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A STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF RURAL YOUTH  
AND THE  
CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH IN MEETING THEM

by

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
in  
The Biblical Seminary in New York

New York, New York  
August 1945

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
A. Statement of Problem . . . . .	2
B. Significance of the Problem . . . . .	3
C. Method of Procedure . . . . .	4
D. Definition of Terms . . . . .	5
E. Sources of Data . . . . .	6
I. THE ENVIRONMENT OF RURAL YOUTH . . . . .	7
A. Introduction . . . . .	7
B. Physical Surroundings . . . . .	8
1. Landscape . . . . .	8
2. Size and Appearance of the Community . . . . .	9
C. Economic Conditions . . . . .	11
1. Standard of Living Among Rural Youth . . . . .	11
2. Opportunity for Increasing Income . . . . .	13
D. Educational Status . . . . .	13
1. Schools in Rural Areas . . . . .	14
a. Availability of Schools . . . . .	14
b. Size of Rural Schools . . . . .	14
c. Length of School Year . . . . .	15
2. School Attendance of Rural Youth . . . . .	15
3. Opportunities for Higher Education . . . . .	16
E. Social and Recreational Facilities . . . . .	18
1. Recreational Facilities Provided . . . . .	18
a. By the Community . . . . .	18
b. By the School . . . . .	19
c. By the Church . . . . .	19
2. Participation of Rural Youth in Recreation . . . . .	20
a. Available Leisure Time . . . . .	20
b. Use of Leisure Time . . . . .	21
F. Home and Family Life . . . . .	21
1. Economic Condition of the Rural Home . . . . .	22
2. Importance of the Home in Rural Life . . . . .	23
G. Church in Rural Areas . . . . .	25

*Oct. 17, 1945*

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Chapter	Page
1. Location and Size of Rural Churches .	25
2. Economic Condition of Rural Churches . . . . .	27
H. Summary and Conclusion. . . . .	28
II. THE PROBLEMS OF RURAL YOUTH. . . . .	30
A. Introduction. . . . .	31
B. Need for Economic Advantages. . . . .	32
1. Rural Youth Faced Closed Economic Doors. . . . .	32
2. Youth's Outlook Affected by Economic Insecurity. . . . .	36
a. Relation of Unemployment and Marriage. . . . .	36
b. Relation of Unemployment and Crime . . . . .	38
c. Relation of Unemployment to Youth's Philosophy of Life. . . . .	38
C. Need for Educational Opportunities . . . . .	40
1. More Equality of School Facilities Needed . . . . .	40
2. Effect on Rural Youth of Inadequate Preparation. . . . .	42
a. Inability to Attain Economic Security. . . . .	42
b. Inability to Assume Civic Responsibility. . . . .	43
3. Uncertainty of the Future Without Adequate Preparation . . . . .	44
D. Need for an Expanded Recreational Program . . . . .	45
1. Factors in Rural Life Requiring Recreation . . . . .	45
2. Opinion of Youth Regarding Recreation . . . . .	46
3. Inadequacy of the Present Program. . . . .	47
E. Need for Religious Guidance . . . . .	50
1. Spiritual Needs of Rural Youth . . . . .	50
2. Inadequacies of the Present Program. . . . .	51
3. Effect of Inadequate Christian Training . . . . .	53
F. Summary and Conclusion. . . . .	55
III. THE AGENCIES MEETING THE NEEDS OF RURAL YOUTH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHURCH . . . . .	56
A. Introduction. . . . .	57
B. Agencies Aiding Rural Youth . . . . .	58
1. Government Organizations . . . . .	58

Chapter	Page
a. National Youth Administration.	58
b. Civilian Conservation Corps. .	60
c. Other Government Organization.	61
2. Non-government Organizations. . . .	61
3. Contribution of Such Groups to Rural Youth . . . . .	62
4. Limitations of the Organizations in Meeting Needs . . . . .	63
C. Contribution of the Church . . . . .	65
1. The Church Functioning in a Community. . . . .	65
2. The Church Functioning for the Youth	68
a. In Meeting the Spiritual Needs	69
b. In Meeting Other Needs . . . .	69
1. The Economic Need . . . .	72
2. The Health Need . . . . .	73
3. The Educational Need. . .	73
4. The Recreational Need . .	74
3. Results of the Church's Program . .	77
a. To the Church. . . . .	77
b. To the Young People. . . . .	78
D. Summary and Conclusion . . . . .	79
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION . . . . .	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	90

## INTRODUCTION

A STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF RURAL YOUTH  
AND THE  
CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH IN MEETING THEM

INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of Problem

" . . . Rural work involves the fate of human beings. It can be faced only with the mind of Him who saw men, not as trees walking, but as sons of God and brothers one of another; not as so much waving grain to be reaped by the exploiters, but as living souls to be gathered into the Kingdom of God . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Of the millions of rural folk in America a large percentage are youth. Because there are rural youth there is a rural youth problem.

"Too often the rural youth situation has been dismissed with the statement that at least the young people on farms need not starve. Such summary disposition of the matter fails to take account of the other necessities of human living or of the fact that there are thousands of rural young people in small towns who are just as desperate as their city cousins for a chance to develop their capacities and to banish the specter of insecurity."<sup>2</sup>

Because rural youth have problems this thesis proposes to study rural youth and their relation to the church. The study involves a two-fold approach. First, a study of the problems and needs that are peculiar to rural youth. Secondly, a brief survey of the agencies

1. William M. Green, quoted in The Rural Messenger, February, 1943, p. 5.
2. Bruce Melvin and Elna Smith, Rural Youth: Their Situation and Prospects, p. xi.

contributing to the life of rural youth with particular emphasis on the aid the Christian Church should offer in helping to solve the problems that rural youth find facing them.

#### B. Significance of the Problem

Young people are a nation's greatest asset and as such should be the ones given most serious consideration. It is in them that the future welfare and destiny of a nation lies.

"Youth is a period of economic and social adjustments. In a democracy it is society's obligation to make certain provisions for this transition period. Despite the expansion of educational facilities, however, present economic opportunities are so limited that large numbers of men and women are unable to establish themselves in a field that may be expected to lead to economic security. As a result the problems of youth have become serious and far-reaching in their implications and effects."<sup>1</sup>

Rural youth compose a large share of the youth of America. The population of the city is fed by the youth that pour into it from the country. The standards of a city are only as high as the standards of the people of which it is composed. It is imperative then, since rural youth form so large a part of the city's population, that the standards of rural life be high.

Rural young people have tremendous problems some of which are peculiar to them alone. Unless these problems are solved and the needs met these young people

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. xi.

who form such a large part of the population will not be able to render capable service to the nation and will be unable to assume their rightful share of responsibility in future leadership.

Recognizing the needs of rural youth, a number of agencies have attempted to meet them. To some extent they have succeeded; in some respects they have failed. The institution that ought to be the most interested in the youth has often been the agency that has been most lax. That is the church. As one travels through the country one is met constantly with the dreary sight of small country churches either closed completely or badly in need of aid. In the same communities are young people to whom the church ought to be ministering. These youth must not be passed by indifferently. The message of the church must become vital in the lives of rural young people and effective for every-day living if their lives are to be of worth and the future of the nation enriched.

#### C. Method of Procedure

The study has included a careful survey of all available material that deal with rural youth and the rural church. It will treat first of all the environment of rural youth specifically the physical, economic, educational, recreational, spiritual, and home surroundings. The next phase of the study will survey the

specific needs and problems of rural youth in these same areas. Finally the study will conclude with an analysis of the agencies endeavoring to aid the young people. Particular emphasis will be placed on the contribution the church should make to rural youth and the place the youth should take in the church.

#### D. Definition of Terms

There has been some discussion as to what is included in the term "rural". Does it refer only to a farming community? How large shall a town be before it is too large to be included in the category of a rural community? For the purpose of this study the term rural will be used to designate any farm community and any town with a population not exceeding twenty-five hundred. This definition of a rural community is that stated by the United States Census Bureau and generally accepted by the rural committees of the various denominations.<sup>1</sup>

A distinction must be made between rural farm and rural non-farm youth. In areas such as the Middle Atlantic and New England states rural youth are in the main non-farm. In other areas farm youth are in the predominance.<sup>2</sup> The problems of these two groups are, however, similar. Therefore, this study will treat the

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1. Cf. Margaret Teague, Forward Into Rural America, p. 15.  
2. Cf. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. xiii.

problems as they present themselves making a distinction between the two groups only when necessary.

#### E. Sources of Data

The sources for this study consist of available material gathered from the denominational boards of the city, particularly the units of rural work of the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Board of rural work, the rural board of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the rural board of the American Baptist Church, and the Town and Country Commission of the Home Missions Council of North America. In addition books and pamphlets dealing with rural young people published by the United States Government were consulted as well as pertinent material obtained at the various libraries of the city including the libraries of the denominational boards.

CHAPTER I

THE ENVIRONMENT OF RURAL YOUTH

## CHAPTER I

### THE ENVIRONMENT OF RURAL YOUTH

#### A. Introduction

Character is shaped by the two factors of heredity and environment. In studying a group of people it is necessary to discover what the environment is, what in the environment is different from that of any other group, what in the environment may give rise to particular problems.

"The community implies not individuals per se but individuals enmeshed in a net of relationships that surround them - family, friends, neighbors, and associations. Each relationship conditions and molds the life and thought of each individual. . . . But the rural community is made up of more than people. Its welfare depends upon another factor - that is, the land and the kind of life and living it can sustain. So as we look at the community we must see it not only from the standpoint of the relationships of the people to each other, but also from the standpoint of the relationships of the people and their institutions to the soil."<sup>1</sup>

This chapter, therefore, proposes to consider the economic, educational, cultural, social, family, and religious background of rural youth. Such a study should help to explain the problems that rural young people find confronting them.

. . . . .

1. Benson Y. Landis, American Rural Life, p. 10.

## B. Physical Surroundings

In the physical environment of rural youth must be considered the general landscape which is vastly different from that of urban youth, and the size and appearance of the community.

### 1. Landscape

In the rural community "God is nearest as is evidenced by growing grass, blooming flowers, and boundless, open sky. Here one is free from the noise, hustle, and bustle of the city. Here one has time to think."<sup>1</sup> The above statement applies particularly to rural farm youth. Rural young people living on farms have around them the natural beauties of green fields, trees, hills, streams. The noises and sights of urban life are not in evidence. Such is a general picture of the youth's physical surroundings. Differences in the surroundings would be conditioned by two main factors. One is the region in which he lives. The landscape of rural New England communities, for example, naturally differs from that in Southern and Western rural areas. The other factor conditioning the appearance of the landscape of the farm youth is the relative prosperity of the land. The arid, soil-eroded country of some of the western states presents

. . . . .

1. Landis, op. cit., p. 24, quoting Mary O. Miller, in "Characteristics of a Christian Rural Community?" Rural America, April, 1941.

a vastly different appearance from that of the rich lands of some of the other states.

The landscape around the rural non-farm or village youth differs in some respects from that of the rural farm youth. The village youth's immediate surroundings are those of urban life on a miniature scale, namely, houses, stores, churches, and other buildings. Combined with this is the distinctly rural landscape surrounding the town. If the village is prosperous the town may be attractive and well-kept; otherwise the village youth is apt to be faced with the dreary picture of dilapidated buildings and a town that proves to be only a blot on an otherwise attractive countryside.

## 2. Size and Appearance of the Community

The 1940 census reveals that there are some fifty-seven millions of American people who live in rural areas. Of these over thirty million live on farms, which is about twenty-three percent of the total population.<sup>1</sup> Approximately thirty percent of the young people in the nation live on farms.<sup>2</sup> A farming community varies in appearance throughout the country. Such a community may consist of a few scattered, individual farms lying some distance from a village or it may be composed of a group of farms situated close together on which the farmers

1. Cf. The World Almanac of 1945, "The urban population in 1940 was 56.5 percent . . . , the rural farm population was 22.9 percent; the rural non-farm was 20.5 percent.", p. 488.
2. Cf. David C. Coyle, Rural Youth, p. 22.

work either individually or cooperatively. Many farm communities are prosperous with buildings well constructed and cared for. Too many other farms are located on land too poor to yield an adequate living with buildings that are badly in need of repair.

As stated in the introduction a town to be considered rural must not exceed twenty-five hundred in population. Most rural villages in America are not that large. Since the depression years, however, rural youth are remaining home rather than migrating to the cities and many in the cities have returned to rural areas, thus increasing the population in the small towns and villages.

The average rural town's appearance depends to a great extent upon the prosperity of its members. If it is a thriving, prosperous town it will present to the passing motorist a pleasing picture of attractive homes, shady, well-kept streets, a business section distinct from the residential district, a well-built and attractive school building and church; in short, a general air of cleanliness and beauty in keeping with the surroundings. On the other hand many of our rural youth live in "stranded villages . . . where the passing motorist sees only a brightly painted filling station and does not see the closed factory, the dying local trade, the unrepaired houses going to rack and ruin."<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

1. Coyle, op. cit., p. 5.

### C. Economic Conditions

In the study of any group of people the economic conditions form an important part of the picture. The economic environment of rural youth has a tremendous influence on them and so must be considered.

#### 1. Standard of Living Among Rural Youth

The actual wage income of the rural farm youth is in most cases small enough to be negligible. Most rural farm youth grow up as laborers in their own home helping to harvest crops to meet family needs in which they share. Their wage is seen in their food, clothing, and shelter and some spending money. Farm youth working away from home receive very little cash wage in addition to maintenance. The economic situation of rural farm youth naturally differs in various sections of the country, but does not approximate that of the average youth in urban areas.

Such is also true of the wage income of village youth. Rural youth in villages have some degree of economic advantage over farm youth. In a town there is usually opportunity to work in other places than at home and thus receive more of a definite salary in actual cash.

However, while the cash income of village and farm youth is not large, it must be remembered that in rural areas an income is not measured solely in terms of

money. For many years prosperity in rural areas has been measured in terms of property - land, livestock, a business. This was true of the youth also.

"The economic status of rural young people who are living with their parents and working at home can be but partially measured by money income, by property owned, or by whether or not they receive wages for their work. It must frequently be measured by the prospects for ultimately owning a farm or business in the community or becoming established in a profession,<sup>1</sup> in a secure salaried position, or in a skilled trade."<sup>1</sup>

The economic unrest that has been general throughout the country has been felt in rural areas. The relief rolls now, due to increased employment caused by war activities, have been greatly reduced in rural as in urban areas. However, during depression years rural youth formed a large share of the number requiring relief aid. It has been estimated that not less than

". . . two million rural youth have been members of relief households at some time since 1930. The peak in the number of households was reached in February, 1935 when approximately 1,370,000 rural youth were receiving aid."<sup>2</sup>

Such has been the economic condition of youth in rural communities. The above distressing picture has been relieved since the boom of war-time industry has placed a premium on the labor of farm help. At the present time rural youth are better situated economically than they have been for some time.

. . . . .

1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 21.
2. Ibid, p. xv.

## 2. Opportunity For Increasing Income

The economic situation of rural youth cannot be left without a brief survey of the possibilities for an increase in income presented to rural youth both within agriculture and without. Opportunities within agriculture for an increase in income previous to the war were slight. The large relief rolls were indicative of that fact. Youth began to pile up in rural areas.

"Opportunities for young men in rural areas to acquire their own property and economic independence have materially decreased in recent years because of a growing surplus of rural youth, according to a Works Project Administration report."<sup>1</sup>

Then opportunities in industry were slight. There was little chance for all to find employment in the cities for there was a surplus of workers for every available job. The cities were unable to find work for their own unemployed to say nothing of those who came in from rural communities.

Since the outbreak of war the economic picture has considerably brightened and both industry and agriculture now need workers badly.

### D. Educational Status

The school is one of the chief factors in the environment of every person's life. It is one of the

. . . . .

1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p.xv.

necessary features of rural life that must be considered.

1. Schools in Rural Areas

a. Availability of Schools

The facilities for the education of rural youth are meagre. In many states, particularly those in the South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central areas, facilities are poorer than in others.<sup>1</sup>

"Because of comparative lack of taxpaying ability rural States have the most meager provision for public education. Hence the areas with the largest proportions of children have the poorest schools."<sup>2</sup>

In many areas schools are so poorly located that rural youth must travel long distances to reach the school buildings. It is obvious that such a situation would not be conducive to regular school attendance. Here again the availability of the rural school is dependent upon the locality. In some sections of the country where rural communities are situated close together or near large cities, there is not as great a need for rural schools, particularly high schools.

b. Size of Rural Schools

The size of the rural school depends upon the number of children in the community in attendance, the opinion the adults have regarding the necessity of education, the economic prosperity of the community, and

. . . . .

1. Cf. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p.42.

2. Ibid, p. xv.

the number of schools in the locality. The school building often is a one room frame building badly in need of repair in which one teacher is supposed to teach with only the most meager of equipment all the children who will come, ranging from grade one to grade eight or more depending upon how long the youth will attend. Or the school may be a modern stone or brick or wood building that is well-kept with more than just one room and with more than just one teacher to teach all the grades. Both types may be seen in rural communities.

c. Length of School Year

The length of the school year varies. In definite agricultural areas the school year may be dependent upon the crops. In many cases farm youth must remain out of school to assist with the planting and harvesting. The school year in such cases would be short. In rural areas where youth must walk long distances to school the attendance is often hindered during the winter months resulting in a shorter school year. In this respect rural village youth have an advantage over farm youth.

2. School Attendance of Rural Youth

"In areas where facilities are available, a large proportion of all rural youth attend school."<sup>1</sup> There is a difference in the attendance of rural and urban youth with the advantage on the side of the city youth.

. . . . .

1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 44.

There is a difference also in the school attendance of farm and non-farm youth with the advantage lying with the village youth. However, the American Council on Education reports:

"The difference is a product primarily of difference in opportunity rather than difference in native ability or even in interest."<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of reasons for the lack of attendance or early cessation of attendance at school on the part of rural youth. A survey in North Dakota revealed that financial difficulties was the greatest reason offered by the youth themselves.

"Economic difficulties account for about three-fourths of the farm males and two-thirds of the farm females not going further in school. . . . Financial difficulties was given as the reason for leaving school by about the same percentage of farm and village youth, but "needed at home" ranked much higher for farm than for village youth."<sup>2</sup>

Other reasons given by rural youth for dropping out of school at an early age are poor health, lack of transportation facilities to schools, early marriage, and lack of interest.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Opportunities for Higher Education

The increase since 1930 in high-school enrollment for the United States as a whole has been on an upward trend. The increase has been evident in rural areas

. . . . .

1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 45.
2. Donald G. Hay and others, Problems of Rural Youth in Selected Areas of North Dakota, p. 51.
3. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

as well although youth in such areas still do not attend high-school to the same extent as do youth in urban areas. There are several reasons for the increased interest in higher education as shown by rural youth. One is the lack of available opportunities for employment. Those who normally would have migrated to the cities have remained home; rather than remain idle they have gone on to school. Then gradual improvement in transportation facilities between urban and rural areas has increased high-school enrollment. Furthermore the relief the government has offered rural families has made it possible for rural youth to remain in school for a longer period of time. Rural young men and women along with urban young people are being given advanced training through the various branches of the service. It must be remembered that rural youth have not had educational advantages. All youth in families with a low economic standard drop out of school as soon as the law permits and rural youth are no exception. But when young people in rural areas have equal opportunity with their urban brothers, their thirst for education is just as strong.

## E. Social and Recreational Facilities

Every person needs to find relief from the routine of every day life in some form of recreation. It is necessary, therefore, to discover what opportunity rural life provides for its youth to be "re-created".

### 1. Recreational Facilities Provided

#### a. By the Community

The changes that have affected the social life of urban areas have penetrated also into rural social life. A greater contact of rural youth with urban civilization has resulted in an increased desire on the part of the youth to "do something".

"The old-time community provided various forms of social life that were not dependent on money. The village life included corn-huskings, spelling bees, dances, shooting matches, and all kinds of homely pleasures that live in the memory of farm-born city folks, but that have almost entirely disappeared from the country. Young people of today, forced to depend on themselves for social life and deprived of the informal support of the community, are often unable to find any wholesome recreation that is within their means."<sup>1</sup>

Realizing the lack in many rural communities of an adequate program for recreation, various agencies have attempted to supply such programs. Many communities through 4 - H clubs and other organizations seek to provide for youth's social desires. In addition to such groups rural youth throughout America find amusement in parks,

. . . . .

1. Coyle, op. cit., p. 23.

playgrounds, camps, and swimming pools. Perhaps the greatest source of entertainment is the moving picture which finds its way into even the smallest hamlet. In many small rural towns may also be found the tavern and pool-hall in which many of the rural young men in particular find their only source of enjoyment.

b. By the School

In some rural communities the school is very active in providing forms of recreation for the youth of the area. In the localities where the educational standards are high it is reflected in the extensive extra-curricular activities provided for the young people. These activities may range from track meets and football games which are part of school life to clubs and classes not directly connected with the school but sponsored by it. In such circumstances the school building is the focal point of the whole community.

In other regions where little time or money is spent on education, little is done by the schools in the way of making provision for the social life of the youth.

c. By the Church

The rural church in former years was the center of the social life of the rural community. Whole families attended the meetings held by the church for very often they were the only break in the routine of daily life.

Since the radio, automobile, and moving picture have broken down the barrier of rural isolation, the church in many communities has lost its place as social leader.<sup>1</sup>

As is true of the school, the provision the rural church makes for the social life of the youth is to a great extent dependent upon its own economic condition and the vision its leaders have of the social needs of the youth and adults.

## 2. Participation of Rural Youth in Recreation

### a. Available Leisure Time

Does rural youth have leisure time? In former years there was little free time in the average life of a rural family. It was necessary to be up in the early morning and spend a long day in heavy physical labor. When evening came it was generally thought that there would be little desire to participate in recreation of any kind outside the family circle. Within recent years, however, changes in rural life have brought about changes in the recreational life as well. There is leisure time now and with the increased free time there is a growing desire to fill it in some way. It is certain that "the constructive use of leisure time is of more importance to the individual during youth than during any other equal number of years of his life."<sup>2</sup> How then does rural youth use his free time?

. . . . .

1. Cf. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 72.

2. Ibid, p. 71.

b. Use of Leisure Time

It is difficult to estimate what percentage of rural youth take advantage of the recreational opportunities that are offered. Reports seem to indicate that organizations aside from the church have had little effect upon rural youth, especially those out of school. Either the groups did not attempt to reach the young people or the program offered was not sufficiently attractive to them.<sup>1</sup>

In general it has been found that there are three main types of activities in which rural youth engage. First there is participation in the activities sponsored by community organizations such as the school and church. Then there is participation in the facilities provided by the community such as swimming pools and playgrounds. Finally there is individual use of leisure time through reading, fishing, and dancing. Much of rural youth's free time is spent in indoor, passive types of activity.<sup>2</sup>

It has also been found that participation by youth in social activities is dependent on their economic situation and educational status.

F. Home and Family Life

The home is the earliest environment in which a child becomes aware of himself and others and it remains for

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1. Cf. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 76.

2. Ibid., p. 82.

some time the main environment. It is well, then, to briefly survey the rural home.

### 1. Economic Condition of the Rural Home

Farming is more than just a business; it is a way of life to those engaged in it. The entire family turns out to assist in planting, harvesting, caring for the animals and the other daily tasks of the farm home. The entire family is concerned if a dry spell should harm the crops or if an excessive amount of rain should negate months of labor. The family as a whole helps to earn the income in the farm home. What then is the average income of a rural family?

The rural home like all homes was affected by the depression years. The average rural farm home has a low income even in these days when wages have so greatly increased. "In 1913, the farmer's share of the consumer's dollar spent for major foods averaged 53 cents. In 1940, the average for the farmer was 42 cents. . . ."<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that nearly forty percent of all the farms in the United States are worked by tenants and that only one farmer out of three owns his own farm free of debt.<sup>2</sup> As was noted in the discussion on the income of rural youth, the actual cash received does not measure entirely the income in a rural home. However, even taking into account the

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1. Landis, op. cit., p. 20.

2. Dr. Randolph, in Town and Country Church, December, 1944, p. 1.

property owned and the food raised for family consumption, the economic situation of the rural family is not very good.

It is in the rural areas that the largest families are to be found. The combination of a low cash income and a large family with little opportunity for an outside increase in income results in a low living standard so that many of our rural families are ill-housed, ill-fed, and ill-clad. Mark Rich in speaking of the low income of rural families has the following to say:

"More than a third of our rural people cannot afford the basic necessities of life. The upper one-third live in comfortable circumstances . . . but most of the young people are to be found among the poorer families."<sup>1</sup>

A large share of the rural young people throughout this nation which is so rich live in homes that do not have economic security.

## 2. Importance of the Home in Rural Life

Aaron Rapking in discussing the importance of the home to rural life in general emphatically states:

"No doubt the one greatest determining factor in the building of the kingdom in the community is the home. As go the homes of America, so goes America, is certainly true of our rural communities."<sup>2</sup>

A report in the Town and Country Church stresses the place of the home in the community by calling the family the

. . . . .

1. Mark Rich and others, Youth Work in the Rural Church, p.11.
2. Aaron H. Rapking, Building the Kingdom, p. 48.

"basic unit in a Christian culture"<sup>1</sup> and urges a reorganization of rural life so that rural families may be established and have economic and social opportunities. A community is composed of families; families are composed of individuals. Each child receives from the home the attitudes that determine later responses. In the home the youth receives his first impression of God, develops the attitude he takes toward others, begins to develop a philosophy of life. Thus for the contribution that the home makes to the community in instilling into its members high ideals of good citizenship, the home is indeed the basic unit in a Christian culture.

The home exerts a tremendous influence on rural youth. To farm youth in particular the home is of great importance. Because of the isolation of rural areas a family is drawn together in a way that is not possible in urban areas with the constant distractions afforded by the more complex society. A rural family spends the greater share of the day in each other's company. The relationship that exists may be a close one bringing satisfaction to all or it may be an obnoxious relationship from which the youth seeks to break away as soon as possible. Because of the need for the whole family to work together there is little opportunity for a spirit of individualism to develop. The training which the rural youth receives from

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1. Town and Country Church, October, 1943, p. 1.

the home is of inestimable value to himself and through him to the community.

Remembering the large percentage of youth in rural America and the great influx of rural youth into the cities of the nation, it is obvious that the rural home is of great importance to the future of America.<sup>1</sup>

#### G. Church in Rural Areas

The church along with the home and school usually holds a commanding position in any community. It is a part of rural youth's environment.

##### 1. Location and Size of Rural Churches

The 1940 census reveals that in 1936 there were somewhat over seventeen million people who were members of rural churches. When it is remembered that there are about fifty-seven millions living in rural communities, the number affiliated with the church is not very large. In 1943, Clifford L. Samuelson estimated that "sixty percent of the people living in rural America are not related to any organized church work."<sup>2</sup> The Home Missions Council has recently published statistics indicating

" . . . there are still ten thousand villages in rural America without a church of any kind - Jewish, Protestant, or Catholic - and thirty thousand villages without a pastor. There are thirteen million four hundred thousand children under twelve years of age who are receiving no religious instruction . . ."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Teague, op. cit., p. 56.
  2. C.L. Samuelson, in The Rural Messenger, November, 1943, p. 2.
  3. Arthur W. Hewitt, God's Back Pasture, p. 16.

While some communities have no churches, other areas are over-churched. In some sections of the country it is rare indeed to find a rural town of any size that does not include among its furnishings a church building. Some villages have as many churches as there are denominations represented. Roy G. Ross of the International Council of Religious Education views as an obstacle to church progress the fact that " a town of twenty-five hundred people may maintain as many as ten churches sometimes two of the same denomination."<sup>1</sup> In the open country the church buildings are not as numerous although the distance to a nearby town is usually not very great. Yet many instances may be cited of rural communities in which there is no religious instruction of either youth or adults. A conference called by President Roosevelt to investigate the youth situation reported that about one-half of America's children and young people receive no religious training.<sup>2</sup> A large share of these are rural. In fact Goodrich Fenner has said that "there are more than five million rural young people who are not members of any Christian body."<sup>3</sup> That makes a very high percentage that is being neglected by the church.

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1. Roy G Ross, in Town and Country Church, February, 1945, p.8.
2. Cf. Henry McLaughlin, The Gospel in Social Action, p. 53.
3. Goodrich R. Fenner, The Episcopal Church in Town and Country, p. 83.

## 2. Economic Condition of Rural Churches

One of the great weaknesses of the rural church is the economic poverty of which it is the victim. The church has declined in economic influence in proportion as the economic prosperity of the community has declined. "Like the city slum and the downtown sections of the big cities, the country church is regarded as a well-nigh lost home mission field."<sup>1</sup> The economic poverty of the church is evidenced in the unattractive and, in some cases, dilapidated church buildings that are poor also in equipment and leadership. Many churches are financially unable to support a resident pastor. One rural minister in writing on the resident pastor problem estimates that seven-tenths of the open-country churches and one-fifth of all the village churches have non-resident service.<sup>2</sup> The financial difficulty of the rural church may be more readily understood by a survey of the study made by Edmund Brunner in 1936. His report shows the average yearly contribution of members of village churches in some areas to be a little over eight dollars and of members of open-country churches to be about three dollars.<sup>3</sup> When the yardstick of economic prosperity is applied to the rural church it does not measure up very well.

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1. Rolvix Harlan, A New Day for the Country Church, p. 1.
2. Cf. Hewitt, op. cit., p. 15.
3. Cf. Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, June, 1943, p. 2.

## H. Summary and Conclusion

Realizing that "the educational, health, moral, and spiritual quality of the rural stream flowing into urban life affects directly and deeply the life-blood of the city"<sup>1</sup>, this chapter proposed to survey briefly the surroundings of rural youth. This included that of nature as well as the more intangible but nevertheless important environment of the facilities affecting the social and spiritual nature of the youth.

In the physical surroundings of rural young people this chapter considered the landscape, pointing out the immediate natural environment of village and farm youth. The size of the community was also discussed with statistics showing the relative population in rural areas.

The economic condition of the youth was then analyzed. This involved the actual wage income and the opportunities provided for an improvement in the income.

Realizing the close relationship that exists between the economic situation and the educational attainments, a study was next made of the schools in rural areas. This included the availability of schools in respect to their location, the average size of rural schools, the

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1. The Rural Messenger, February, 1943, p. 5, excerpt from an address at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in 1936 by Rt. Rev. William Green, Bishop of Mississippi.

length of the school year. It dealt also with the percentage of rural youth in attendance and the reasons given for lack of attendance.

The recreational life was found to include community organizations in addition to the usual type of recreation provided by the movies, dance halls and other commercial amusements. A study also was made of the leisure time of rural youth and the use that is made of that free time.

The home was the next feature of the rural environment to be considered. The economic condition of the rural family was studied with respect to the size of the family and the average income. The place of the home in rural community life and in the life of the youth was also considered.

Finally the church was studied. Since the church forms an important part of the environment, it was studied with respect to the size, location, and economic condition.

From the study of the environment of rural youth it is obvious that there is much in it that gives rise to problems. There is much in the surroundings of rural youth that must be remedied.

CHAPTER II  
THE PROBLEMS OF RURAL YOUTH

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A. Introduction

The people of America have recently awakened to the realization that the youth of the nation were facing entirely new problems.

"In their period of greatest receptivity, they appeared to be thwarted in many ways. Jobs were lacking; months and often years elapsed between school graduation and employment; education was not training adequately for the work opportunities available; marriage was being indefinitely postponed; economic insecurity was curtailing advancement; confusion as to spiritual values was evident. The normal avenues along which the young people of earlier generations had passed to a responsible, enriched adulthood seemed blocked."<sup>1</sup>

Miss Brandon has thus well stated the problems of youth in general. These problems common to youth of all localities seem particularly urgent in rural communities.

". . . the needs of rural youth in the 1930's and well into 1940 and 1941 were so great, in some areas literally so overpowering, that the effective and unlimited cooperation of all available resources would have been inadequate to meet them fully."<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will take up in detail the problems of rural youth as they have been seen by those working in rural areas and voiced by the youth themselves.

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1. Margaret Brandon, Youth on the Highways, pp. 3-4.
2. Edmund Brunner, Working With Rural Youth, p. 29.

## B. Need for Economic Advantages

In beginning the study of the problems of a group of people it is natural to look first of all at the economic conditions. The economic environment of rural youth was found to be such as would give rise to certain problems.

### 1. Rural Youth Faced Closed Economic Doors

Doors in urban areas have been closed to rural youth. In former years a large percentage of rural young people migrated to the cities and found the doors of industry open to welcome them. Such an influx of rural youth had little effect upon city youth for there were job opportunities for all. Indeed such a move of rural youth to the cities was necessary to maintain population in the cities.

"The 1940 census makes it quite clear that the cities of the United States fail by thirty-one per cent to produce enough children to maintain a stationary population, while on the other hand village folk produce a surplus of thirteen percent and farm folk a surplus of forty-five percent in each generation. This means that our urban population must be maintained by a heavy migration of rural people to the cities."<sup>1</sup>

The fact is, however, that such a maintenance ceased to occur during the depression years. The lack of employment opportunities during those years slowed up migration city-ward and a surplus gathered in the rural communities.

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1. Morton C. Hanna, The Training of the Rural Minister, p. 1.

What of the rural areas then? Were they able to provide work opportunities for the youth who would normally remain at home as well as for those who would normally be cared for by city employment? A glance at the agricultural situation quickly leads to a negative conclusion. There are several reasons for the negative answer.

Previous to the depression years America was able to adequately maintain its rural population. For any youth who wanted work, long hours and heavy labor, there was plenty to be had. This picture has been changed in recent years. One factor drawing youth to the cities was the attraction of easier jobs requiring less physical labor. Combined with this has been the added factor of the lessening of opportunities in rural communities.

The question logically arises as to why, in a world in which people are starving and in our own country where many people have not enough to eat, should it be that rural areas had not enough employment for all seeking it. The answer lies in the poor conservation America has made of its resources, both those of nature and human resources. The problems facing youth in agriculture prior to the war and even at the present time are manifold. Some have been cared for by the increased demand for workers in industry; others are still facing youth.

There is first of all the loss of much good land through soil-erosion.

"Reliable estimates indicate that of about 414,000,000 acres of arable land, about 100,000,000 acres have been seriously impoverished by the washing away of top-soil, and that about a similar number are losing fertility at a rapid rate."<sup>1</sup>

Thus much valuable land that ought to produce and provide sustenance for many is lost through careless farming.

Then there is also the problem of the increased mechanization of farms. No one would wish for a return to the days when all labor was done by hand or with the very poorest of equipment. Nevertheless the negative aspect of mechanization must be faced in its effects on farm labor. Partly as a result of the machine's doing man's labor it "has been estimated that our permanent migrants now number considerably over 2,000,000 people."<sup>2</sup> With this is connected another problem, namely, the alarming increase in farm tenancy over against farm ownership. At one time youth could expect to inherit the family farm or buy one of his own thus achieving a degree of independence. Such is no longer possible.

All these factors combined to swell the increased tide of rural youth flowing to the cities. However, the depression brought about restricted opportunities in urban areas and rural youth was not only forced to remain at

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1. Landis, op. cit., p. 20.

2. Ibid, p. 19.

home, thus causing an increase in the number to be cared for, but also the tide flowed the other way and youth returned to the rural communities from the cities. The government previous to the war recognized the fact that rural areas could not begin to care for the youth.

"It was estimated that there were more than two young men available for every farm that became vacant through the retirement or death of an operator and that by 1938 there were over a million more youth on the farms and in the villages of rural America than would have been the case had normal conditions prevailed."<sup>1</sup>

This depressing picture of the economic situation confronting rural youth has been alleviated by the war as has also been the case in urban areas. So great has been the demand for workers in industry that it has taken many youth from rural areas and the various branches of the service have taken many more leaving agriculture in a desperate plight for workers. In spite of the shortage in help the response to the emergency has been magnificent. The problem that will confront the nation upon the cessation of the war will be the millions of people who have left the farms in response to the call of the service and industry who, in all probability, will expect to return to the rural communities.

"If it is found that the people now on farms with machinery and more efficient methods can produce enough to meet all needs, the problem of re-employment of former farmers and farm workers will be one of our major national problems."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Brunner, op. cit., p. 2.
2. I. W. Duggan, "The Need for a Strong Rural Church", in What Emphasis for the Church in Town and Country, p. 21.

Thus we see poverty to have been the lot of many rural young people with many uncertainties for the future.

## 2. Youth's Outlook Affected by Economic Insecurity

### a. Relation of Unemployment and Marriage

A survey of rural youth in North Dakota reveals that the economic ability of rural youth to maintain a home is a major factor influencing his decision to marry.<sup>1</sup> Economic insecurity affects all phases of rural youth's life and is most prominent as he begins to plan for the establishment of his own home. It is natural for a young couple to want a reasonable assurance of security. The establishment of a new home is an important step. "For all youth marriage is a major social adjustment; for farm youth it is usually both a social and an economic adjustment."<sup>2</sup> Statistics indicate that the marriage rate for the country during the early years of the depression fell to one of the lowest points in United States history. Furthermore, it was found that the decline was greater in urban than in rural areas.<sup>3</sup>

"The limited data available for the depression years indicate that in spite of fluctuations in rates the fundamental factors in the marriage situation of rural youth have remained about the same. Rural youth do marry at a somewhat earlier age than urban youth; but this is associated with the cultural pattern in rural areas where early marriage is socially approved. It is

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1. Cf. Hay, op. cit., p. 15.
2. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 57.
3. Ibid., p. 64.

also a well-known fact that early marriages are characteristic of the lower economic groups and hence of the groups with the lowest standards of living and the lowest educational attainments. Because such large proportions of rural youth are under-privileged in these respects, a high rate of marriage naturally occurs. Yet these youth have such limited economic opportunities that they face appalling handicaps in their efforts to attain a reasonable economic base for family living. . . . Hence this is a vicious circle in which poverty begets poverty."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, rural youth who are unable adequately to support a family are found to have a higher marriage rate than urban youth.

In the better economic areas marriage is put off until some degree of economic security is attained. This results in the delayed personal happiness of young people. Moreover the birth rate among those who could give children adequate care is thus reduced. In poorer rural communities poverty causes little delay in marriage. The young couple simply moves into the already too crowded family home or else begins life in a most inadequate and unsatisfactory way. A young minister in reporting to the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church on this very problem relates the experiences of various couples in his rural parish who, having married recently, have been forced to live either with the parents or in rented homes. Out of thirty-four couples only eight have homes of their own.<sup>2</sup> Not only are the lives of the young people

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

2. Cf. Landis, op. cit., p. 14.

tragically burdened but they also add more children to a community that is unable to provide the minimum of care needed. Because of the importance of the family in the community the effect of unemployment on marriage is serious and far-reaching in its influence on society in general.

b. Relation of Unemployment and Crime

The effect of economic problems is seen also in the relation that exists between unemployment and crime. Unemployment is not the only, nor perhaps can it be called the major cause of delinquency and crime among young people. Bruce Melvin reports studies that were made to determine what relationship existed between stringent economic conditions and crime. The conclusion reached was that the relationship was slight.<sup>1</sup> However, the report concludes: "Surveys of youthful crime in rural territory indicate that the solution lies largely in providing better economic opportunities."<sup>2</sup>

c. Relation of Unemployment to Youth's Philosophy of Life

The effect of inadequate and unequal economic opportunities is felt less immediately but none the less forcefully as it is seen in the philosophy of life developed in the mind of youth. One who is well-clothed, adequately fed, without the dread of insecurity would have no hesitancy in facing each day. But those youth who have

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1. Cf. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 84.  
2. Ibid., p. 86.

lived familiarly with poverty all their lives and seen its effects in their personal lives while at the same time realizing that all people do not share their plight are bound to develop a bitter attitude toward life, a feeling that fate has played a malicious trick on them and that the world owes them a living. It is all too easy to develop a defeatist attitude under such conditions.

As one watches the expressions on the faces of youth in rural villages and on the farms as they sit idly with nothing to do, one cannot help but fear for their future.

"Even though most of the young people are keeping up their hope and courage, time is passing. Every year some of them break under the strain. Some take to crime. Others sink into a lethargy that makes them poor prospects for future jobs. But most of them are still on their feet, ready and able to seize any good chance that comes their way. . . . Young people can stand only so much anxiety before they give up hope."<sup>1</sup>

What is rural youth's economic future to be? Obviously it is difficult at the present to determine what prospects materially the future holds out to rural young people. A glance at the years just past seem to give promise of a dark future. Will the boom immediately following the present war give way as did that following the last war to a long seige of depression and unemployment? If so what will be the effect on those rural communities that have not as yet fully recovered from the last depression?

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1. Coyle, op. cit., p. 6.

The economic problems alone that face rural youth are tremendous and ought not be carried by them alone. Our nation's greatest asset is its youth; if their needs are neglected and their future over-shadowed by the specter of insecurity, the welfare of the nation as a whole will be impaired.

### C. Need for Educational Opportunities

Closely linked with the economic problems of the youth in rural areas is that of the lack of adequate educational opportunities.

#### 1. More Equality of School Facilities Needed

The great contrast existing between the schools in urban and rural areas and the large proportion of the nation's children who live in rural communities indicate a need. Rural schools labor under great difficulties. The problems include a heavy financial burden, poorly trained teachers, low standard for salaries, lack of equipment, transportation problems, lack of interest in education by the adults of the community, unequal opportunity for advanced education.

In addition there is the problem of the low scholastic standing of many rural schools. Because of the inability of predominately rural states to pay teachers an adequate salary they must depend upon teachers who have not had sufficient preparation. As a result of the low

standard youth are unprepared when a transition is made into a city system.

There is also a lack in vocational training for rural youth. Vocational training in agriculture has been made increasingly available to the young people in recent years although there is still much progress that can be made in that realm. However, while such training is fine and an expansion of a program of agricultural vocations is necessary, the fact must not be over-looked that many of our rural youth do not intend to remain on the farms and in rural villages. Many hope to find their way into industry or a profession. Unfortunately little training is available to them at present.

"Inadequate as the vocational training is for farm boys and girls who are to become farmers or wives of farmers, the chances of obtaining training for other occupations are almost non-existent for rural young people within reasonable distance and at a reasonable cost."<sup>1</sup>

There is a definite need for rural schools to be more readily accessible to rural youth with a more adequate course of study in order to give them the educational equipment they need. Just as the nation is becoming aware that the rural areas must receive a fair share of the national income, so it must come to realize that rural youth must receive an equal share of educational opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 55.

2. Cf. Teague, op. cit., p. 34.

## 2. Effect on Rural Youth of Inadequate Preparation

### a. Inability to Attain Economic Security

Biographies of men who have taken a place among the millionaires of the world have made it clear that at one time a high school education was not necessary, to say nothing of a college degree, in order to become prosperous. Opportunities for employment were everywhere and a young person with ability and initiative was not hindered by the lack of formal education. Such is no longer true. A college graduate is given preference over all others and a youth without a high school diploma is rarely considered capable of anything but unskilled labor. Rural youth without sufficient education are at a great disadvantage.

"To rural youth will fall the lot of performing the most menial and unremunerative types of labor in the cities because their city cousins refuse to accept the pitiably low wages paid for such work and because few rural youth are trained for skilled work."<sup>1</sup>

There is another factor complicating the problem of attaining security. It has been assumed that there were employment opportunities open at all times to youth who were educationally prepared to take advantage of them. However, the emergency of the depression made employment scarce even for those with a college education. As was discovered above<sup>2</sup>, the lack of employment during the depression years caused youth in general to remain in

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 40.
2. Cf. above p. 17.

school for a longer period of time. This is to be desired if the further schooling is of value. However, in many rural communities where the educational standards are low, the added time spent in school is apt to make little contribution in preparing youth for a vocation. "Training as well as occupational guidance are still vital aspects of the employment situation as it faces rural young people and their leaders."<sup>1</sup>

Rural youth, then, because of a lack of educational preparation are hindered in their efforts to become financially stable. Unless education provides necessary preparation for future employment it has not adequately prepared youth.

b. Inability to Assume Civic Responsibility

"To make our democracy really effective every one of us must assume responsibility for making the wheels go round."<sup>2</sup> The wheels must be made to run efficiently whether in the nation as a whole or in a small rural community of a few hundred people. Our government has long believed that people cannot be good citizens, capable of intelligent government unless they are adequately trained. Hence, those applying for citizenship must attend classes in which are taught the principles of democracy. Schools insist that youth shall study history, principles of

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1. David C. Coyle, Rural Youth in Action, p. 8.
2. E. L. Kirkpatrick, America's Leaders of Tomorrow Are Talking, p. 8.

government, the meaning of citizenship. But what of our rural areas in which the inadequacies of the present educational system have been pointed out? Rural youth will form a large part of the youth who ". . . will bear the anxieties of the future . . . and . . . rebuild democracy."<sup>1</sup> These future leaders need training now.

### 3. Uncertainty of the Future Without Adequate Preparation

The demands of the war have made great changes in all youth's education. In the last year particularly young men have been called into the army even before completing high school. Large holes have been made in industry with a resultant increase in wages so that many youth, both boys and girls, feeling they should take advantage of the job opportunities and at the same time aid the war effort, have dropped out of school.

The question of what to do when the war ends and men return is a big one. Will the young people be willing to return to school having once known the thrill of earning high wages, and enter school where they left off with a younger class? If they do not return to school what will their future be should employment again be scarce and job preference given to those with an advanced education? This chapter has already pointed out the close relationship existing between education and employment<sup>2</sup>

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1. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.
2. Cf. above, pp. 42-43.

and the close relationship between economic security and personal happiness.<sup>1</sup> What then is ahead for rural youth if schools continue to offer them so little in the way of both academic and vocational preparation?

#### D. Need for an Expanded Recreational Program

It was discovered in the discussion on the rural environment that rural youth of today have more leisure time than those of previous years. There is also the desire to fill that extra time. Rural youth need recreation.

##### 1. Factors in Rural Life Requiring Recreation

Ernest R. Groves writing some years ago on rural problems stated:

" . . . the vices of the country are vices of isolation. Sex difficulties arise spontaneously and require no commercial exploitation when young people live a barren and narrow life without ideals."<sup>2</sup>

Rural communities no longer have the degree of isolation that existed when the above was written. The automobile not only takes the rural youth to town but also brings the city to the youth. Moving pictures bring to rural young people a vivid portrayal of urban life which is all too often accepted as the normal life of the city. The radio is in evidence in every little hamlet. Other amusements have found their way into rural areas and the tie between the small town and the large city has become increasingly

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1. Cf. above, pp. 36-39.

2. Ernest R. Groves, Rural Problems of Today, p. 26.

strong.

"Yet taking everything into consideration, rural youth are comparatively isolated. Contacts with the outside world, with people of different customs and ways of living are limited. The range of friendships may be limited."<sup>1</sup>

Combined with the isolation of rural life is the drudgery and lack of variety in the average rural youth's day. This is particularly true on the farm where there is the same round of chores every day. Where no relaxation is to be had the people stagnate. The life of the farm youth is tiring physically it is true. This ought not, however, be an excuse for the lack of recreation but rather an incentive, for these very young people need an outlet for nervous energy not expended through physical labor. The same need is found prevalent among rural village youth who, when the routine of the day is over, find nothing to do with time that hangs heavily on their hands. This particular need has been intensified by the lack of work opportunities. "Imposed idleness and lack of work opportunities present youth's most pressing problem."<sup>2</sup> These two factors of rural isolation and the lack of variety from the routine of daily living unite to form a need that must be met.

## 2. Opinion of Youth Regarding Recreation

Rural youth themselves are acutely aware of their

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1. Rich, op. cit., p. 13.
2. Brandon, op. cit., p. 6.

needs. The young people reporting in the American Country Life Association recognize that " a wider use of leisure, including recreational programs, activities and facilities, seems to be the outstanding need in the local community."<sup>1</sup> A survey of the needs of rural youth in certain areas of North Dakota reveals that recreational needs take precedence even over the economic needs. North Dakota youth have expressed the need for some kind of a program that

" . . . would interest and give them the necessary recreation that is needed so badly; a chance for recreation (especially during the summertime) which young people would gladly supplement for the cheap dance hall they now frequent."<sup>2</sup>

The opinions expressed by rural youth throughout the country reveal a deep-seated need for an expanded social and recreational life.

### 3. Inadequacy of the Present Program

Rural youth are seeking for a wholesome recreational life. Why then is the need so great? Principally because the need is not being met by the agencies now working with rural youth. The first chapter of this study pointed out that the recreational environment of rural young people is largely composed of dance halls, theaters, and taverns and that these places of amusement are frequented by the young people often beginning at a very early age. The inadequacy of the present program intensifies the

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 82.
2. Hay, op. cit., p. 61.

needs and in some cases creates new problems.

"Urban studies of youth have revealed that the key to the problems of many young people lies in the use they make of their leisure hours. It has also been found that the wholesome use of leisure time plays an important role in preventing crime and delinquency. There is no reason to believe that this relationship is any less effective in rural than in urban areas."<sup>1</sup>

Butterfield writing early in the twentieth century made it clear that "the recreations of the country, not only for children but for young people and adults as well, are grossly inadequate."<sup>2</sup> The inadequacies of former years have been to some extent corrected but the need is still great.

The Bible tells the story of a man out of whom an evil spirit had been cast. After some time the demon returned and, finding no influence for good in the man, entered in again taking others with him and so "the last state of that man becometh worse than the first."<sup>3</sup> The lack of recreation in rural life must be filled. If unwholesome amusements gain prominence, the situation is not improved but made worse. The leisure time of rural youth needs to be filled by constructive activities and not simply by places where they go to be passive spectators. The fascination of the city is great but rural life can offer more to its young people than the city when that

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 84.
2. Kenyon Butterfield, The Country Church and the Rural Problem, p. 43.
3. Matthew 12:43-45.

rural life is properly organized and directed.

There is in rural areas on the whole a paucity of social, cultural and recreational life. The lack is vividly stated by one observer of rural youth as follows:

"What I have seen has frequently saddened and distressed me. In some places the country lacks cultural privileges today quite as much as it did a century ago, and the young men and women of farming districts must look to the cities for whatever of social life and amusement and entertainment it is their fortune to purchase. As long as this is the case we cannot make a well-balanced race of agriculturists; we cannot make of country life a life worth living."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the fact that country life is impaired by a lack of social life, the effect is felt in the cities also. The fact that many rural youth will find their way into the cities has been pointed out previously.<sup>2</sup> Unless the moral tone of rural life has been maintained at a high level through a social program that has touched all of youth's life, the standards of the city will not be improved. In this respect the city would do well to assist in providing for a more adequate social life in rural communities.

A further complication of this social problem may be seen in the youth returning to rural communities from the far corners of the world. Young men and women will return who, perhaps for the first time, had left the narrow sphere of the local community and have seen the

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 82.

2. Cf. above, p. 32.

wonders of the world. Will they be content to settle down to the limited life of former days? It is logical to assume that such a life will be unsatisfactory.

To assume that simply because rural youth are aware of their need of a wider social life will in itself answer the problem is not sufficient. Young people are hindered by a lack of facilities, by a lack of financial backing, and, not of least importance, by the lack of interest shown by adults and by organizations within the community. The recreational needs of rural youth cannot be side-stepped or ignored. They demand expression of their social instincts and if no other means are available they will find expression in unwholesome places. The challenge faces leaders of rural youth to meet their need in this realm.

#### E. Need for Religious Guidance

Mankind in general has religious desires that demand satisfaction. If religious needs are not met problems are very likely to arise that will affect all of life. Like other youth rural young people need guidance in their religious life.

##### 1. Spiritual Needs of Rural Youth

Young people living in rural communities do not differ greatly from urban youth in their spiritual needs.

The eight-fold objectives set up by the International Council of Religious Education are as applicable in a small rural church as in a large urban church. All youth need a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Friend, all need a Christian interpretation of the meaning of life, all need the help of the church in establishing Christian homes. Closely united with the distinctly spiritual needs of the youth are those already outlined in this chapter. Although these needs are common to all of youth they become intensified when not met. And in that fact lies the greatest need of all in rural life, namely, that the rural church awaken to the needs of its youth. More than any other group in rural life youth are "as sheep without a shepherd."<sup>1</sup>

"Country life needs the rural church because it is in danger of losing its soul, its rural soul. . . . The poor farmer must have the church to strengthen his spirit in the midst of insecurity and landlessness. The fortunate farmer needs a religious inspiration at a time when the changing social order is tearing him away from his moorings."<sup>2</sup>

Every age needs the message of the church but the youth do especially. They need religious guidance for the establishment of their own lives. Problems result when their need is not met.

## 2. Inadequacies of the Present Program

That the church is not meeting the needs is evidenced in the deserted church buildings of many rural

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1. Teague, op. cit., p. 67.
2. Thomas A. Tripp, "Rural Culture Needs the Church", in Town and Country Church, February, 1945, p. 4.

communities. Many are limping along; others are closed completely. There are a number of reasons given for the condition of the rural church. The economic state as noted in the first chapter is one of the major explanations. Combined with this are the population shifts, the lack of a trained ministry and leadership and other causes. Rolvix Harlan believes the inadequacy of the church program to be

" . . . a problem of social conditions, economic change, and readjustment, but it is principally a problem of lop-sided Christianity and a narrow-visioned ecclesiastical policy. In so far as the plight of the Christian Church is the result of short-sighted inadequate leadership, program and methods, it can measurably be corrected. Christianity has recovered itself in numerous situations in the course of church history. It must now set itself the task of recovering and rehabilitating itself in rural America."<sup>1</sup>

The large number of rural youth not reached by the church is evidence of its inadequate program. The limited activities offered rural young people by the church and the seeming indifference to their need also indicate a failure on the part of the church. "One sees so many churches, blind to the community, piddling along, that one fears the church will fail to carry out its God-given mission."<sup>2</sup> In many communities in rural America the church is failing, particularly in its outreach to youth.

There are a number of specific weaknesses that may be noted in the rural church pertaining particularly to the youth work within the church. Isaac Beckes lists

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1. Rolvix Harlan, A New Day for the Country Church, p. 1.
2. Rich, "The Rural Church in Community Life", in International Journal of Religious Education, March, 1941, p.15.

three major weaknesses:

1. There is need for greater vision and more effort in the youth work.
2. There is need for competent adult leadership.
3. There is need for a community program of Christian Education for young people.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Albert Gage sums up the inadequate program of the rural church as follows:

"From a wide survey of many schools it appears that most of the leaks in the church school are caused by 1) the teacher problem, 2) lack of a Christian spirit, 3) poor organization, 4) crowded conditions, 5) failure to win the pupil to Christ and build him into the life of the church."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Effects of Inadequate Christian Training

The results of such a weak church program are seen in the life of rural youth, in rural community life, in the life of the cities. There are boys and girls living in rural America who are future leaders of the nation. For their own lives they need the message of the church. Without adequate Christian training rural young people are deprived of the spiritual stability that is necessary to life and the lack of which is evident in all other areas of life. The youth's development is not well-rounded and he is not able to understand and correctly interpret the meaning of life.

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1. Cf. Isaac K. Beckes, "Facing Problems in Youth Work", in International Religious Education Journal, June, 1944, pp. 14,15.
2. Dr. Albert Gage, "Increasing Church School Attendance", quoted in The Gospel in Social Action, H. W. McLaughlin, p. 103.

If rural youth are not taught how to live, then there is little hope for the world.<sup>1</sup> The community also is affected if the church neglects rural youth. In speaking of the importance of the Christian Education program to the community Margaret Teague states:

"We must go forward into rural America with a more adequately supported program of Christian Education or else a generation will be lost and this without any question of a doubt, will make increasingly difficult the task of reaching rural America."<sup>2</sup>

If rural youth are not instilled with the ideals found only in the Church, the community will not be governed by them.

Furthermore, the city feels the effect of the church's neglect of the youth. The tide of rural youth that, under normal conditions flows regularly into the cities, is so large that it plays an important part in developing and shaping city standards. If rural youth's philosophy has no room for God the result will be seen in city life.

"Much of rural youth is destined to become city youth. The present experiences, feelings, and thoughts of rural youth are . . . important to our cities. The attitudes and character they develop out in the country will subsequently color many aspects of city life."<sup>3</sup>

Thus the lack of a church program affects the life of youth in rural communities and through them the life of the nation.

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1. Cf. Teague, op. cit., p. 3.
2. Ibid, p. 56.
3. Coyle, Rural Youth, p. 7.

## F. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has endeavored to set forth the needs of rural youth, the problems with which they are faced. It has found that the youth of rural America are confronted with difficulties in almost every realm of life.

Their opportunities for economic security have been in the past very inadequate and even at the present are far from adequate. The educational preparation given them is not sufficient. Their social life is in most cases narrow and limited. Even their spiritual needs have not been satisfied by the church. These unsolved problems of rural young people profoundly influence their personal lives and the life of society as a whole.

It is logical to question what will be the future of the cities and subsequently of the nation if the potential leaders are harassed by problems during their formative years.

The study of the needs of rural young people has made it clear that something must be done to meet the needs if the future of the youth and of the nation is to be safeguarded.

CHAPTER III

THE AGENCIES MEETING THE NEEDS OF RURAL YOUTH  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHURCH

### CHAPTER III

#### THE AGENCIES MEETING THE NEEDS OF RURAL YOUTH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHURCH

##### A. Introduction

Having noted the problems of rural youth and the effect such problems have on them, it is well to consider next the organizations that have attempted to aid the youth. The government has realized the desperateness of the rural situation and as a relief measure established various organizations. Other agencies beside those set up by the government have attempted to assist rural youth. This chapter proposes to study all such organizations as to their contributions to the youth and their limitations in meeting needs.

In addition this chapter will analyze also the place of the church in rural life. The functions of the church in a community will be considered as well as the particular contribution the church can make to rural youth that will offer solutions to their problems. The importance of solving rural youth problems may be more readily understood when we realize that "in the little community no matter how remote and how humble the setting, there is drama and destiny that means the future of America."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Landis, op. cit., p. 9.

## B. Agencies Aiding Rural Youth

There were a number of organizations set up by the government in recent years to aid youth throughout the country. Some of them were specifically rural in scope, others were not specifically so but did have bearing on the rural youth situation. This chapter will contain the purpose of each agency as it was organized and then treat it as it is related to rural youth.

### 1. Government Organizations

#### a. National Youth Administration

This organization established in 1935 had four main objectives.

1. To make provision for the employment of students between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, thus making it financially possible for them to continue their education which would otherwise be impossible.
2. To make provision for the employment of young persons eighteen to twenty-five. The work projects were to be such as would benefit not only the young people but the community as well.
3. To establish vocational and counseling services for young people.
4. To encourage the establishment of worth-while leisure time activities.<sup>1</sup>

The administration was set up to help youth who were on a relief level but in its practical working out it has helped many more. It is impossible to estimate how many rural youth were aided, but the percentage is doubtless very high. The National Youth Administration program along with others was able "to reach out with considerable success into the

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1. Cf. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 94.

country districts."<sup>1</sup> Through its efforts to aid youth educationally, the N.Y.A. helped to overcome some of the educational obstacles facing rural youth.

" This is one of the few emergency activities that was not restricted to the relief group and can thus contribute to the solution of the larger problem of making up the deficit in education among the youth of all underprivileged rural groups."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to its program of making it possible for rural youth to continue in school, the N.Y.A. program made provision for rural youth who were out of school to attend classes for a stated period of time at the state agricultural college. Here the youth, both boys and girls, were able to work for their maintenance while receiving training in both agriculture and the trades.

The N.Y.A. program seemed to reach a larger number of rural non-farm than rural farm youth.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps one explanation of this may be the fact that rural farm youth are more scattered and thus find difficulty in coming together to a common training center. However, organized at a time when all youth and rural youth in particular were desperately in need of help, this agency did much to alleviate the educational and economic plight of rural young people.

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1. Coyle, Rural Youth in Action, p. 8.
2. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 96.
3. Ibid, p. 99.

b. Civilian Conservation Corps

The Civilian Conservation Corps, initiated in 1933, was created originally for the "purpose of relieving the acute condition of widespread distress and unemployment . . . and in order to provide for the restoration of the country's depleted natural resources . . ."1 The young men who flocked into the camps performed many valuable services in the way of conservation of forest and wild life, conservation of soil, maintenance of recreational facilities, and other valuable work. Later provision was made for the educational and vocational training of the youth who were enrolled.

In the years during which this program was in operation, the number of young men enrolled mounted up into the million mark. Many of these were rural. "It is probable that fifty percent of all junior enrollees who have passed through CCC camps have come from rural territory."2 The importance of this agency in providing opportunity for youth to obtain a living and at the same time gain experience in a certain skill, cannot be emphasized too strongly. Combined with this is the contribution of this agency in providing both vocational and academic schooling.

In 1941 the CCC was put under the Federal Security Administration along with the NYA program. Because of the emergency of the war there was no longer need to provide

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 101.
2. Ibid, p. 102.

work camps for the young men. However, some of the work carried on by them is being continued under the Federal Security Administration, namely, that of the conservation of resources.

c. Other Government Organizations

There were many other efforts made by the government to aid families during the days when help was especially needed. Some of these agencies have not had direct bearing upon the rural youth though they have aided rural families. The Agricultural Administration Act, the Farm Credit Administration, the Farm Security Administration all were designed to assist rural people. To the extent that rural youths' families are assisted, their own economic problems are made less acute.

2. Non-government Organizations

There are many non-governmental organizations that are seeking to aid youth in their social, recreational, economic and other needs, but "it is doubtful that many are penetrating very far into rural territory."<sup>1</sup> However, there are some agencies designed with the particular purpose of aiding rural young people. One such is the 4-H clubs organized especially for rural farm youth. These clubs have endeavored to promote better farming by developing interest on the part of youth in improved methods

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1. Paul Douglass, How Shall Country Youth Be Served?, p. 34.

of agriculture. Along with this has been the purpose of developing leadership among farm youth through the club's educational and recreational activities. Unfortunately it has been found that these clubs on the whole are not reaching out of school rural youth and that the program is confined largely to rural communities that are already economically well-situated. Thus the 4-H clubs, while effective as far as helping the youth contacted, do not have an outreach that is sufficiently wide.

Then there are the junior Co-operative and Grange groups which, as the name implies, are a branch of the national Co-operative and Grange groups. Like the parent organization their aim may be generally summarized as being an emphasis on " a wholesome social life, cooperation with churches, economic cooperation among farmers."<sup>1</sup>

In individual states organizations are being formed as the needs of youth are recognized. Some of these are formed by adults as an outgrowth of their own organizations; some are set up by youth themselves. An example of the latter is the Georgia Rural Youth Council which "just grewed" as rural students recognized their own problems and saw the need for action.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Contribution of Such Groups to Rural Youth

The main emphasis of most of the organizations,

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1. Landis, op. cit., p. 29.

2. Cf. Coyle, Rural Youth in Action, p. 33.

both those set up by the government as relief measures and those initiated by rural people themselves, is on the more apparent needs of an economic, educational, and social nature. These problems have received attention from all the organizations. The economic relief offered by the NYA and CCC was important and necessary. The academic and vocational training received was valuable and necessary also. The gains in physical fitness and morale are an important result of the program. The organizations also emphasize citizenship and the development of character.

"A major result of the work of the National Youth Administration has undoubtedly been a reduction in the volume of crime among young people. Moreover, a boy's experience in a CCC camp often does much to change his attitude toward life. ."<sup>1</sup>

Thus in many respects we find that the various organizations working in the interests of rural youth have rendered much valuable service to them in aiding them to solve their problems.

#### 4. Limitations of the Organizations in Meeting Needs

The chief drawback may be seen in the limited contacts. Many rural youth are not reached at all by any of the organizations. On the whole the farm organizations have offered a program for the younger rural groups and not the older youth. In addition ". . . they serve only a fraction of the rural population and chiefly those in the higher income bracket."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Melvin and Smith, op. cit., p. 129.
2. Ibid., p. 128.

There are other features that hinder the effectiveness of the program that is offered. The government organizations were hindered by the limited funds available to them. They, of course, were only set up as relief, emergency measures and in this respect fulfilled their purpose quite adequately. However, young men going from the camps back into the rural community often found conditions to be so tense that their newly acquired skills and knowledge were of little value. What would have happened had the war not ended the emergency is difficult to conjecture.

In the final analysis, the chief lack in the program of both the governmental and local agencies may be summed up in the statement made by the Christian Rural Fellowship. "Improved physical standards of life are meaningless except as they contribute to the satisfaction of the deeper longings and needs of human life. The new rural movement must be at heart spiritual."<sup>1</sup> The work that is being done to rebuild rural America through an improvement of physical life is necessary but it must not be carried on apart from a rebuilding of the spiritual life if it is to succeed.

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1. Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, June, 1943, p. 1.

### C. Contribution of the Church

If there must be an emphasis on the spiritual rehabilitation of rural America, it is obvious that the church must be considered. We turn now to a study of the rural church and the place it holds in the total picture.

#### 1. The Church Functioning in a Community

In the cities there are any number of agencies ready to assist youth. Of the many the church is only one. Very often the program of the church in urban centers is merely a repetition of that offered by other organizations. Such is not true of rural communities for in many places the church is the only institution in the community that is seeking to improve life. The responsibility resting on the rural church is thus tremendous. J. H. Kolb of the College of Agriculture of the University of Wisconsin stresses the importance of the church in rural life in that he "believes religion to be one of the major interests in strengthening the rural community."<sup>1</sup> The familiar church building along with the home and the school "carries more influence in their lives than does any other institution."<sup>2</sup>

In considering what the church has to offer in

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1. J. H. Kolb, "Social Issues the Church Must Face", in Town and Country Church, December, 1944, p. 6.
2. Rich, op. cit., p. 18.

aiding rural youth to meet their needs, it is well to look first of all at the functions of the church in a community.

Rolvix Harlan has given the following list:

1. The church is the place of common worship.
2. The church is the school in which people are instructed in the meaning of their religion.
3. The church is the means of moral discipline.
4. The church is the agency through which people combine for common service.
5. The church is the means through which the tenets of religion are perpetuated.<sup>1</sup>

Specifically with reference to rural communities the function of the church may be designated somewhat as follows:

1. Teaching people that personal growth along right lines is a religious duty.
2. The glorification of toil.
3. Developing a love for the rural environment.
4. Developing a love of justice.
5. Interpreting the kingdom of God to rural people in terms of their daily life and daily toil.<sup>2</sup>

The rural church must be all that in a community if it is to reach the youth. The program must be vital. Someone has said that the rural church "must have teeth that bite into the needs of the young people."<sup>3</sup> How can the church do this? Where shall it begin?

The Home Missions Council Committee on the rural church states emphatically that ". . . the rural church must be Christ-centered, motivated by the power of the living God, with a community consciousness . . ."<sup>4</sup> It was

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1. Cf. Harlan, op. cit., pp. 2-9.
2. Cf. Butterfield, op. cit., pp. 75-79.
3. Mary C. White, "Let Us Mix Palestine and Hollywood", in International Journal of Religious Education, March, 1943, p. 11.
4. A National Program for the Rural Church, 1938, p. 10.

noted above<sup>1</sup> that a large share of rural youths' problems arise directly or indirectly from their surroundings and are due to circumstances over which they have no control. Because of this fact and because no person can be dealt with entirely apart from the family or community, the church in seeking to help youth must go back to the source of the problems. That source may often be the conditions in the community.

The rural church in the past has not always realized its importance to the community. Some years ago Warren H. Wilson wrote:

"Rural religion has suffered from too exclusive reliance upon preaching and too little living contact; too few of the experiences of life have been included, and too many have been shut out of the church."<sup>2</sup>

The rural church cannot stand on the fringe of life and expect to exert any influence. It must cease "piddling around"<sup>3</sup> and grapple with everyday community life problems. Making a rural community Christian will demand the best that any church can offer. It is imperative that as the church seeks to aid the individual, it first meet community needs, for "in so far as the life of the community is less than Christian, the life of the individual is hindered."<sup>4</sup> In seeking to meet needs the church must do all within its

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1. Cf. above, p. 29.

2. Wilson, Rural Religion and the Country Church, p. 11.

3. Cf. above, p. 52.

4. "The Rural Church at Work as a Religious Educator", p.3.

power to aid the community in economic problems, health needs, educational and recreational inadequacies. To this some may object that such interests are outside the field of the church. Really every concern of human life must be the concern of the church. Because the church seeks to reach individual souls, it has also to do with ". . . the farmer's crops and his business, with community spirit and friendliness, with wholesome recreation and amusements, with a high level of general education . . ."<sup>1</sup> A community in which many of the people live in poverty and illiteracy will have little time for any institution that exists in its midst and does nothing to improve living conditions.

"The community will naturally look to the church for a solution of the rural problem if and when the church is able to provide not only competent spiritual help, but also mature counsel in the economic problems, the agricultural adjustments, and the general social welfare of its citizens. . . The church must not only make an occasional effort to reach the unsaved; it must transform the social consciousness as well. It can do this only to the extent in which it is able to identify itself with the life of the people."<sup>2</sup>

The importance of the church in endeavoring to improve community living cannot be too strongly emphasized.

## 2. The Church Functioning for the Youth

As the church proves to the community its interest in the daily round of life, it has a surer entrance into the heart of the individual. A large share of

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1. "The Rural Church at Work as a Religious Educator", p.5.  
2. Landis, op. cit., p. 40.

of the individuals whom the church is seeking to reach in rural areas are youth. "Children are . . . the most distinguishing thing about rural society."<sup>1</sup> In what way is the church of value to rural youth?

a. In Meeting the Spiritual Needs

The study of the secular organizations that are aiding rural youth revealed that the one great need not met by them is that of the need of religious guidance, the spiritual need of the young people. While this is not a need peculiar to rural youth alone, it is fundamental and must be met. It is one that no amount of education, wealth, or culture will adequately take care of. Only in the message of the church as it centers in God can the deeper hungerings of a person's soul be satisfied. Rural youth may well express themselves in the words of the disciples at Capernaum, "To whom shall we go?"<sup>2</sup> The question can be answered by the church that is alert to the fact that all men need God. This is the distinctive contribution of the church to rural youth. The greatest contribution it can make is to give meaning to life, to satisfy the spiritual need. This spiritual stability found in the message of the church is basic to the solution of all other problems.

b. In Meeting Other Needs

While the spiritual needs of rural youth are of

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1. Teague, op. cit., p. 20.  
2. John 6:68.

great importance, other needs loom up in their eyes to large proportions and seem to demand immediate attention. It must be recognized that the other needs which have been outlined in the second chapter of this study, have a direct bearing on the rural youth's attitude toward the church. Physiologists have rendered a service in their discovery of the inter-relation of all parts of the body. Psychologists have done the same in showing the relation between the body and the mind. The homely illustration of an injured finger demonstrates the principle that what affects one part of the body is felt by the whole. Every part must be healthy in order to have a harmonious whole. One is not distinct from the others and does not function separately. So it is with all of life; one area is not isolated but each is inter-related with the others. Therefore an institution cannot minister only to one phase of life and thus think to meet the needs of all of life. In relation to the rural youth there may be a difference in the degree of importance or in the order in which needs are to be met, but they must all be met if the lives of the youth are to be enriched and of service to others.

How then can the church contribute to the solution of material needs? Many people will not seek the assistance of the church save as a last desperate measure. The reason for this may be the fact that the church in many rural communities has become so dissociated from life that the

average person does not think of the church as being of any use save when he is in desperate trouble. So the church must often take the initiative.

One of the first principles the church must observe in working with its rural young people is the importance of showing its concern for every phase of their life. When young people feel that the church is interested in them and their problems, they will respond to any program it may set up.<sup>1</sup> Then before setting up any independent program, the church would do well to take into consideration any organization already assisting the youth and work in co-operation. "The task of the country church is not to do a single thing these agencies can better accomplish or to compete with them in any shape or manner."<sup>2</sup> Any group or agency attempting to aid rural youth should have the full co-operation of the church. Such cooperative action would be eagerly welcomed. Youth "want to see the church tie up vitally with the rest of their life, with their school program, their clubs, societies, their vocational interests."<sup>3</sup> If a church should find itself in a community in which little or nothing is being done for the youth, it has a wide-open field that should prove to be a challenge.

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1. Cf. McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 118.
2. Edwin E. Sundt, The Country Church and Our Generation, p. 97.
3. Landis, op. cit., p. 41.

While the purpose of this thesis is not to set up a program of church action, nevertheless, various suggestions will be made whereby the church may be of practical assistance to the youth.

### 1. The Economic Need

Since in so many communities the economic inopportunities loom the largest, the church must somehow help the youth to find a way out. Of course, as the church improves the community standard of living, it does help the youth. This is true of all these problems. However, even so, the church has the responsibility of making a more specific attack against this problem. This may be done in various ways and each church must find the method best suited to the situation. Above all, church leaders must be informed on economic problems and ready to offer assistance in any way possible. Dr. Randolph so well expresses the church's responsibility when he says:

"This is the task of the rural church, for there is no other institution that can undertake and carry through such a momentous responsibility. There is no other institution known to rural life that is so well fitted with philosophy, idealism, and method to provide the needed sympathy and prophetic direction to complete rural living by disadvantaged youth of the soil as the Christian Church. The holy work of the rural church is to build out of these hopeless, spiritless lives, which poverty has strewn over this fair land of ours, youthful lives strong and true."<sup>1</sup>

When the doors of opportunity are closed to rural youth,

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1. Dr. Henry S. Randolph, quoted in The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, November, 1941, p. 7.

they need as at no other time the help of the church that will understand their problem and intelligently seek to help.

## 2. The Health Need

Closely linked with the economic problem is that of the poor health so prevalent among rural youth as army doctors have discovered. The church should insist on the maintenance of decent standards of health in the interest of youth.

## 3. The Educational Need

In the educational field the church should have personal contact with the school and know what is being taught. The activities of the two ought not to conflict. Cooperation between rural schools and churches could result in more opportunities for vocational training of the youth. "One of the great tasks before the rural church is in helping to work out a better vocational adjustment of young people."<sup>1</sup> Is it not logical to assume that as the church seeks to aid youth educationally, more and more the Christian principles will be infused into every vocation entered by rural youth who have been so aided? An earnest plea should be made by Christian leaders for competent, well-trained teachers who will receive an adequate salary. The church and school might cooperate

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1. I. W. Moomaw, "Rural Life Objectives", p. 7.

to work out a system of weekday religious instruction to meet the lack of religious training that has been found to prevail in rural communities. Public school teachers may be enlisted in the teaching ministry of the church. All these avenues are open to the church by which it can help to relieve the tremendous educational lack among its young people.

#### 4. The Recreational Need

The third major problem of rural youth was found to be the lack of an adequate recreational and social life. Here the church can make one of its greatest contributions. Because of the lack the "rural church has a special responsibility in the matter of making it possible for young people to have a good time."<sup>1</sup> A recognition of either the lack of recreation in its community or the existence of unwholesome amusements should be a spur to the church in working with rural youth at a point at which they will readily respond. It is easy enough to draw anyone to a place where there will be "fun and food" and rural young people are no exception. A recreational program sponsored by the church is not in this case a bait whereby the real purpose is masked. It is to be hoped, of course, that the youth will see in the church something that they need that is beyond the recreational need and respond to the other activities of the church. However, the social need in rural

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1. Fenner, op. cit., p. 34.

life is a very real one that must be met and can most adequately be met by the church. The natural surroundings of rural youth provide wonderful opportunities for a rich social life and on this the church should capitalize. The cry of rural young people is voiced by a seventeen-year-old farm girl who asks, "Isn't there someone in every community who will take the responsibility of providing decent recreational places for young people?"<sup>1</sup> The challenge faces the church to provide facilities, leaders, equipment, and time in answering the cry of the youth.

In all this it is imperative to think in terms of the future, of what can be done for rural youth who will be returning from the various branches of the service. Ex-servicemen and women will undoubtedly present many problems to the churches throughout the country that will demand solution.

"During war we have been able to mobilize the greatest armed force and the greatest productive power in the world. Surely in the post-war years we can mobilize our human, spiritual, and social resources for the children and young people."<sup>2</sup>

In concluding this discussion as to what measures the church should take in assisting youth to overcome the problems facing them, it would be advantageous to cite a specific example of the program carried on by a rural church.

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1. Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin, December, 1940, p.5.
2. Katherine Lenroot, "Children Are Post-war People", in the International Journal of Religious Education, November, 1944, p. 16.

The Home Missions Council reports the work of the Ramsey Reformed Church located near Titonka, Iowa, in a distinctly rural field. The program is for the youth and comprises three main features, namely, general, special war-time, and long-distance planning.

In the general phase of the program is included various activities centering around the worship, service, social, and educational areas of the young person's life. Service, for example, may include work on church grounds, some community project, or some form of missionary activity; education may include the study of agriculture, health, or marriage.

Because of the war a special program has been put into operation. It includes red cross work, writing to the service men, a study of post-war problems. In this connection the church reports that there has been little tendency on the part of the youth to leave for defense jobs. Instead they are satisfied in the country.

In the long-distance planning phase of the program, particular attention is given to peace plans and the adjustments that must be made after the war. A study is made also of the place of the church in the post-war world.<sup>1</sup>

This is but one example of what is being done in

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1. Cf. E.L. Kirkpatrick, The Church's Part With Rural Youth, pp. 5-6.

some rural churches and other examples could be cited. Yet so many rural youth are not aided by the church; so many have problems that are not met. The church at one time was central in rural life and can again take that position. The church must assume the leadership in rural areas, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the youth.

"Here is the greatest challenge before the Protestant church in the United States in this hour. . . the Protestant church must recognize the greatness of its obligation, the richness of its opportunity, the heroic proportions of its task."<sup>1</sup>

The task of finding solutions to youth's problems is a tremendous one and assumes new proportions when it is realized what the effects will be on society as a whole if satisfactory solutions are not found. Yet while the task is large, the rewards also are great and well worth any effort.

### 3. Results of the Church's Program

#### a. To the Church

There is no work that pays as large dividends as that done in the interest of youth. The results of improved and enriched lives will be evident in the community and other areas of life and will also be evident in the life of the church. Young people will respond to an institution that is vital, that is seeking to help them and they will gladly support its program. Having come to

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1. William V. Dennis, "The Place of the Church in the Rural Community", in Town and Country Church, February, 1945, p.4.

the church for help and finding it, the young people will in turn take their place and assume their share of responsibility in the church. Thus the church will be energized by the new young life with its eagerness and enthusiasm and devotion to a cause. Youth needs the church it is true. The church also needs the youth - it needs those qualities that young people have in such abundance. The rural church particularly needs the young people. It will have them only in proportion as it manifests its interest in them and seeks to reach them.

b. To the Young People

The results of any effort to improve human living cannot be measured in terms of figures and percentages. Improvements may come very slowly and be evident only in isolated, individual cases. This is particularly true of a program that would attempt to meet problems as overwhelming as those that have been seen to face rural youth.

Yet when the effort is made there will be results. The effort will be rewarding as it brings about changes in young lives. When hope replaces despair, anticipation of the future replaces dread, economic stability takes the place of insecurity, and deep spiritual qualities are instilled in place of doubt and cynicism, the church will be able to see how well worth while were its attempts to aid its youth. The rural church will find that as it endeavors to assist youth to meet satisfactorily the

physical needs of life, it will be rendering at the same time its greatest service, that of filling spiritual hungers. Thus rural youth will become "rooted and grounded" in their inner selves and all of life will take on new meaning.

#### D. Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to survey the agencies that have as an important part of their program attempted to help rural youth make possible an improvement in their life.

The agencies instituted by the government were considered first of all. Only those were selected that had to do with rural youth. The National Youth Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Farm Security Administration programs were surveyed as to what they have been able to contribute to rural young people as well as wherein they have failed. It was found that in general the government organizations rendered inestimable service in their efforts to aid youth economically and educationally. Their failure lay largely in their inability to contact enough rural youth and the restrictions placed on them by a lack of funds and by a lack of cooperation from other organizations.

Other agencies in rural areas established apart from the government are represented by the 4 - H clubs,

grange organizations, and other groups, The purpose of such groups covers quite a range including economic improvement as well as a supplying of the lack of social life and a building of character. Here, too, the weakness of the organizations may be seen in their failure to reach far enough into rural territory.

However, it was felt that the chief weakness of the groups was their failure to stress the necessity of the spiritual qualities needed to give meaning to life. This led naturally to a consideration of the church in the rural community in relation to the needs of the youth.

The place and function of the church as a unit of the community was considered before attention was turned to the specific problem of the church's relation to the youth. It was discovered that the church cannot hope to reach the individual if it shuts itself off from the obvious needs of community life.

In analyzing the contributions of the church to rural youth, its distinctive contribution and first obligation was found to be the spiritual satisfaction it could offer. It was realized, however, that youth often do not recognize their spiritual needs as being basic. Realizing also that the physical needs of life demand satisfaction, various methods were suggested by which the church could assist youth in solving problems in the economic, educational, and recreational fields.

In concluding the discussion of the church in its relation to the rural youth, emphasis was laid on the value of the assistance that the church could offer. The results would be evident in its own life and in the lives of the young people.

Thus it is evident that the church commands a vital place in the life of the community and the youth. It alone has within its message the power to enrich life materially and transform it spiritually.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to survey the problems of rural youth and to discover how the church can contribute to the solution of the problems.

Before studying the needs it was thought necessary to find out just who rural youth are and where they live. It was found that about one-half of the nation's population live in rural communities and that over a third of the youth population is rural. Some of these live on farms; others live in small villages. But whether they live on farms or in small towns, the environment was found to be quite similar. There is first of all the natural environment affording fresh air, sunshine, and a close contact with nature. There is a certain degree of isolation in rural communities keeping the youth from some of the undesirable influences found in urban life. A quick glance at a rural community might lead to the belief that all was well with youth in rural America.

However, a closer examination of the rural environment revealed that there are many deficiencies. While a rural community might logically be expected to provide a living for those living on the land, the opposite has often been true. Many rural youth have found few economic opportunities to be their lot. While the war has

relieved this situation somewhat, it was discovered that other factors in the rural situation complicate the prospects for an economic improvement in the future. The increased use of machinery on farms has resulted in a lessened demand for human labor. A great many rural youth belong to families who are migrants or mere tenants on the land with little prospects of ownership.

The economic poverty of rural areas was found to be reflected in other aspects of the environment. There is a lack of educational opportunities. Rural states are unable to pay high taxes for the support so that school facilities are far from adequate. Attendance of rural young people at school was found to be dependent upon many factors among which are the financial condition of the home, and the fact that many rural youth are needed at home at some time during the year. Rural schools in many areas do not provide much opportunity for an education beyond the eighth grade.

Recreational facilities provided by the community, school, and church include playgrounds, swimming pools, and various clubs. However, other amusements have found their way into the rural communities and rural youth spends time also at pool-rooms, taverns, and other undesirable places. Many of the natural rural opportunities for recreation are often neglected by the youth.

The rural home as an aspect of the environment

was considered. It was discovered that rural families as a rule are large but unfortunately do not have an adequate income to meet needs. This fact is of particular significance in view of the tremendous influence that family life with its close relationships exerts on rural young people.

The low economic standards of rural communities are reflected also in the church, for the church in many rural areas was found to be small in size with limited funds and a narrow outreach.

At the conclusion of the study of the rural environment it was obvious why rural young people are faced with problems. The problems are those that face any group of youth but are accentuated by the conditions found in rural areas.

The needs of youth for economic security, education, an adequate social life, and spiritual stability were found to be especially acute in rural communities.

While it is true that economic conditions became severe throughout the nation as a result of the depression years, the limited opportunities existing in rural areas made the situation particularly difficult for rural youth. The lack of security was found to be reflected in all areas of life and affected especially youth's attitude toward life.

The inadequacy of the educational program causes

many problems for rural youth in hindering their ability to gain financial security, making it difficult for them to participate in civic responsibilities, and making their future insecure.

The isolation and drudgery of rural life were found to be two factors emphasizing the need for a social life. Because the need exists and in the main is not met, rural young people have the additional problem of a narrow, limited social life with all that that involves.

Then, perhaps most serious of all, is the problem rural youth have of an unmet spiritual need. The church in some instances was found to be very active; in other cases the program for youth is very limited.

Thus the study of the environment of rural youth and the problems confronting them seemed to indicate that the situation held little promise of a bright future. Fortunately there is a bright side to the picture of the condition of the youth in rural areas. A number of organizations have been established to assist the young people.

A study was made first of all of the government organizations, including the NYA, CCC, and FSA: Non-government groups such as the 4 - H clubs, junior Grange groups, and other local community agencies were studied to discover in what way they were able to aid the youth. It was found that the greatest contribution of the government organizations was the assistance offered in the

improvement of the economical and educational life of rural youth. Both the government and local groups were concerned with the improvement of the recreational and social life and the building of character.

However, the realm in which these agencies failed was in the building up of the spiritual life of the youth. It is at this point that the church enters the picture. The chief purpose of the church is its ministry to the youth in meeting the need of the knowledge of God. Since all of life is inter-related, the conclusion reached in the final chapter was that the church has also the responsibility of ministering to the satisfaction of the other needs of life. Youth responds to the message of the church as that institution shows its interest in all phases of life.

In conclusion then, it is evident that rural youth, the nation's future leaders, are surrounded on every hand with problems. Something has been and is being done for them by various agencies. The one institution that can meet the fundamental need for a true interpretation of life and at the same time do much toward the solution of other problems, is the church. Its most challenging task is that of awakening youth to a realization of their own possibilities and worth. Instead of finding the church alert to take advantage of such a field of opportunity,

it has been found to be lethargic and indifferent to the challenge. Does the reason for such failure lie with the rural church itself or is it not rather due to the attitude of people at large toward the rural communities and everything connected with them? Even as a boy from the farm is often derisively called a "hick", so the rural pastor is regarded by fellow ministers in large city churches. The common attitude of ministers and even of many seminary leaders is that the rural church is the place where young men "try their wings" and old ministers retire. Members of city churches regard rural communities as mission fields without recognizing the fact that a large share of the leaders in the urban churches came originally from a small rural parish. It is not to be wondered that the rural church is slow to recognize its worth to say nothing of seeking to make itself an influence in the community.

The solution to the rural church problem may lie in the direction of making the rural minister aware of the tremendous size of his job, of impressing upon him its challenge. It may be solved by the introduction into seminaries of courses dealing with distinctly rural pastoral problems. However, the rural pastor cannot wait until he has gained recognition from urban centers before he begins to solve the needs that are at his very doorstep. Youth cannot wait for a solution of its problems. They

demand immediate attention or rural America will indeed become a mission field. There is urgent need that the rural church awaken to its opportunity, to its responsibility of making Christianity real to the youth through its practical working out in every day life. As the church contributes to the solution of the needs of rural youth it establishes their personal lives, builds a better community, and insures the future of the nation.

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