

The Time is Out of Joint

As the old saying goes: "There is some bad news and there is some good news". First, the bad news. It was Hamlet in Shakespeare's famous tragedy who said, "The time is out of joint, O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right". It was also Hamlet who said, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark". Either of these lines might be used to describe the period of history that the world is going through now. "Out of joint", "out of kilter", out of sync, out of order, if not out of its mind would be fair descriptions for the way things are going in the world these days. One writer has said: "There is a sick odor in the air; it is the smell of a dying civilization". Something is rotten -- and not only in the state of Denmark.

Start with unemployment; when people lose their work and gradually lose their hopes of finding work, the situation is sick. If a society literally isn't working, if large percentages of its people are not working, then that society is out of order. It has broken down in some basic, fundamental way, and the seeds of trouble and upheaval have been sown to germinate and grow into the downfall of that society. The "bread and circuses" policy toward unemployment contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire; the massive unemployment in pre-war Germany paved the way for the end of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler. The unemployment and underemployment of blacks in the U.S. sparked the violent riots of the 60's. And someone has speculated that the anger of the 60's will be child's play compared to the fury of the 80's.

Unemployment and inflation are going hand in hand. Inflation raises the costs of producing goods and lowers the profits, thereby, discouraging investors. If you add high interest rates, you will have more investors quitting the business of production, and you will have more unemployment.

Inflation seems to be related to depletion of natural resources which is another, perhaps the most serious, problem of our time. The shortage of oil raises the cost of oil, raises the cost of production, raises the cost of products, lowers the profits and raises the unemployment. It sounds like the old nursery rhyme, "This is the house that Jack build". Even if the economists ever figure out a way to cure inflation and unemployment, it is pretty clear that there is no way to stop the depletion of natural resources. We are going to have to live with limited resources -- not only oil but all kinds of natural resources that are non-renewable. Our industrial civilization has been built up largely on the basis of an escalating use of non-renewable

resources. The end, or at least severe shortages of many resources, is now in sight. This, more than anything else, puts our world out of joint.

We have heard all this before, and I don't want to belabour it, but let me simply mention some of the other major factors creating that sick odor in the air. Escalated use of non-renewable resources is related to increasing pollution that threatens the biosphere. In many urban areas of the world there is literally a sick odor in the air which is polluted with carbon disulphide and other noxious gases. Acid rain, radioactive waste, solid wastes, chemical residues, PCB's, etc. etc. etc. Dying lakes, disappearing species, epidemics of cancer, mutant offspring -- and the worst of all -- starving millions of people. All the while the world spends over a million dollars a minute on armaments. A couple of weeks' worth of armaments money would provide fresh water for all the people on earth. Another couple of weeks would provide adequate health care. The earth can and does provide enough food for all its people and no one would have to starve if the production and distribution of food could be organized properly. But the war machines roll on, wasting resources, wasting money, wasting lives, wasting the earth.

How did we ever get into this mess?

Would you believe that a protestant theologian had something to do with it? John Calvin, a theologian from Geneva in the 16th century was the main founder of the reformed tradition of protestant Christianity in which we in the United Church still stand. Some of Calvin's ideas contributed to the ethos or mindset or ways of thinking that characterize our industrial civilization -- the ways of thinking that have gotten the world out of joint and into the mess we are now experiencing. Calvin believed that God is all-powerful and that anybody who is saved or damned is saved or damned because God predestines them to be saved or damned. God elects or chooses some to be saved and leaves the rest to suffer the fate that everybody deserves. It hardly seems fair but, said Calvin, that's the way it is. The problem is, how can we know who is chosen for salvation? What assurance can we have of our election? It would be easy to delude ourselves. After careful thought Calvin decided that those who are truly elected for salvation will show it in their lives -- they will give evidence of God's saving grace by "unceasing activity in the service of God". In short, they will work hard, give the fruits of their labour to God's service, and never cease producing with all the skill and discipline and carefulness of which they are capable.

With this kind of thinking the protestants were very likely to achieve economic success. Though Calvin never intended it to be understood this way, his doctrine of assurance of salvation came to be interpreted in terms of success. The secularized

version of Calvin's thinking came up with the formula of hard efficient work leading to economic growth and capital formation, leading to increasing profits, leading to economic success which then assures people that God is truly on their side and they are truly the chosen people of God. The converse is also true; if you do not succeed financially, it is because you are not chosen to receive God's grace, and in a sense, you are getting what you deserve. The so-called Protestant Work Ethic has been a major factor in creating the mindset of the industrial era; it is a mindset that infects both capitalists and communists. It is the conviction that unlimited growth, unceasing progress (conceived in economic terms) is the right and proper goal of human history. It is what Chairman Mao called "economism", the viewpoint that puts economic success above all other human values.

There were some other key factors in the development of our present ethos. Francis Bacon was one of the earliest philosophers of the modern scientific outlook. His understanding of science was that it is the means whereby human beings gain effective control of the world. The value of science, he said, was its ability to produce economic increases. The essence of science is mathematics which deals with quantity more than quality. "Quantity" thinking is a major element in the modern mindset. This "value-free" way of thinking owes some of its origin to Francis Bacon.

Perhaps the most influential philosopher for the modern era was John Locke. He conceived the purpose of human life to be the dominion over nature. He said, "The negation of nature is the way toward happiness". Human beings also compete with each other in achieving happiness. Locke said: "He who applies reason the best will benefit the most". This competition is not a bad thing. Human beings are basically good and this basic activity of acquisitive competition is also basically good. In fact, the chief and proper purpose of human government is to safeguard the process of acquisition of wealth through the negation of nature. The way of thinking that has been called "possessive individualism" comes largely from John Locke. He believed it was not only possible but right and a duty for people to try to accumulate more wealth. He laid the basis for the "trickle-down" theory that says that when the rich get richer the poor get richer so the way to help the poor is to help the rich get richer.

John Locke in the 18th century was followed soon after by Adam Smith, the economic philosopher, who spelled out the theories of "laissez-faire" capitalism. He argued that the best way for society to encourage and enable the increasing wealth and well-being, that Locke saw as the goal of human history, is to have as few controlling rules as possible; let the people do their thing, "laissez faire", because there is an "invisible hand" of natural law or even divine providence that will help everything work out fairly and properly if you just let human beings go free in their economic

activity. Both Locke and Smith were infinitely optimistic about human beings. Like the old nursery rhyme they thought you could "leave them alone and they'll come home bringing their tails behind them", all in one piece, in other words. Their optimism was also directed towards nature itself as well as people. It never occurred to them that unlimited economic exploitation of nature could cause a problem of depletion or pollution of nature. They lived in the era of imperialist expansion into the new worlds of the far east and west. The wealth of the world in the Americas and the Indies was boundless. The ethos of growth, progress, exploitation of natural resources and private enterprise seemed to them to be eminently logical.

There was at least one more major factor that shaped our modern thinking in a profoundly significant way. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution has had immense influence on our modern way of thinking about ourselves and the world. Darwin believed that nature is governed by a process of chance combined with a principle of survival. The evolutionary process that produced the various creatures was a long, gradual process of small changes that happened by chance and then were perpetuated because the changes helped the creature to survive and reproduce more offspring that could also survive. Two important implications of this view were the denial of any inherent purpose or initiative of God in the creation of the world; if the world was produced by chance and natural selection through the survival of the fittest, then God is irrelevant to the process. Who needs God to understand the world? God becomes an unnecessary hypothesis. This is not God's world. We don't need to respect nature as the creation of God. A neutral, chance-dominated world is fair game for exploitation. Darwinism fit hand in glove with the secular, profane view of nature as fodder for generating wealth.

The second implication of Darwin's thought that has had disastrous consequences was the theory of survival of the fittest. This lent itself to the thinking that has been called Social Darwinism. Social inequalities are acceptable because that's the way the world is. Competition to survive is natural and, therefore, right; to the victor belong the spoils; some individuals and some races and nations have shown their superiority over other individuals or races or nations; this is as it should be; imperialism is the natural order of things. Christian concern for weaker people modified Social Darwinism somewhat, taking the form of the ideas of the "White man's burden" to help bring other peoples up to our standard of superior being (although many of them will never make it), and the idea of the "manifest destiny" that some nations have a God-given destiny to give aid and enlightenment to weaker nations, all the while continuing to exploit them in laissez-faire economic competition.

The patterns of economic, political, and social activity that make our modern world the way it is are caused by the way we think about ourselves, the meaning of life, the purpose of government, the value of nature, what is right and wrong, and, most basically, what God has to do with the world. Specifically, the ideas of economic success proving God's favour, the idea of unlimited economic growth, endless progress, the Protestant work ethic, the emphasis on quantity rather than quality, the belief in competition, exploitation of neutral nature, possessive individualism, survival of the fittest, Social Darwinism --- these are some of the ideas and beliefs that have produced the modern world with its pollution, depletion, inflation, unemployment, inequities of distribution, constant military destruction, and even the threat of annihilation.

The time is truly out of joint. Our systems of living are all in crisis. The assumptions which have governed our way of life in the industrial era have proven to be impossible: unlimited growth clashes head on with limited resources; inequities of distribution clashes head on with growing starvation; an escalating arms race clashes head on with everything else; depletion, pollution, starvation. There is a sick odor in the air; it is the smell of a dying civilization. One writer has described our time as a great, shuddering, irrevocable shift taking place in human history.

Many others speak of the coming apocalypse, the end of the world; and few things make me personally feel sicker than those Christians who almost gleefully await the end of the world smug in the assurance that they have an "in" with God and the sooner the end comes, the better.

Are we looking at the approach of Armageddon? We are certainly looking at a painfully corrupt and distorted world. We are certainly looking at a situation in which there will have to be fundamental changes in thinking and action if humanity is going to move away from destruction towards anything like universal fulfilment.

One writer points out that in literature there is a trusted device known as the Black Moment, the point where all seems to be lost just before the final rescue. It's counterpart in tragic writings is the White Moment, a sudden rush of hope, a saving chance just before the inevitable disaster. Are we at the Black Moment? Is there some way in which the world could change its thinking and its systems to rescue humanity from this dying civilization? Are there any realistic grounds for hope? Or have we passed the White Moment in a final tragedy? Was the optimism of the first half of the 20th Century the White Moment of the human story? What is the real situation? There is a lot of reality in the prophecies of doom.

I promised you some good news. There is a growing tide of opinion that holds out some realistic hope for a transformation of massive proportions that is beginning to come about. In the next session, we will look at the ideas of these prophecies of hope.

#### Questions for Discussion in Session I

The aim of this first discussion period is to share ideas and stories about the crisis which seems to be building up in our time. The following questions can be used to start discussion, or another method could be used such as giving each person in the group a chance to say what he/she think are the underlying causes of the present situation in the world. Before starting discussion, it is suggested that Mark 14:32-42 be read.

1. What aspects of the current conditions in the world strike you as most serious/dangerous/wrong?
2. In your own experience of living in your family, community, or this country, what would you say are the most difficult problems you have to get involved in? ("O cursed spite, that ever you were born to set them right.")
3. Would you agree that the way people think is a basic cause for the problems in society and the world? What specifically is wrong with the way people think?

Will There Be A Brighter Day Tomorrow?

All through the 1970's the mood of intellectual opinion in the world was growing more and more pessimistic -- for the reasons we looked at in the first session. People were only half joking when they remarked that it wouldn't be long until 1984. The novel entitled 1984 by George Orwell pictured a world controlled by totalitarian powers through electronic surveillance of every individual in the world. People were/are only half joking when they refer to 1984 as a real possibility to be realized in the near future because the problems we talked about yesterday seem to be solvable by only two possible alternatives, one of which would be not unlike the system in Orwell's 1984. The "crunch" created by increasing population and decreasing natural resources might be dealt with by some totalitarian system of government taking control and distributing the diminishing resources as it best sees fit, probably in the interests of a chosen group of people at the expense of others who are not deemed worthy of a full and equal share.

In 1974, a man called Garret Hardin proposed a theory like this which was widely discussed. He called it the ethics of living in a lifeboat. There are not enough natural resources, he said, to provide adequately for everybody. The situation is as if we were all in lifeboats. Some lifeboats have enough provisions and few enough people to survive. Others are overcrowded, with insufficient provisions. People keep falling or jumping out of the overcrowded boats and trying to swim over and climb into the less crowded boats. The people in the crowded boats call out to the others in the less crowded boats to share their provisions with them. What should we in the less crowded boats do? Hardin said that the only rational thing to do is to row away from the overcrowded boats and from the people swimming in the water. To stay with them and help them would invite what he called "the tragedy of the common". This metaphor refers to the old custom of having a plot of common ground in a town on which anyone in the town could graze animals if they wished. The tragedy of the common is that the more people grazing animals there the less good the common becomes to anybody. There comes a point at which the increased numbers of animals grazing on the common results in all the animals starving to death. The solution, Hardin said, is for those who control enough resources to survive to keep them to themselves by force if necessary, and let those without enough resources starve to death.

There was a kind of superficial logic about Hardin's argument, but it has serious deficiencies. One fatal flaw is the fact that there may soon be a hundred or so countries with nuclear bombs, some of whom may not be prepared to sit in their overcrowded lifeboats and watch the affluent people row away and leave them to starvation. Another error in Hardin's metaphor is the fact that in the real world there is a much greater degree of economic dependency of the less crowded nations on the more crowded ones, so that it is questionable if we could row away from them without scuttling our own lifeboat in the process. In a sense there is a plug in the bottom of every lifeboat that is tied by a string to the plug in every other lifeboat. Finally, another error in Hardin's metaphor is the comparison of the world to a "common" which is overgrazed to the point of threatening everyone's existence. The world can and does produce food. The problem is distribution more than production. It is an error to attribute the crisis to an absolute shortage of resources. There may be a way in which the existing resources can meet existing and future needs.

This leads to the other possible alternative to the mess the world is in. Instead of fascism or nuclear catastrophe caused by those contending for the remaining resources, there could be a genuine transformation of human beings, both personal and social transformation, which would create an entirely new situation in the world. Instead of a vicious fight to the finish, there could be the development of a "steady state" society in which cooperation and sacrifice would replace the competitive struggle for increased wealth; ecological balance would be carefully maintained; renewable resources would replace non-renewable resources as much as possible; disparities among people would be reduced to the minimum; frugality would replace acquisitive consumption as a prevailing value; the goals of human life and history would be qualitative rather than quantitative, spiritual rather than material. Instead of thinking that humans have dominion over the earth by negating nature and exploiting it, people would think of themselves as stewards over creation with the responsibility and privilege of looking after the world and all the creatures in it.

As Eliza Doolittle said: "Wouldn't it be lovely?"

Eliza was daydreaming. Would it be daydreaming to hope for a transformed world to replace the mess that we are in?

There is a growing number of people who are writing books which try to show that this transformation is not daydreaming at all but a real possibility that has already begun to come about. These authors do not all agree on what will cause the transformation to take place but they are quite unanimous in describing the kind of changes that need to take place.

One man, Jeremy Rifkin, in a book called The Emerging Order argues that the only force reasonably capable of pulling off the transformation we need is the growing movement of conservative Christianity. The born-again evangelicals and charismatics, he argues, are the only hope we can see. They have thousands of schools, colleges, seminaries, youth groups, and churches in North America and elsewhere which could be a structural base with which to carry out the two-pronged process of re-conceptualization and implementation that is necessary for the transformation of modern society. Furthermore, he says, they have the doctrine of God as creator and human beings as the stewards of creation, and it is precisely these ideas that we need to replace the ones presently messing up the world.

Rifkin admits that there are some obvious reasons why the conservative Christian movement may not rise to the challenge. They have traditionally been very individualistic in outlook, reluctant to be involved in "worldly" concerns. They are usually suspicious of each other's differences in doctrine and could not join easily in an united front. Even worse, their convictions about having the absolute truth from their interpretations of "inerrant" scriptures could easily lead to a kind of Christian fascism or totalitarian control. If they ever became the majority and held control, they might easily dismiss others as misguided sinners and impose their own ideas by force.

Another author, William McLoughlin, a sober-minded professor at the University of Chicago, has a theory that between 1960 and 1990, North American society will go through a period of what he calls "religious awakening". He is a student of North American history, and he thinks that the current awakening will be the fourth in a series of awakenings that have shaped our history since the time of the first Puritan immigration. McLoughlin uses an anthropologist's analysis of the structure and dynamics of religious awakenings and applies it to the three great awakenings that have already taken place. Then he applies it to our present situation. In any awakening, he says, there are "old lights" and "new lights". The "old lights" try to deal with the contemporary problems by re-affirming some traditional ideas and going back to the good old ways. However, the old light by itself is not able to cope adequately with the changed situation, and old lights do not prevail in the awakening. New light is necessary for an awakening, and combined possibly with some elements of old light, the new light gradually achieves predominance and comes to be the prevailing ideas of a new era of history. Let me read you a paragraph from McLoughlin's concluding chapter:

"The beginning of a new belief-value system springing from this new respect for life and its mysterious source and continuity is found not only in the current distaste for defoliation weapons, carbon monoxide, insecticides, preservatives, fluorocarbons, detergents, nuclear fission, and toxic dyes but in the concern to preserve whales, dolphins, and other endangered species. It is found in greater

respect for the helpless aged and the battered wife, the oppressed races and the incarcerated prisoner, in respect for the materials of craftsmanship and the patient skill with which the craftsman works. Today's countercultural behavior strives for relationships that are tolerant, soft-spoken, respectful of the feelings and opinions of others; it frowns on the aggressive, defensive, hostile, and possessive attitudes of the cultural past; it likes what men and women have in common as individuals and as groups and finds no "specially chosen people." It does not measure success in terms of money, status, or power but in terms of friendship, generosity, and the ability to empathize and give. It is concerned preeminently with the quality of life, not its quantity. In that direction the awakening is moving and changing American life."

Yet another author, Alvin Toffler, who wrote Future Shock a few years ago, has written a book called The Third Wave in which he argues that there are revolutionary changes well underway in our society which will transform our thinking and the ways we live. Our industrial society of the past 200 years or so was the "Second Wave", he says, which followed on the First Wave of basically agricultural societies. Now there is a Third Wave coming which will be as different from the Second Wave as the Second Wave was from the First Wave. The Third Wave will come about largely as a result of the rapid growth of four clusters of related industries: (a) electronics and computers with fibre optics and the use of solid state physics. In other words, industries using the "micro-chip" technology; (b) space-related industry which will be able to produce many new natural resources in space which cannot be produced under conditions of gravity; (c) sea-related industries which will produce vast amounts of food in the sea and mine undetermined amounts of natural resources which have been inaccessible to date; (d) genetic engineering industries which will contribute to producing renewable resources including oil-producing plants as well as creating unimaginable new possibilities for food production and health care, etc. etc. etc.

Toffler argues that the new technological capabilities will change the way people think and live. The "mass" media, for example, is being de-massified. Instead of issuing identical messages to great masses of people which causes us to be a Pepsi generation of conforming consumers, the new electronic media will be flexible and capable of handling infinite numbers of messages both to and from the sending stations. The media will be something like the old party telephone lines in rural communities: very personal if not entirely private. Messages will be customized. We will have so many TV channels that people will get the messages they are interested in rather than all getting the same message. Printing technology has also been revolutionized to serve customized purposes. Look at any magazine rack in a bus station or drug store, and you get an idea of how de-massified the media already is.

The electronic media linked to computers linked to production machines will be able to customize products of all kinds to suit individual needs or preferences. We could have clothes "tailor-made" and purchased through a TV terminal that sends

messages as well as receives. The possibilities are endless.

All the de-massifying and decentralizing will weaken rather than strengthen the possibilities of having 1984, Toffler argues. Our freedom and ability to express ourselves individually will be vastly increased. This will lead to social changes on a grand scale. The variations in family types will increase to include solo's, child-free marriages, single parent families, aggregate families, extended families. There will be technological capacity to work at home with electronic communications linking us to others who are also working at home. In July, 1982, McLean's magazine had an article entitled "Offices in the Bedrooms of Our Nation" which described this exact situation taking place somewhere in Ontario. Toffler argues that the revolution in electronic communications will also revolutionize political power, bringing like-minded people together into wide-ranging networks that will be able to effect changes in policy much more quickly than our present political structures allow.

Toffler acknowledges that the technological revolution by itself cannot produce the transformation that is needed for the well-being of the world. He says there will also be a philosophical revolt to overthrow the reigning assumptions of the past 300 years. There will be a new image of nature with emphasis on our human symbiosis with the earth, ie. interdependence with nature. Neo-Darwinist ideas are already obsolete; there will be a new understanding of the "open Universe" in which possibilities for rapid and radical change far outreach our present capacity to imagine them. There will be a decrease in nationalism as increased regionalism and increased transnational organizations grow in strength. Holistic understanding will replace the present tendency of our sciences to split up into over-specialized sections that don't know what is happening outside their narrow fields of specialization.

How all this new thinking is going to come about is the subject of yet another book called The Aquarian Conspiracy, by Marilyn Ferguson. The book is sub-titled "Personal and Social Transformation in the 80's". Ferguson starts her book with this sentence: "The great, shuddering, irrevocable shift overtaking us is not a new political, religious, or philosophical system; it is a new mind -- the ascendance of a startling worldview that gathers into its framework breakthrough science and insights from earliest recorded thought." Ferguson thinks that some of the breakthroughs in scientific discovery in the past 5-10 years are revealing a different kind of reality than we have assumed to be real up to now. This new view of reality includes as real possibilities things that we always thought were impossible. For example, psychic phenomena such as clairvoyance (seeing at a distance), telepathy (the transfer of mental messages without any known media), precognition (awareness of events in the

future), and psychokinesis (control of matter by the mind alone); these she claims are now subject to experimental verification. We cannot go into all the scientific details, but Ferguson cites the discoveries of Ilya Prigogine (1977 Nobel Prize Winner) in brain research, Bell's theorem which proves rationally that our rational ideas of the world are profoundly deficient, Karl Pribram and David Bohm who propound the so-called "Holographic" theory of reality in which the solid material world is basically an illusion created by our minds. Reality in itself is not matter at all but more like what we call "spirit". Time and space are quite different from our ordinary experience of them. The old ideas of religious mystics come close to describing the kind of reality understood in the new world-view that Ferguson sees emerging in modern science.

This new view of reality, says Ferguson, is being discovered by a growing network of scientists and scholars in many different disciplines. The Aquarian Conspiracy is a con-spiracy, literally a "breathing together" of people who have been personally transformed by the new understanding of reality. When the new understanding spreads throughout the world, there will be a radical social transformation which will address and overcome the problems presently bedevilling the world.

Will there be a brighter day tomorrow?

As Ferguson herself admits, "The gold of transformation has inspired a whole generation of counterfeiterers". Where does the truth lie? Where should we who wish to follow Jesus take our stand? What should we do as the darkness falls or the dawn of a new world breaks? We'll look at this question in the third session later this afternoon.

#### Questions for Discussion in Session II

The aim of discussion in this session is to share insights about the possibility of a major transformation taking place in the world which would deal effectively with the problems discussed in Session I. Before the discussion, it is suggested that Jeremiah 32:1-15 be read. In this passage Jeremiah buys a plot of ground in Israel as a sign of trusting in God just before the invading armies of Babylon capture Jerusalem and take the inhabitants into exile.

1. Can you see any grounds for hoping that the crucial problems facing the world can be resolved?
2. What, in your opinion, are some of the "counterfeiterers" offering false or inadequate solutions to the problems of our world?
3. Do you think that the Christian religion will have an important role in the transformation of the world?

What Do We Do as the Dawn Breaks or the Darkness Falls?

Before we consider what we as Christians should do in the face of the deteriorating situation in the world, there are some things we should be clearly determined not to do.

We should not say "peace, peace" when there is no peace. In other words, we should not pretend to ourselves and to others that things are not really as bad as the gloomy doom-sayers claim they are. There can be no equivocating about the tragedy of the millions of people who are undernourished, the disappearing species of animals and birds, the insane wastage of diminishing resources in military hardware, and the proliferation of mega-death weapons all over the world. These problems will only get worse if nobody takes them seriously. The easy, doctrinaire optimism of our secular, humanistic ethos has been a major factor in creating the mess we are in. Christians should be the most realistic people of all because our understanding of human nature includes a realistic awareness of the tragic as well as the potential greatness of people. So we are not going to buy any "snow jobs" that mask the real situation in the world. Alvin Toffler's book, The Third Wave, is rather over-optimistic. It suggests that technological changes will be the main saving factor for our current problems. Unless there are changes of heart, it is not likely that improved technology by itself will improve the world much.

The second thing we should not do is to throw in the towel. This could take either of three forms: the first is the "eat, drink, and be merry" attitude, for tomorrow we die. There is certainly some of this thinking going on these days. The second way to throw in the towel is represented by the "Apocalypse-Armageddon" types of fundamentalist Christians who claim to be able to prove by the Bible and some ingenious mathematical calculations that the end of the world is coming before the year 2000, and there is nothing anybody can do about it except be sure your religious insurance policy of personal salvation is in good shape so you will not go down to destruction with the majority of human beings. The reason we cannot go along with this option is because it is fundamentally unbiblical, unfaithful, and unloving. The promise of the God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Jesus, and all the prophets was not to flush human history down the tubes but to fulfill the world in the Kingdom of God. If we give up on the world while making sure that we'll be okay, we have simply lost touch with the true Christian faith and are out of the tradition of Jesus whom God sent because "God so loved the world" (John 3:16).

There is one other way to throw in the towel and that is by simply despairing and

finding consolation in a pessimistic, cynical, self-pitying, or condemning attitude that neither works at resolving the problems of the world nor enjoys what can still be enjoyed in life. Ferguson notes this outlook when she says, "In our drawerful of cultural biases is the conviction that unhappiness is the mark of sensitivity and intelligence" (page 33). There really are what John Diefenbaker once called "prophets of doom and purveyors of gloom". Our Christian vocation is not to be "wet blankets". We are supposed to be ambassadors for the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is important to be clear what we are against, but it is even more important to be clear about what we are for.

This brings us to the first thing that I would suggest we should be doing as the dawn breaks or the darkness falls. It might be called "conscientization".

Conscientization is a term that has come into use from the "liberation theologies" of Latin America. It means increasing the awareness of the gospel to the point where a person becomes intentionally involved in the saving work of God in the world. It is a kind of conversion to mission based on a deeper understanding of God's nature and purposes. It also involves coming to a deeper understanding of the problems to which the gospel gives an answer. Conscientization is to awaken conscience, not in the sense of creating guilt feelings, but in the sense of waking people up to what they should do and be "in good conscience" if we wish to follow Jesus Christ. October quest itself is a process of conscientization if it deepens the intentionality and commitment to be more thoroughly Christian in our living.

Conscientization will involve a deeper engagement with the Bible because it is from the Bible that we get our understanding of the nature and purposes of God. It is from the Bible that we discover and test our understanding of the saving significance of Jesus Christ. The Bible is the handbook of the Christian Church; from the Bible we get the understanding of what the meaning and mission of the church should be. When we confess <sup>in</sup> the Nicene Creed that we believe the Church is apostolic -- what we mean is that the Church in every era of history should be basically or essentially the same as the church of the apostles who were the first eyewitnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible is the source of the gospel ideas that are learned in a process of conscientization.

The fundamentalists are right in looking to the scriptures as the authority for what they believe. Their mistake is in the way they study the Bible and the way they regard it as infallible or inerrant in all possible respects. The Bible was written by human beings in particular historical and cultural circumstances. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit to bear witness in faith to the acts of God, but they do not cease

being human beings who necessarily must speak and think and act out of a particular cultural context. Their witness that makes up our Scriptures is what St. Paul in II Corinthians 4:7 called "earthen vessels" or "clay pots" that hold the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible is a "clay pot", but it is the particular clay pot that holds the truth of God as revealed to the prophets and poets and wise ones of Israel and as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. If we are to be conscientized we have to drink deeply from the earthen vessel of scripture that God has providentially provided for us.

I personally doubt if we can hope to conscientize the coming generation unless we start teaching the Bible in schools. I am afraid this is a sort of hobby horse for me. I feel that it is extremely urgent that we re-establish the practice of teaching our young people at least the bare facts of the Biblical history. Prof. Northrup Frye of Victoria University in Toronto has said that we are raising a generation of highly intelligent but senile young people -- senile because they have lost their cultural memory which, in particular, is the memory of biblical history from which much of our cultural meaning and value has come.

It is not only the younger generation that is senile in this sense. Much of the meaning of the Biblical view of God has been lost to the majority of people in our culture. We spoke earlier about Jeremy Rifkin's emphasis on the biblical doctrine of God the creator who calls human beings to be stewards of creation. Rifkin is quite right that the belief in God as creator and the world as God's precious creation has been lost by default in our society to a secularized, so-called scientific view of evolution in which the world emerges by chance with no inherent purpose or value in itself except to provide human beings with a source of wealth. If we are conscientized we will be awakened to the power and presence of God the creator. We will have new respect and concern for the well being of all God's creatures. Happiness will not consist in negating nature as John Locke said. Success will not consist in increased accumulation of wealth as the Protestant work ethic suggested. Success will not be a matter of possessive individualism at all. A steward's focus of concern is not on what we possess but on what we are looking after. Success for a steward of creation means the preservation, health, and well-being of the creation. The joy of a steward is in the master's commendation at the end of the day, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord".

Very closely related to the theology of creation is the message of the Kingship or Reign of God which was the central message in Jesus' teachings and the gospel for which he worked and died. The message of the Kingdom is that God can be trusted to realize goodness among humankind through the presence of the Holy Spirit. God is

reigning and will reign in spite of the sin of the world which spoils human life and even the creation itself. God is present in Spirit all over the world, wherever there is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, temperance, and self-control -- what St. Paul called the fruit of the spirit. God reigns wherever there is truth and justice in whatever small fragments they occur. The message of the Kingdom of God is the basis for our hoping for a future for the world and its people in spite of the mess we are in. God's goodness in the world surpasses the evil that we can see so clearly. Ferguson in The Aquarian Conspiracy is right that the possibilities of transformation and renewal of society that come from the mystery of ultimate reality far exceeds our ability to imagine it. She says "we are untrained in expectancy". She hardly knows the biblical tradition at all but she has at least a partial vision of the God who was well known to the biblical writers. She speaks of God as "all-encompassing love, compassion, power -- the ground of being, the organizing matrix, that which enlivens matter". She makes no mention at all of the meaning of Jesus' death in which we see that the very worst that humanity can do to the very best cannot prevent the realization of God's purposes. The resurrection is the sign for us that God's Reign will come despite the worst that can happen in history.

There is a lot to learn in conscientization: a lot to learn about God and a lot to learn about the world. If we want to do something about circumstances in the world, then we have to take the time and trouble to find out about them. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said one time that "Ignorance is sin, if the knowledge is available to improve a situation". The United Church draws a lot of criticism because it asks its members to study this or that subject which some people think are largely irrelevant to the Christian faith: human sexuality, advertising, uranium, South Africa, North-South economic relations, Canadian nationalism, agriculture, native affairs, inner-city life, and so on. But these are precisely the kinds of things we have to know accurately if we are to love the world intelligently as God calls us to do. If conscientization is conversion to stewardship, we have to ask what good is a steward who doesn't know how to get into the barn? We have to know the world as well as God because the God whom we know in the Bible has called us to work in the world.

But we all cannot do everything and this suggests a second thing that we should do as the dawn breaks: Covenanting. Covenanting means joining together in groups with a common purpose and common objectives to work for common goals. The church as a whole is a covenanted community: we all enter the church under the sign of baptism which means that we take on the vocation of dying to sin and rising to new life in God's service, and we all celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion which also speaks of the

death and life of Christ that enters us in the Spirit and becomes part of us. We are already covenanted in a most basic way, but we need to covenant further with those who agree to work at specific tasks in God's vineyard.

The modern term is "network". It is in the networks of concerned people that specific problems are studied and acted upon. Both Ferguson and Toffler maintain that there already exist many networks of people with new understanding and new commitment to transform the world. Conscientization and covenanting are going on not only in the church but all over the world. God can bring about transformation beyond our power to imagine. That is the good news of the Kingdom of God. And we have been invited to join in the transforming work of God. The way we join is by covenanting, by getting into a network of people who are working at some specific task in the transformation of the world. It could be a church committee, a neighbourhood group, Amnesty International, the Mental Health Association, a Special Needs Housing Coalition -- the possibilities are endless. The important thing is that whatever network we choose to work in, we need to make the connections between our biblical faith and the work we do. Covenanting must connect with conscientization. For this reason there is a third thing we should be doing diligently as the dawn breaks: celebrating.

Celebrating is worship. Celebrating is remembering God, receiving God's Spirit, hearing God's word, hoping in God, and consecrating our lives to God. Celebrating is explicitly focussed on the meaning we discover in conscientization and the work we do in our covenant groups. It connects our practical concerns with our understanding of God. Worship is absolutely essential if we wish to be faithful stewards. We saw in the first session how wrong thinking contributes to the problems of the world. Good stewards have to be continually renewing their thinking. Celebration is the way we keep on track with the work of God.

Let me try to draw a word picture of what this three-fold process of conscientization, covenanting, and celebration might look like. You and I identify our desire to serve God as stewards in the world. We know we cannot do it alone so we seek to form or join a small group of others who have a similar conviction. We need a support group in which to learn more about our faith—a bible study group, or a home congregation, or a small group of some kind in the church to give the solidarity and companionship that will keep us growing in faith and awareness. We will enter into a covenant in this group to keep our conscientization alive and growing. And with the spiritual strength that we get from this group and from the celebration of worship in the larger congregation of the church, we go out into the world and work in some network or other that is trying to change the world for the better.

## Conclusion

The process of transformation of the world has already started in the awakening of people all over the world to the need for new ways of thinking. The dawn is going to break. God who made the world will remain faithful. God's love will not abandon the world to destruction. This is our hope. We will, therefore, not stand idly by and wring our hands while the world is wasted. We will join into covenant with all the people of God who work at the purposes of God's Kingdom. And we will celebrate God in memory and hope as we go on with our work.

## Questions for Discussion in Session III

The aim of this discussion is to consider what actual possibilities there are for Christians to contribute to the transformation of the world. Before starting discussion read Romans 12:1-21.

1. What are the facilities available to Christians to help us be "transformed by the renewing of (our) minds"? (Romans 12:2)
2. Would you be interested in joining a small group of committed Christians for on-going study, companionship, worship, and work? Do you think "house congregations" might add an important dimension to the life of our big church congregations?
3. What "networks" in society are represented in the discussion group? Do the members feel that they can adequately connect their Christian faith to their work in the social network?