. Those of us younger ones were most fortunate who paid more attention to what our teachers were than to what they said. My elders held before me the heroes of the town. But God was good, and at last I saw that many of them were more profound than the ideal that they proclaimed. The leaders of town churches are delighted to take in Mennonites. We are among the best of the Christians of the town precisely because we are not wholly town, some level of the village still goes with us.

Our church also began as a renewal movement. But it was a movement within an ethnic setting. Some non-Mennonites were also converted, but they were allowed to marry in, and they became ethnics too. Moreover, both sorts of religious experience were present. We also had our ecstasies (the *fröhliche Richtung*), though the leaders quickly moved to tame the excesses. Perhaps they did too good a job, for the ecstasies, though always present among us, have always been held down.

And so our church has had emotion, and has had controls for it.

It has called for discipline, and has had ways to support the decisions that were made. And we had a larger context that functioned to put both "in their place."

Our traveling ministers (**Reiseprediger**) were evangelists, but they were also more. They held **Bibelbesprechungen** and discussed the problems of Christian life and growth. Our leaders were elders; and deacons also were selected from those who came nearest the image of the sage. We too have produced evangelists, but they tend to mature into pastors, or become missionaries who mature into church builders, or they move out into non-ethnic churches which still conceive the ministry as preaching to the pagans or the young. Our own church leaders were laymen chosen because they had earned the respect of other adults. Even when we paid our pastors, this older ideal continued. We could appreciate evangelists, but where the ethnic bonds held strong, we could use their services and then get on with the day to day business of Christian living.

So also we could appreciate renewal movements and non-denominational associations which sponsor a specific cause. We could support faith missions and Gideons and Navigators and many another cause. And yet most of us could also stand over against them, seeing that their validity was as a part of a larger whole. We have often been suckers for dynamic outsiders. But our own conference leaders have been the teaching type, whether or not they served within a school.

Finally, because of our ethnic character, we have had a strong family life, and the whole family came to church. One may almost say that the church was an extended family. And we have also had a range of mature models for the young to imitate.

2. **Ethnic Breadth and Hope.** We Mennonites have been so aware of the narrowness that is the result of ethnicity that we have not even recognized that narrowness comes in several models. It is true that we have found it difficult to accept non-ethnic Mennonites. But it is also true that our ethnicity has made it possible for our communities to contain an astonishingly varied group of people. We adults have had many reasons for staying together and even our rebel children have all sorts of reasons for "hanging in there." And most of these reasons have more to do with borscht and Low German and history and genetics than with theology. The result is that almost any of our congregations contains farmers, businessmen, laborers, and professional people. There are babies and grandparents and every age between. There are people who can hardly read and others who move freely in the most literate circles. A Sunday morning service may include a congregational song by Sankey, a choir anthem from an oratorio, and a Bach prelude for the offertory. Events announced for the following month can include a folk singer, a Christian rock musical put on by the youth group, and a visit by a college choir which mixes baroque with Negro spirituals. We may think of ourselves as oddly provincial because we like to live in Winkler or Hillsboro. But, thanks to our history and to the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and foreign missions, many a church has members who know their way around Europe or Asia or Africa as well as most people do their own country. We have even been broad enough to speak two languages in a single service.

Even if our exclusiveness is subchristian, it must be remembered that it could not exist except as the other side of something good. Only when membership in a group means little is it open to all. The stronger the

ties that bind a group, the more hesitant that group must be to accept a stranger. Of course it is a sin to predicate Christian fellowship upon ethnic ties. But to the extent that the strength of our brotherhood is based upon our heritage, to that extent our exclusiveness is an almost inevitable part of that which makes us attractive in the first place. Conquering our ethnic bias will be good only if, at the same time, we do not weaken the ties that bind us to one another.

Narrow? Yes. And yet, we Mennonites grow up with more variety and a larger experience than can even be imagined by Christians who accept people with any sort of name into their churches so long as they have the same theology, education, and cultural tastes that the others in that church already have.

However intolerant we may wish to be, we Mennonites have usually proved willing to stretch the limits of our church to include our own children. We have long memories: "Yes, he is . . ., but you should have seen his grandfather at that age." With us, the agitation of new ideas and new attitudes has taken place as much within the church as in the passages leading away from it. And those with reforming zeal did not always leave. Some remained, considering perhaps that the long effort of making a small dent on our stubborn way of doing things would have a more lasting effect. In the long run, it is more satisfying to pound at iron than to punch pillows.

Our relief and mission efforts have also served to awaken new ideas and interests. Missionaries and their children have widened many a horizon. And MCC and Voluntary Service have provided settings where new methods and ideas could be tested prior to official adoption by our churches. Somehow, the same congregation can contain a father who attends conventions of the National Association of Evangelicals, his son who attends meetings of the MCC Peace Section, and an uncle who never misses a McIntyre or Hargis rally in that area. And the tendencies of each are moderated by the sense that, somehow, all are "brethren."

We have also lived in expectation of God's continued blessing. We too are afflicted with the fears of our age. But we have known worse tribulations and have been able in them to be grateful. We worry about the future, but we are fairly sure that our grandchildren will be a credit to us all.

C. The City and the Waning of Ethnicity.

Our people have been ambitious. We children were taught to master that to which we put our hands. From our adult models many of us caught the drive to go on reaching beyond any actual level attained. In this world's terms, we have been almost indecently successful, and so we have moved into and beyond the town. Even our remoter communities experience the way and the attitudes of the city. Of course, our youth are the most deeply shaped by it. And, perhaps, their parents feel the confrontation of the new structures most intensely. Meanwhile, our city churches and our colleges are the institutions that most directly feel the strains created by the confrontation of the old and the new.

1. **Our City Churches.** Not all who move to metropolitan centers have understood the way of the city. Some leave our older communities reluctantly, forced by economic necessity. Some of these expect to find only a bigger town and others wish for nothing more than an old-fashioned village. They have left their home community but they have not outgrown

it. They find a job, choosing something that offers security rather than a challenge. They establish routines for living and routes for getting to the few places they go. But they do not explore the city, for they instinctively dread its diversity. And quickly they begin to build a church in the image of the one they left behind. Because the city frightens them, they crave religious reinforcement for the familiar ways of the village-town. And so they resist any fundamental innovation in their lives or in their church. Few of the people they left behind are so conservative as they. In time those whose mastery of the ways of the town is weak prove unable to keep up with the middle-class structures of the others and drift away, perhaps joining the churches which continue the more emotional tradition of frontier revivalism.

But the Mennonite church they left is not delivered from the strain produced by differing outlooks. For two other sorts of ethnic Mennonites are present in the congregation. These are the ones who are so sure of their mastery of the town that they move aggressively to conquer the city. They choose challenge rather than security and they succeed, or fail, in the grand manner. Some of these also wish for a church that reflects the gospel of the town. The other segments of their lives are lived in the city; but in their religious thought, they remain bound to the theology of the town. One shape rules their Sunday mornings and other shapes reign during the week. But they come increasingly into tension with their brothers of the town. For they want a church of which they can be proud and which therefore must look appropriate to the city rather than to the country town they left behind. They may deeply admire those aggressive ministers (every big city has one or several) who build highly-organized, million-dollar structures around themselves while stoutly proclaiming "the old-fashioned gospel." They want a church cast in their image, one with the action of the city and the rhetoric of the town.

Finally, there are those who cannot so easily accept this compartmentalization. They want to understand who they are and what they should become. They wish for an explanation of their faith and life that pulls together the loose threads and makes sense of the modern condition. To them, town truths have the ring of truisms or even hollow cliches.

All of these sit side-by-side, sensing a coming splintering that few of them understand and with only our weakening ethnic glues till holding them together. Some of our rural-town communities are also experiencing these tensions, especially if some institution or industry has attracted young people. In centers with a large Mennonite population one can predict that Mennonite churches will gradually become type-cast, each with its own brand of narrowness. In some cases, this may already be more description than prediction.

2. Our Schools. So sure have town Christians been that school is the key to the inculcation and preservation of Christianity that a few years ago a number of their top leaders called for the construction of yet another school, this one to be a "graduate center," to clarify and preserve "true" doctrine. Unfortunately, church colleges, by their very nature, are among the first institutions of the church to fight the city or to capitulate to it.

In the first place, it is difficult for a would-be professor to fail to see the hypothetical character of knowledge when his own discipline, pursued far enough, leads to basic disagreements and rival theories. In

the second place, the tone of a school is largely set by the students, and youth is deeply influenced by the city.

This seems less apparent in academies and Bible schools, but even here the style seems to be increasingly city even though much of the content remains unchanged. In the end, however, shape has an effect upon content. Fortunately for these schools, their effectiveness is judged on the character of the graduating seniors, not on what will become of them ten years later.

a. Christian Colleges in the City. The Christian colleges built by the kind of town religion already described are faith-defending like the churches they serve. The kind of faculty member they attract recognizes the modern malaise and is horrified by it. He affirms that Christ is God, the key to history and the center of meaning. But he does not know how to get back to that center from the loose ends of his specialty, and he is uncomfortable with this ambivalence. And so he insists that these faith affirmations are true and **that** there is an over-arching theological structure that harmonizes truth, even the truths he has learned in the university. But he does not know what this theological structure is. Or else, if he has studied theology, he insists that a particular theological formulation is that structure. But then he does not know how to fit his data into it, for much of it no longer seems to fit. He can neither change his attitude to theological formulations nor deny the data.

The long battle over creation and evolution is one illustration of the problem. By now everyone accepts the fact that change may occur within a species. As one of our college administrators told a group of churchmen, "No one believes that there were short-horned Herefords in the ark." But town Christians cannot accept the theory that these changes can result in a new species. For he believes that all truth can be expressed in a system of logically related propositions. Time is not a function of such a system; correctly formulated, the systematics is eternally true. But if species change, then a system of statements about nature could be true at one time and not at another. And this, it seems to me, is the real offense of evolutionary thought. The data of biology denies neither the creating nor the sustaining power of God, though many biologists have also denied that. What it does call in question is the nature of truth as defined by our kind of town Christianity. And it calls in question the methods by which town Christians have read parts of the Scriptures. Since Einstein, the time function of truth has even been recognized in the realm of basic physics.

In theology a similar problem has arisen. Town Christians have built theological systems, and in so doing they too have created city. For their systems lie side by side, each focussing those aspects of Christianity which its vantage point brings into view. But none of them can clearly prove that its vantage point is the only true starting point. As Carl F. H. Henry has plaintively admitted, evangelical theology will be in doubt so long as it cannot develop a theory of truth and language on which to base it. No such theory is known to me. Worse yet, how could we agree on one unless we had first agreed upon some yet more fundamental base by which we judged it? Neither a common theology nor a common interpretation of Scripture unites town Christians. What is left is a common style and the belief that the Scriptures ought to reveal such a single structure of propositions.

The more educated they are, the more teachers come to experience

the dissonance of city. Some compartmentalize, interspersing their teaching of the knowledge of the city with faith affirmations appropriate to the town. Others struggle to bring about a harmony between their knowledge and their faith. But faith-defending Christians are hampered because they are unable to grasp the pluralism which they live. If they do grasp it, they may remain Christian, but they cease to be town and they no longer fit into the schools and churches of this sort of town.

Out of all this dissonance comes either a kind of paralysis or energy. It is not power. Power was possessed by the older sages. Power is what the Spirit can cause to flow from the man whose eye is single, whether he does much or little. What comes from dissonance is energy, not even the energy of youth, but the energy of neurosis. On the surface it looks very similar. But from it comes activity (vines and branches) rather than results (fruit). Schools with this kind of fervency have little trouble finding a constituency.

b. Mennonite Colleges. What about us? I think that much that is puzzling can be understood once it is realized that most of us have our feet in both camps. On the one hand, we identify ourselves with other Christians of the town. And we have a right to do so. We too have taken on a great deal of what it meant to be the religion of the Bible Belt. Whatever our theological pilgrimage, that remains at least one level of our own being. But on the other hand, our own history is quite different from that of the majority of people who belong to that tradition. Most of us come from our old village-towns. In a real sense, American Mennonites existed before their theological formulations existed. We are ethnics; and blood is often thicker than baptismal water.

Some of us cannot forget what we learned in the old setting. We hunger for primary community. We believe in saintly maturity. And we are in search of a world-view that is adequate to the knowledge we have learned. We come back to our schools, in part, because of the pull of this older, ethnic-religious past. Spiritually and psychologically we are different from faith-defending types, even though we often use faith-defending language to talk about our Christianity. Our conceptions have been shaped more by our H. H. Flamings than by Hodge and Machen. Deep down, we know that A. H. Unruh is our guru.

We also are caught between the town and the city. And we know both of them well enough that we yearn again for the village we are losing. On the one hand, we know that we must teach the ways of the town. Late adolescence is the appropriate time to master its techniques. We are also pleased when students live up to the energetic Christian ideal of the religion of the town. Indeed, much of our success is judged on whether or not they do so. On the other hand, we are aware that that ideal is inadequate in the city, and we are anxious to introduce them to an understanding of Christianity that can survive its acids. Finally, we wish to uphold again the values of the village and the ideal of life as growth toward sainthood.

c. Students. To prospective students we present ourselves as town. And they come, expecting to learn the techniques of the town and to be inspired to live up to its ideals. When they come, they discover that the campus is a city. But they also contribute to the pluralism of the college. No longer are the students all Mennonites. Even Mennonite Brethren eighteen-year-olds are at many different levels. They tend to be even more diverse, religiously, than are those who come from the

churches of the town. Some are as naive as ever left our villages, and some already know far more of the city than their parents (and teachers?) will ever know.

Town-type students are quite sure that they already understand their faith and, in general terms, the nature of their mission in this world. What they expect from us is technical expertise and the reinforcement of their fervor. They do not expect to change their vision. But as soon as they arrive we begin our subversive tasks. We do not accept their vision even though we use their formulations. The older organic models we have learned in our older village-towns begin to operate. We do not simply want to broaden their knowledge and stimulate their energy. What we really want to do is to give them a new altitude. We want them to grow up to higher visions. Therefore, we are thought to be failures precisely where we succeed. And we do often "succeed." Many of our students are led into deep waters, suffering the collapse of their shallow world-views and religious understandings. And of these many find a profounder understanding of faith and life. And so it is that if an active Christian high schooler comes to a Mennonite college and catches a higher vision of what a Christian might be, the college is more likely to be faulted than praised. For new stages of growth take time to work themselves out. Initially there is the necessity of concentration upon oneself. There is spiritual confusion, and a crisis of faith. Worst of all, there is a loss of out-flowing energy. The irony is that we are seen as failing for doing precisely what is demanded by our mission. The tragedy is that such a person cannot easily go back to his own community. For the community can no longer recognize what constitutes higher approximations of what the community thinks is its ideal.

Nor does the student who catches the vision for growth normally wish to go back to his home community. That place is seen by him as a place for stagnating. School is the one community he has experienced that believes in growth. Small wonder that so many of our graduates wish also to be teachers.

d. Constituency. Our colleges are products of the town attempting to recreate the context of the village (albeit age-graded) in order to confront the city. Once the community was the continuing locus of becoming and the school was an aspect of community. Now the school is that locus and takes on more and more of the functions abdicated by the town and the city. Now even secular schools are supposed to teach values! In attempting too much, we fail to do anything very well. In the light of all this, it is not surprising that we in the schools are constantly re-evaluating ourselves and that our constituencies are puzzled and suspicious.

On the one hand, we in the schools are unhappy with our churches, both for their unwillingness to help us face the reality of the city and for the way they have turned their backs upon the village. On the other hand, we know that we very much need the churches to be the larger context within which our own efforts must fit. So also the churches are ambivalent. They do not comprehend what is happening to themselves and cannot understand their own children. We seem to do so, at least up to a point. But at the same time we reinforce much of the critique that those children level against them, and we do so from an elevation that they do not understand.

We believe that we are promoting maturity and a more soundly

based apologetics and that we are engaged in the noble mission of preserving what is most worthy in our communities. At the same time, they hear us speaking a different language and suspect that it is subversive. Because we so tangibly need them, we are tempted to use their rhetoric. After all, understood our way, we can even use it honestly. In fact, we sometimes get very excited about it with almost accusatory self-righteousness. But they understand that rhetoric their way and so its use is either a self-deception or is openly dishonest.

The miracle is that they are ambivalent all. They and we still have a deep willingness to love each other. Deep down, many are in search of what our villages stood for. And many wish to understand the city that surrounds us and is in us. There is a basis for a rhetoric that can communicate. But it will take a context that is strong enough, and lasts long enough, that we can break through our mutual defenses. But where is that context? The bitter truth is that there is no place left in our church where adult Christians can struggle deeply to comprehend the shape of our world and the Christian gospel to it.

V. FAITH AND WORKS

Developed cultures have always distinguished between the sacred and the secular. But the way of making this distinction changes from the village to the town. For the villager this is much more a distinction between levels, of higher and lower within a scale of being which begins with the earth and moves up to God. The whole moves according to the same basic rhythms and is bound together by a sacred purpose. And although some aspects of life are less sacred than others, and therefore "secular" in comparison, even that which is lower can sacramentally signify the higher. The earth itself can be as charged with the presence of God as is the worship in a church. The care of the whole is the building of the Kingdom.

But with the coming of the way of the town in the Western world, this distinction was applied horizontally. They now apply to separate realms. Some aspects of life are sacred; other aspects are secular. To be in the one is to be out of the other. Other distinctions emerge; distinctions between faith and works and between evangelism and social action and between ordinary living and Christian service. The sacred has been largely removed from the affairs of everyday and, thus purified, it has seemed to be more highly honored. But its sphere has shrunk as the secular has taken over more and more of life. And, gradually, the seriousness man once devoted to the sacred is shifted to the place his heart is.

A. Work and Worship

1. **Work as Worship.** Nearly ten years ago an uncle told me, "In the old days, I would work for my neighbor for several days when he needed help, and then he would work for me. We never thought of paying each other. We never even kept track. I guess it all came out even." But then he hesitated and was silent, for, just below the surface, there was the recognition that "coming out even" didn't really matter. "Work" was not that important.

In the village we were almost all farmers. More to the point, we were prescientific farmers. We prepared the soil, put seed into it, and then waited. We did a lot of waiting. Some years there would be a

bumper crop. In other years, though we planned just as carefully and worked just as hard, there was nothing.

It was literally true. Work was not all that important. It was necessary, of course. But our own skill and sweat was not sufficient to guarantee a reaping. The more important part was what God did, not what we did. The rain came or it did not come. Hail and killing frosts came or they did not come. Insects and disease moved through the fields or they did not. And there was little we could do about it.

"Success" was God's doing, not ours. We learned to look up, not at ourselves. Through the anxious days of waiting and the agony of watching hopes being blasted, we either learned to be bitter—or to trust. And in this trust we learned to see our work as not our own. Our energy flowed out from us into the greater energies of God, that Force which was—had always been—the source of our own strength.

Our work was not so all-important. And then again it was. For it united us with God. There were times when work was worship, and this was its ultimate meaning. There were mornings when the fences of the soul swung wide their gates to mystic interpenetration while the body moved along the furrow made by horse and plow. There were also afternoons, for one must learn endurance. And there were times at close of year when, moving through the smokehouse and the granaries, one felt the rhythm of the year summed up as psalm of celebration.

There was even a word for this attitude of effortless action and of caring serenity. It was called *Gelassenheit*. A man who had it could share his action as freely as God dispensed His bounty. And he could kneel while standing straight even as he stood up straight while kneeling. For he knew himself to be a child of God who shared in the creating power. When Sunday came he shared his worship and his celebration with those who understood with him the Sabbath rest of God.

2. Work As Idolatry. My uncle then went on, "But nowadays you can't work for each other without being paid immediately, cash on the line." Work is valuable. The town has measured its value—in money. Few of us are farmers. We perform fixed tasks for fixed wages, or sell on commission, or manage businesses. Those who are farmers are not helpless. They irrigate, fertilize, mechanize, and if they fear what cannot be controlled, they insure themselves against potential "acts of God."

The meaning of work has changed for us. It is our work, and the results are our results. Success and failure are in our hands. For work is not only necessary, it has become the sufficient condition of my success. (Of course one must also be smart. But even thinking has become work, brain-work.) And now I can identify myself with my production. Who am I? I am the person who does "such and such" and for "so much." The work of my hands defines my meaning. I create myself and am my own idol.

But he who would create himself must also be his own sustainer. That which begins in the fierce exaltation of creation passes over, little by little, into the grinding toil of the daily rut. Only "relaxation" (rest for the sake of the coming work) and "recreation" (as driving and hectic as the work itself) can now replace the work one wishes to escape. Here there is no celebration; for there is no summing up that is not a death.

If work must end, then meaning must end. Retirement is a living death, and the coffin—? He who would create himself must be his own redeemer. The fence he draws around himself becomes a solid wall,

for interpenetration is a losing of control. There can be no worship that carries a man outside himself. It is only the threat of the grave that drives him then to church. There his idolatry becomes complete. There he makes God the rewarder of his finest labor—his spiritual work. Anxiety fuels his part in the “work of the church.” And the work of all works is the “work” of faith.

3. Idolatry and Brotherhood. The way of the town destroys the fellowship that was known by village saints. About three years after the conversation with my uncle, I asked my then ninety-year-old grandfather what it was like to be a deacon when he was young. “Well, I’d take the wagon and load it full of stuff, and go over to the people who needed it, and give it to them.”

I doubt that it is ever easy to give and to receive help. But for grandpa and his neighbors it was still possible for charity to be direct and personal. As brothers in a fraternity of common dependence, we could share freely if God had, unaccountably, given some a larger hand-out than others. Nor did it destroy our sense of belonging to the community and of being needed by it if we had to receive. All was a gift and could therefore be shared.

But it is no longer an inconvenience to be poor. It is a tragedy. What it now means is, “I have succeeded. You have failed. I do not need you, but you need me. You are not really a man.” To be poor now means almost to be destroyed as a man.

And now it is just as terrible to give as to receive. Giving separates me from my brother. Not only is my success the result of an individualism that isolates me, it is also the result of a competitiveness which makes my conscience uneasy. Is it not true that my success comes at the price of another’s failure? Does not my larger operation doom several smaller ones? Who now has the brass to face his poor brother—with a sack of potatoes?

“Freely ye have received, freely give.” But when we lose the sense that what we have is really a gift—is something received—then it is no longer possible to “freely” give. And so we organize to make charity faceless. Our deacons operate in mysterious silence, if they operate at all.

Actually, their whole position is undermined. Once we had a task and sought the right man for it. Now we have the positions and seek for a task. As long as we could believe that what we had was a gift from God, then the qualifications needed by those who handled the goods of the church were spiritual ones. But now that superior management brings forth our wealth, the qualifications needed are much more practical. Trustees and boards take over property management and church administration. Mutual-aid programs take over charity. What we now require are businessmen-banker types who can read actuarial tables, not the old men of God who understood the soul. For pastors we hire preacher-administrators or player-coaches, not prayer warriors.

And so “church” having ceased to be a place for the sharing of our daily worship, ceases also to be a place for fellowship. Having lost our sense of dependence on God, we have also ceased to be brothers. Having lost our brothers, we must now lose even ourselves. That is an inevitable logic.

Children are deeply affected by these shifts, and they are not forever fooled by our official Sunday pieties. About the same time I

asked my grandfather about deacons there was a serious dry spell in the area, and the pastor announced a special day of prayer for rain. When this was explained to the Sunday school, a kindergarten pupil raised his hand and proclaimed, "We don't need rain. My father uses fertilizer." He was essentially right about the meaning of our idolatry. To the extent that we become guarantors of our success, we do not need to depend on an unpredictable God. And the aim of technology is precisely this kind of independence. We wish to control rather than to be controlled.

In a nearby town another five-year-old was overheard discussing with his playmate whether Jesus lived up in the sky. Quite scornfully he clinched his argument, "Jesus isn't really up there. What would hold him up? (Grownups) just say that because it makes them feel better." Christians of the town have "honored" Jesus by exalting him. But they have also removed him from the earth and from our weekday lives. Truly, there is nothing to "hold him up." And so youth is looking again at the earth, and they are seeing that the way of the town is taking even it from them. They are seeing that our vaunted mastery is an illusion. We are dependent forever on the thin and fragile skin of earth which we may almost have destroyed.

They have grown up with the spiritual and personal effects of our idolatry. And they are rejecting what they see as the destructive way of the town. And so they have come to trust feeling more than thinking and prefer a primitive commune to independence. They have gone to the poor and the dispossessed for a sense of brotherhood and to find new songs and new ideas. Perhaps God arranges always to keep the poor and the despised among us because there are no others to whom the children of the successful can go to find their souls again.

B. Time and Money: God's and Ours

The gifts of the earth and the time to enjoy them were once wholly God's to give and wholly ours to use and share. Here again, the way of the town has distinguished between that which is God's and that which is ours.

1. A Time to Work and A Time to Play. In the village these times were not clearly separated. The fields and the houses were close together and at any time one might be working or visiting. Or one might be doing both at the same time. Of course there were special times to play and to pray, times when the play that was implicit even in work was lifted up into a communal celebration like a hog slaughtering and times when the prayer that was felt on the fields was solemnly raised to God in the church. There were times when the essence of work and prayer and play was distilled and savored. But time was one, a gift of God to man.

Nor was there much anguish in the village over the decision how to spend one's time. Most all were simply expected to continue to work and live as their fathers had. They did not need to find the "will of God" for their lives, for life itself was their godly vocation. In our Mennonite circles even the choice of a minister was as much the decision of the church as the result of a heavenly "call" to an individual.

But the town has divided between vocations even as it has divided time. The week is divided between the time we owe to the job and the time we have to ourselves. Vocations are classified as secular or as

“full-time Christian service.” The result of all this is that the sacredness has gone out of both work and time, and most of our rhetoric about “finding the will of God” does more harm than good.

This rhetoric accepts the town idea that time belongs to man. Some of it, of course, is owed to God. A part of Sunday and an evening or two a week is set aside for God by those who choose a secular vocation. The rest of the time belongs to them and God is not expected to have any claim upon it. Hardly anyone who prays for guidance whether to be a teacher or a banker would imagine that God would have any interest in the hobby that he chooses. And yet, granted early retirement and a long life and a shorter work week, one may spend as much time at the hobby as at one’s job.

In the town there can be no sense of time as a sacred whole. Specialization has cut up our tasks into efficient bits. The whole business is productive, but few of the workers have any sense of personal fulfillment. Few can feel creative. And the meaning of secular work steadily erodes the meaning of “full-time service.” This too constantly threatens to become another job. Laity worry how the pastor “puts in his time.” Even the pastor’s image of himself may be taken from the secular world. He tends to become either the manager of the business of the church or the personal counselor whose services are free. In the end, hardly any townsman remains happy in his work. He becomes either resigned or restless. The modern careerist, say some experts, should not think of choosing a career. He should aim for a sense of variety, if not of fulfillment, in a “trajectory” of jobs. In the end, for many, the only meaning left in the time at work is the money derived from it. Time has become money.

2. **Stewardship.** This word also has changed its meaning. Once it referred to the being of a “steward” of the bounties of God. Money itself was less important in the village. Most of the necessities of life could be produced at home or secured in barter. Thus “stewardship” applied to all the goods of life. Nor was there a clean distinction between the godly worth of that which was kept and that which was given away. To improve the village and to find new land for sons and daughters was as much the extension of the Kingdom of God on earth as it was the personal use of the gifts of God.

Just as with time, we have divided money into sacred and profane. “Sacred” money is that given in charity and for the support of those in “full-time Christian service.” That which is kept is profane. With this division comes the question of how much ought to be given in order to justify the amount one keeps. “Stewardship” now becomes the question how much one ought to tithe. The teaching of the church is received by many a churchman as justification for his feeling that his money is his own.

The deeper issue behind our teachings on both vocation and stewardship is that we have had no way to solve, or even to understand, the root problem. Even our appeals to be liberal implicitly deny the Lordship of Christ over our time and our goods. We have accepted an artificial division between the sacred and the profane, thus delivering over to the profane almost all of what we do and have. In so doing, we have deprived our work and our goods of any sacramental purpose. Only in getting rid of them do we redeem them. We can neither conceive of our energies as extensions of the power of God nor can we receive what

flows from them as the gifts of God. Insofar as we have become men of the town, our time and our goods are ours. They are as honey on our lips; in the end they become as gall in our bellies.

C. Evangelism and Social Gospel

1. **The Gospel and the Kingdom.** So long as a community is conscious that God has given them a charge to build His Kingdom, there is no separation between faith and action. Even when the builders are perfectly clear that all their efforts produce poor imitations of the coming splendor, they nonetheless know that the social is as much an embodiment of the gospel as is the proclamation. The villager builds the Kingdom when he prays and fertilizes, when he worships and takes flour to a needy neighbor. He knows as if by instinct that it is as necessary for salvation to be culturally embodied as it was necessary for the Incarnation to take place in a real man living in a particular place and time and within the context of a given culture. And so the village took care of local needs. Every society possesses those who do not have whatever it takes to succeed and those who fail for no fault of their own. And the village found simple ways to carry them along.

The religion of the town also implies a social structure, as was clear to evangelists until more recent times. Early revivalists of the town constantly spoke out against injustice and stressed the necessity of a pattern of society that harmonized with their understanding of the gospel. They took for granted that the way of the American town, when ideally conceived, was the appropriate earthly shape of the Kingdom of God. The politics and economics of the American heartland is the "social gospel" of the religion of the town.

Insofar as this vision triumphed, earnest Christians could assume it as the context for their mission. Because they could increasingly take it for granted, they concentrated on the "sacred" part of the larger vision. They called individuals to give themselves to the God who was giving them this land and who was preparing a still better place for the elect. And they could urge the converts to work out those personal virtues that were fundamental to both the church and the nation. The town also took care of the needy. It continued the unofficial charity of the village. It also proffered the education needed for success and tried to give incentives for hard work.

Gradually the "secular" success of the town produced the cities—and the ghettos. The poor of many lands were brought to furnish labor and to catch the hope of freedom and advancement. Gradually, the economics of the town forced the failures from the rural places into the ghettos of the inner city where they joined those of the immigrants who failed. And here their numbers grew, for their children no longer lived with models of success.

There were good Christians in America who discovered the city and who were moved to extend the promise of the gospel to it. They began to see that the answers of the town did not suit the desperate reality of the city. A new shape for justice and righteousness was needed to help the citizens of the city. A new sort of economics and politics would have to arise, and a new and massive official charity would have to be organized.

But the town could not, or would not, try to understand the city it had unwittingly created. The town hated the city, for the city called

into question the vision of the town. And so the Christians of the town tried to deny the reality—and the needs—of the city. And they shut their ears to the cry for a justice appropriate to it, calling it “social gospel.”

Unfortunately, many of those who embraced the city, having been rejected by the semi-official town religion of America, came to pin their hopes in a secular version of a just order. They sold out the greater Kingdom of God for the vision of a righteous and loving city of man on earth.

And so the town betrayed itself. It organized for law and order to preserve itself from heretics within and from enemies without. And all its efforts produced the bigness of—more city. It created the “industrial-military complex” to save itself and found that its own economics and politics had thereby become obsolete. The town, it turns out, can only save itself by destroying itself.

In the face of all these city threats, the way of the town can no longer be taken for granted; and the Christians of the town have remembered once again that they too have a social gospel. Conservative Christianity has leaped to the defense of the economics and the culture of the town. Some evangelists cannot imagine that the town has itself produced the city. And so they search for enemies without and sinister plottings within. Other evangelists have seen a little deeper; but, unable to see beyond the individualism of the town, they blame our condition on the personal sins and vices that have destroyed the simple virtues and thereby sapped the national fibre. This has become the standard wisdom, and its chief spokesman has become the national chaplain to the American town. The town-type conversion of the individual is still held forth as the basis of both the future Kingdom of Heaven and the present kingdoms of this earth: “Wake up, America!” And so it is that the “official” religion of the town is selling out the larger gospel for its vision of a town of God on American earth. Meanwhile, the town nourishes the image of the sort of man it needs to impose town order over city chaos. It is the image of the creator-builder, the self-made man, the “boss.”

2. On Evangelism, Energy, and Mennonite Communities. Like many of our church-going neighbors, we too feel the need to be spanked. We know, or think we know, that we should go out to compel the lost and wandering to come in. We also have turned inward and wish that somehow we could be driven outward to do what few of us have the heart to do.

But how shall we restore a single vision? Our life is lived in segments. We work to be financially secure. We develop hobbies. We improve our communities. We build larger churches. But these are separate things. And most of them are secular. Except for occasional moments, the parts that make up our lives are lived within the realms of the profane. And yet we insist that our way of life as a whole is “godly.”

We are also troubled by external threats. Social and economic upheavals are threatening the whole village-town way of life that we have wished to build. Even our children are telling us that our farming practices are ruinous, our church structures are obsolete, and that the answers and loyalties by which we have lived are irrelevant in their city world.

In the face of all these assaults it is natural that we turn inward, throwing up defenses which encircle the networks of practices and be-

liefs by which we live. Never mind that these beliefs and practices are mostly a jumble of borrowed elements; they attain the status of a system by being attacked wholesale, by the fact that a wall must be built to surround them. This structure has many enemies: political liberals, left-ist economists, liberal and neo-orthodox theologians, social gospellers and radicals of all sorts. Few know what these words denote, but their connotation is clear. They connote the denial of our "system" and, therefore, the rejection of ourselves, critical, and defensive. And yet, many of us prefer to defend ourselves against unknown enemies rather than to admit that the enemy is within. We do not wish to see that inside our walls we are already—city.

It is small wonder that we have lost whatever triumphal spirit we once had. Evangelists are always evangelists of a shape for life. And a part of their zeal is the fruit of their own joy in having received the vision of a larger life and the power to live by it. Their success is greatest when they preach to those most like the earlier self they have outgrown. They know the route that these must also take and testify authentically of the joy and freedom that can come.

So was it with our elders who moved from village to town. They were caught up in the triumph of a larger gospel, and they went to those, at home and abroad, who also needed to master the way of the town. We sent teams to jails and rescue missions. We went to backward tribes and the outcaste. Only recently we have begun to open up to people who are already middle-class.

But when our people face the complexity of the city, they find it difficult to celebrate and recommend the pattern of the town. They do not deny its virtue. But neither do they find in it the freedom they once knew. The sincerity of their Christian conviction is not in question. But they are struggling to discover the shape of the Kingdom required by the city. When the new shape does emerge and joy and power returns, then these will again find a mission field—and come to us in the town who still have ears to hear. They will teach us to live in the city as becomes the sons of God who know that all our earthly cities must be mastered—and out-grown.

VI. A NOTE ON ETHICS

H. Richard Niebuhr has pointed out that ethics tends to be governed by three great metaphors: man-the-citizen, man-the-maker, and man-the-responder. Those whose thought is shaped by the first symbol attempt to formulate laws which express what is "right" (deontology). The second metaphor leads to the attempt to define the desired "good" and to the formulation of rules as guidelines for achieving it (teleology). The third metaphor leads men to define "the fitting actions" and to sensitize themselves to respond to others in the most appropriate and loving way (contextualism). In the first case, sin is caused by willful disobedience and leads to a sense of guilt. In the second case, sin is the result of ignorance and leads to a sense of failure. In the third case, sin is the result of selfishness and leads to a sense of shame.

A. Mores in the Village

Insofar as communities were more village than town, there was less of a distinction between morals and mores. "Our way of life" was

a whole package and had to be accepted as such. Sin was anything that threatened this whole or that lay outside it. Villagers placed eccentrics "under the ban" more quickly than they did the "weak in the flesh."

The context for morals in the village is the total community with all of its customs and ideas as they have evolved through time. And so, the "fitting response" to any situation is that response which defines the character of that community and which maintains its well-being. Those acts which tend to tear apart the social fabric of the village are forbidden.

Thus alcoholism was strongly frowned upon, but wine was accepted as a health-giving gift of God and as a sacrament of fellowship, both in church and among friends and family. Even near-drunkenness was tacitly accepted at certain communal celebrations like a hog slaughtering or a shivaree. From the point of view of community cohesion, this use of alcohol had an entirely different function than when misused by individuals to escape responsibility.

In addition to those acts which are wrong because they are disrupting and degrading, there are others which are treated as wrong because they lie outside the local package. Communities define themselves by what they do not do as well as by what they do. That "We Mennonites do not dance" has helped give our communities a sense of identity over against all the other "worldly" people who do. These cultural distinctives are often more important than doctrinal ones. Thus we Mennonite Brethren have found it easier to accept other forms of baptism than to accept any kind of dance.

The context for the contextualism of the village, therefore, is the total community and this totality is sensed as greater than the individuals who comprise it and who respond to the whole with a deep loyalty. Secondly, such an ethos is teleological and deontological. Those patterns of response which endure tend to do so because they lead to the "good" which the community seeks. And because the pattern changes slowly, those rules which define a village are accepted as eternal laws commanded by God. Because these strands were not differentiated, our elders could mean the same thing when they counseled, "This is the way we do it," "You want to go to heaven, don't you?" and "The Bible says . . ." To a pure villager, "What will people think?" is a fully legitimate temporal argument. And so, for those who outgrow the village, that ethos is binding and stultifying, and the Town is liberation to the kind of thinking that is **ethical**.

But this is not the whole story. The Christian villager receives his entire situation as a special creation of God. Our Mennonite ethos, for our elders, was also a gift, an earthly approximation of the Kingdom. Just as constant reading of the Scriptures tended to shape our elders, so a man's response to his fellow men, and even to the earth, could take on the form and spirit of God's response to man as revealed to him in nature and in history. The power to live a higher kind of life was also a gift, and the "commands" of that higher life were joyfully received as "right" and "good."

B. The Morality of the Town

The town makes a system of ethics. It demands clear thought upon axioms and principles, not sensitivity to contexts. And so it is that town moralists choose between the systematics developed from the metaphors of man-the-citizen and man-the-maker. Deontologists derive universal and

eternal principles from nature, from the nature of the mind itself, or from some set of scriptures. Teleologists define a hierarchy of goods and advise men how to reach them. The "Law of God" then ceases to be a description of responsible and loving freedom of a son of God to live out his high calling and becomes, in the end, pharisaic casuistry and scribal legalism. The joyful expectation of purer blessedness becomes careful calculations what a man must do to get to heaven. Both life and death become serious "business" and faith itself is a duty achieved or that spiritual "work" which heaven rewards.

Just as the Christian of the town separates the sacred from the secular, so he distinguishes between ethics and ethos and between the Kingdom and this world. No longer is his labor a dance with God, and natural things are no longer sacraments of higher meaning. He either obeys or he plans, but in neither case does he escape his own ego and merge into the rhythms of nature or the consciousness of a group.

And so his ego becomes the burden that he bears and he struggles against the temptation to lay it down. No longer can wine be a sacrament of communion, either for his family or with God, for secretly he wishes to drink until he forgets. His body no longer moves with responsive grace, either in labor or in fun. He no longer knows the sweeping move of the scythe or the sweaty ballet of the harvest crew. And other forms of dance have been taboo. Even marital sex becomes half illicit, a form of masturbation rather than communion. The man of the town has ceased to be of the earth, earthy. And so he is left only with his pragmatism, his disembodied idealism, and with—dirt.

C. Ethics in the City

Ethical thinkers enter the city when they finally realize that no form of deontological or teleological ethics can stand by itself. Here the study of ethics becomes meta-ethical speculation. The questions today are not how we can recognize the right and produce the good. Philosophers of morality now debate the meaning of words like "good" and "right," and they question how any sort of value judgment can be proved valid.

On the practical level, men in the city sense that they are surrounded by many ways of life, each of which appears to be as justified as any other. And once again contextualism emerges. But now it is called "situation ethics" or "new morality." No longer is the community under God the context for decision. Rather, the anomic individual moves through a variety of situations, each of which demands a response in its own terms.

One response to this relativism is a scepticism that remains town in its individualism. "Right" and "wrong" are meaningless. The only end that makes sense is pleasure. But here also one must stay "cool," sampling the pleasures of life but succumbing to no great passion. Hence the playboy vision of life.

Another response, one closer to the way of the village, is the ethics of the "groupie." In each situation one must be "transparent" and "sincere." The ego itself is the primary obscenity and alcohol or some other drug that helps one to other "consciousness" is eagerly accepted. So long as "love" is present anything is permitted, for merely social taboos are meaningless. But no transcendent loyalty binds individuals to any given context, and so the loss of a "meaningful relationship" is simply cured by the flight to a new one.

The primary sin of the man of the town was pride. He wished, vainly, to master his own destiny, to become God. The sin of both of these city responses is equally great, though it is harder to name. It is the sin of refusing to aspire to greatness. The tragedy of the city is unfulfilled promise and burned-out potential. Vice can be grand only where virtue is also great. When cursing becomes monotonous profanity, there blasphemy is impossible. When sex becomes play, it ceases to be passionate and when passion is sought for its own sake, it ceases to be profound. The greatest sin of the modern is that he has lost the capacity to sin. The profligate, and those who only wish that they were, are no longer "prodigal." Today's wayward son, not having a home to return to, settles into his apartment or suburban home and seeks "playful encounters" or "meaningful relationships" among companions his lot affords him. But his sty is so gilded that he does not recognize where he is or that there are better homes that he might build.

There are also those sons and daughters who neither master the town nor have found a village and who wander the highways and the streets. Loss of consciousness is what they seek and, unless they find a village, they soon destroy themselves.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is quite unlikely that any villager has read this far. Nor will very many confident citizens of the town have endured thus long. I will therefore take for granted that I am addressing those like myself who have discovered the city and are troubled.

Readers may not be as impressed with the village, nor as nostalgic for it, as I am. This will be true both for those who have not experienced as much of that way of life as I have and for those who know it better than I. I have celebrated the values of the village and criticized the town. But I know that I could not survive in the village. Our parents were right to break past its limitations and to experience the liberating power of the town.

I too am town. The conscious ability to take a point of view and to analyze is largely a gift of the training given by the town. Whether the logic of this analysis falters or illuminates will also be judged according to criteria developed by the town.

But the mood of my essay is city. I have taken a vantage point and have tried to see what can be seen from that point of view. Other vantage points would illuminate other facets of our many-sided reality. Any conclusion, therefore, is both premature and partial. It would be false, and unbrotherly, to try to give "the answer" to our problems.

But it would also be false to end with only questions and problems and the despair of the city. For the city is also a liberation. It delivers us from the narrow smugness of the village and the too-easy idolatry of the town. The city is a culmination of man and all his ways upon the earth. And it forces man to realize that none of his works escapes the erosion of time. Not even the scientific, philosophic, or theological constructions of his mind are proof against the corroding acids of his scepticism. At the same time, this culmination reveals that nothing man makes contains the human spirit which is forever being called beyond itself. The city points everywhere, and nowhere. In the end, it either points the way to death or it points beyond itself and waits in silence. In so

doing, the city also testifies of what it does not know. And so it too is preparation for the gospel.

At first glance, the city seems to be the well-nigh universal solvent, destroying community, dissolving ethics, denying greatness, undercutting the Scriptures and theology, and eradicating the sense of God. In all these things it completes the inner logic of the town. But the city is not only Babel and Babylon. The city is also Jerusalem. Even in the Scriptures the future promise is—a city. What the city takes away will be restored again, though in a different way. This is a statement of faith, a hope that rests more in God than upon what can presently be seen. And yet, the city is no new thing upon the earth. What I describe as hope has often happened. The pattern of the gospel is not new, though it has always been true that the gate is strait and the way is narrow and few there be that find it.

A. Community in the City

A long time ago, far from any Mennonite community, I moved within a very sophisticated circle in a very cosmopolitan city. One day the girl I admired most said, "We envy you, Delbert, we really do." I could not imagine why, for I suffered constantly from my country ignorance; and I was still ashamed of being a Mennonite. She also was puzzled and finally added, "You seem to know where you come from." I thought about it a long time and finally decided that she was right. I might become an atheist; but, even so, I would be a Mennonite atheist. If I became a drunken bum, I would be a drunken bum from Corn. Even if only in shocked gossip, my home communities would acknowledge me. And I was strangely comforted.

I have learned to be grateful for my ethnic past, my rural village background, and the strength of my family. I am also thankful for the long discipline I received in the way of the town. And I am profoundly glad that I live in the city.

But what about my children? How can they experience the village and the town inside a city? How are they to find a full range of models to imitate? Where is there a continuing setting within which growth will be demanded? Families cannot do all this by themselves. Nor does the present pattern of our churches provide the answer. For many of us adults, the church fellowship and worship is the high point in our week. But neither for us nor for our children is it anymore the center for our life. And since our children do not learn to know it as the center, they are unlikely to grow up even thinking of it as a high point. I am not sure that the family structure can even survive unless it is embedded in something like a village. Nor will any mere improvement in our educational programs succeed in teaching Christian values or even Bible knowledge. Even the church cannot survive unless it finds a way again to build a brotherhood.

A new community must be built. It must exist inside the city and offer all the advantages of town as well. I do not know what shapes this community will take, but I am quite sure that it will look different from the church that we now have.

It has been done before. The earliest Christians were not rural villagers. In fact, the rural people clung so tenaciously to their old gods that the Latin word for "villager" has become our word for "heathen" (*paganus*—pagan). And the cities of that time were busy cosmopolitan

centers. Christianity succeeded in the first place because it had an answer for the needs of the city. The early evangelists did not preach only an individualistic conversion or offer instant ecstasy. They proclaimed that a heavenly kingdom was being born on earth in the midst of the decaying older kingdoms of this world. It is the Gospel of the Kingdom that must be rediscovered, a kingdom that always is, and yet is not, a kingdom in this world.

B. Theology in the City

A thoughtful layman recently disagreed with me when I suggested that our colleges and seminary should offer intensive Bible study in our churches. "People aren't interested in the Bible," he said, "it bores them. Stay on the campus. The few who are interested will find a way to come there."

I was surprised that he could say it so calmly, and when I repeated the conversation to a veteran pastor he essentially agreed, adding that this was one of the heavier burdens of the ministry. This too can be understood as a result of the town and city. I think that few people of the town have learned how to read the Bible. Large portions of the Old Testament reflect the conditions of the village, and the New Testament was written for people in the city. The person who recognizes again the values of the village and who does not draw back from the questions of the city is in a position to hear again the message of the Bible. But he must also have at his command the tools developed by the disciplines of the town. Just as Christian community must again be reforged within the city, so that community, if it has the courage and the willingness to work, can discover the relevance of the Scriptures to their needs.

So also theology can be rediscovered in the city. The city is right, of course, that no single set of propositional systematic can be the literal truth. Each thinker must assume a place to stand and then he sees what that stance illuminates. But each stance does illuminate. And all of them together point beyond what they can say. Theology too must become a sacrament, a form of worship.

The villager participates in the creating power when he discovers his place within the whole of things. Insofar as he theologizes, it is God the Father with whom he has to do. Truth is for him a hearing and an answering, a knowing like the knowing between a husband and a wife. The man of the town has lost his natural place and has discovered power in his new-found knowledge. It is God as Logos that he seeks, and he constructs Christologies. Truth for him is found in rational meaning. The man of the city has no natural place and loses confidence in meaning. And so he searches directly for the power that he lacks. It is God as Spirit that he craves and truth is the power to be and act in singleness of heart.

And so the ancient doctrine of the Trinity returns to help us. The final unity of truth is hidden in the unity of God. It is with partial modes that thought must work. Here is a way of talking which is aware of what cannot be said. It is also a way to show again the need for balance. Without power, meaning is dead. Without meaning, power grows demonic. And neither power nor meaning can be good unless we have a sense of our true place.

We may start almost anywhere, for he who truly seeks will be led

beyond the point of his beginning. Change, and growth, is a law of life, and conversion is a dying to old patterns and the discovery of higher forms. The pattern of Christ is the shape of the life of those becoming the sons of God. We do not painlessly stroll to higher levels as if the new is simply an extension of the old. New content can be added to old shapes quite easily. But we must die to both old shape and content when a new shape must be claimed. We must die to be reborn. He who gives up everything, including the claim to place and to meaning and to power, and seeks the Kingdom first of all, will find these things restored in fulness.

C. Worship in the City

Worship also dies, and is reborn, within the city. The villager could praise the Lord for sun and rain and all the gifts God gave him. The townsman thanked his Lord for truth and strength so that he could produce his own necessities. Both, when they sense the complexity of city, yearn again for older ways.

But the way back is the road of fear and narrowness and death. Neither the idolatry of self-sufficiency nor a regression to childish dependency can restore true worship. In the city we must learn that our ultimate dependence is deeper than dependence on the gifts of God. There a deeper nakedness is revealed. In the poverty of soul we then discover will come a reaching out to rediscover brothers. There we will receive our selves again. Together we will celebrate and worship God for the creating and sustaining power that holds us constantly in being and for the redemption that transcends our relativities and makes us sons of God.

Emptiness and blessing, crucifixion and resurrection. Our Lord has taught us that they go together in the realm of Spirit as surely as they do in the spheres of daily life.

When he saw the crowds he went up the hill.
There he took his seat, and when his disciples
had gathered round him, he began to address them.
And this is the teaching he gave: "How blest
are those who know their need of God; the
Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."
