

BILL from Willis

Comments requested on 4Nov76 Paul Kittlaus' "Pronouncement on the New Urban Agenda"
9Nov76

[Paul Kittlaus decided against coming to Chappaqua, and Larry Schultz may come. Chappaqua is aware of Larry's Mobil/S.Africa action--Mobil's chief lawyer, who wrote the official company defense against Larry's attack, is a former deacon in our church, but recently moved elsewhere because of "disappointments" with what's happening to the church. The committee was impressed with (1) how knowledgeable Larry is about what's happening in Rhodesia.-S.Africa (oil leakage, etc.) and (2) his ignorance of how to get things done in-through U.S. business/government. I've talked with the search committee members, and Larry's social-action smell is NOT a hindrance! E.g., the pres. and bd.chm. of Irving Trust admires the church for conscience-raising about business, and pleads only for real and sweaty dialog enough to overcome ignorance.]

That long paragraph on Larry is off-the-wall on Paul's aim "to reclaim the city as a focus for ministry."

I have no problem either with the goal
or with its wording.

My problem has to do with substance: the longer I think of the phrase, the more it feels like a vague slogan.

Cities are involved in the first paragraph of this note: Salisbury, Johannesburg, New York (including Chappaqua).

In our Bible study this morning, the cities of Jerusalem and Rome were axial--and the Stoics' vision of the universe as model city [cosmopolis].

What now is NOT the city? Plains GA? Not any more!

You know our city as few ministers have ever known their cities, and you know that the power of a city to address its problems, which are increasingly complex, is diminishing--and that we must become more sophisticated about all three: social power, responsibility structures and processes, and "ministry in the city."

The "Goals" [pp.8-11] seem to me unexceptionable for anyone sharing the biblical egalitarian vision [on which Norm Gottwald is great: #878, which you got yesterday]. The categories of advocations [pp.11-13], and the advocations themselves, I like; but the advocations to the church give me some pause:

1. While in the national UCC office I was on a number of "interinstrumentality staff team"s on "urban agenda"--teams that got almost nowhere because the work of the team was just one more time-eating thing in an already bloated portfolio: we could take little time for the team talk/action, so virtually all the time went into talk. What prospect is there that such a team now would be less actionless?
2. "A revitalized urban agenda for the UCC" feels Constantinian and palely triumphalistic. I never was partial to the '60s slogan "The world writes the agenda," but church agenda for the world even more turns me off, except guidelines.
3. The church as church local and larger has collective responsibility for prayer, informed reflection, service, and the witness involved in the pro-human uses of all its collective powers--so we MUST, at the national UCC level, participate in / form such groups as will serve to (1) inform staff, (2) provide opportunity for staff to contribute to public thinking [government, business, education], (3) prepare staff for its functions vis-a-vis UCC folk. But little can be accomplished through incestuous, intrastaff groups: listen/respond to the laity in/out of power!

A good model of ministry: I've been distributing, to executives in multinationals, Irwin Miller's piece in the current WORLDVIEW. All of them I've had conversations with voted for Jimmy Carter "because he's a businessman himself and knows our problems": they won't much listen to Larry Schultz or me on multinationals, but they will Irwin Miller, one of their own kind.