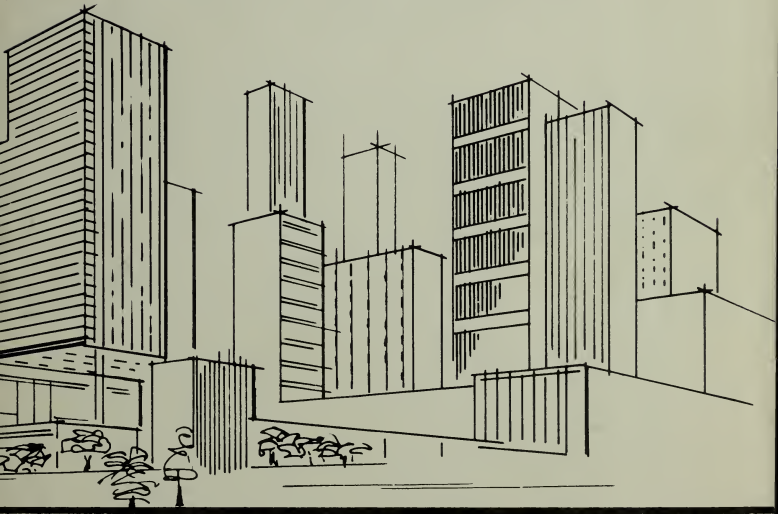


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Paul, VI, Pope, 1897-1978
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The Church and Urbanization

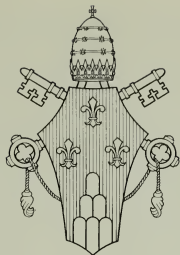


Letter to French Social Weeks
June 21, 1965



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***Letter sent on behalf of Pope Paul VI
by Amleto Cardinal Cicognani to Alain Barrere,
president of French Social Weeks, on the occasion
of the 52nd Social Week held in Brest,
July 9 to 14***

The French Social Weeks are preparing to hold in Brest their 52nd session, devoted to "Man and the Urban Revolution: Town and Country Dwellers and Urbanization." The Holy Father, to whom you outlined this project during the audience he recently granted to you and to Alfred Michelin and Roger Laviaille, has deigned to ask me to convey to you his blessing and his encouragement. It is with great pleasure that I fulfill this agreeable duty.

First of all, the Social Weeks Commission should be congratulated for not fearing to attack the study of phenomena the extent of which radically modifies the traditional way of life of millions of families, shatters the structure of society and is not without grave consequences for the social adjustment of individuals and of families and for their religious behavior. Before an upheaval of such magnitude the Christian cannot remain indifferent. He must reflect, not only on facts and their consequences but also on the values at stake, because beyond the technical problems and the options facing those responsible for urbanization it is man himself who is affected by the urbanization movement.

It is also important that we should ask ourselves what action

we should undertake in order that these absolute and permanent values, closely linked to human nature and in a necessary relation with the supernatural end of the person, should be not only safeguarded but possibly strengthened in the midst of these considerable changes in the history of mankind. In the course of its long history the Church has unceasingly defended these values against all threats. Which then are these values which any reflection on urbanization must consider as essential points of reference and the guiding principles for thought and action?

It is first of all the transcendence of the human person, which the Social Weeks, in accordance with the social doctrine of the Church, have always intended to proclaim and have always sought to undertake the appropriate action to ensure its safeguard effectively. Notably, this was the aim pursued at your last sessions, when socialization was studied at Grenoble, the emergence of youth at Rheims, and the democratic society at Caen, and then, last year, labor at Lyons. As you know, it is not a matter here of a vague "personalism" with uncertain outlines, but of a clear affirmation, solidly rooted in faith. The person is inviolate for the three-fold reason of its origin "in the image of God," its redemption by the Blood of Christ and its supernatural vocation for the beatific vision. It is a primary need which no structural evolution, no more than any temporal organization, can legitimately put in question.

Inseparable from the person is the family. This first social cell to which you recently devoted your work at Bordeaux is, like the person, inviolate for the very reason of its vital function and whatever the changes surrounding it and the transformations to which it has been subjected. While transmitting life, the home also transmits a whole heritage, spiritual and temporal at one and the same time, a precious heritage enriched by the contribution of successive generations. There the child receives, together with life, ways of thinking, feeling and acting which he gradually assimilates and through which he progressively makes the apprenticeship of his liberty. This also could not be diminished by any progress, nor could it be abrogated by any structure, without offending the inalienable prerogatives of the person.

To affirm the primacy of the personal and family values means to affirm at one and the same time and with the same stroke a third fundamental value: the primacy of the spiritual. As you happily showed at your Grenoble session, the twofold process

of personalization and socialization can be harmoniously combined if it upholds the complete development of the person, whose life is an essential component of the community. It is therefore the reference to the transcendent destiny of man which will serve as a norm for contingencies of a temporal order, all of which must be oriented toward supporting and promoting the spiritual order. This duty which man has toward himself and his traveling companions sets up rights which society recognizes in him, and whose exercise it must facilitate since it is not for him just a question of fulfilling a temporal destiny, but also of marching toward a destiny of which the stake is eternal.

It is in this light that you intend to submit your analyses and it is in accordance with these principles that you will take care to act, so that your reflection on urbanization will lead you to promote positive conditions for the development of man in the very midst of this urban revolution which tears individuals and families away from the social structures which enfolded them so far, throwing them into conditions of life hitherto unknown to history.

The phenomenon of urbanization is at one and at the same time the sign, the cause and the effect of a radical transformation in society, and of a profound change in human psychology. Man, who until recently was settled on his land or in his town, has become mobile. From being rooted, he has become migrant, either temporarily or definitely. Once solidly installed in the social surroundings of his birth, he is now torn asunder among a plurality of diverse and heterogeneous allegiances in the midst of which he suffers solitude. The growth of the towns, often anarchic and gigantic, added to the expansion of audio-visual means of diffusion, entails for many an uprooting from the original way of life and a "banalization of thought" which tend to depersonalize man and to make him vulnerable to manifold dissolving influences.

The urban revolution gives rise to new cultural, economic and political processes. Man is exposed to losing himself in anonymity: anonymity in the great enterprise where he works; anonymity in the means of transport, where we elbow one another without knowing each other; anonymity of the masses which are but agglomerations of solitude; anonymity of leisure time and holidays, where relations are only occasional and fleeting; anonymity of thought rendered uniform by the spreading of mass media.

The same is the case as regards the great ensembles where it

happens that everything has been foreseen except that which would permit a home to be itself, both within itself as well as in the neighborhood, freely accepted and the source of friendly relations. If we add that the family is far too often dispersed owing to the demands of work, time-tables and at times even by the staggering of vacations, we see the importance of the transformations to be wrought to enable town dwellers to form for themselves a family circle where the persons can develop and at the same time open themselves outwards and establish solid community links within the urban framework.

There is no question, when thus emphasizing what has been called "the maladies of the city," of giving in to useless regrets before the inevitable disappearance of a past which certainly did not bring only advantages. But it is necessary to take note of the changes in progress in order to orient them as much as possible toward greater humanity and spirituality.

It is undoubtedly difficult to check the movement toward concentration in the great cities, although its very excess is a growing source of unbalance within the national communities. Historical evolution, technical progress, the network of communications, the centralization of political authority and the intellectual and cultural attraction of the great metropolises all combine their influence to draw toward them greater and greater masses. Yet, the experience of the past few years has proved that a concerted combination of administrative and economic measures can stimulate the life of a regressing province and not only check a process of deterioration which seemed inevitable but also give it a new, healthy life by creating poles of development, new industries and new centers of population. A new symbiosis thus comes into being, through controlled urbanization, between an organized countryside and a city established on a human scale.

The humanization of towns which have grown out of proportion proves, however, to be the most arduous as well as the most urgent of tasks. Too many coercions have often weighed in an interested and anarchic way on the growth of the cities, while the inadequacy of the responsible authorities and the hazards of unsuitable regulations prevented the urban fabric from developing according to the needs of the common good. Without fear of offending certain deep-rooted habits of the mind, one must set up the institutional and financial mechanisms which will help to

give a new visage to the great cities, in order to make them better able to fulfill their primary vocation: assuring to all the best conditions of life, harmonizing the demands of environment and of work, and offering the services of collective equipment which requires a certain concentration for an economic return.

That is to say that to put cities in proper order demands courageous decisions, which will not pass without stirring up notions alleged to be traditional but which are in fact only the abusive protection of particular interests.

There should be no fear, for example, of recalling that the right of property must never be exercised to the detriment of common utility, according to the traditional teaching of the Fathers of the Church and the great theologians. Here, we doubtless find an unhappy conflict to be surmounted between private acquired rights and primordial communal exigencies. The vocation of the public powers, the guardians of the common good, is to apply themselves to the solution of this, with the active participation of persons and of social groups to be brought into the search for ends as in the choice of means.

It is at this price that the organization of urban space for men will be accomplished according to the social demands of the Gospel message, whose ferment has not lost its power of shattering the selfishness of individuals and groups, if only somebody has the courage to spread it. Officials must therefore rise above considerations of immediate expediency and sound the call for personal sacrifices which are indispensable if the urban agglomeration is to be truly built for the service of man.

It goes without saying that this should be done only while taking care to avoid useless sacrifices, dishonest speculation and everything that would be merely the satisfaction of new selfishness under the guise of public usefulness. Care should also be taken to ensure the indemnization postulated by legitimate private rights and to take into account esthetic and artistic considerations, which must never be neglected if man is to be given harmonious and well balanced surroundings. For it is man as a whole who must find in this framework the best living conditions, for his soul and his spirit as well as for his body. This is the task of urbanization: to ensure the development of persons and families and their social integration in groups which are neither anarchic nor tyrannical

but are adapted to the requirements of the individual and of the community.

Needless to say, it is not enough to ensure the satisfaction of bodily needs and of legitimate economic and cultural requirements. It is also necessary to help individuals to fulfill themselves in their totality, including their relationship with God. Many painstaking sociological enquiries have already enabled responsible pastors to assess the transformations to be made and the decisions to be implemented to ensure the opportunity of worship in the new cities and in the new districts. But it is not enough to put up churches nor even to create parish centers. It is the pastoral effort as a whole which must be adapted to a new situation which concerns all the parishes, those in the country as well as those in the cities, owing to the extreme mobility which characterizes the man of urban civilization. How many fields are opened up for the activities of the clergy and for the lay apostolate through general and specialized Catholic activity as well as through an active presence in the organisms in which the future society is being shaped! How could we help seeing the contribution which could be given to this society by the professional competence and the enlightened collaboration of men with a sharp sense of spiritual and religious needs in the service of the common good.

It is indeed a new civilization which is being constructed through the urbanization movement which shapes the present-day world. Christians owe it to themselves to be present in it and to work for the establishment of a society in which individuals can develop in faithfulness to their transcendental vocation as future citizens of the City of God. They will thus collaborate in the plan of love of the Lord and in the great movement of Biblical history which started in a garden (*Gen.* 2-3) and ends in a city, the new Jerusalem.

Undoubtedly, the forthcoming Social Weeks will give a fruitful contribution to the study of the problems of urbanization, viewed in the light of the Gospel and of the social doctrine of the Church. Under the benevolent authority of Bishop Andre Fauvel of Quimper and his zealous auxiliary, those taking part will be guided in their reflection by training courses and round tables, both general and specialized, which will enable them to receive authoritative teaching while at the same time taking part in research through brotherly conversations.

The Holy Father wholeheartedly calls down on this work, on its organizers and on all those taking part, the abundance of divine graces as a pledge of which he sends you an apostolic blessing.

I am happy to convey to you these precious encouragements and I add to them my best wishes for the good success of the Social Week of Brest, and assure you, Mr. President, of my entire devotion in Jesus Christ.

Letter dated June 21, 1965

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