

Notes and Comments

Edited by Joseph Jeppson

CONCERN FOR THE URBAN CONDITION

Stanton L. Hovey

Stanton Hovey is a social worker in Mesa, Arizona while working towards an advanced degree in sociology.

The urban age — with all its complexities, opportunities, and monstrous problems — is upon us. How are Christians — and Mormons — responding to this new environment? This article will present exploratory research comparing Mormons and non-Mormons and will be followed by a look at what other churches are doing.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Dr. Frederick L. Whitman, an assistant professor of sociology at Arizona State University, undertook to study the "role religious groups play in motivating their adherents to an awareness of and willingness to act toward solution of contemporary urban problems."¹ The research was based upon the assumption that one's religious beliefs and membership may affect attitude, feeling, and overt behavior in *non-religious* areas.

Three dimensions of behavior were studied: (1) holding of abstract, *generalized values*, such as "all men are created equal," (2) translating abstract values into *specific attitudes*, such as "I believe in sending my children to integrated schools because I believe all men are created equal"; and (3) *overt behavior* consistent with both generalized value and resultant specific attitudes, such as willingness to join a committee working for integrated schools.² Questions designed to measure these three dimensions of behavior were focused on subjects' responses to five urban problems in the Phoenix area. These were (1) inadequate wages of certain occupational groups, (2) inadequate financing of schools in low-income districts, (3) sub-standard housing, (4) an inadequate

public transportation system, and (5) inadequate public mental health facilities. The questionnaire was administered to all residents of two single-dwelling, middle class areas in Tempe, Arizona. The sample size was too small to suggest any inferential statistical treatment of the data; however, simple comparisons of percentages between religious groupings were made.

The questionnaire also consisted of two additional parts: indexes both of social background factors and religious involvement; social class position, rural-urban background, duration of residence in the Phoenix area, and political orientation were background factors studied in relation to the respondents' concern for urban problems. The religiosity index was included on the assumption that the most religiously active respondents would show greater concern because of more frequent exposure to church discussion of these problems.

Catholics, as a group, scored highest, followed by Protestants and those professing no religious belief; L.D.S. respondents scored lowest of the four groupings. Seventy percent of L.D.S. respondents scored in the low concern category.

The hypothesis regarding religious involvement was found to be incorrect. Those moderately active in their church scored higher than those with either high or low religious involvement. This finding is in general agreement with the research findings of Dr. Victor Cline, who found little difference between the non-religious and the religious person, no matter what his faith, in his being a "good Samaritan," or "having love and compassion for [his] fellow-man."³

The social background factors were found to be more important than was religious belief or membership in the formation of attitudes and behavior toward the secular world. Rural-urban background and general political orientation were especially significant. The chain of causation, however, may not be so simple, but may be circular instead, since a Mormon's politics may be conditioned or reinforced by certain Church doctrines or principles. However, sophisticated statistical procedures and large samples are needed for the thorough investigation of the interrelationship between the many relevant variables.

Whitman's study, though inadequate in sample size and research design, provides a springboard for discussion of important issues. Replication of this and similar research (such as Armand Mauss's study of "Mormonism and the Negro"⁴) would be helpful in identifying those blind spots Mormons share with others. Regardless of the causes of apparent lack of concern, it is important to know what other Christians are thinking and doing.

¹Frederick L. Whitman, "Religion and Response to Urban Problems," *Essays in Urban Affairs*, William S. Peters, ed. (Tempe, Arizona: Urban Systems Report #2, Center for the Study of Urban Systems, October, 1967), pp. 13-23.

²*Ibid.*, p. 14.

³Victor B. Cline, "What Does It Mean To Be Religious?" *The Instructor*, (March, 1968), p. 106.

⁴Armand Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro: Faith, Folklore, and Civil Rights," *Dialogue*, II, 4, 19-40.

ACTIVITIES OF OTHER CHURCHES

The urban crisis seems to revolve around two interrelated issues — race and poverty. Concern for both is widespread, extending from top to bottom in church ecclesiastical organizations. The Second Vatican Council and the World Council of Churches are active. Some major denominations have felt the city is the place to hammer out solutions to major issues of our time. Prior to five years ago church efforts were directed toward sensitizing congregations to urban problems and collecting data. In the last five years money has been available and programs have begun.⁵ National organizations are assisting local churches in establishing programs and in issuing information and guidelines for decision-making. The most burning question for Christians seems to be in deciding how far *corporate* action should extend into the world. Lewis Mudge states, "There is less difficulty in our minds about the propriety of Christians acting as private individuals, taking political stands, working for social justice, seeking to influence legislation and so on."⁶

Among involved Christians motivation varies. Some respond out of fear of riots, others out of a desire to "get on the bandwagon," still others out of a deep commitment to help out. Since 1964 the War on Poverty has provided churches with funds and with psychological incentive. Church women's groups have been especially active. Involvement has brought sharp awareness of the general lack of the knowledge and skills necessary in dealing with urban needs. Therefore, major denominations have banded together in forming special training facilities for the training of clergy and laymen.⁷

Individual churches have found it impossible to work alone, and many churches have combined in their ecumenical activity. One of the more promising experiments is the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago, where 200 or more church men and women of different faiths have moved into a sixteen-block area in a ghetto called "Fifth City"⁸ — a demonstration project designed to be a prototype for operation of the local church in the city.

Training teams from the Institute are sent throughout the country to share their experience and know-how with local church groups. The goal of the Institute is to work itself out of existence by building community identity and by creating new social structures whereby residents can begin to meet

⁵Much of the material used for this section was obtained from interviews with Mr. William Baker of the Long Range Planning Committee of Synod of Arizona; the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.; Rev. A. Leonard Miller, Coordinator of Inner City Work of United Methodist Churches of Metropolitan Phoenix; Rev. Richard Moyer, Assoc. Director of Catholic Charities for Diocese of Tucson (Roman); Rabbi Albert Plotkin of Temple Beth Israel, Phoenix, Arizona; Rev. Donald R. Jessup, Pastor of Grace United Methodist Church, Phoenix, Arizona.

⁶Lewis S. Mudge, *Why Is the Church in the World* (New York: Board of Education, 1967), p. 8.

⁷Two such are (1) Metropolitan Urban Service Training Facility, 220 E. 49th St., New York, 10017, (2) The Urban Training Center for Christian Mission, 40 No. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60607.

⁸A description of the Institute is given in the fourth issue, Summer 1967, of its publication *Image: Journal of the Ecumenical Institute*, published by the Division of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, 3444 Congress Parkway, Chicago, Ill., 60624.

their own needs. Programs are varied and intensive, extending from the creation of new community symbols such as hats, insignia, and songs to be used at community functions to organizing Negro senior citizens, teaching Negro history in local schools, and holding community art festivals. They attack such economic problems as housing, employment, consumer education, practical education, voter education. Job training, pre-school programs, after-school programs, and work with youth gangs are also conducted at the Institute. All age groups are dealt with in an attempt to destroy the negative "victim image" of the Negro.

Not all involvement by churches is so well defined, coordinated and executed as the work done by the Ecumenical Institute. The bulk of individual and church involvement is found in examples of Phoenix activity below. Some of the activity is inter-faith and inter-racial.

Many churches have food and clothing banks; St. Vincent de Paul (Catholic) has a dining hall in Phoenix for indigents. Thrift and salvage stores are operated by churches, and some have joined with governmental units (receiving OEO funds). Headstart centers, staffed with professionals and volunteers from churches, are prevalent. Neighborhood and community centers contribute funds, building materials, physical labor, and workshops of all kinds.

The National Conference of Christians and Jews and its local affiliates have been active in setting up bi-racial and inter-faith summer day camps for young children and human relations seminars for teenagers and adults. All of the Methodist churches in Phoenix have committed themselves to a two-month study of the Kerner Commission Report as top priority for adult classes. One youth group from a Jewish synagogue has constructed on weekends a recreation center at a migrant farm labor camp. Other church groups are buying old homes, remodeling them and selling them to low-income families at 3 percent interest, with approval of a new FHA program. Visiting rest homes and conducting cultural and recreational programs there utilizes many other talents of Phoenix church members.

Despite all the good intentions represented above, involvement by institutions as opposed to individual involvement is difficult for many church members to understand. The most significant fact is the gradual movement away from simple provision of food and clothing, representative of charity, toward more sophisticated efforts designed to enable the ghetto resident to become his own master. The variety and quality of programs are limited only by the imagination of participants.

RESISTANCE TO INVOLVEMENT

Involvement in the urban crisis is not without its problems. Some church members contribute money but resist personal involvement, feeling such activity to be the job of the ministers. Others interpret involvement by the church as political action, encroaching on old church-state traditions. Those favoring political action feel the church is of necessity already involved in the life of the community and therefore is part of the decision-making process whether the church realizes it or not. As mentioned earlier, many members may feel satisfaction in taking a sack of groceries to the church for the needy

but cannot accept institutional approaches where the corporate body may assume advocacy, even legally, for the poor. Obviously the institutional approach requires strong individual and church commitment to a given task. Other church members feel that divergent political views held by a congregation make corporate action impossible. Lewis Mudge states, however, that positive action will reconcile people who differ without squelching differing viewpoints.⁹ Others feel that churches are not competent to act where public policy is technical and where expert knowledge is needed to unravel problems. This argument ignores the numerous skills and talents to be found in most congregations.

The most significant argument leveled against church involvement can be found in the fear that too much involvement in community action can cause the church to forget its central purpose, which is the salvation of the individual soul and its relationship with God. Professors Rodney Stark and Charles Glock found that religious orthodoxy tends to decrease as ethicalism increases (ethicalism is defined as concern for social justice).¹⁰ As churches direct their members toward social work, fewer members seem to adhere to a literal interpretation of the supernatural tenets of Christianity.

Mormon response to the challenge of secularism is discussed elsewhere in this section and specific suggestions for involvement in city planning are presented. However, it may be helpful to point out several myths concerning the nature of the urban crisis which seem to be in vogue among Mormons.

In addition to our myth regarding the Negro (also discussed elsewhere and in past issues of *Dialogue*) others are obvious in the areas of (1) the causes and cures of poverty, (2) the omnipotence of our Welfare system, and (3) ecumenical activity.

A FOLKLORE OF POVERTY

The mythology on poverty has three parts: (1) The myth that starvation is the motivating force that keeps the shoulders of the masses to the economic wheel; (2) the belief that everyone can find a job who wishes to do so, and (3) the "belief that all men have the necessary resources, if they will but use them to compete on even terms for available opportunity"¹¹ — the myth of the self-made man. In our culture it is often sinful to be poor, a mark of inferior moral character and evidence of a lack of spirituality. Where productive work was once the essence of social status, now consumption seems to be the god of all avid consumers. Mormons have adopted, unknowingly, the Protestant ethic, which is based on the Calvinistic notion that the evidence of a man's grace is in his worldly position and his wealth. This in turn seems to reinforce the idea that somehow if one pays tithing and is a good Church member, it will be impossible to be poor.

⁹Mudge, *op. cit.*, Ch. 3.

¹⁰Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, "Will Ethics Be the Death of Christianity?" *Transaction*, V, 7 (June, 1968) 7-14.

¹¹Alan D. Wade, "The Guaranteed Minimum Income: Social Work's Challenge and Opportunity," *Social Work*, XII, 1 (January, 1967) 96.

Another myth closely associated with this one is that poverty is individually caused. On the contrary, the poverty found in a highly technological society like ours is structural. This means that entire groups of persons may lack marketable job skills regardless of spirituality or moral character. Thus, many minority groups are locked into poverty because of inequity in social structure.

Certain elements in the Church have so distorted the achievements of capitalism that it is nearly impossible to be objective in discussing the merits of cooperative political programs. As a result, any highly pragmatic solutions are called "socialism" and are doomed to failure. If we are to succeed in solving city problems, however, cooperative action *must* be stressed.

I have found many Americans (and many Latter-day Saints) to be ignorant about the Public Welfare System which imprisons so many Americans. The Welfare System is blamed for idleness and many other social problems. One constantly hears of the value and nobility of hard work, yet such paeans are irrelevant when many people simply do not have access to employment. Although many aspects of the Public Welfare System — such as its low grants, its asinine laws and regulations which violate not only constitutional rights but human dignity, and its bureaucratic red tape — should be denounced, many of us denounce them for the wrong reasons. Many public works projects for welfare recipients and Title V training programs make the Church's welfare projects look small and insignificant by comparison. In fact, one of our biggest pitfalls is the assumption that Church welfare programs are perfect. Several years ago, it seems, mass advertising sold Church members the slogan "We Take Care of Our Own" and we have believed it ever since. Perhaps our welfare program is more comprehensive in the production and distribution of concrete services (food and clothing) than programs of other churches. But it must be obvious by now that it does not engage in other related services, like job training (other than Deseret Industries). It is not likely that we could sustain our own in case of a real national emergency. And if we continue to serve people by first separating the worthy poor from the unworthy poor, a large mass of humanity will certainly go unserved. An urban society is so complex, requiring paid professionals in so many aspects of social welfare, that sometimes the traditional functions of family and church *must* be assumed by those governmental units with sufficient resources.

Ecumenical activity may mean different things to different people. However, many Mormons seem to feel that any cooperation between themselves and other churches will result in dilution of their own doctrines and practices. But this need not be the case. If some of our best minds would work on construction of an appropriate ecumenical program, we could work with other churches in solving urban problems and would find that our own image had grown thereby.

Discovering and correcting folklore no longer useful to us should be a project for all Mormons. We can base this undertaking upon understanding of what our own unique contributions can be. There are five phases of involvement, including both individual and corporate types which might be

helpful: (1) the exorcising of our folklore (cultural and theological), (2) an increase in services to our own members, (3) information gathering and indirect service to others, (4) direct involvement by individuals, and (5) direct involvement by the Church in humanizing social institutions. The role of the Church will differ. Sometimes it will discern what is happening, sometimes it will speak, sometimes it will act. As Lewis Mudge puts it, "Nothing the Church does will be of any avail unless what it works for in the world is already becoming a reality within its own fellowship."¹²

EPILOGUE

Taking action in the world carries with it the risk of failure. Mistakes will be made; programs or approaches will be dropped; but this will not mean that God is Dead, or that we do not have revelation in the Church. We must be willing to admit that the Church *is* political, whether we like it or not, that it *is* involved in community life and that it plays a part in solving community problems, either by direct action, or by its silence.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS HENCE — 1945

In a day when the Saints, as well as members of many other churches, hoped that the millennium would soon come, the MILLENNIAL STAR (October 15, 1845, Vol. VI, pp. 140-42, reprinted from THE NAUVOO NEIGHBOR) published this prognostication of events which might be expected to take place in the year 1945. We are indebted to Dale L. Morgan of the University of California's Bancroft Library for calling this piece to our attention. Following this note is a contemporary forecast by an L.D.S. economist as to what we might anticipate in the year 2000 A.D.

God, through his servants the prophets, has given all men a clue to the future. In view of this, we were cogitating upon our bed the other night, what would be the state of the world a hundred years hence. In quick succession the events and periods which have filled up nearly six thousand years passed before our mind's eyes, together with the accompanying, "Thus saith the Lord, I will destroy the earth with a flood, after one hundred and twenty years. There shall be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine in Egypt. Israel shall be held captive in Babylon till the land enjoys her Sabbath's seventy years;" and then came Daniel's numbers; and the exact time when the Saviour should be was born, his crucifixion, and second coming.

While thus looking over the "has beens," we fell into a deep sleep, and the angel of our presence came to the bedside and gently said, "Arise!" Now, it mattereth not whether we were in the body or out of it; asleep or awake; on earth or in heaven; or upon the water or in the air; the sum of the matter is like this: — Our guide, for such we shall call the angel or being that conveyed us, soon brought us in sight of a beautiful city.

¹²Mudge, *op. cit.*, Chs. 1 and 2.