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R E P O R T

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Sub-Section 1 to Section IV

QUEST FOR COMMUNITY IN THE MODERN URBAN,
TECHNOLOGICAL AND PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Quest for Community in the Modern Urban,
Technological and Pluralistic Society

- A. Modern man finds himself confronted with a specific type of technology, new patterns of community, and the process of secularisation. This situation offers him new opportunities. But as it asks for adjustments, it may also impose suffering and demand a price in temporary désorientation or the abandonment of cherished traditions. Although the speed and the quality of the change may differ in the different civilisations and social contexts, the process is universal. The Church, in obedience to her Master, is called upon to stand by man in the vicissitudes arising from the crisis, She can fulfil this task only if she takes careful notice of the facts, and than, without fear faces their implications for herself.
- B. I. The Impact of Technology
1. Technology combines both the mental processes and their moral pre-suppositions which make technical development possible together with the knowledge, skills, and tools that permit man to transform his natural environment. As application of science technology assumes theories which can be tested by objective experiment, but which depend on the questions asked. These questions are not morally neutral. The effects of technology can be good or bad in accordance with the goals which it presupposes and for which it is put to use. The goals and means to achieve ends are therefore subject to Christian scrutiny as to their effects on humanisation and dehumanisation.
 2. Technology can be used to humanise and free mankind or it can be used dehumanise and enslave man. Various illustrations for both can be given; freedom from magic, from material servitude and want, from endemic diseases and hunger as well as new possibilities for leisure, for satisfaction and fulfilment of self, for new forms of creativity and meaning are among the gifts through technology. At the same time technology can lead and in effect often leads to meaningless routine, to boredom and loneliness for the individual, and to a highly fragmented and fiercely competitive society. It can reduce man to a mere economic unit, so that he loses his capacity of choice in freedom. Overspecialisation removes the thrill of creativity from work and results in uncertainties in the personal and social life.
 3. Some of these illustrations indicate only side effects of a more temporary character. They are a familiar phenomenon of technological society and range from new vocational diseases, air and water pollution to mental disturbances and disruptions in the life of the community. The changeover to automation can for instance cause serious unemployment. In addition we find new social problems like large-scale migration and slum-dwelling side by side with continuing social evils such as alcoholism, drug addiction and prostitution.
 4. But other effects of technology are of a fundamental character. Among them are a change in the relation between man and nature, a fundamental transformation of work patterns and economic organisation, a change in the forms of human association and of the structure of society

(e.g. the domination of primary relationships by ecological groups and secondary structures). Technological society is based on a continuous and consistent process of change, by which all men are affected. It leads to a concentration of power in the hands of relatively few with the danger of its misuse by privileged groups and the destruction of democracy by a decision-making technocracy.

5. Thus man has arrived at a new historic crisis resulting from the cumulative impact of technology. The vision of conquest over the cosmos gives him power for good or destruction as never before. Its use or misuse is fundamentally a moral issue. As technology cannot be an end in itself - lest it becomes the dehumanizing force - it calls for goals which determine its processes and give meaning to the power it generates. In the Biblical view we need not set limits to the power of man's intellect and use of nature. Rather through creation man is called to appreciate and use responsibly the gifts placed within nature. Technology is part of man's historic search for truth and justice and derives its goals and meaning from there.
6. We believe that this meaning is decisively expressed in the quest for community as a sociological and theological concept. The quest for new forms of community should be the directing factor in our use of technology relating it to the Christian understanding of man and nature as well as to the new structures of social and economic organisation. Technology should not only meet human and social needs but become the function of community as such; Equally the meaning of work derives from its contribution to the service and growth of community.

B. II. Changing Patterns of Community

7. The traditional community as a sociological group which transmits culture, shapes personality and satisfies basic necessities of life, is becoming more complex. In the rural areas, this has meant the demolition of the old social boundaries, the widening of levels of social interaction, and the transformation of the conception of the world among rural peoples. In the urban areas, the basic relations are supplemented by special interest groups and less permanent connections, related to new activities in work and pleasure, thereby creating a network of relations that are independent of geographical limits. This is a flexible network that originates special types of diversities. Thus for instance they have an impact on the family wherein the wife secures relationships in the immediate neighbourhood while the husband becomes job-centred. On the other hand, reference groups constituted by persons in valued social situations to which a non-member aspires, motivate action and make the network of secondary relationships even more complex.
8. In general terms, such complexity of the urban community prevents man from acting as a full personality in relation to other individuals. Witness again what happens in the family. Previously, the family and the neighbourhood were the comprehensive framework in which personal activities and productive economic life took place. In urban life these two major functions become separated. But there are positive aspects of the family as an economic unit that should be recognised. Moreover, it is important to appreciate that secondary relationships can have an integrating, humanizing role for the person, and that they do not displace primary relationships, but exist with them.

Besides, mobility itself is essential to man's urban style of life, allowing him to remake his relationships in accordance with his new needs. This becomes especially important to the young, who need time to be away from family control. Ease of travel permits to retain personal relations. Such mobility may be an advantage to those who have an anchorage in a social group. But it is no help to those who are rootless. They may become marginal men or outcasts of society.

9. Marginality arises as a result of lack of accommodation in the functional structure of the city. The most visible, marginal men are those who migrate to the city and do not find an appropriate niche in it. This phenomenon spurs the appearance of marginal types of communities like slums or shanty towns. Very often the rural migrants import to these communities the structures and elements that they enjoyed in the country, including the tendency to settle relatives in close proximity. In any case, as the rural areas are unable to provide an adequate level of living for the peasants, they flee to the city to become often marginal men as the city cannot provide them with enough opportunities of work. Here lies a problem of adaptation and motivation which the Church must help to solve. It is important to learn the meaning of loss of some historic forms of human control that this implies, and of former definitions of identity. Planning should take the riches of modern technology to the rural areas where persons still live in depressed conditions. If urbanisation tends to destroy some of the forms of communal life that have nurtured men in traditional sociological groups, then we must furnish some other cultural frame of reference essential to the integrity and growth of the person in this new environment. We must find ways to build into the secondary or functional relationships of the urban milieu the supportive, effective depth that man seems to require for his full humanity.
10. Moreover the new types of communities found in the modern city often present a fragmented structure, made of diverse social and cultural forms that compete for dominance, both in society and in the individual. This is a disjointed pluralism. The Church could help ethnic and cultural groups by fostering respect for the values of different peoples. It cannot do this with integrity however as long as identification with a particular ethnic or cultural group stands for disadvantage and discrimination, or when there is little regard for human diversity, as certain values are forceably imposed on those who are different.
11. There is a configuration of a world-wide society composed of groups of decision makers who produce large international plans. They represent a marginal group which spends most of its time in aeroplanes and decides matters on a grand scale. They have tremendous power, for which the nation-state is an inadequate instrument of control. In general these persons are obsessed with the importance of the economic factor and need to be oriented to other values. We are confronted here with the awful and exciting fact of oikoumene, the one world held together tenously by technology and trade, and in constant danger of getting out of balance and destroying itself. What is the alternative? Certainly there must be ways to find in urban life and world society the quality of relationships that sociologists call "affective" or Christians refer to as "Koinonia". Koinonia should hold society together across ethnic, class, national and other types of boundaries.

12. In conclusion, a new sense of fellowship and community should arise in these adverse conditions of modern life so that this organisation, marginality, anomie are reduced in the future. Christian fellowship should help each person to achieve (a) a sense of security (b) a sense of worth (c) a larger degree of freedom (d) a belief in the meaning of his existence. When a person has experienced these basic needs, then he will have a basis on which to treat his fellow men as a neighbor. A better type of community should emerge, aided by planning so that a sense of identity, loyalty, and belonging, so necessary for man as roots for living, is made available to him. Thus this new community should bring about not only charity and love but also justice.

B. III. Man in a Secular Society

13. As the process of secularization, concealed by outward traditions in some, and more obvious in other cases, takes on different characteristics in different cultures, its general definition is difficult to give. Nevertheless, it has certain clear meanings:
14. Secularisation means the possibility of choice among alternatives, a world in which there is more than one answer to any given problem, because diffusion of vocation and responsibility creates openness and the possibility of change. In the diversity of the world God has given many gifts, and in the secularised world all may be studied and chosen for their contribution. Nothing is sacred or untouchable or not subject to questioning. The secular society is not founded on a religious base that cannot be challenged, but rather religion is one of the many components of the social structure. This means freedom and with freedom, uncertainty and risk.
15. In the secular society, therefore, man is autonomous in his responsibility. His choices are no longer obligatory and prescribed. Each man is free to seek his own face, his own assumptions about the ground and purpose of his being, and no face is considered a priori superior to others. This brings the risk that where there are no prescribed religious absolutes, no religious seams in the common life may be subtly absolutised, (nationalism, the profit motive, social plans as "new Molochs") and play a determining role comparable to that of religion in the sacred society.
16. In the secular society, man becomes responsible for the effects of his decisions and must relate means to ends, must tie his actions to his intentions. In pre-secular societies where his choices were prescribed, he could not always be held accountable for the result of his actions, but in the secular society he must come of age in accepting the responsibility for the implications of his free decision.

C. The response of the Church

17. The Church is called to create interpersonal relationships across the most important lines of social differentiation and conflict. As the body grows only if each part works together, the Church seeks to develop the responsible interaction of organised groups in the urban and secular society. To do this, churches serving in different social-economic milieus must be in continuous conversation and move forward together.

18. While firmly supporting the constructive means of technology and the development of urbanisation, the Church continues to stress the primacy of human value and identifies herself with the people who are despised and suffering in a period of transition. The Church witnesses to Christ when she stands together with the suffering people in the spirit of solidarity in the struggle to actualize the community of freedom and responsibility. It requires of the Church to have a critical discernment of the times and courage and openness to work together with non-Christian groups who share the common concern for humanity.
19. In non-Christian cultures, the Church often has not been a carrier of the institutions of urbanisation and is therefore freer to be a critic and creator of new social forms. In cultures where the profession of Christianity has been predominant, the churches of the dispossessed may play a similar role. In either case the first task of the Church is listening in a dual sense, listening to the word of God and listening to the challenges of the world.
20. The church, at another level must be in dialogue with the new world-wide power structures, must seek to humanise their decisions and check their tendencies toward economic totalitarianism. The churches have traditionally tended to deal with human problems at the "micro" level - individuals, small groups, local institutions. It needs now to deal with humanity's needs at the "macro" level, to give an eschatological vision of the totality of mankind. It needs to speak of the need for new forms of planning and direction for the nation-state and beyond. The basic task of the Church is to provide for the world a network of mutual trust pointing toward a world community in which questions can be attacked in a spirit of hope, because the men who speak across dividing lines know there are men on the other side who respect their humanity.
21. In secular society the Church can no longer seek to be the governing, dominating institution in the social order. This is not something to deplore, but something in which we may rejoice in that it provides an opportunity for the Church to restore one of the essential marks of Christ's Church, namely to be a serving community in the world.
22. The Church can come of age in a secular world and take seriously many of the things it has been preaching. After a long extended period of being identified with privilege, power and comfort, it may again preach the gospel that makes Christianity foolishness and a "stumbling block". (Skandalon) It speaks also of love through manifesting justice. It may become the fore-runner of new forms of social order, giving a real ground for the responsible joint action of man with man on the basis of truth and love. It can point to a God who works through a variety of means in secular realm and who is the fullness of potentiality and can give new possibilities to old and new civilisations. It can break loose from every form of institutional and ideological enslavement and free man to become himself in the new situation.

22. Man's quest for a real freedom involves the question of ultimate meaning and values of man and history. What makes him to be a real man? What gives him the meaning to all meanings? In the period of cultural and social transformation there are many uncertainties in the minds of people. There are tendencies to absolutise the relative power of man and world. The challenge to the Church, rather than keeping distance from the world, is to travel together with the people of the world, to show that faith in the love of God is essential for our hopes for the future. As a company of sojourners on earth, the Church participates in all the work towards human fulfilment and freedom in looking forward "to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrew 11:10 RSV).

D. Conclusions for Recommendation

1. We recognise in this industrial and technical world, that communication among people of specialist knowledge and good will are extremely important. We believe that it is one of the tasks of the World Council of Churches and of its member churches to communicate with those who engage in the specialised studies in the field of humanity, social and natural sciences. We need to widen and strengthen our effort to engage in real dialogue with these different groups in order to accomplish the common task.

Therefore we recommend to the World Council of Churches and its member churches to organise conferences, meetings and discussion groups in order to create opportunities for communication among people who are engaged in the specialised studies of humanity, social and natural sciences, to discern together a way to strengthen human values in modern society.

2. In recognition of the significance of theological education in effecting the future work of the Church, we recommend that theological training be radically reconsidered in such a way to further the real confrontation of the Church with the realities of the changing modern world.



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