

**W**HAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR CITIES to a great extent is shaping the destiny of this nation. For this reason the urban scene commands the attention of sociologists, psychologists, politicians, business, and industry.

The urban scene is a constant focus of the news media, for it is there that the bizarre, the horrid, the unusual, and the pathetic occur. What would reporting be without the demonstrations, riots, class struggles, and corruptions of the big cities!

Because of the peculiar influence of the cities upon the concern and conscience of the nation, the church

is forced to define itself in terms of urban evangelism. The question emerging in the hearts of countless church leaders is, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

First let me say I am here as a preacher of the gospel and as a brother in Christ. My remarks will be tinted with Christian conviction and gospel priority. This does not mean I will gloss over actualities or obscure present problems. Having pastored in Harlem, New York, and on the southside of Chicago, I have had some exposure to the problems, some consciousness of the patterns of privation, and some experience of the difficulties faced by blacks.

An estimated 14 million blacks reside in our urban areas. The decay of the cities affects these people greatly. The inequities in education, the inadequacies in housing, the insufficiencies in jobs, and the general economic and social blight are the constant experience of black Americans.

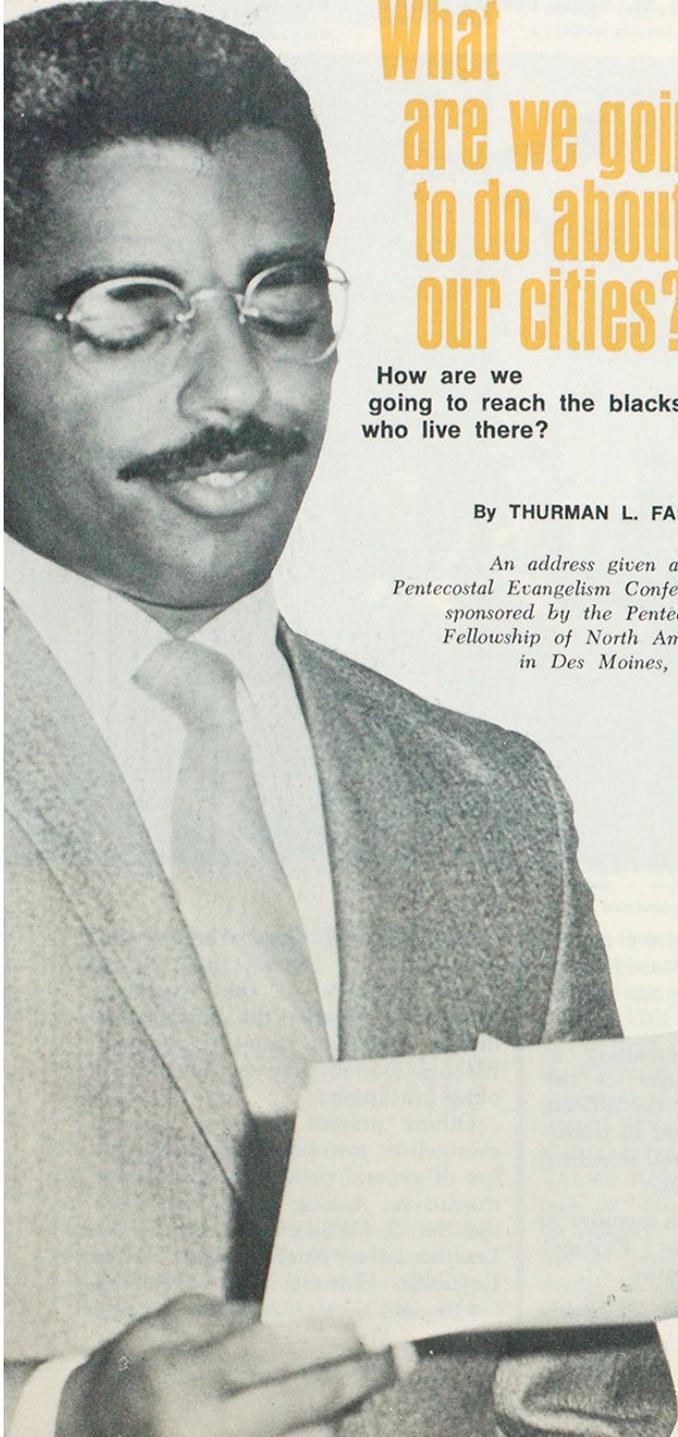
Most of us are aware of the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, the affluent and the culturally deprived, the favored majority and the unfavored minorities. The seething discontent and the constant confrontations in our cities appear as handwriting on the wall, reminding us of an imbalance in social justice, of inequities in our present system of democracy, and of strong prejudices in this nation.

I am not here to present an in-depth paper on the social ills of the hour. I am neither qualified for it by training nor called to it by vocation. But I am affected to some degree by the problems and must adopt a scriptural stance that "all unrighteousness is sin"—be it prejudice or adultery—and that the righteous Lord loves righteousness.

I BELIEVE the biggest problem facing the church in this hour is to rediscover and maintain its identity. The Lord gave certain distinctives to the church. She is called in Scripture "the pillar and ground of the truth," "an habitation of God through the Spirit," "the bride of Christ," "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." What she is said to be to a large extent dictates what she is supposed to do. She is to preach the truth, reveal the presence of God, maintain her engagement to Christ, retard corruption, and dispel the darkness wherever she encounters it.

However, there is an increasing pressure upon the church to abandon these priorities and adopt the social ideals desired for this nation and the world. We are constantly told how we must adjust our concepts in the light of the present developments. Certain groups have made it plain that the church must serve the revolution. But I am more interested in how the church will serve the Lord in this last-day revival. I am more concerned with how she will glorify the Saviour and express His attributes. I am more concerned with how well she will fare in earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.

The issues of yesterday are not the same today, nor will they be the same tomorrow. The particular goals of one nation or people change with the circumstances and the priorities of the moment. But the biggest issues will always be constant: the problem of sin in the human heart, the alienation of men from God, and the expressions of unrighteousness in word, thought,



## What are we going to do about our cities?

How are we  
going to reach the blacks  
who live there?

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and deed. Solomon declared: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The issues of life are bigger than the issues of the moment, for they will have the greater consequences both now and eternally.

The greatest questions in the human heart can be condensed into three categories: "Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? These are penetrating questions, going deeper than the issues of the moment, more important than "Why Vietnam?" more complicated than the race issue, of greater significance than the draft.

THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN the danger of a conflict of interest for the church in her involvement in the things of this world. The child of God is a unique individual. He is conscious of two worlds—experiencing the power of the world to come and yet residing in the world that now is. He is faced with a dual responsibility, being a citizen of both. In his relationship with men he must ever be obedient to God.

Because of her peculiar nature the church must always distinguish between earthly citizenship and heavenly discipleship. Some things are definitely at variance when considered in the light of the church's first obligation to her Lord. Some things are definitely important in the temporal and yet not necessarily expedient for advancing the spiritual.

A writer stated recently in *Christianity Today*: "There will be a noticeable tension between the spiritual church and the secular culture." I believe we will need to recall the beginning of the church at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2: "There came a sound from heaven." The church is God's institution, or more accurately God's creation, called into being by His decree and power, motivated by His will and purpose. This thing started with a sound from heaven; let it not be controlled now by sounds from earth.

Am I advocating total noninvolvement in the concerns of the present society? No. But I advocate retaining the higher priorities and the particular purposes for which we have been called. We must define the lines of demarcation and place our emphasis according to our calling. We will never be able entirely to please the world at large. Jesus said to those of His day in a parable, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." It will be equally difficult in this hour to gain a perfect approval from men as we seek to serve God in this world.

AS WE ANALYZE the urban situation from a gospel standpoint, I believe we are compelled by spiritual convictions to maintain a Bible-centered emphasis. I believe the urban man is as sensitive to his spiritual needs as he is toward his temporal needs. Witness the packed churches in any black community on any Sunday morning. There is a traditional concern for spiritual well-being ingrained in the hearts of blacks from the days of slavery when God was our only refuge. The urban man will listen to the gospel, and the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

However, I firmly believe the church must show an

understanding of the particular needs of the urban man. We must respect his desire for social achievement, be sympathetic toward his demand for change, and help him in every way compatible with gospel principles while we maintain his spiritual welfare as the highest priority.

I SUPPOSE I could be called a moderate from a political standpoint. The Scriptures teach us: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). If there was ever a time for the church to have a temperate viewpoint, it is today. The course of the entire world needs to be critically and carefully analyzed in the light of the Great Commission and the soon coming of the Lord.

The world demands what they call "contemporary relevance." If I understand the word *contemporary*, it means "to happen along with," and the word *relevance* means "to have a definite relationship or bearing upon the matters at hand." I believe the gospel-preaching church meets this standard of contemporary relevance. God's purposes have always run parallel with the events of history, and His workings have always had a definite bearing upon the matters at hand.

Again divine purposes are pinpointed by the happenings of contemporary history. John the Baptist preached repentance during the reign of Tiberias Caesar. The apostles declared that Jesus was Lord in every conceivable situation, refusing to allow the pressures of a degenerate world to change their concept of a divine mission.

When facing execution for maintaining gospel priorities in spite of society's disapproval, Paul told Timothy to "preach the word." He reminded Timothy that "no man that warreth entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he might please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." The Great Commission has never been revoked. The Lord Jesus said that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." The church is running on a schedule regulated by heaven's clock and must be about the Father's business. This constraint is placed upon us in the suburbs and cities, on other continents, and in the isles of the sea.

May it be said of us that *we preached Christ* during the Nixon administration while Mao was ruler of China and Brezhnev party leader in Russia.

May it be said of us that at the time of the riots and demonstrations in our cities and during the student revolution, we reasoned of temperance, of righteousness, and of judgment to come.

May it be said of us that in the age of free love, LSD, and the 18-year-old vote, we were found calling men to repentance and looking for the soon return of the Lord.

Although we are found in the midst of secular history, we must make spiritual history for the glory of God.

I feel urban evangelism is just doing what God has called us to do in a different set of circumstances. We are still to hold forth the Word of life in the midst of all the passing events of history, for it is not His will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.