The Lamplighter.

CHURCH AND CITY

(Dr. Ralph Conant, Assistant to the Director, Joint Center for Urban Studies at M.I.T. and Harvard, is an active Unitarian Universalist layman and is serving currently as a member of the UUA Committee on Goals.)

Experts who know social trends in urban America freely predict that the culturally and economically deprived will, in a few years, comprise the bulk of the population who reside in the central cities of our metropolitan regions. The prediction is already a fact in some cities; merely inevitable in others. Part of the reason is that the urban poor are increasing in numbers at least as fast as other segments of the population but that the city boundaries within which they are confined are not expanding. In some places the only housing the poor can afford is in the old central city. More often the difficulties are made worse by local, state and federal policies which mitigate against outward mobility. Large lot zoning in suburbs is only one blatant example of a systematic exclusion policy of local government. State legislatures refuse to develop annexation legislation that would allow central cities to gain elbow room. The federal government is at best not aggressive about devising policies that would relieve the pressures that compel the poor to remain in the core city. An overriding complication in this whole matter of social blight in the central city is the hard fact that so many of the urban poor are Negroes.

It is not simply pessimistic to say that there is no visible way out of the situation; it is realistic—inexorable.

What does this mean for the urban institutions that have thrived and become great precisely because enough people of means congregated in the place called city to make possible an amassing of vital resources of support? Take away the traditional clientele, the middle-class market, the people of means, and you risk starving out of existence the institutions they created: the educational systems, the libraries, the churches and most of the rest.

Do these institutions really die? Many will, or become tragic parodies of what they were. The public school systems of core cities are already teetering on the brink of disruption and chaos. Libraries are scurrying to develop respectable branches into which the old central institutions can disperse if the going gets too rough. Scores of great urban churches have disappeared and others are on the way out. Some institutions will survive because they find a new clientele among the urban poor. Others will retain accustomed vitality because accident or rare foresight provided a location of easy access to a suburban clientele.

But surviving in the central city is not the same thing as surviving in the service of the central city. The hard reality is that the middle and upper class oriented institutions of the old core city will not and cannot do the latter. The social problems are too complicated and too thorny for such institutions as libraries, churches and museums.

Speaking directly to the problem of the church institution, as this article demands, it seems obvious that such efforts as social action programs prompted by feelings of moral obligation are bound to be adjudged ineffective forays by poorly informed do-gooders who may end by doing more harm than good.

The church—our denomination or any other—is ill-equipped to tackle the vast web of problems associated with the urban poor. There is little the church can do directly to alleviate the tragic hardships of the masses who crowd into the old neighborhoods.

Yet collectively and on a massive scale the church as an influential segment of the local and national body politic can articulate a sense of moral commitment to reshape the public policies that grind down or fail to uplift the human beings who by fault or default rest inert at the bottom of our society.

The church as a national institution can and should undertake to identify the critical issues of urban life, work to establish a denominational consensus on modes of resolution, perhaps seek support from other like-minded denominations, and press for action at sources of public authority.

Does the Unitarian Universalist Association support the principle of open occupancy in metropolitan areas? Does the Association support equality of job opportunities regardless of race, color or social condition? Does the Association support integrated public schools in metropolitan areas? Does the Association stand for decent, safe and sanitary housing for all persons regardless of economic circumstances? Does the Association support proposed programs of adequate health care regardless of ability to pay?

These are the important issues of our time and they are issues the outcome of which will determine the destiny of cities; the quality and texture of life in urban America; ultimately the fate of institutions like the church that have heretofore been responsible for the moral and intellectual tone of our society. The church can continue to make a contribution to the inner city, but no longer in fragments. The scope of the problems has outrun the potential of individual action.

RALPH CONANT

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- **Do you believe** man is capable of self-improvement and is not condemned by "original sin"?
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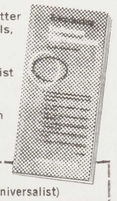

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Ad #2

AN EVENING AT THE GARDNER MUSEUM

Boston is the home of many fine museums. Several are nationally known—but one of them is so unusual as to be unique in the world. It is the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, a richly varied private collection housed in the opulent splendor of a palace in the Renaissance style. On Sunday, May 23, the Gardner Museum will be the setting for the Laymen's League reception for visiting UUA delegates and their friends — a truly glamorous occasion to start the week of the Assembly.

If the idea of an Italian palace in Boston sounds fantastic—well, it is! The museum, especially built to house Mrs. Gardner's art collection, is designed around a cloistered courtyard. Three floors surround the court which for the reception will be ablaze with hydrangeas and calceolarias, a breathtaking sight. Lights glow softly, illuminating pink washed walls, stone-framed windows and statues. The museum incorporates many architectural details that Mrs. Gardner bought on her trips abroad, and the impression is of a balconied palazzo on the Grand Canal while in the great rooms beyond the open windows, candelabra light paintings, antique furniture, tapestries, grillwork and statuary.

Those attending the reception will be free to roam at will through the museum, looking at masterpieces by Rubens, Titian, Botticelli, Giorgione, Rembrandt, Van Dyck and many others. The entertainment will be of an unusual musical nature. You may either sit and listen or enjoy the music as a background for this delightful occasion. Guests of honor will be outgoing officers of the League and the Women's Federation, and their successors. A champagne bowl and light refreshments will be served.

The museum is being specially opened for our organization through the courtesy of the Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

About the Gardner Museum

Isabella Stewart Gardner was a prominent Bostonian. Although born in New York City, Boston became her home for the rest of her life when she married John Lowell Gardner in 1860. Her husband died in 1898 having shared with her the delight and entertainment of collecting. In 1900, Fenway Court, the museum building which they had planned, was begun and the museum was incorporated. Mrs. Gardner lived in the building from 1902 until her death 22 years later. During construction, she closely supervised the project. By her will the museum is maintained "for the education and enjoyment of the public forever." Isabella Stewart Gardner made many friends in the world of the arts. Bernard Berenson advised her on many of her purchases and John Singer Sargent painted her portrait, which may be seen on the third floor. The museum is her own private collection and as such is a uniquely personal memorial to an unusual and perceptive woman.

Special Luncheon

One of the high points of the General Assembly will be the League Luncheon on Monday, May 24th at Boston's Statler Hotel. The principal speaker is author and sociologist Michael Harrington, whose best selling book *The Other America* is credited with initiating the "War on Poverty." He is Chairman of the Board of the League for Industrial Democracy.

Michael Harrington was born in 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended Holy Cross College, Yale University Law School and gained his MA from the University of Chicago in 1949. Now a freelance writer he has been associate editor of *The Catholic Worker* and organizing secretary of the Workers' Defense League. He does not consider himself a Catholic—"though I'm not one of those Angry Non Catholics!"

Now married and living in New York his name was in the news last year when he was arrested during a civil rights demonstration at the World's Fair.

Michael Harrington

REGISTRATION FORM

- ☐ I shall attend the League Reception on Sunday evening, May 23. Please make ..... reservations in my name.
- ☐ I shall attend the League Business Meeting on Monday, May 24.
- ☐ I would like a reservation form for the Michael Harrington Luncheon.
- ☐ I would like additional information about the above events.

Registration Fee—$3.00 per person—should be enclosed with this form.

Name .....

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