

THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

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## THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

### I. WHERE HAVE WE GONE WRONG?

Why was this topic selected for discussion at this Study Conference? What are the factors within the total life experience of the North American Christians in 1974 that warrant valuable time being taken on this delicate and unpopular subject? How might the Biblical teachings concerning the Christian and his material possessions, which are generally well known to our people, be repackaged and freshened so that they speak loudly and clearly, and demand from each of us a thoughtful and considered response? These are some of the questions that preoccupied me when preparing this paper.

What, then, is new and different in 1974? First, it is safe to state that, as a total brotherhood, we are wealthier today than we have ever been before. It is also safe to say that there are larger masses of people in the world today who are desperately needy in spirit and in body than there have ever been before. We are speaking, then, of an immense resource scattered amongst a people whom God owns and an immense need residing in a people whom God loves; and we are saying that the resource is not adequately responding to the need. If this is so, then, according to the teachings of Scripture something is out of phase.

Or, are we as a Conference in fact 'in phase', and meeting our fair share of the missionary, relief and development needs of the world, "as God has prospered?" A partial answer respecting the Canadian Conference is found in George Epp's, M.B. Herald article, "What The Statistics Tell."<sup>1</sup> Canadian M.B.'s contributed an average of \$255.00 to church treasuries during 1973. After domestic needs were met there remained a per member

average of \$52.75 for the combined needs of Missions / Services and MCC, or, a daily per member contribution of 14 cents. Are these amounts 'in phase' with "as God has prospered?" - with the need for evangelism at home and abroad? - with the cries for food, clothing, health and shelter in overseas countries? - with our own personal needs in North America?

How extensive do our personal needs in North America seem to be? As a devout people of God, our personal needs appear strangely similar to the needs of all other affluent people about us who make no claims of being the people of God. We ~~need~~ houses of similar ornateness, size and cost; we need similarly oversized and overpriced automobiles; we need both summer and winter vacations, one of which should really be enjoyed overseas; we need increasing real estate, insurance, pensions, savings and securities; and one could go on.

Not long ago, in the terminology of David Riesman's, Lonely Crowd, we were an "inner-directed" people, guided in our behaviour by an inner gyroscope. During the last few decades, however, we have assimilated into North American culture so effectively that we have, with the rest of society, become "other-directed", taking our behavioural cues from our little antennae that tells us what others about us are doing.

What, then, has gone wrong, for we were not called to be a conformed, other-directed people; but we were called to be a transformed, spirit-directed people (Romans 12:1-2). (What really does it mean in terms of stewardship to be transformed in the Biblical sense, for a Christian living in Winnipeg today on a \$10,000 - 30,000 income? I wish someone would address this question.) Neither have we been called to make a good impression on others (Philippians 2:3), which so much of our conformity seems to be directed at. Where, then, have our simplicity and humility and those other Biblical indicators of a people genuinely following Jesus in devout

*our needs  
our wants*

discipleship gone? Why have they left so many of us? How did it happen that we allowed these essential Christian virtues to drop away from our lifestyle? Has, perchance, our newly acquired wealth and economic independence replaced our former obedience to the Scriptures call for, and Christ's example of, a modest level of living? Or, would our mode of living never have been modest if it had not been a matter of necessity?

## II, THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

The crucial question which all these preceding questions leads up to is this: Is the root of the problem this paper addresses really an inadequate stewardship of material possessions on our part, coupled with a steady drift into social conformity and a love for more material things? Or does the root of the problem pierce deeper - namely into the general spiritual health of our people? If, indeed, it is the latter then the cure is not to be found primarily in more and better sermons and papers on stewardship and modesty of lifestyle. Rather, the cure lies primarily in each of us examining humbly and honestly the quality of our personal relationship to Jesus Christ and to our fellowman in the light of the total scriptural account.

Most of those who have seriously studied and written about the Christian and his stewardship of material possessions emphasize that where stewardship is poor the root cause lies in the sin of covetousness, which in turn is the root sin of most other sins (I Timothy 6:10).<sup>2</sup> Milo Kauffman in, The Challenge Of Christian Stewardship, has said, "The farther people are from God, the more difficult it is for them to give, and the more likely they are to be overcome by covetousness. This is illustrated in the lives of men like Cain, Achan, Ahab and Judas."<sup>3</sup>

Christian stewardship is not possible apart from spirituality while genuine spirituality must result in a sense of stewardship. The Old Testament relates that unfaithfulness to God and failure in bringing the tithes to God went hand in hand. When revival came, a restoring of the tithes followed.

This relationship is paralleled in the New Testament. Right relationships with God result in right attitudes to possessions. Kauffman says that the nearer men are to God, the less will be the grip of material things upon them. When the publican Zacchaeus met the Lord and yielded to Him he said, "The half of my goods I give to the poor." Jesus answered, "This day is salvation come to this house." Helge Brattgard, a Swedish Lutheran theologian, makes a similar point in his book, God's Stewards, but much more pointedly. A perverted attitude to material things, he said, demonstrates a basic lack of trust in God, and hence is sin. "Instead of ruling over them in sovereign freedom, and instead of using his possessions for doing good, he worships them and believes that he can derive courage and confidence from them." <sup>4</sup> He says that God's wrath rests upon such a way of life because it is characterized by idolatry and is therefore a contradiction of the first commandment. When the name of an idol is given in the New Testament the name which is usually used is Mammon - man's property. The fundamental sin of whatever love we may have for our property is stated clearly in Matthew 6:24. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." C.J. Dyck, in his booklet, They Gave Themselves, puts it even more bluntly. Those of us who love money more than we love Jesus Christ are indulging in "plain pagan idolatry." <sup>5</sup> Love of Christ and love of temporal property do not mix. The rich young ruler serves as a tragic illustration of one who was

forced to decide between Christ and Mammon (Matthew 19:21). He really wanted to love both, but this option was not open to him. And as surely as he was not able to have it both ways, you and I cannot have it both ways. We must make a choice.

Why then does God place so much importance upon the Christian's attitude to his possessions? Does God need our money? Is His economy also on the gold standard? Can He not achieve His eternal purposes apart from the dollar? ~~Jesus~~<sup>Paul</sup> answered these questions when He said to His disciples, "I seek not what is yours, but you" (II Corinthians 12:14). But in having us He must also have what is ours, or there will remain a divided and conflicting loyalty within us, which is not good for us. For a divided loyalty means a violation of both the first and last commandments. A divided loyalty will also result in a continuing state of tension within our lives - the kind of tension and anxiety that comes from a major, unresolved issue that one day must be faced.

The root of the problem, then, where the issues of Biblical stewardship have not been squarely faced by a Christian, or a congregation, or a brotherhood, is not stewardship but simply sin - sin which takes such forms as a lack of commitment, disobedience, lack of trust, covetousness and idolatry.

### III. STEWARDSHIP IS PRIMARILY FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHRISTIAN

Christian stewardship is God's way of enriching the life of the Christian and leading him to a deeper experience with Himself - making him a partner with God. It has been said that the Jewish tithe was not for the sake of the tithe, but for the sake of the Jew. Similarly, Christian stewardship is primarily for the sake of the Christian. It will

help~~y~~ make God real to him. It will help him conquer selfishness and covetousness. It will help give him mastery over himself and his passions. It will help remove the sense of frustration and uselessness. It will give him a greater interest in the kingdom, and will give him a sense of partnership with God. <sup>6</sup>

This view of stewardship on God's part should result in a parallel motivation for stewardship on the part of the Christian. Kauffman referred to this when he indicated that just as stewardship is not a scheme of God to take something from man, so it must not become man's scheme for raising money for the purposes of the church. The primary purpose should be the development of Christian character, the right relationship of man with God, and man with man, and the enrichment of spiritual life. <sup>7</sup>

I must confess that this view, that Christian stewardship was intended primarily for the growth and maturity of the Christian, rather than for ministries to non-Christians and the hungry, ~~comes~~<sup>came</sup> to me with a new clarity and I believe that it has deep significance. If this indeed is the Biblical view then why are ministers so reluctant to preach with conviction and joy on stewardship as a basic essential to Christian growth and blessing? Is the timidity and the near-apologetic tone with which stewardship seems so often to be approached based on the false assumption that God is about to take something from the Christian, rather than give him something?

The falseness of this assumption should surely not be a surprise to any Bible-reading Christian. If any doubt remains that God will permit Himself to become a debtor to a faithful Christian steward then let this doubt be dispelled. Our Lord said, "Give and it shall be given unto you." Paul said that if we sow bountifully we will also reap bountifully. God says, "Prove me...bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse...if I will



not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be enough room to receive it." The writer of Proverbs says, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Surely in the light of these teachings the minister who can lead his congregation into an attitude and a practice of Christian stewardship is doing them the greatest possible service. He is helping to open the windows of heaven to them!

There is a prevalent misconception that Christian stewardship is an option that a Christian may accept or reject like chrome hub caps on a car. Stewardship is not an option but a basic requirement of every Christian. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give" (II Corinthians 9:7). It would seem that the reason God has not left stewardship as an option but insisted that it be an essential is because He is desirous of blessing all his children.

Some of the blessings or rewards in store for the Christian steward have been mentioned, but there are many more. The Christian steward has acknowledged by his attitude that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. Seeing material things of the earth in this context is a great relief to the Christian for it settles the question of ownership of both self and property and clearly asserts the Christian imperative of stewardship. Brattgard says simply that, "man receives things in order to get rid of them: Give to the poor! When this attitude is lacking, everything is lacking."<sup>8</sup> The Christian steward has the joy of knowing that he has become a fellow-labourer, and has entered into a fuller partnership with Christ in His great ministry of reconciliation, healing, teaching, feeding and caring for those in need of Christian love. From the close association with Christ that this partnership creates, the

steward can constantly draw upon the boundless love and compassion of Christ, without which His gifts are meaningless and unacceptable to God. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and though I give my body to be burned and have not love it profiteth me nothing" (II Corinthians 13:3). That an acceptable measure of love and compassion constantly motivate our giving of goods to the poor is not an idle concern. It has been said that many North American Christians suffer from a serious infection of "compassion fatigue". The continuous bombardment of full color sights and sounds of naked, starving and suffering people desperately in need of the gospel and of Christian compassion has of necessity built up resistance or defense mechanisms in us and thereby has blunted our sensitivities. How can we remain sensitive and responsive apart from drawing continuously on the inexhaustible love and compassion of our Lord? We dare not become mechanical and legalistic in our giving (stewardship), as the Pharisees also gave large amounts yet their gifts were not acceptable to the Lord. The Christian living in close fellowship with his Lord is privileged daily to draw upon His reservoir of love as a motivation for sharing his material possessions.

In returning to God voluntarily, regularly, abundantly and cheerfully, as God has prospered, the Christian steward gives evidence that he is no longer bound by the grip of Mammon; that he has been liberated, and set free from the enslaving love of material things for their own sake; that he and all that he possesses has been bought with a high price and that he is no longer his own possession; that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; that he has entered into a full and immensely rewarding partnership with Christ in reconciling alienated men and women to God and in healing, feeding, housing, and visiting the needy, in the name of Christ. Who, then, could possibly benefit more from faithful stewardship than the

faithful Christian himself? (Indeed stewardship is primarily for the good of the Christian!

#### IV. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

While it is true that stewardship is primarily for the good of the Christian, this is only one side of the stewardship coin. The other side is the kingdom work that cries out to be done and which Christ in His wisdom has commissioned His Church to do. The Church, in turn, depends heavily on immense amounts of financial support from the Christian community to respond in obedience to this commission.

The despairing details of this side of the coin hardly need full description as the hungry, sick and desperate expressions in the eyes of the Bangladesh Bengali and the Ethiopian mother with bloated child, featured on the last night's color television news, is still stark and vivid in our minds.

Furthermore, it is quite beyond our imagination to grasp the long term impact on fellow human beings, of a daily world population increase of 200,000 and a monthly increase of 6 million, one million of which monthly is added to the population of India. And with the exponential growth rate of population the net increase per day and per month is constantly increasing. At present rates of increase, today's world population of 3.8 billion will have doubled to 7.6 billion in the next 30 years. Seventy to eighty percent of the additional 3.8 billion will be born in Asia, Africa and Latin America - where the Mennonite Brethren have active missionary programs - and where already the lean and dry soils in many places cannot keep existing populations alive.

Never before have informed and responsible statesmen and scientists predicted with a greater measure of concern and urgency the imminence of

massive food shortages and global starvation then during the past 12 months. Should these predictions come true, as is feared they will, then what will we say to, or be able to do for, those thousands of brothers and sisters in our own "household of faith" in India, Colombia, Zaire and those other countries to which we send missionaries - not to mention those to which we do not. When this day arrives, how will we then "enjoy" our affluence and our day to day preoccupation with making money here in North America? And along with our concern for food for the bodies of our far away brethren, we must of course continue to provide food for their souls and minds, for they also, do not live by bread alone. The challenge to the Christian Church - to the Mennonite Brethren Church - is a staggering one indeed. We can throw up our hands in despair and hopelessness, which would be the easy un-Christian way out. Or, we can, in obedient and confident stewardship, turn over to God the loaves and fishes that we have, and trust Him again to multiply them before the multitude as He once did by the seaside in Galilee.

There is encouraging and hopeful evidence that God is at work among our people and that we are choosing the latter course. I believe that our MCC and Mennonite Brethren leadership has recently heard the voice of Christ again say to His disciples, "Give ye them to eat." At the January, 1974 Annual Meeting of MCC held in Hillsboro, an eight-point resolution on the "World Food Crisis" was adopted unanimously which committed MCC to an ambitious program of study, education and action on this issue. An MCC sponsored World Food and Famine Seminar is being held in Washington, D.C. next week as a part of this program. Then in February, the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions and Services, at it's meeting in Winnipeg, endorsed a similar resolution, also committing itself to a vigorous

program of agricultural missions, and so responding boldly and courageously to the Voice that said, "Give ye them to eat." I am personally grateful to our leadership for their sensitivity in hearing this Voice, and for its courage in responding in faith by saying in effect, "Here Lord, take our two loaves and five fishes," and multiply them in Asia, in Africa and among our friends in South America. How better could the love of Christ "be made flesh" and be preached to a hungry people than if, added to the preaching there was also teaching about how the patches of rice and wheat and millet could yield enough to keep the angel of death at bay?

Committing the brotherhood to such a mission was a bold act of faith on the part of our leadership because the difficulties associated with a church related agency launching an effective program of this type are enormous. Apart from the primary challenge of enlisting adequate, qualified staff there will be the need for an immense amount of money voluntarily given by the constituency.

There is, however, an urgency and future uncertainty about us sharing our material possessions in Kingdom ministries of love and compassion. The danger is that the longer we delay in putting our Kingdom money to work the more likely we, who may be saving our money for another day, may be the ones described in James 5:1-3, as inflation continues to waste away the value of the dollar.

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasures together for the last days.

I am not certain of my theology in using this passage in this context, but I believe it to be sound economics. I know of a national relief agency that was able to purchase for overseas use, 40 percent less food for this

year than intended with its fixed dollar budget, because of the inflationary rise of food prices. Who knows how much less a dollar will purchase next year and the year after that, because of the "cankers" and "rust" that are so rapidly "corrupting" the dollar and sapping its value.

An evangelical church leader of international stature I spoke with a few weeks ago expressed deep concern lest the church may have missed its golden opportunity during the sixties and early seventies for missions and services, especially in the area of food production. The recent tripling of energy costs and with that the costs of fertilizer and other essentials for large scale increases in food supplies, has almost crippled the efforts of those now dedicated to helping third-world countries increase their food production. We might well ask whether the judgement pronounced in James 5:1 will also come upon us because we waited too long. "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you."

These few paragraphs do not begin to do justice to describing the spiritual, physical and social needs that exist at home and abroad among the people Jesus referred to in Matthew 25. Jesus said with awesome clarity that whoever refuses to clothe, give food, give drink or visit these people in need, they have refused to minister to His needs and, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (vs. 45). As a materially prosperous brotherhood we need to give careful thought as to whether the warnings of punishment to come upon the Christian who has little concern about God's claim on his material possessions, as noted in James 5 and Matthew 25, might also apply to us, and whether they should be taken seriously.

Indeed, Biblical stewardship is primarily for the good of the Christian for it gives evidence that he has been liberated from the enticing and

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (II Corinthians 8:12).

The crunch question for many of us today is to determine that adequate and proper proportion of our income that we should give to the Lord's work.

Many Christians, for various reasons, want no mention made of the tithe as representing that minimum proper proportion, notwithstanding the fact that nearly all Biblical references to that "proper proportion" speak of the tithe. One rationalization for this view is that the tithe smacks of legalism and we are no longer under the Law. But Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). Jesus' standard was always higher than the law, never lower (Matthew 5:17-48). Similarly the Christian should not come under the law because he too should be living above the law, as Jesus did. Likewise, Canadian Christians should not have to come under the Canadian criminal law because they should be living above it. However, the moment they live below that law, they come under it.

Might this not teach us something about the tithe? Christians should not come under the law of the tithe because they should be living above it. However, the moment they live below the law of the tithe, would they then not come under it? Should the acceptable New Testament standard of giving be lower than the Old Testament standard which Jesus wholly endorsed (Matthew 23:23). Under the law, "Giving as God prospered," was giving the tithe, or more. Would it be less under grace? Would it not be more? Considerably more perhaps, for Christians earning \$20,000 to \$50,000 dollars in an unevangelized and hungry world?

2. Proportionate to the income *Deut 16:17*  
*Exod 23:10, 16*  
*Lev 5:11:29*

3. Regular And Systematic

Although Paul's account of the Macedonian offering of the saints in Jerusalem teaches us that Christians should be generous when special needs arise, giving, as a usual practice should not be impulsive and spasmodic. Rather it should be a premeditated matter of the will - it should be regular and systematic.

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him... (I Corinthians 16:2).

This teaching should warn us to beware the skillful emotional manipulators who, as angels of Light, have frequently applied so smoothly their fund-raising art in our communities - raising thousands of dollars. Paul's teaching suggests a deliberate, ordered and regular approach to giving.

4. Abundant And Cheerful

...so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver (II Corinthians 9:7).

Giving reluctantly or under protest does not please God. Such giving suggests that the gift still has a hold on the giver - that the last ties with Mammon have not yet been severed. God is pleased only if the giver is crystal clear about his ultimate allegiance, and is pleased to symbolize with his gifts the total commitment of himself and his possessions to Christ. A Christian wholly committed to Christ will give joyfully and abundantly. Of the Macedonians, Paul wrote:

How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality (II Corinthians 8:2).

The issue before us Mennonite Brethren today is that of giving cheerfully and abundantly from our riches. Thanks be to God, many of our people do respond abundantly and cheerfully when faced with the facts of a large mission deficit or of typhoons, droughts or war in Bangladesh, Upper Volta

*budget?*  
*church assessments?*



or Biafra. But many others do not respond according to their riches.

The great lesson to be learned from the Macedonians is that they gave cheerfully "and unto the riches of their liberality" - not from their abundance - but out of their "deep poverty". The Macedonians, as the woman in the temple who "cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Mark 12:44), go well beyond abundant giving; they have entered into sacrificial giving. Having observed the woman in the temple, Jesus summoned his disciples and taught them a lesson in giving sacrificially. This is the measure of giving that our Lord upheld and demonstrated.

##### 5. Simply And Without Ostentation

...he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity... (Romans 12:8).

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth (Matthew 6:3).

While the above five principles of stewardship ought to be taught in our churches, perhaps more vigorously than they now are, <sup>this might not be the place where a teaching emphasis on</sup> an emphasis on stewardship should begin. The teaching of ultimate values and priorities - matters of the heart - cannot be divorced from the teaching of stewardship - "for where your treasure is there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21), and vice versa. Redirecting the treasure requires a change of heart. What we need, then, is a well-considered preaching, teaching and service strategy in our churches which, when translated into program, will lead us into the quality of spirituality and Christlikeness that results in voluntary, regular, cheerful, simple and sacrificial returning to the Lord of what He has given us. I believe churches need help in developing and implementing such a strategy.

## VI. SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN GIVING

The topic of this paper, *The Christian and His Material Possessions*, is much too broad in scope to be dealt with satisfactorily in a presentation of this length. There remain a number of areas within the range of this topic that require exposure and study in our brotherhood. I shall introduce but a few of them.

### 1. How Do We Come By Our Possessions?

A Christian should be no less concerned about how he ~~gets~~ his possessions than he is about how he disposes of them. Questions of ethics related to how one comes by his income escapes no one, as John Redekop pointed out in his very recent M.B. Herald article, "Faith and Work." <sup>9</sup> Every Christian should be very concerned that the income from which he tithes is "clean" (but not "laundered"), and that it would pass close scrutiny. For instance, would it in 1974 be right for a Christian to tithe from the profit he made in business because he had not contributed to a pension plan for his ageing employees who had served him faithfully for many years? Similar questions could be asked of trades people, farmers and professionals of all kinds. How we come by our possessions is extremely important.

### 2. To Whom Or To Which Agencies Should We Give?

Views on this question vary widely in the M.B. Conference. There is developing, however, an increasing concern that many Mennonites, perhaps Mennonite Brethren in particular, are much too ready to respond generously to the relentless barrage of radio appeals for "missionary" causes. Many hundreds of thousands of dollars are believed to be spent each year for a wide range of non-Mennonite missionary and relief projects by Mennonites in Manitoba, in response primarily to radio appeals.

It is well known that many producers of religious programs are extremely

eager to air their programs in regions with concentrations of Mennonites, not primarily, it seems, because the Mennonites need another religious program, but because Mennonites are known to respond most generously to financial appeals, even to agencies whose theology differs widely and runs counter to their own.

"Giving From The Heart With The Head" is a little booklet published jointly by ten Mennonite church, missionary and other agencies as a guide for Christians to follow when giving.<sup>10</sup> In response to the question, "How can we know which missions are reliable" the following questions are asked. Who directs the work? Is an accurate financial statement available? How much money goes for overhead and fund raising? Does the money create over dependency? Are the statistics reliable? Is the need clearly defined? Are the objectives consistent with New Testament principles?

The question of where our tithes should be directed is one about which different views will likely persist, but concerning which teaching and counsel are nonetheless very necessary. We are not good stewards (administrators of God's possessions) if we direct our gifts to agencies whose "spirits" we have not adequately tested.

### 3. What Do We Say In Our Wills?

Is there such a thing as a Christian will? If there is, what are it's essential conditions? Relatively little teaching and counsel has been offered Christians on this binding decision that deals with the final allocation of all the material possessions accumulated during a lifetime.

It may be unfortunate that all the blessings to be received from giving to the Lord cannot be enjoyed during one's lifetime. However, there is also satisfaction and blessing to be gained from knowing during one's living days, that upon one's death, a portion of what God has left one with will be returned to Him. Increasingly one now hears of Missions/

Services or MCC being remembered in the wills of our people.

Kauffman reported that some Christians willed to Christian causes ten percent of all possessions; others willed an amount equal to that bequeathed to each child. There are many approaches that can be taken to including Kingdom ministries in our wills and we need increasingly to become aware of these options and to appropriately exercise them.

Fortunately our Conference now has a Stewardship Department and the literature and services of this department are slowly finding their way into the churches. Besides providing advice on wills, information on an Annuity Gift Plan is also available.

A Christian will is made in conscious recognition that God is the owner of material possessions and that man is God's steward.

#### VII. A CONCLUDING COMMENT

The decision to consider carefully the issues surrounding the Christian and his material possessions was a timely and appropriate one. It was timely because we need to pause and examine carefully the accusation of many Christians and non-Christians that the Christian community, including Mennonite Brethren, are little if any less materialistically (Mammon) inclined than the non-Christian world about them. If this accusation is correct then a profound and far-reaching spiritual issue has been raised that must be dealt with. We are becoming a relatively rich people in an increasingly poor world. The Scriptures have very much to say by way of warning and judgement to materialistically-minded and rich Christians.

This topic is timely also because of the other side of the coin. Economic forecasters tell us that North Americans will continue to increase their per capita wealth and third world countries will continue to become

poorer in the foreseeable future. Hence the need for Christian ministries to the total person - spirit, mind and body - in these countries will become increasingly urgent. It is appropriate that we pause now, in 1974, to acknowledge this fact and to decide, under God, what we want to do with our increasing riches under these circumstances.

Do we indulge them on ourselves? Do we grudgingly return a minimum proportion to the Kingdom of Christ, or do we voluntarily, cheerfully, simply and sacrificially give to the Lord as the Macedonians did, having given ourselves first to the Lord?



FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> George Epp, "What the Statistics Tell Us," Mennonite Brethren Herald. Vol. 13, No. 6 (March 22, 1974), pp. 26 - 27.

<sup>2</sup> For example see:  
Helge Brattgard, "God's Stewards," (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1963).

Cornelius J. Dyck, They Gave Themselves, (Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 1964).

Milo Kauffman, The Challenge of Christian Stewardship, (Herald Press, Scottdale, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> Kauffman, op.cit., p. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Brattgard, op.cit., p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Dyck, op.cit., p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Kauffman, op.cit., p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Kauffman, op.cit., pp. 7.- 8.

<sup>8</sup> Brattgard, op.cit., p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Redekop, "Faith and Work," Mennonite Brethren Herald. Vol. 13, No. 9 (May 3, 1974), pp. 4 - 5.

<sup>10</sup> "Giving From the Heart With the Head," a small pamphlet published and distributed jointly by ten Mennonite agencies including M.B. Missions/ Services and MCC.

<sup>11</sup> Art Gish : Beyond the Rat Race.

What is our 'attitude to material possessions?

Proper attitudes to the created world in all of its aspects?

