

Conscientious Objections: Thoughts on Living as a Baptist in the 21st Century - Part 1

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I. INTRODUCTION

Peter Sellers, the British comedian, produced an extended play vinyl record 42 years ago called 'The Party Political Broadcast'. It was little more than a string of clichés spewed forth at election times by that noble profession of politicians. He began with the profound claim, '*Let me say, right away, that in the light of present day developments, I do not regard existing conditions as likely!*' for which he received polite, automatic applause.

Neil Postman, one of my favourite modern writers states (and I change his illustration, for obvious reasons): '*Grievance is the source of all interesting prose. Without grievance, a writer tends to become a celebrant, which is an agreeable but repetitious state. After you have sung two choruses of 'O Canada', what else is there to say?*¹, and again, '*A good writer is a wimp who has found a unique and prudent form in which to say 'No!'*'²

Although I have a grand topic as a title for my talks, I think most of you will know what to expect. In this talk my scope is limited, and the talk is characterized more by what I omit than by what I include. Of necessity it is a 'Big Picture'. The focus is simply this, '*What are Baptists going to do (or more importantly, What are Baptists going to BE) in the foreseeable future?* Put in a slightly different form, '*How do we live in the present as a people with a past?*' I also want to you to have in mind throughout this talk, the sentiment expressed by Thomas Paine in his pamphlet 'Common Sense' (1776), when he wrote, '*A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it the superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable defence of custom.*'³ There will be, throughout these presentations, similar, shamelessly expropriated quotations. The concerns and questions I have are born of more than thirty years professional, as well as personal involvement with our Baptist Convention; and over forty years' association with other Baptist bodies, like the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the European Baptist Federation and its constituent bodies; work for over fifteen years on commissions of the Baptist World Alliance; and, more recently, deep involvement in the life and witness of the tiny Baptist Union of the Czech and Slovak Republics, an involvement which continues and will do so. This involvement has led, for several reasons, to a growing sense of unease, particularly in the past two decades. Throughout the world - it is now safe to say - groups like the Gathering, the Alliance of Baptists, the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship have grown up in response to something wrong. In Great Britain, Australia, the United States, South Africa, and most recently, in Central Europe, and I hear now in Russia, numbers of concerned pastors and layfolk have organised for their own nourishment, fellowship and health into groups such as this. Something is in the wind.

Of course, Peter Sellers notwithstanding, existing conditions are likely and real. And we have to chart our way through them if we wish to live as responsible Christian people who bear the name Baptist. It is my hope that I can offer some signposts, or at the very least a candle to light the map. Let me tell you where we shall be going in the two presentations.

A. A brief sketch of 'existing conditions', broadly drawn. Here I do not focus specifically on Canadian Baptists, although what I have to say I hope will be relevant.

B. An outline of some responses to these conditions. In times of stress people, and groups do the darndest things, and here I want to show what is possible in such a time of stress.

C. An evaluation and implied recommendation of one response. Here I reach back into history, our history as Baptists, to explore elements of our past life and thinking that I believe are lost in the modern rush to fix things we perceive are wrong. Our colleague Ken Sehested has reminded us in another context that *Baptists at their best are sectarian, apocalyptic, against the world. Not against the earth, mind you (the distinction is crucial); but the world, that complex set of arrangements and powers which now rummage creation.* (Ken Sehested, 1994). And, I might add, anything which resembles it.

Let me repeat that I offer a very big picture. I hope for a reaction, some growing awareness, perhaps, some discomfort, and some action. A comment about the title of these talks. It is also (shamelessly) expropriated from one of Postman's books, the title of which is *Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble about Language, Technology and Education*.⁴

II. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Just a few months ago we were all mesmerised by the so-called Y2K bug. Remember that one? For many people round the world the shift to the third millennium was an excuse for a party, as we saw on that mammoth CBC broadcast. For others, like the guardians of computer systems, it was a time for serious work as they protected the world from the attacks of the so-called Y2K virus. It reminded me very much of the horror space movies I used to watch in the 1950s and 1960s. It seemed that Mary Shelley's mythology, a vision of a technology gone crazy, was about to reassert itself. At the very least it demonstrated to many that we live with a fear of our very own creations.

It quickly passed almost without a hitch. But it did provide us with time to pause and reflect. We had rushed through the 1980s and the 1990s, and now we had an opportunity to stop and survey the scenery and look ahead, at least as far as the next bend in the road. What did we see?

In spite of the cliché about history repeating itself, most of us had the strange feeling that we had never been here before. There were reasons for this. Up until the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century most of the world lived in a stable, almost unchanging world. It was dominated by agriculture, powered by the natural elements of wind, water and muscle, ruled by kinship and clan, focused on the village and governed from a high centre of power - the prince or the king.

By the end of the 18th century - but certainly beginning in the Renaissance - all that had changed. The American Revolution and twenty years later the French Revolution changed the political face of Europe and the west. Although they both had long pre-histories, these massive shifts in the political map of Europe were unique, and they held out enormous promise for what was then regarded as 'civilization'. William Blake, responding to the events across the Atlantic in his poem 'America', betrayed the widespread initial optimism when he wrote his concluding lines, *And so the Princes fade from earth, scarce seen by the souls of men But tho' obscured, this is the form of the Angelic land.* It was an optimism which he did not lavish upon the French Revolution, and which was, in effect, short-lived. What has been called by Eric Hoffer, *the revolution of the rich*⁵, the Industrial Revolution, changed the physical landscape forever, and had enormous effects on the way people lived and made their livings. It was no accident that the three coincided.

Once the dust, which had been raised through the turmoil of the next two centuries, had settled, we now come out into the open and survey the landscape once more, looking for points of recognition. And what we see for many is distressing. I offer just a few of these landmarks, but they are important ones because they become the social landscape upon which we live as Christians. They constitute what social geographers call the 'goal-ranges', that is *the carrying*

capacities of an environment, the ranges of states that allow a society to continue its existence. Put simply, if there is no water, settlement, or continuation of settlement is doomed. Continually in tension with these goal ranges are what the same folk call the 'reference values', that is the values we prize highly and organize ourselves around. They are always in tension, and the nature of the balance between them allows, or disallows the health of the society. Let this be a metaphor, a helpful way of understanding these 'existing conditions'. In my perspective, they consist of the following, and I offer here a brief summary, by no means comprehensive:

A. There is a loss of a system of values. By this I do not mean the common lament for the loss of dominant 'Christian' values in society, but what political observers called the 'Liberal consensus', which was based on certain, rather positive views of the human being (positive views, which some early Baptists, like Helwys, endorsed). This is no longer viable in our culture. The political tradition which began in the sixteenth century based on individual human value, reason and basic goodness⁶ - however naive it might appear now - has almost evaporated. Has liberalism's doctrine of toleration now drowned in a tide of its own success? At the moment, no one seems to be showing the way, and in times of such crisis, people will be easily led.

B. We are dominated now by the vast power of the 'market', which is essentially an illusory social construction. Let me explain what I mean by this. It has to do with language, which, in turn has to do with the quality of society and social grouping within which language is used - our moral communities. Several years ago Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, two sociologists, published an influential book called, *The Social Construction of Reality*,⁷ a distinctly optimistic vision, partly because of its moral neutrality. Four years ago John R. Searle, a philosopher, published his book *The Construction of Social Reality*,⁸ which was implicitly less optimistic. Searle implied that we too quickly become slaves to our own constructs. He was approaching social reality from the perspective of our use of language, especially what has come to be known as 'speech-act theory'. What this means is simply this: With language we create social and institutional facts by which we live. The chair at the end of meeting states, 'This meeting is adjourned.' and a social fact is created. It is based on an utterance, the assumptions of which all present generally agree upon. It is also called 'performative language' and is used in the Bible of blessings and cursings.

What is created is an illusion based on common agreement. We take something and in specific contexts it becomes something else which we value. Searle's most common example is that we take paper, process it in particular ways, print on it and all agree that it has value. We call that paper money. Now if we can do it with paper, we can do it with other elements as well. Paper money is relatively new in the west. Other cultures use rocks, sea shells, even coconuts or beads as symbols of value. Our culture is shifting from paper money, first to plastic, and now to the invisible electronic impulse flashing through a sliver of silicon. This we declare to be of value. In fact we declare it to be of such value that our stock-markets indices rise and fall at enormous rates, and billions of dollars (our ultimate symbol of value) 'change hands' or simply disappear. It is this piece of social magic which has dominated our news channels over the past several weeks.

It is as though we are hearing thunderings from Olympus, and fear that the gods are angry because we have not demonstrated our dedication by investing in the right stocks, or remained faithful in times of trouble. On the matter of the dominance of the 'market' I am amused that one of the most important current Canadian theological debates is being conducted between a Roman Catholic Bishop and Conrad Black. (See *Globe and Mail*, April 3rd et segue).

C. Directly relevant to this is the new role that ‘business’ plays in our everyday lives. The term ‘business’ has now come to be such an intrusive part of our vocabulary, and our daily lives that it appears indispensable for all of us. It has taken on the status of a new religion, and has its converts, worshipers, high priests, Theology, temples - even its sects (the day-traders). Like many religions, it is rife with cognitive dissonance. In spite of its appearance of firmness and stability, of hidden, inflexible laws, I find it highly amusing that the demise of one of Canada’s most promising - and at the time, the largest - mining companies was attributed simply to a ‘string of bad luck.’ Did you ever really need to know what the four or five sections of the *Globe and Mail* tell you about the business world each day? This is symptomatic of a replacement of values.

D. A fourth point of recognition is the development of a new system of values and for lack of anything else, it is centred around accumulation and expansion - collectively known as greed. Globalization is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the way it is accomplished. Legend has it that twenty three hundred years ago Alexander, son of Philip of Macedon, sat down somewhere in the deserts of Persia and wept. He wept, not for the countless dead his campaigns in the east had left in their wake, the innumerable number of women raped and enslaved, the hordes of children left fatherless, the burning cities and destroyed empires. He wept because he knew of no more worlds left to conquer.

It is no accident that throughout the literature of business run the names of the old classical heroes of warfare and conquest who set examples for leadership and accumulation.⁹

E. Accompanying all of these is the loss of the value of ‘human being’. This is experienced in the deep sense of alienation in so many people from the institutions that once nourished them. It is also seen in the debasement of language. And by this I am not talking about poor grammar, but of something far deeper.

Jacques Éllul, in his book *The Technological Society*¹⁰, spoke of ‘*the humiliation of the Word*’, and by this he did not mean the passing of books, or the decline of role of the Bible in culture. He meant something quite different, and probably more important. It was a lament over the debasement of discourse. Discourse had been displaced by what he called ‘*technique*’ a belief in the validity, indeed moral superiority of the rational and technical approach to life. Michael Halliday, a sociolinguist, writes well, ‘*Language does not consist of sentences; it consists of text, or discourse - the exchange of meanings in interpersonal contexts of one kind or another.*’¹¹ You see, communication, in its truest form, presupposes, even demands a moral community. The sharing of information - a dominant pastime in the technological age in which we live - does not. It saddened me then when a member of the Gathering, Michael Steeves, wrote a complaint to the officials of our Convention over the demise of the magazine *Canadian Baptist*, which, whatever its faults, did provide a forum for debate and dissent. It has been replaced by a glossy news-sheet, which transmits information one way. This has been supplemented by an electronic newsheet called *Splash*, which again is a channel for information. As an aside I would think that one fundamental criterion for contributors or editors of such organs is that they write in intelligible English. What I have seen thus far gives me little or no confidence on this matter. The only written response he received indicated that that was the way things were in the present day. Small bites of information were more digestible than reasoned arguments or theses with some depth. Now this I regard as a very serious problem. Communication had become decontextualised. But what was more serious, is that it was an (unconscious) admission that the moral community on which it was founded, had collapsed.

F. The other point of recognition which goes along with all of these others is the dominance of a cultural attitude of ‘instrumental activism’. This is the notion of *technique* which Ellul expounded in his book *The Technological Society*.¹² The unfounded belief that we can fix anything. This is seen partly, but importantly, in our use of the language of technology to describe what were once social and community institutions. Medical Arts become Health Sciences. The Body Politic becomes the Social and Political structure, to name but two examples. It is inevitable that our perceptions of life change according to the material we have at our disposal from which to create our metaphors of living. In these cases, industrial, mechanical and technical. But there is more to it than this. Let me quote again from Ellul:

*Public opinion...is completely oriented in favour of technique; only technical phenomena interest the modern [human]. The machine has made itself the master of the heart and brain both of the average person and the mob. What excites the crowd? Performance, whether performance in sports or economic performance, in reality they are the same thing. Technique is the instrument of performance. What is important is to go higher and faster; the object of the performance means little. The act is sufficient unto itself. The modern person can think only in terms of figures, and the higher the figures, the greater the satisfaction. One looks for nothing beyond the marvelous escape mechanism that technique has allowed, to offset the very repercussions caused by the life technique forces one to lead. One is reduced, in the process, to near nullity.*¹³

One of the serious side-effects in this scenario, of course, is that with the dominance of technique in the social air, the only problems deemed worth tackling become the technical ones. So all of life becomes reduced to a struggle to overcome our technical shortcomings, not only in the mechanical or material sense, but also in the social sense. Obviously, lost in the shuffle are the spiritual, the emotional problems - unless they can be understood only in terms of technique. Unless we can find a way to fix things, or, unless we can find a way to express our problems in terms of technique, we have failed.

I want to pick this up in the second session because I seem to be placing before you two mutually exclusive alternatives - doing, and not-doing (or being). There is a third possibility. But I believe up to now I have sketched, in watercolours, the landscape in which we find ourselves. Details could be added here and there, the shading could be more precise, or less defined, but the broad contours can stay.

Now, in the light of this landscape, how fares it with the churches? It is a simple and depressing picture. We continue to suffer a decline in membership. In an environment, dominated by technique, which prizes among other things, expansion, growth and bigness as symbols of success, some feel we are being shamed. Even the SBC suffered a 2% decline last year. There is a continued decline the scope of our resources. We hear only this month from our Executive Minister’s mailing, that our budgetary expectations for last year fell short, to be offset by a reduction in spending in certain areas. One hears rumours that the situation is darker than this, but information seems lacking. There is, for many reasons, an enormous sense of disillusionment among our pastors. Groups like the Gathering are providing a haven for many who have been ground up by a system which does not seem to care. But, strangely enough, all of this is accompanied by an increase of activity from the ‘centre’.

When the storm-clouds began to gather, it was Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act 1, Scene 2), who said:

*Brutus would rather be a villager
Than to repute himself a son of Rome
Under these hard conditions as this time
is like to lay upon us.*

I suppose that we must remind ourselves that this is always a choice.

III. WHAT QUESTIONS DO WE ASK?

Existing conditions seem not only likely, but depressing, and I can only resort to that overworked word, crisis, to describe what I think the existing conditions are. Now social scientists have studied times of crisis in human experience and can offer us some valuable insights. They construct models of human behaviour. These models are not real in the sense that in every case they will be replicated. They are rather 'typical', and helpful ways of looking at situations which do recur. Daniel Bar Tal, an Israeli psychologist and psychiatrist, writes of the 'Masada Syndrome'.¹⁴ He was writing of organizations and countries which, at a time of perceived threat (a 'crisis'), and dominated by a sense of being alone against a hostile world, develop a collective psychological state, almost a pathology, which has serious consequences for the members of that state or society. For example, its language is simplified to reflect a dichotomy between the 'us' on the inside, and the 'them' on the outside. Within the group, its perceptions are equally simple and members will be willing to sacrifice to unheard of limits for 'the cause'. Borders, entrances and exits are closely controlled, as are the borders, entrances and exits of its members. The dominant pressure on the inside is one towards conformity. There is no small measure of that attitude in recent events in the SBC and elsewhere. That is one possible response to crisis.

Victor Turner, a Chicago anthropologist, writes of 'social dramas' in his books *The Ritual Passage*,¹⁵ and *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*¹⁶. He breaks down human crises into four identifiable stages, [1] the breach, which causes a rift or destabilising of an existing order; [2] the crisis, in which the situation reaches its highest level of stress; [3] the redressive action, or liminal phase in which an assessment of the situation is undertaken and behaviour is modified; and, finally, [4] the reintegration, during which phase a way of living with the crisis is evolved. This might not result in what we as westerners love, a happy ending. In Turner's analytical model stage three, the time of redressive action, is the most interesting. At such times, the participants in a crisis ('social drama') resort to '*root paradigms of behaviour*', that is, exemplars whom they believe strengthen them through the crisis. Such root paradigms are immediate, and elusive responses to times of social drama, yet they reflect the deepest sense of values in the person or group involved in the drama. Turner goes on to show how Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, realised he would be murdered. So he organized his last days around the Jesus in the Passion story, even to the point of sharing a supper with twelve of his diocesan bishops. His root paradigm was the suffering Christ. Think of the Biblical prophets under challenge and stress - they all begin to sound like Moses. In Lent we reflected on the closing days of Jesus ministry, and through the story comes one image on whom he patterned his end, the Suffering Servant of Isa. 40-55. Now, if this model of understanding has any validity - and it is certainly persuasive - in times of crisis, the question is not so much, 'What do we do?' but rather 'What do we become?' If we as that part of God's people called Baptists, understand ourselves to be in a crisis of some kind, how do we reshape our lives? What root paradigms of behaviour do we adopt? How can we Be?

A Biblical story found in 1 Samuel 8-10, and a familiar one. I have used it often in a number of different contexts. It is such a good illustration! It is the story of the people's and elders' request of Samuel for a king. It is a perfect illustration of Turner's model of social drama. Clearly it involves [1] a breach of an existing order, caused by the incursions of the Philistines into the Hill Country (1 Sam. 1-4). This is a continuation of the story from Judges 13 on; the breach develops into [2] a crisis with the utter defeat of the tribal army at Aphek, and the loss of the Ark of the Covenant; in 1 Sam. 8-10 we are in the stage of [3] redressive action, in which the people and elders are seeking a form of being to deal with the crisis. Their choice is to opt for a 'root paradigm of behaviour' in the person of a king - and all that goes with that. This, in turn creates a serious debate between the people, Samuel and God in which [4] the stage of integration is reached. Finally, God and Samuel grant them their request, and suggest they learn to live with the consequences. For them, things will never be the same again.

In this story an entire way of life is changed, from village-centred, clan-oriented, limited good, to the centralization of power in one system, and the control exercised over the whole by that system. In times of such crisis there are always choices, the *way of life*, and the *way of death*, as the Bible puts it, and we must learn to tell the difference. From this point on in the Bible there is a judgment hanging over this experiment in kingship, and the final verdict is that it failed.

Now change of course, is important, and we ignore social and cultural change as Christians at our peril. But we must be discriminating in how we embrace it. Of course, I am speaking of life within the Baptist community, and its peculiar temptations. Much of what passes for 'reality' in society is a reality that none of us experiences. Within a context of change and crisis we have options and choices. The most popular is to be like the culture - *give us a king, just like the other nations*. It is an immediate reaction, and often seems to miss the implications of what it demands. It is a seductive possibility. Somehow, while we were looking elsewhere; while we were absorbed by a variety of problems and issues in the Convention, something has been slipped under the front door - an entire package of organizational changes which accompany our request, and this looks so attractive.

Baptist Conventions and Unions in many parts of the world are embracing this option, it is what I call the organizational tinkering approach to crisis. In the BCOQ on the web page one can now download documents entitled 'Future Directions', 'Core Values', and formerly 'Lifestyles and Morality', which have appeared recently, and suddenly from committees and task forces which work within the denominational structures. In UBCAP there are whispers of restructuring, but no documents are available to outsiders like myself, from Ontario. In Europe there has been a massive shift in emphases in Theological Education, through which the old IBTS was decimated and gutted, and a so-called 'refocusing' took place. The Baptist Union of Great Britain has undergone several years of talks on restructuring and are close to implementing their far-reaching proposals. Most enlightening was an article which appeared in the *Baptist Times* (Now incongruously called *BT 2000*) in November of last year. Following a passionate appeal for the priorities of evangelism and spiritual nurture by Douglas McBain, the General Secretary of the Union summed up the discussion by stating that evangelism and other demands were dependent upon the proposed organisational structures.

So, in answer to the question What shall/should we be? the answer seems to echo back, The Organizational Human, the Manager. That same General Secretary introduced himself to me after - after a gap of twenty years - as 'the chief executive officer of the senior management team of the Baptist union'. He took this seriously until he saw the smile on my face. Watch your language, David! Alongside this general expectation is a more pointed one which affects pastors.

The literature that I have read recently puts pastors into the role of a new breed of human being, new to me, that is, until very recently, the Project Manager. (See the fuss around the ‘Purpose Driven Church’ movement). Key words now enter our theological vocabulary, like efficiency, progress, goal orientation, purpose-driven, etc. *We want a king to fight our battles for us.*

Some preliminary observations: [1] this approach to life, the organizational-management approach is based on an understanding of human relationships and the way we live together as a machine; [2] it is therefore antithetical in a fundamental way, to the inner life of the soul; [3] all organizations carry within them the seeds of their own destruction.

Let us look now, briefly at this organizational mentality and its dangers. Its values are evident. Microsoft is efficient, wealthy and big. But this says nothing about its goodness, its humanity or morality, as a recent court decision has demonstrated. In fact, in the final analysis, these notions are irrelevant to its progress. This overview is ‘typical’ in the academic sense. Namely, it presents a model of human behaviour with which understanding is made easier. It does not describe one organization, but a set of behaviours which make up the organizational mentality.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL MENTALITY

A. Description of Organizational Mentality

You must understand that these characteristics are self-definitions, from writers who embrace the organizational mentality, and not its critics. And so, to the ‘*ways of the king*’ (1 Sam. 8.11).¹⁷

1. Organizational mentality involves an all-embracing way of thinking. It is essentially totalitarian in its thinking. From one of the standard text-books on ‘organizational mentality’ comes the following comment:

*Organizational Integration is achieved primarily by aligning and integrating the goals of individuals with the objectives of the organization...The socialization process achieves organizational integration by...undoing the individual’s previously held goals and creating new ones that come closer to those valued by the organization.*¹⁸

2. Organizational mentality is goal-oriented, and expects its members to be thus inclined: *From the perspective of the individual, the socialization process [that is, of the organization] is related to career development.*¹⁹ Further, the authors state:

*Whether the goal is to make a profit, provide education, foster religion, improve health care, put a person on the moon, get a candidate elected, or build a new football stadium, organizations get the job done. Organizations are characterized by their goal-directed behaviour.*²⁰

Now of course, organizations cannot tell you how to be or become except in their own terms. They cannot handle grief, joy, sorrow, pain, or fulfillment. They cannot save. The trouble is that often they think they can.

3. Organizational mentality places efficiency high on its list of values. This hardly needs illustrating, but because of the nature of the beast, an organization that is not efficient, above all else, ceases to be competitive, and is in danger of dying. But efficiency is more than this, it inevitably relates the desired results to the overall costs of the organization’s existence. The balance must always be in favour of the output.

The measures of efficiency include the rate of return on capital or assets; unit cost, scrappage and waste; downtime; occupancy rates; and cost per patient, per student or per client.

*Measures of efficiency must inevitably be in ratio terms; the ratios of benefit to cost, output or time are the general forms of these measures.*²¹

For fellowship of believers, which is more used to language of service and sacrifice, such a world-view seems alien, and such an implied evaluation of the role of the human in this world is close to obscene.

4. Organizational mentality regards expansion and growth as the desired end of its activity. Within the mythology of the organizational world - which becomes a kind of closed system of values - only those organizations which achieve (as opposed to serve) are honoured, and only those serving organizations which can be subsumed under the credo of the organizational mentality can be understood.

5. Organizational mentality sees the preservation of the organization as its greatest good. *Leaders must know how to influence individuals and groups to accept and pursue organizational objectives, often at the expense of personal objectives.*²²

6. Organizational mentality regards itself as rational, scientific, objective, therefore true. It even embraces the notion of 'self-correction' as a hallmark of its scientific approach to behavioural and management knowledge.²³ One must speculate, According to what standards is the organization 'corrected'? Certainly not those of morality and self-giving.

B. Immediate Costs of Organizational Mentality

1. The absorption of the human individual. I have already quoted Ellul to the effect that 'technique' reduces the individual to a nullity, but again, we must realise that this is part of the organizational culture.²⁴

2. The inevitable development of a hierarchy. Within the organizational world view there must be someone to tell others what to do. The pedigree and the mythology of the organizational mentality, i.e. the military, demands such a structure.

3. The moral sense is subordinated to political expediency. This is often in the face of what is assumed and said. Organizations, because they are totalitarian in outlook, because they absorb the individual, and think of themselves as so important, think of themselves as moral, whereas they are thoroughly political. They deal with power distribution (usually unequal), and thrive on the achievement of balance between affiliated groups, so that no one is able to destroy the subtle equilibrium within the organization. As with technique, problems become understood and tackled as political problems, rather than moral ones.²⁵ This I have experienced both on this continent and in Europe.

C. Historical Observation

This Organizational mentality which is based on modern management theory and practice is a relatively new phenomenon. Historians of management techniques have traced it back to the organization of the Pennsylvania Railroad in post-civil war United States. It may come as a surprise to us to learn that by 1869, the largest corporation (and reputedly the most successful) in the world was the Pennsylvania Railroad. Before the expansion of industry in the 19th century 'organizational management', if such a thing existed, was the domain of one institution within society, namely the military. This link goes back in history beyond the times of Julius Caesar to Sargon the Great in the third millennium BC, that is, five hundred years before Abraham.

Merchandising (rather than 'business') up until the late Renaissance and early Enlightenment period was a matter of personal contacts and influence-peddling. The 'states' up until the 18th century were still run as vast domains of patronage, and the treatises written about the state and the running of the state, such as Macchiavelli's *The Prince*, dealt primarily with the way to run

such organizations based on patronage²⁶ and influence. On the other hand, Macchiavelli's *Art of War* was in a tradition going back to Vegetius's *Strategmata*, and Polybius's *De Rerum Militarii*, which were documents of management and highly skilled organization - but applied only to armies. No one thought of applying such tactics to the state or to business. And certainly no one thought of applying such tactics to church government and life. This does not come until the mid 20th century. What does happen - and this is common with the adoption of strong conceptual metaphors - is that the state and business become the servants of the military, and the process of militarization takes place. The whole of society then becomes subsumed under one dominant theme. One of the historical ironies of the development of this in societies and countries, was that those who wielded the most power through the introduction of militarization had more to fear from their own subjects than they ever from an enemy.²⁷ But, to go back to Thomas Paine, just because it happens and happens often, does not make it right. The alternatives to this, whether it be through the encouragement of a military, or organizational ethos, is the messier involvement of the whole dhmoß (people). It may not be the most controllable or efficient way to get things done, but it is the most human.

There are conceptual metaphors through which we view reality, and by which we understand reality.²⁸ They are ways of understanding our lives and our experience of life in pictures, as it were. Life is a struggle, is one such metaphor. The church is an army, is another.²⁹ These foundational metaphors are to be taken seriously. The most immediate effect is upon our language, and by virtue of this language use, on our behaviour. In a recent reaction to the brutal behaviour of members of the Los Angeles Police Department, observers and participants noted that the change in attitude, and hence behaviour, came when the police were told they were in a war on crime. Forms of address, vocabulary, dress, and weapons were thus militarized. Attitudes change dramatically. Perceived 'enemies' were dehumanized, and the brutality increased alarmingly. The foundational metaphor of much modern church life is linked to notions of the organization. We are urged to become communities of 'mission statements', of 'goals and objectives' (often very unrealistic). The language and attitudes of efficiency and management dominate our living together and the literature we are encouraged to read. What we should realise is that this foundational/conceptual metaphor is of very recent construction, and it has little, if anything, to do with the Bible. It is part of the social reality that we have constructed. What we should also realise is that it is not permanent, nor is it inviolable. It can be changed. An alternative I propose in our next session.

¹ Neil Postman, *Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble about Language, Technology and Education*. New York: A. Knopf, 1988. xi.

² Postman, *Conscientious Objections*, xii.

³ Thomas Paine 'Common Sense' in *Thomas Paine Reader*, M. Foot, I. Kramnick [eds.], Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987. 65.

⁴ New York: A. Knopf, 1987.

⁵ Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1951. 10.

⁶ The literature on this is vast, but primary sources to be recommended include B. Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise* originally published in 1677; T. Hobbes *Leviathan*, originally

published in 1651. In the following century, essential reading is J.J. Rousseau *The Social Contract* originally published in 1762, and, dependent on this are the works of Thomas Paine, and the so-called *Federalist Papers*, written in support of the American Constitution of 1787. They are published in many modern versions.

For a very good survey of 'liberal' thought, see D.J. Manning *Liberalism* London: D.M. Dent, 1976, and for a recent attempt to deal with the issues raised above, see R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara, Henry S. Richardson [eds.] *Liberalism and the Good*. London: Routledge, 1991.

⁷ P. Berger, T. Liuuckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

⁸ J.R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996.

⁹ The topic of 'leadership' is a common subject of discussion and study in both business and religious circles. See my articles on 'Leadership' in the *Gathering Newsletter*, 1998-1999, and the bibliography listed.

¹⁰ J. Ellul *The Technological Society*, Translated by J. Wilkinson. New York: Vintage Books, 1964. 387ff.

¹¹ M.A.K. Halliday, *Language as social semiotic*. London: Arno Press, 1993, 6. On this general topic, see the comments by Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986, *passim*.

¹² See also G. Grant, *Technology and Empire*. Toronto: Anansi Press, 1978.

¹³ Ellul, *Technological Society*, 302.

¹⁴ D. Bar-Tal 'The Masada Syndrome: A Case of Central Belief' in N.A. Milgrom [ed.] *Stress and Coping in Times of War*. New York: Brunner Mazel, 1986. 32-51.

¹⁵ V. Turner, *The Ritual Passage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969.

¹⁶ V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.

¹⁷ Lewis H. Lapham's book *The Wish for Kings: Democracy at Bay*. New York: Grove Press, 1993, is highly recommended as commentary at this point.

¹⁸ J.L. Gibson, J.M. Ivanevich, J.H. Donnelly, *Organizations: Behavior, Structure, Processes* Homewood, Ill: BPI Irwin Publications, 6th edition. 1988. 674.

¹⁹ *Organizations*, 651.

²⁰ *Organizations*, p. 5

²¹ *Organizations*, 37.

²² *Organizations*, 43.

²³ *Organizations*, 767-768.

²⁴ On organizational culture see E.H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985. esp. 9.

²⁵ On this see F.G. Bailey, *The Kingdom of Individuals: An Essay on Self-respect and Social Obligation*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. 18-21.

²⁶ See especially E.R. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, and B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso, 1991.

²⁷ A point made well by Spinoza, *Treatise*. Ch. VI:5-12.

²⁸ Cf. G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988.

²⁹ On this see T.R. Hobbs 'The Language of Warfare in the New Testament' in P.F. Esler [ed.] *Modelling Early Christianity*. London: Routledge, 1995.