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**THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LOCAL
CONGREGATION TO ITS COMMUNITY**

Chapter

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by

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June 1957

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CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A. Introduction: Importance of the Study

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Each of us in this place, has my responsibility towards the community in which it finds itself or that community tries to solve its various social problems. In doing this the study also generally at disposition of the church and the community and the voice, goals and motivation of both. On the basis of these reflections it wishes to set forth certain principles that a local church and its leaders might use as they seriously consider the various social problems in their community.

B. Introduction of the Study

This study is concerned not primarily with the social ethics of the individual churches. The study is concerned with the local church, or what is generally called the congregation. There was speaking of the

CHAPTER I

THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A. Introduction: Objectives of the Study

In any given community there are problems and difficulties that in one way or another make it impossible or difficult for all or certain members of that community to live life to the fullest. For example, a community may suddenly be faced with an influx of population. From this may develop crowded living conditions, problems of sanitation, education, recreation and poverty. The problems vary from community to community. However the very fact that such problems arise places a responsibility upon the people in that community to attempt to find a solution.

This study attempts to establish if a Christian congregation, the Church of Christ in this place, has any responsibility towards the community in which it finds itself as that community tries to solve its various social problems. In doing this the study aims primarily at definitions of the Church and the community and the tasks, goals and motivation of both. On the basis of these definitions it strives to set forth certain principles that a local Church and its leaders might use as they seriously consider the various social problems in their community.

B. Limitations of the Study

This study is concerned not primarily with the social ethics of the individual Christian. The study is concerned with the local Church, or what is commonly called the congregation. Hence when speaking of the

Church a real and concrete group of people, Christians, are conceived.

When speaking of the community, the author has in mind first and primarily the American community, the local community in the United States. This is done because it is the only type of community with which he is acquainted and hence he hesitates to think or write of any other part of the world. However, many of the things said about the Church and the community are applicable in other places.

Finally, if one admits that the local Church has some responsibility towards its community on the social plane, some sort of program will have to be initiated. Since this is something only local situations can fully decide no attempt is made to say definitely how principles are to take concrete form. The study only attempts to arrive at such definitions and principles that will lead to such action. It attempts to determine whether or not the Church has any social responsibility towards its community, and if so, what that is.

C. Organization of the Study

In arriving at some conclusions the following procedure is used. First the Scriptural doctrine of the Church is examined. The Church is defined with special interest given to the Church in the place. This local Church is viewed as a community.

Since the local Church is a community one must ask how this Church becomes such and how it maintains its community. Chapter Three is given to discussing this on the basis, primarily, of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

With this accomplished the study turns to the community surrounding

the local Church. Here too certain definitions must be found. The study therefore defines a community and indicates in Chapter Four how the community maintains itself as a community. Then it contrasts the local Church with the community surrounding as to goals, means and motivation.

The final chapter attempts to draw some conclusions from the above definitions.

References used in the bibliography of this study were taken primarily from the Pritzlaff Memorial Library of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

D. Historical Background

Interest in the social aspects of the Church's doctrine and life was revived in the early nineteenth century in the United States. The movement known as "the Social Gospel" stems from the theological and philosophical views of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. This was accompanied by the great migration of peoples and an expanding American and world frontier. It grew amazingly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The philosophical principles of the social gospel were formulated largely by academic theologians. Among the more familiar of the leaders were Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch, Shailer Mathews, Charles A. Ellwood, and E. Stanley Jones. The object of this social salvation was the rebirth of society through change of the social order by mass or group action. It hoped to apply the teachings of Christ to both social and individual morality. The extreme exponents made little reference to the need of the individual to be reconciled to God through

grace, by faith in Christ Jesus and also little reference to the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in individuals. For many it was essentially a this-worldly gospel of works attempting to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.¹

The end was conceived to be the creation of a world of social justice, peace, brotherhood and plenty. The true social order envisioned was that in which all are living in fellowship and love. This will result only when the Kingdom of God, or the reign of love is found in all human affairs. Hence they felt it necessary to judge every economic, social or political system by the measure in which it hinders or facilitates the free growth of persons and of fellowship, mutual love and trust among them.²

The social gospel flourished especially among the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Unitarians, and Episcopalians. These groups have their Social Service commissions, to issue literature and undertake instruction in the various social problems within the churches. As an example of the sort of thing these groups said and did the Methodist Church adopted the following social creed in 1912.

We stand for equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life; for the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions; for the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupation diseases, injuries, and mortality; for the abolition of child labor; for such regulations of the conditions of labor for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community; for the suppression of the "sweating

¹John Daniel, Jr., "Social Gospel," Lutheran Cyclopedia, edited by Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), pp. 987-989.

²J. H. Oldham and W. A. Visser 'T Hooft, The Church and Its Function In Society (Chicago & New York: Willett, Clark & Co., 1937), pp. 134ff.

system"; for the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practical point, with work for all; for the degree of leisure for all which is the condition of the highest human life; for a release from employment one day in seven; for a living wage in every industry; for the highest wage that each industry can afford and for the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised for the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy for all social ills.³

The social gospel movement continued to grow in the early twentieth century, but already before World War II it began to decline. It seemed to be inadequate in the serious testing of World War I and the world-wide depression. In more recent years Reinhold Niebuhr has largely repudiated the extremes of the Social Gospel and has rejected most of it.⁴ However the movement has not died by any means. It continues strong in most of the Church bodies mentioned above.

The Lutheran Church has, for the most part, maintained a quietistic attitude toward some social questions. It has, however, carried on extensive welfare and social activities through such agencies as the Associated Lutheran Charities, a Board of Social Missions in the U.L.C., the Boards of Charities and Christian Social Action in the A.L.C., the National Lutheran Council, and in numerous congregations on the local level.⁵

Yet there remains much for the Church of Jesus Christ to do, much for it to say. It must face the social problems in its day for these problems do affect the people of the Church in one way or another and do

³F. E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 308.

⁴Daniel, op. cit., p. 988.

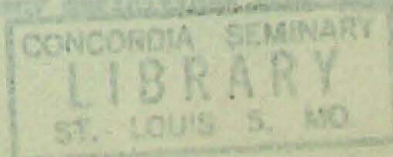
⁵Ibid.

play their part in hindering the message of the Gospel the Church has been commissioned to proclaim. The Church must learn and help its members to learn what it truly means to "love thy neighbor as thyself." This criticism must rest upon the conscience of the Church: "Christendom is full of altars upon which the death of Christ is celebrated daily, and of pulpits from which the atoning death of Christ is preached every week, but from which has come no stimulus to change society."⁶

⁶John C. Bennett, Social Salvation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 93.

A. The Church

When the history of the term "Church" is considered it becomes almost impossible not to give any satisfactory definition of the word. So much has been written. So many definitions have been given. Opinions



CHAPTER II

THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

There has been much misunderstanding on the part of Church leaders when they speak about the part that the Christian Church is to play in solving the multitude of social problems of our day. Much of the difficulty has arisen because such leaders and those who follow them are uncertain both of what the Christian Church really is and then what is the task of the Church in the world. Hence before any answers to questions about the Church's social responsibility can be found it will be necessary to define once again the Church and its task, especially as this task is carried out on the level of the local congregation.

For the purpose of this thesis three areas are examined in arriving at a definition of the Church and its basic unit, the local congregation. To begin with the Church is described in general terms. Then this definition is focused upon the local congregation asking when the local congregation is the Church. Finally the local congregation is considered as a community, a group of people at one with one another. This leads over into the next chapter and the consideration of the tasks of this community.

A. The Church

When the history of the term "Church" is considered it becomes an almost impossible task to give any satisfactory definition of the word. So much has been written. So many definitions have been given. Opinions



have varied considerably. How can anyone arrive at a satisfactory definition? Yet perhaps it is a mistake even to consider history when trying to define the Church. This must be left to the historian and the sociologist. Rather than ask what the Church has been it seems wiser to ask what the Church was meant to be. To find the answer to this question it is necessary to ask Him who created the Church what He meant it to be. This One is God and God speaks through His Word; hence for a definition of the Church it is necessary to turn to God's Word, the Holy Scriptures. As obvious as this sounds to the Lutheran Christian it is nevertheless important to realize from the outset that any definition must come from this source. This must be emphasized because the Church has too often been defined as a sociological or historical phenomenon. It is both, but this does not mean that such a phenomenon is that which God has willed. Only as the Church is the Church described in the Bible is it the Church of Christ at all.

Actually the definition of the Church is very simple, so simple in fact that Luther could write in the Smalcald Articles, "For thank God, a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd."¹ On the basis of this definition it at once becomes evident who is involved, namely lambs and their Shepherd; the believers and Christ. His lambs are all those who have heard His voice and followed Him. Of course this statement is based upon Jesus' familiar discourse in John 10:27-30:

¹"Smalcald Articles," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 499.

My Sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

The Sheep-Shepherd picture is, however, only one of a number of pictures that the Bible uses in describing and defining the Church.

Other figures used include the Church as Christ's Body, the Church as the Temple of God, the Church as Christ's Bride, the Church as the Family of God and the Church as the People or Nation of God.² These various analogies suggest a basic truth about the Church. The Church is people intimately related to God.

The intimate relation between God and man that Adam knew in the Garden of Eden has been broken and destroyed by sin. There is a wall of division between God and man. Man is spiritually dead.³ More than that he is at war with God.⁴ The glorious news of the Gospel is that God did not in turn wage war with man. Rather God loved the world and gave His only Son into death to suffer and die for the sins of the entire human race. Whoever believes this has God's forgiveness and with that forgiveness, everlasting life.⁵ Faith to believe this is, however, a gift of God. It is God the Holy Spirit who must raise the spiritually dead to life. This He does through the preaching of the Gospel. Through

²Eph. 1:23; 2:19-22; 5:23-27; Rom. 12:4-12; Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Cor. 6:16.

³Eph. 2:1.

⁴Col. 1:21.

⁵Jn. 3:16-18; 5:24.

this power of God men are brought to faith in Christ as their Savior.⁶
By such a personal faith they become members of the holy Christian Church.

Returning then to the figures mentioned above it can be seen from them just how close and intimate a relation God has established with His Church. The relation is as close as that of the parts of an organism: The Church is Christ's Body. The relation is as intimate as marriage: The Church is the Bride of Christ. The Church can approach God as fearlessly as little children do their dear Father: The Church is the Family of God. The Church is as secure as a nation ruled and protected by an invincible and all-loving monarch: The Church is the People of God.⁷

So it is that God has restored to His Church that intimate relation that Adam knew in Eden. This has been done through Christ. In fact the Church is Christ, for the Church is Christ's Body and where His Body is there He is also present with her, meeting her on earth.⁸

With Luther then the Christian confesses his belief in the Christian Church.

I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together

⁶Jn. 3:6; Eph. 2:5,6; 1 Cor. 12:3; Jas. 1:8; Rom. 1:16.

⁷Clifford L. Stanley, "The Church, in but not of the Church," Christian Faith and Social Action, edited by John A. Hutchison (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1953), p. 57.

⁸Anders Nygren, "Corpus Christi," This is the Church, edited by Anders Nygren, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), p. 10.

by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms.⁹

B. The Church in the Place

The Church consists of all who are bound to Christ as their Head, their Lord, their Shepherd by faith in His vicarious atonement. But faith is a matter of the heart and cannot be seen by man. Hence some have referred to the Church as being invisible. Must the Church, however, remain invisible? Or can the Church be seen and heard?

The Lutheran Church confesses that the Church is tangible. Moreover it can be identified by certain marks. The Augsburg Confession states that "the Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered."¹⁰ The Apology gives the marks of the Church as the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the Sacraments. This Church, it says, is properly the pillar of truth.¹¹ Edgar Carlson, in interpreting Luther's doctrine of the Church, writes, "In the proclamation of the gospel the Church becomes visible. . . . For Luther the gospel is the essential and creative element in the Church. The Word and the Sacraments constitute its indispensable marks."¹²

⁹Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 691.

¹⁰"Augsburg Confession," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 47.

¹¹"Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 233.

¹²Edgar M. Carlson, The Church and the Public Conscience (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 44.

This gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered in certain places. Thus to find the Church one must look to the congregation or gathering of those men and women who confess the Lord Jesus Christ and gather to teach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. Pieper thus defines a Christian congregation as "the assembly of believers who congregate about Word and Sacrament at a particular place."¹³

This is the predominate note in the New Testament. The word for "Church" in the original New Testament Greek is *ἐκκλησία*. This word originally referred simply to a gathering or an assembly, gathered and assembled for any number of reasons. It often referred to an assembly of citizens regularly convened. In Acts even the mob at Ephesus is called an *ἐκκλησία*. The town clerk of Ephesus called the courts the regular *ἐκκλησίᾳ*. He also dismissed the gathering which is called *ἐκκλησίαν*.¹⁴

More specifically, however, *ἐκκλησία* refers to a group of Christians in the New Testament, gathered in a specific local for the purposes of worship, administering the sacraments, rebuking and exhorting one another. Jesus refers to those gathered in His name as the *ἐκκλησία*. The book of Acts is full of references to these Churches. It speaks of the Church in Jerusalem, in Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, Caesarea, Ephesus.¹⁵ Paul greets the Church in the house of Prisca and Aquila; also the Church in Corinth. He teaches the ways of Christ in every Church. He says it is shameful for women to talk in the

¹³Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translated by Walter W. F. Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), III, 421.

¹⁴Acts 19:32, 39, 41.

¹⁵Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 5:11; 11:22, 26; 15:3, 41; 18:22; 20:17.

Church. He feels he robbed other Churches by accepting support from the Corinthians. And so it continues. Reference is made by New Testament writers to the Church or the Laodiceans, the Thessalonians, the Churches in Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia.¹⁶ In nearly every instance the New Testament, when using the term *ἐκκλησία*, is referring to people in a particular place and in very concrete situations.

There is such a thing as the Universal Church and some find it helpful to refer to the Invisible Church. Yet, however useful this may be, when looking for answers as to what the tasks of the Church are, one must give primary consideration to the local visible congregation. Here all theories must become concrete, for here God confronts real men, with real sins, in real situations. Here real men respond in concrete ways to the preaching of the Gospel and the administering of the Sacraments. This is only remaining true to the spirit of the New Testament.

C. The Church as a Community

Thus far the Church has been defined as all those people in the world in whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven. This emphasizes that the intimate relation originally planned by God between Himself and man has been restored in Christ. Those who believe in Christ are God's people, God's family, Christ's bride, Christ's Body. In this sense they are properly called the Church. Furthermore this Church is visible. It can be seen in specific places and is composed of people who gather in these places to

¹⁶Rom. 16:4; 2 Cor. 1:1; 11:8; 1 Cor. 4:17; 14:34; 1 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 2:1.

speak the Gospel to one another and to administer the Sacraments.

One more aspect of the Church must be stressed for the purposes of this paper. The Church is properly a community. The believers in Christ who gather in a place to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments are at the same time members one of another. They are in the true sense a community, a people at one with one another.

The Church is a fellowship and a body; the fellowship of Christ and the body of Christ. Because of this fact the individuals of the Church are more than what they are alone and individually; and the Church is more than the sum total of individuals.¹⁷

Failure to recognize this has led to much confusion about the meaning of the Church. There are two common definitions which partly or completely bypass this emphasis. The one is often found among Protestants and the other is that of the Roman Catholic Church.

Donald Rowlingson in an essay on the social ministry of the Church defines the Church as follows: "The Church of Christ is essentially a body of disciples who are inspired by their experience of God in Christ to share Jesus' convictions about God and thus to reproduce his ethical values in their fellowship."¹⁸

Although such a definition may be acceptable, there is the danger that too much emphasis be placed upon the individual. Carlson would thus call this a mistaken concept of the Church. He describes in detail a common mistaken concept current among theologians and writers. For them

¹⁷R. R. Caemmerer, The Church in the World (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), p. 6.

¹⁸Donald T. Rowlingson, "New Testament Sources of the Social Ministry of the Church," The Church and Social Responsibility, edited by J. Richard Spann (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1953), p. 35.

the Church is

a body of individuals who believe alike with regard to Christ, or who have shared a similar experience in relation to him. The agreement may be found at the level of emotion and feeling or at the level of doctrine, or even at the level of a kind of working philosophy. What is required of those who would join the church is either a testimony of saving faith, subscription to certain doctrines, or a readiness to act on the basis of the working philosophy which characterizes its present membership.¹⁹

The emphasis in such a definition is upon the individual. This individual has had an experience of God in Christ or believes a particular thing about Christ. He finds that it is for his own good and the welfare of those he would serve that he gather together with others who share his convictions. Actually such a definition may be defended. Nevertheless the emphasis remains upon the individual and the Church is likely to be thought of as no more than the sum total of these individuals.

The Roman Catholic Church on the other hand, defines the Church as a body of men united together by their profession of the same Christian faith, and participation in the same sacraments. This body is governed by lawful pastors, more especially the Roman Pontiff, the sole Vicar of Christ on earth.²⁰

This makes apostolic succession more important than the Apostles' doctrine. It gives the hierarchy authority that is not derived from the content of the Gospel, but from their interpretation of the "office of the keys." The priesthood is the important thing and without it the Church cannot exist. The emphasis upon the community of believers is

¹⁹Carlson, op. cit., p. 42.

²⁰G. H. Joyce, "The Church," The Catholic Encyclopedia, III (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1908), pp. 744-761.

completely missing.

What God wills in the Church is not mere unity. The Church is not simply a group of individuals with a common belief and purpose. Nor is the Church simply a group of men who are under the governance of lawful pastors. "What God wills . . . is not mere unity, but community."²¹

The Church is a fellowship in Christ. The program of redemption in Christ was one by which God designed to gather all together into one in Christ. That redemption took away whatever was between men and God and hence all that was between men and men; thereby Jew and Gentile became of the same sonship, the same body, the same fellowship, one family of God in Christ. Hence a bond and tie exist between the individuals of the Christian Church, the bond of love and peace which is established by Gospel and Sacrament. That bond demonstrates itself not only in a general way, but practically and actively, in the overcoming of the flesh and world; in the exercise of Christian love in the practical relations of life in general and in various Christian callings in particular. This bond and fellowship of the faith is the power which reaches out to the help of the Christian brother.²²

This concept of union between members of the Church is eloquently described in the concept of the body of Christ. According to Christ this was the great goal of the Atonement--that they all be one. The members of the body of Christ are, therefore, "the people in whom Christ dwells and over whom He is Lord and people thereby related to each other so that they share the same life principle and mutual concern."²³

From this it is evident that it is impossible to be a Christian and still be an absolute individualist. What is the interest of the Church must be the interest of the member. To be a Christian, therefore, in the fullest sense, a Christian must be a member of a Christian community, a

²¹John A. Mackay, God's Order (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 63.

²²Caemmerer, op. cit., p. 6, 7.

²³Ibid., p. 7.

member of a Church. In the Church the Christian finds that true community willed by God. Here is the only place where men, united to God by the indwelling of Christ's Spirit, are devoted to the business of loving one another.²⁴

Three points, then, have been emphasized in the definition of the Church. The Church is the creation of God's Spirit and is composed of all in whom He has worked faith in the vicarious atonement of Christ. This Church becomes visible in that place where the Gospel is taught and the Sacraments are administered. Those who gather in this place do so because they are members of Christ's Body and therefore members of one another. As such they seek to create that community that God wills in Christ. This task of continually becoming one with one another will be discussed in the next chapter.

²⁴Mackay, op. cit., pp. 23, 63, 118.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH BECOMING A COMMUNITY

The Church gathered in the place faces the task of becoming what Christ meant it to be. It faces the task of becoming completely at one by faith with its Lord. It faces the task of becoming unified in all its members. This task is never complete until the Body of Christ in this place has attained to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.¹

As was indicated in the previous chapter the Church comes into existence in a particular place through the Word and Sacraments. When the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered the Holy Spirit creates the Church. These are His means. These are also the means that the Spirit uses in bringing about the envisioned unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Hence it becomes the task of the members of this local Church to minister the means of grace to one another. It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss briefly areas of life in which this must be done; also to discuss areas of life to which local Churches must give more attention in their ministering of the means of grace to one another.

¹Eph. 4:13.

A. The Task

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians speaks continually of the unity that is theirs as members of Christ's Body, the Church. He urges them to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Then he goes on to point up the nature and grounds of this unity. "It is a unity which arises from the fact--there is and can be but one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God."² They are all members of that one body of which Christ is the Head and they are the members. There is one Spirit. This same Spirit has given them all life. This same Spirit brought each one of them to faith and made them members of this Body. This Spirit dwells in all the members. "By one Spirit," writes the Apostle, "are we all baptized into one body."³ Moreover they have all been called to one hope. They have all been called to be saints of God. This call has produced in each one the sure hope of inheriting eternal life with God. Even now they have the earnest of the Spirit.⁴ They all have one Lord. This Lord has bought all of them with His holy, precious blood. Likewise they are all slaves and subjects of that Lord. They have all one faith. They all believe that for the sake of Christ's death they have forgiveness and eternal life. They have one baptism. By this baptism they have been bound together in the same covenant with Christ and with each other.

²Charles Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 203.

³1 Cor. 12:13.

⁴Eph. 1:14.

"For as many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. . . . Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."⁵ Finally there is one God and Father of them all, who pervades them all and abides in them all. He it is who fills them and controls them.

These are the great facts that make the Body of Christ a unit and a community. However not all have attained to this unity. There remains yet much to be done until all reach mature manhood. A lot of growing up must be done. Many are yet children and need the proper food. The members of the Body then must minister the food to one another so that the whole Body grows up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ. Each member then must realize that he has a task to do, namely that of helping every other member grow in love. When each member is working properly, bodily growth takes place and the Body upbuilds itself in love.⁶

This task is carried out by the Body when the members in love speak the truth to one another.⁷ The truth that they keep reminding one another of is that Christ Jesus, their Head and Lord, has died for their sins and thus full atonement has been made. God has forgiven them and made them His children. By faith in Christ they are members of Christ's Body and members one of another. Having indicated what the members of the Body are to do for one another Paul proceeds at some length to carry out his function as an Apostle and member of the Body of Christ. He

⁵Gal. 3:27,28.

⁶Eph. 4:13-16.

⁷Ibid., vs. 15.

begins to speak the truth in love so that "in every way" the Ephesian Christians might grow up into Christ. He points out how the truth must be applied to the everyday situations of life.

Local Churches have been carrying on this task for centuries. However it is a fact that there have often been times and places when these Churches should have been speaking the truth in love to one another and they did not. This is true today. Much confusion remains in the minds of the members of Christ's Body about how their Christian faith is related to their work their recreation, their employer or employee, their family, their politics and the way they use their money and many other areas of Christian life. There is much that Churches should be doing for their members in giving direction and guidance concerning the multitude of social relations in which the individual members find themselves. Although much has been done and much is being done, still it seems to this writer that pastors and members of local Churches must give much more thought to some of the social relations Paul mentions here.

Paul speaks of many of the social relations in which Christians find themselves as he exhorts and guides his congregations. It is the purpose in the remaining part of this chapter to point out some of the areas of life to which Paul gives his attention. This is done only to point up the fact that if Paul was willing to give guidance and instruction in these areas of life it is still the task of the local Church today to do so on the basis of the principles found in the New Testament. No attempt is here made to elaborate upon or to apply these principles to any local situation. That remains the task of the Church in the place. If the Church does this it has already gone a long way down the road towards

fulfilling its social responsibility towards its community.

B. Communications

The general rule that Paul lays down for the Ephesians is that they are to be "imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."⁸ Having set up this as the general principle he applies it to the various situations in which these Christians find themselves.

In these situations words are exchanged. There is communication going on. Paul talks especially about this. They are not to tell lies. They are not to slander one another. If their neighbor has slandered them or spoken unkindly they are to let him know that they forgive him as God in Christ forgave them. They are to avoid filthy language, silly talk and foolish jesting. They are instead to speak the truth to one another and use words that will help their neighbor in Christ to grow in faith and love. And let them express their joy by giving thanks.⁹

In this day when there are so many words exchanged between people Christians tend to lose sight of the real value of words. They are bombarded with words from every side. We have a multitude of ways of communicating with one another. We have radio, television, telephone, books, movies, magazines, signs, and letters. Because of this partly, many have not given serious thought to the meaning of God's gift of

⁸Ibid., 5:1,2.

⁹Ibid., 4:25,29,31,33; 5:4,6.

speech. It becomes the task now more than ever before for the members of the Body to help one another to see just what the real value of words is. The Church must help its members to avoid those communications which will not edify the Body, but rather tear it apart. Advice and guidance must be given concerning good literature. Advice and guidance must be given concerning radio, television, movies and plays. Advice and guidance must be given concerning the people with whom both old and young should associate. Wherever words are being exchanged and communicating is going on there either Satan is at work destroying the Christian community or Christ is at work through His members building it up.

C. Labor

What is said about communications in general is applied also to other areas of life. Paul speaks about the labor relations among Christians. Slaves are to obey their masters as to Christ, with goodwill as to the Lord and not to men. Masters are to treat their slaves as fellow members of the Body of Christ.¹⁰ In his letter to Philemon Paul elaborates upon this in even greater detail.

Paul also has something to say about the purpose of work. The thief is no longer to steal. Rather he is to labor. In another place Paul writes, "if any would not work neither should he eat." The reason for work is "that he may be able to give to those in need."¹¹

In these days the Church is forced to give more attention to the

¹⁰Ibid., 6:5-9.

¹¹Ibid., 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10.

problem of labor relations. The members of Christ's Body in the place are faced with questions about unions, strikes, and relations between their fellow Christian employer or employee. On this level Christians are making decisions that either upbuild or tear apart. They also find themselves working at a job without knowing why and for what reason. They need help in finding goals and purpose for their work also. Their fellow Christians owe them the obligation of thinking through with them on the basis of God's Word the problems they face.

D. Family Relationships

Paul has much to say about the family in his letter to the Ephesians. He tells how Christian wives are to consider their Christian husbands and husbands their wives. He points out how Christian children are to act towards their parents and what the obligation of parents is towards their children. These relations are carried on as members of Christ's Body and hence as members one of another.¹²

Here it becomes the responsibility of the Church to give guidance and instruction concerning all the many varied family relationships. The members have an obligation toward one another in the area of sex, courtship, marriage, divorce, and education. Here too they must speak the truth in love so that in every way they might grow up into Him who is the Head, into Christ.

¹²Eph. 5:21-6:4.

E. Worship and Art

Paul, as a Jew, was also familiar with the beautiful Psalms and chants used in the worship service of the Jews. Such things Christians might well use in their worship also he feels. He urges the Christians to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father."¹³ In his letter to the Philippians Paul writes, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."¹⁴

From such advice the local Church might well conclude that it should seriously consider how it might use aids such as music, hymns, poetry, painting, architecture and drama in bringing the message of the truth to the members of the Body of Christ. Here a vast and exceedingly rich field opens up. From its very beginning the Christian Church has been the Mother of a rich, highly edifying and extremely varied culture. Today there has been added to this field that which is known as visual aids. The Church should use these aids wherever and whenever possible in its worship, its architecture, the homes of its members, in its education program. All this is done so that "in every way" the Body

¹³Ibid., 5:19,20.

¹⁴Phil. 4:8.

might grow up into Him who is the Head, into Christ.

No doubt many more conclusions might be drawn from this very rich letter to the Ephesians. For instance Paul speaks about how Christians are to use their leisure time. These few comments have barely scratched the surface. The purpose was, however, only to point out that the local Church has an extremely varied and important task to fulfill towards its members. Although generalizations are dangerous, it nevertheless must be said that at times the Lutheran Churches have been so busy fighting battles in the field of justification that they have lost them in the corresponding field of sanctification. There remains many battles to be fought yet there. Important as it is to remember that a man is justified by grace through faith, it is also important that he be given guidance and direction as to how to live out this life in Christ for the welfare and edification of the Body of Christ, the Church.

What is our contribution?
 In a general way this chapter explains the community. It defines the community and the government in that community. Having done this it contrasts the Church with that community as to goals, aims and activities.

4. The Community

The first thing that distinguishes one community from another is the people living in the community. Each local community may be thought of as an area of selection, drawing to itself people who are similar in background and living objectives, and also as an area of characterization, influencing the behavior of those who live within it and affecting their

CHAPTER IV

THE COMMUNITY

As the Church in the place looks about it sees that it does not stand alone. It is part of a larger group of people known as its community. In this community there are various problems and difficulties that must be solved. There are community activities that influence the thinking and lives of the people of the Church either negatively or positively. Before the Church is able to answer the question as to what responsibility it has toward this larger community it must define for itself what is meant by the community. It will have to be aware of what the community does and how it maintains itself as a community. It will have to know what it can expect from the community and then it can decide what it can contribute.

In a general way this chapter examines the community. It defines the community and the government in that community. Having done this it contrasts the Church with that community as to goals, means and motivation.

A. The Community

The first thing that distinguishes one community from another is the people living in the community. "Each local community may be thought of as an area of selection, drawing to itself people who are similar in background and living standards, and also as an area of characterization, influencing the behavior of those who live within it and affecting their

social standing."¹ In a rural community, for example, nearly all of the people may be farmers who have lived there for generations. Their standard of living will be much the same no matter where you go in that community. These characterizations will in turn affect the people who live there.

A community also has boundaries. Most books on Church administration and planning stress the fact that it is necessary for a Church to define the boundaries of the community it wishes to serve. In a city the boundaries may be set by railroad tracks or a highway. In a rural area it may be some area such as a township. At any rate the local Church must decide the boundaries of its community.

Where people are gathered in a community it is necessary that certain rules be followed that the community might maintain itself. Hence there is usually within the community some sort of government to enforce and supervise these laws and regulations. Just what the functions of this government are will be examined in more detail below.

One final mark of a community yet to be considered is its permanence. Lack of permanence on the part of residents destroys the community. The people have no obligations and usually little or no interest in the people in this community. A typical modern day example of a group of people gathered in one place who are yet not a community is the trailer courts of our land. Here people come and go very rapidly and seldom is it possible to establish any sense of community.

What will the Church look for in its community? A group of people

¹Murray H. Leiffer, The Effective City Church (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 49.

with similar backgrounds and living standards permanently settled and regulated by some type of government operating within the boundaries of this community. Of this community the local Church will ask, What is our social responsibility?

B. Origin of Community

As the local Church views its community it is forced to ask whether this community, with the marks of a community as defined above, is something that just happens to be. Is the community merely "a group of people who associate for promoting self-interest or group interest?"² Or may it be said that the community is more than this, that it is actually a part of God's will and creation?

Luther was definitely of the latter opinion. In commenting upon Psalm 82:1 he writes,

Observe that he (Psalmist) calls all communities or organized assemblies "the congregation of God," because they are God's own, and He accepts them as His own work, just as (Jonah 3:3) He calls Nineveh "a city of God." For He has made, and makes, all communities. He still brings them together, feeds them lets them grow, blesses and preserves them, gives them fields and meadows, cattle, water, air, sun and moon, and everything they have, even body and life, as it is written (Gen. 1:29)."³

God wills that there be a community where people live together in harmony and concord. However as the Church looks at the community and the people in the community it is aware of one thing that usually is

²Joseph Haroutunian, "The Person in the Community," The Church and Social Responsibility, edited by J. Richard Spann (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1953), p. 42.

³Martin Luther, "Psalm 82," translated by C. M. Jacobs, Luther's Works, XIII, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 46.

overlooked by sociologists and social planning groups. That is that the devil is at work in the community. "The end and goal of the enemy's work is death, disorder, evil, destruction. This is evident in both individual and group relationships."⁴

It is because of this opposition of the devil that God has created such a thing as government and order within the community to maintain the community. The created orders are part and parcel of God's dynamic aggression against the devil and one of the most effective of these orders is government. Luther vividly describes this in his comments on Psalm 82. He points out why government is necessary and why any thoughts about ruling and maintaining a community by means of the Gospel alone is impossible.

Therefore it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, nay even over one land or company of people, since the wicked always outnumber the good. Hence a man who would venture to govern an entire country or the world with the gospel would be like a shepherd who should place in one fold wolves, lions, eagles and sheep together and let them mingle with one another freely and say, Help yourselves, and be good and peaceful among yourselves; the fold is open, there is plenty of food; have no fear of dogs and clubs. The sheep, forsooth, would keep the peace and would allow themselves to be fed and governed in peace, but they would not live long; nor would any beast keep from molesting another.⁵

Government is a creation of God and is absolutely necessary in this world if a community is to be maintained. This is true because of the very fact that all men are sinners and children of Satan. Elton Trueblood

⁴Edgar M. Carlson, The Church and the Public Conscience (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 34.

⁵Martin Luther, "Secular Authority: To what extent it should be obeyed (1523)," Works of Martin Luther, III, translated by J. J. Schindel (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company and the Castle Press, n.d.), p. 237. Hereafter this will be referred to as "Secular Authority."

makes this fact the argument for a democracy. He writes that

the most profound argument for democracy is the realization, fundamentally Biblical in origin, that the love of power is so pervasive and so inordinate that democracy, which means a system of mutual checks, even upon the ruler, is the only alternative to injustice and oppression. . . . Democracy is necessitated by the fact that all men are sinners; it is made possible by the fact that we know it.⁶

Whether one can agree with Trueblood that Democracy is the only alternative to injustice and oppression is one thing. However it is important to realize that government of some sort is the only alternative to oppression and injustice. This is definitely a Biblical teaching. The Bible makes it quite clear that government is from God and according to His will. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (Rom. 13:1)." And again, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right (1 Pet. 2:13,14)."

C. The Function of Government

The Bible outlines the functions of government. In determining the true function of government in a community it is well that what the Bible says be considered. Passages that apply are as follows: Gen. 14:15; 1 Sam. 15:33; 1 Kings 18:40; Matt. 22:15-22; Rom. 13:1-7; Acts 10:34f.; 8:30; 13:12; 1 Cor. 10:3; 12:13; 7:10; 1 Tim. 2:1-8; 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; Psalm 82.

⁶Elton Trueblood, Foundations for Reconstruction (New York: Harper Brothers, 1946), p. 108.

From such passages the following conclusions may be drawn. The function of government is threefold:

- a. to maintain peace, order, security and justice,
- b. to provide for the larger collective needs of society, the general welfare,
- c. to promote civilization, peace, culture and well-being among mankind throughout its area of jurisdiction.⁷

The first and primary duty of the government is to uphold order and justice. This is the original, primary and immediate end of government. God has given government the obligation to maintain good order and conduct. Carlson says that this fixed framework of society that the government is to maintain is not just a hit and miss thing. "It is a positive expression of the Creator's will, a concrete embodiment of the order which is in the mind of God." This function of government is outlined in the preamble to the United States Constitution.

The second function of the government is to provide for the larger collective needs of society and the general welfare. This is called the secondary and ministrant function of the state and is also guaranteed in the United States Constitution. Luther says about rulers, "They are to make and administer just laws so that the poor, the wretched, the widows, the orphans are not oppressed, but have their rights and can keep them."⁸

The third function of the government is to promote civilization, peace, culture and well-being. This is an extension of the first

⁷American Lutheran Church--The Board of Christian Social Action, "Christian Social Living," A Compilation of Statements Formulated by the Commission on Social Relations, 1938-48 (Columbus, Ohio: Board of Christian Social Action of the A.L.C., 1948), p. 25.

⁸Luther, "Psalm 82," p. 57.

function. It is called the universal and altruistic end of government.⁹

Luther added that the State is to honor and further the teaching of the Word of God. "The ... verse demands ... that the gods, that is, the princes and lords, shall honor God's Word above all things and shall further the teaching of it."¹⁰

The means that the government uses to carry out its functions is "the sword," organized power. The government passes laws and backs up those laws with force. These are the only means at the disposal of the government.

It is the opinion of several Swedish Theologians that the state or government, in carrying out these functions is actually becoming the law of God concretely acting in society. Aulen writes that the law of God confronts us in the state for the state is a creation of the God of order. However the order of the state is divine only in the degree that it serves the law of God and its purpose; otherwise it is the servant of the devil. The purpose of the law, he goes on to state, is to have a concern for the welfare of the neighbor. There are in it the requirements of love. This is expressed in diverse ways and in many different situations.¹¹

Nygren in his book on the State and the Church has the same emphasis. He says that God confronts us in the kingdom of the world with the law.

⁹A.L.C.--The Board of Christian Social Action, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁰Luther, "Psalm 82," p. 57.

¹¹Gustaf Aulen, "The Church and Social Justice," This is the Church, edited by Anders Nygren, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), pp. 307-321.

This kingdom is called upon to love, just as much as the Spiritual kingdom. Hence it is important that government administer law and justice, defend and punish in love, for this is God's work. This, he says, is Luther's view.¹²

In this connection Luther wrote to the Princes:

Thus a prince should in his heart empty himself of his power and authority, and interest himself in the need of his subjects, dealing with it as though it were his own need. Thus Christ did unto us; and these are the proper works of Christian love.¹³

Carlson emphasizes much the same thing when he writes that in creation the law is given concretely in the pattern inherent in the order of society.¹⁴

These things are stressed because, despite their strict adherence to the Bible, Lutherans also have had false concepts of society and government. The significance of God's activity also in the realm of the state is often ignored. Too often there has been the view that God's first attempt to maintain order in this world failed and so He made a second attempt through Christ. It is concluded then that God now works only through the second means. Some even go so far as to feel that the government is inherently evil and irretrievably under the dominion of the devil. This has led to a pietistic separation of the Christian from any active interest in the state. Perhaps this has even been cloaked in what is called the separation of Church and State.

¹²Anders Nygren, "The State and the Church," This is the Church, edited by Anders Nygren, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), pp. 294-306.

¹³Luther, "Secular Authority," p. 265.

¹⁴Carlson, op. cit., pp. 22, 23.

Carlson, in criticizing this view, says that there is no part of life or of the world which is not the scene of God's aggressive activity. He goes on to point out that God is now at work in the total structure of His creation and to assume otherwise is false.¹⁵

Since this is the truth the Christian and the Christian Church is bound by love of God and their fellowmen to support the government in whatever way possible. Luther in speaking to Christians says:

Here the other proposition applies, that you are under obligation to serve and further the sword by whatever means you can, with body, soul, honor or goods. For it is nothing that you need, but something quite useful and profitable for the whole world and for your neighbor. Therefore, should you see that there is a lack of hangmen, beaules, judges, lords or princes, and find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the place, that necessary government may by no means be despised and become inefficient or perish. For the world cannot and dare not dispense with it.¹⁶

D. The Church contrasted with its Community

In summary of what has been said so far it is possible to contrast the Church with its community in three areas. These are (1) as to goals, (2) as to means to meet these goals, and (3) as to motivation.

The goals of the community are to maintain the community and to promote anything that will contribute to this end. This also is one of the goals of the Church. The Church is interested in maintaining this community. Paul writes to Timothy, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made by all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet

¹⁵Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁶Luther, "Secular Authority," p. 241.

and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way."¹⁷ This is what the Church desires, a quiet and peaceable life.

The community stops here. When this is maintained it and its government have met their goals. However the Church looks upon this goal as but the stepping stone to a greater goal. Paul continues in his letter:

This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.

The Church has as its final goal that of preaching this Gospel of Christ's mediatorship for the sins of the people in the community and that of leading them into the vital relationship of faith in that Mediator. This goal is realized only as the Church is able to lead the people of the surrounding community into the Christian community that this local Church is.

The Community uses the "sword" and the government wielding the sword to maintain itself. The community maintains itself by means of force. The Church, on the other hand, dare not use this means. Its only means is the Gospel. As the Church proclaims its Gospel the Spirit enters the hearts of men and regenerates them, gives them a new life and a new reason for living.

The Church and the Community have different motivations also. The Community desires to maintain itself primarily for self-centered reasons. The Community asks itself how this or that activity will benefit it and

¹⁷1 Timothy 2:1-6.

its members. The Church is interested in this too, but not only this. As the Body of Christ it strives to do the will of its Head and to love even as it has been loved. Thus the Church goes beyond self-love. It is motivated by God's love in Christ Jesus.

The local Church views its community as God's will. It also realizes that the devil is at work in the hearts of the people to destroy that which maintain the community. God counters this on the one hand by the government wielding the sword. This maintains only an outward unity however. What God wills is that all men be drawn finally into that perfect community He has created through His Son. This community is created and maintained by the preaching of the Gospel. On the basis of what has been said the final chapter now seeks to arrive at some answers and conclusions to the question, "What is the social responsibility of the local congregation to its community?"

CHAPTER V

THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION TO ITS COMMUNITY

Many things go on within a community. It takes, often, many agencies to carry on the operations of a community. The operations that a community and its people are concerned about include education, entertainment, maintaining healthy life, housing, safety, labor relations. Each one of these may be subdivided many times. In attempting to meet the needs of its people in these areas the community often faces many problems. Often these problems remain unsolved and because of such unsolved problems the lives of many people are embittered and even destroyed. Typical of the problems communities face in large areas of this country are those of juvenile delinquency and racial segregation.

The local Church is usually aware of these problems. The question is whether or not this congregation of God's people in this place has any responsibility toward such operations of the community. Certainly very often the people of the Church are affected by these operations. Is it, then, within the task of the Church in this place to do something about these problems? If so, what can it do? If the Church engages in these tasks will it cease to be the Church of Christ? Will its witness to Christ be hindered or aided? This final chapter seeks to draw some conclusions to these and other questions as it considers, What is the social responsibility of the local congregation to its community?

A. The Cause of Social Problems

Actually the motivation behind this study was a concern about the fact that communities have not been successful in solving their problems. If it were only a matter of meeting in conference, making plans, gathering funds and then carrying out the plans, the Church would have no concern. But this is not the fact. The fact is that education, provisions of adequate housing, planning recreation facilities and the like still leave many communities facing serious problems, problems of crime, delinquency, the break-up of family life, serious labor problems. As one views these things he is reminded of the whited sepulchres of which Jesus spoke. It is not enough to paint the outside. The rotting bones remain within. The Church is concerned about these rotting bones. It is concerned to the extent that it wants these bones to get up and walk around as sound and healthy human beings, healthy in mind, body and soul.

The usual solution to most of the social problems has been through the government and its various agencies. By passing and enforcing laws men have sought to correct the evils found in society. This has been effective, yet incomplete. It breaks down wherever government fails to use force to enforce the laws.

The sociologists of our day say that the cause of social evils is social lag. The technical sciences have carried men far beyond their past. This has left many an unsolved social problem. There are many adjustments to be made. The solution to the evils in society, they say, is to be found in the advances of the social sciences and in education. As men scientifically learn to understand the complex relationships that

our modern world has thrust upon us they will gradually learn how to solve their problems. This, of course, involves education and learning on all levels so that the fruits of study and research might be applied.¹

Another method of dealing with the evils of society is that employed by communists. They say that the cause of these evils is the self-contradictions of capitalism and the class structure of society. The solution is to be found in the working out of these self-contradictions in capitalism plus pressure from the masses under disciplined leaders.²

The writer is not prepared to discuss the merits or faults of the above two theses. Evidently there is some truth in what they all have to say. He also recognizes that the humanitarian efforts of men guided by human reason, pity, and natural love can have the effect of relieving many a social burden and solving many a social problem. However this does not and cannot remove the real cause of social problems.³ They only paint the outside of the sepulchers. The rotting bones remain.

Scientists, politicians, and humanitarians remain fundamentally ineffective in finding a lasting solution to social problems because they have failed to recognize all social problems as symptoms of a world wide spiritual death. Down underneath men are by nature sinful and spiritually dead. The best that these people can do is to remove the physical ills

¹John C. Bennett, Social Salvation: a religious approach to the problems of social change (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), pp. 6-10.

²Ibid.

³E. E. Kowalke, "Social Problems and the Gospel," Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Convention of the Ev. Synodical Conference of N. America, Aug. 4-9, 1938 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 55.

of the flesh.⁴

The first thing that must be recognized is that society is made up of men who act as total personalities. There is the danger, as in communism, to sacrifice the individual for the masses. This must not be done. Nor may one, when considering the individual divide him into something less than a whole man by referring to him as "economic man" or "political man." Man must be considered as a whole, total person. He always acts as such and as these thousands of men live and act so will society live and act, so will the community live and act.⁵

The most important thing to know about this individual man is that he is a creature of God in revolt with his total being against his Creator and rightful Sovereign. This revolt consists in the assumption that man is himself sovereign and can handle his life apart from God. It is egocentricity. To use Luther's words, the essence of sin is that "Man seeks his own in everything, even in God."⁶

This is what is causing the social problems. To say this, is, of course, a generalization and yet it is a valid generalization. Others have listed such things as rationalizations, the complexity of social forces and the lack of imagination as roots of social evils.⁷ Yet, no matter what form it takes, sin is the hidden root of all the unsolved problems in a community.

⁴Ibid., pp. 54ff.

⁵Edgar M. Carlson, The Church and the Public Conscience (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), pp. 1-4.

⁶Ibid., pp. 5-9.

⁷Bennett, op. cit., p. 34.

B. The Supreme Task of the Church

"Since social evils are but the accumulated and institutionalized projection of individual evils, the radical cure for social evils remains the regeneration of the individual."⁸ "It follows from the above that the most essential initial step in social action, even in the approach to social problems, is that thorough evangelization of the individual which sends him forth with the indwelling Christ as the real light and power in his life."⁹ The individual must be transformed by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and empowered by the indwelling Christ. Or in the light of what was said in Chapter Two the individuals of the community must be made members of the Church, God's real community.

This is not only the most radical cure and most essential initial step, but it is definitely the work of the local Church. Among the last words spoken by the visible Lord of the Church were the words to evangelize the world. Hence the local Church interested in finding solutions to the social problems of its community must be vitally aware that it has the basic and fundamental solution as part of its message. The rule of Christ in the heart of men is the solution. The Church is here to proclaim that Christ has come to set up that rule. It has been commanded to preach this Gospel of love and forgiveness. It has been sent by Christ

⁸American Lutheran Church--The Board of Charities, "The Church's Social Ministry," Report on Lutheran Social Action, Part I (Columbus, Ohio: Board of Charities, American Lutheran Church, 1947), p. 12.

⁹W. H. Greever, "The Evangelical Approach to Social Problems," The Hartwick Sem. Conf. on the Social Mission of the Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1944), p. 32.

into the world as a missionary witness to what Christ has already done.

Christ has conquered sin and brought life and immortality to light. Only as the community repents of its sins, turns in faith to Christ for forgiveness and submits itself to the rule of the divine King in deed and in truth will it find the ultimate solution to its problems. There are no short cuts. The community cannot achieve it by laws or policies, organized religion cannot achieve it by its activism. No external program can lead to the lasting solution. The real solution comes only when men surrender their tools, their minds and their wills to the Kingdom of God in Christ: "Thy will, not mine, be done."¹⁰

The local Church that asks itself what its social responsibility is toward its community recognizes that its first and primary task is to proclaim the Gospel to its community. This is a business not only for Sundays, but also for weekdays. The Church is a community in itself, but it is not an end in itself. It exists for the sake of its community.¹¹ Through its message men are converted and regenerated and Christ comes to rule in their hearts. Wherever such converted men "have lived out the principles of the Christian religion, in all relationships, in their daily lives, society has been leavened and social problems have been solved in exact proportion to the practice of these principles."¹²

¹⁰John Bright, The Kingdom of God (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 95.

¹¹J. H. Oldham and W. A. Visser 'T Hooft, The Church and its Function in Society (Chicago and New York: Willett, Clark and Co., 1937), p. 104.

¹²Greever, op. cit., p. 38.

C. Social Education

The very fact that social evils have been lessened and problems solved when Christian principles were followed, leads naturally to the next task of the Church toward its community. The Church has the task of teaching its members how to live consistently as Christians in every phase of their life. It must open their eyes to the problems, point them in directions that are right and provide the motivation of love.

The Lutheran Churches must interest themselves in the social aspects of the Gospel. In the past Lutherans have been afraid of the social gospel. To be sure, there is a social gospel of which the Churches can be afraid. That gospel which has as its aim only the social betterment of man is not the Gospel at all. Yet there is a Gospel which should be actively pursued and that is the Gospel of God's love in Christ Jesus which shows love and concern for all the needs of men.¹³ What has been said about Christianity in general may be applied to the Lutheran Church as well. "It is one of the curious perversions of a great faith that there ever arose the confusing division between personal and social Christianity."¹⁴

Professor Qualben lists three reasons why Lutherans historically have made little impression upon community and government affairs. (1) They have gotten away from Luther's original interest in the State.

¹³Wm. H. Hillmer, "Our Church's Mission to the American Community," presented to joint session of the Rural and Urban Institute, Valparaiso, Indiana, August 8, 1956 (Mimeographed), Exhibit A-2.

¹⁴Bennett, op. cit., p. 63.

Consider especially Luther's tract of 1520, "To the Christian Nobility."

(2) Lutherans were weaned away from civic duties and privileges and affairs of State were left to a chosen few in the Lutheran countries of Europe. Moreover those settlers who came to the United States from war-torn Germany wished to be alone and to leave others alone. (3) Many of the Lutheran immigrants were people of poorer classes who had little or no training for political leadership. Also many were influenced by or were pietists who were content to leave affairs of State to others.¹⁵

What has happened then is that many Church members have compartmentalized their Christianity. Either they ignore completely the affairs of their community or they do not see what their responsibility towards that community is. They thus fail to see that

the life of the Church is a unity, and no part of human life can be arbitrarily separated from the influence of the Gospel. Those Christians who, with an air of great self-conscious piety, concentrate on the cultivation of the spiritual life and ostentatiously ignore the worlds of politics, business and educational policy as spheres of Christian decision and obedience, suffer from an inadequate Christology and deny in practice the orthodoxy which they so emphatically assert in theory. Christ is king over the real world and not merely of a small ecclesiastical enclave.¹⁶

Not only that but to a large extent members of local Churches have come to feel that the work of the Church is only the work of the clergy. This idea also must be changed. "If the Church is to be an effective force in the social and political sphere our first task is to laicize our thought about it. We stand before a great historic task--the task of

¹⁵Lars Qualben, "An Historical Appraisal of Lutheran Social Service," The Hartwick Sem. Conf. on the Social Mission of the Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1944), p. 54.

¹⁶Daniel T. Jenkins, The Strangeness of the Church (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), p. 122.

restoring the lost unity between worship and work."¹⁷

The increasing sophistication of thought and the advancing secularization of life give to the men and women who live in closest contact with the realities of the secular order a deeper insight into the human problem than that which is ordinarily possessed by the clergy. For the same reason the laity, when they take seriously the great Christian principles of reverence for Christ, have strategic opportunities for introducing Christian solutions into private and public life. Today is the great era of the Christian layman.¹⁸

The local Church will then "be willing and eager to explore and exploit any type of relationship which will bring to bear the witness of the Christian life on the consciousness of the community."¹⁹ The members of the Church will want to gather together in worship, in discussion and in classes to edify one another, to discuss mutual problems and to help one another to grow to that level of spirituality where every member is faithfully serving his Lord in all his callings. And indeed the members of the local Church have many callings: citizen, employer, employee, father, mother, doctor, lawyer, student and a multitude of others.

Thus the local Church will bring to bear upon its community the two factors that will do the most towards solving the social problems of that community. The first of these is the message of forgiveness of sins by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Through this message the Holy Spirit works to make new men with new motivations. Then the local Church trains its members and continues to provide them with fresh power and

¹⁷Oldham, op. cit., p. 106.

¹⁸John A. Mackay, God's Order (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 194.

¹⁹Elmer Moeller, "Relationship of Church and Community according to the New Testament," Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Rural Life Institute, Valparaiso University, August 6-8, 1956 (Mimeographed), p. 14.

strength to live out their life in Christ in every phase of their life. These two things are the most important thing that a local Church can do to fulfill its responsibility toward its community.

D. The Church's Hope

One more factor will be discussed below, namely that of preaching the Law of God to the community. However before this is done the eschatological aspect of the Church must be considered. All too often interest in social problems has caused Churches to forget that the Church looks beyond this world to the world to come. Exponents of the social gospel have often made the Kingdom of God which the Church proclaims a kingdom of this world. In so doing they have identified the Christian Gospel with a program of reform which society, as it presently is, may be expected to realize. This is a false view. The problem of the Church is how to "keep faith with both sides of her Lord's teaching, how to combine social duties which she acknowledges with her pastoral mission of preparing men for heaven by keeping before them the paramount importance of the world beyond history."²⁰

This tension is found in the New Testament and in the writings of St. Paul. On the one hand he urges a separation from the world and yet on the other hand he does not disparage earthly citizenship.²¹

It may fairly be claimed that the missionary motive dominates the New Testament, other-worldly in its goal, but involving the moral

²⁰S. L. Greenslade, The Church and the Social Order (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 11.

²¹2 Cor. 6:14-17; Rom. 7:18; 1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 13; 1 Th. 4:11; 2 Th. 3:10; Col. 3:22; 1 Pet. 2:12-13,17.

transformation of society in that the Christian (so far as he is a Christian) accepts the law of love and becomes the channel of that divine love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, love not measured out pitilessly in response to each man's desert, but flowing generously to meet his need.²²

E. The Church Preaching the Law

There is, in the opinion of some theologians, one more task that is the Church's to do for its community. That is that the Church is to preach the Law to its community. This flows out of the idea that the government, the State is embodied Law.²³ The Church is to interpret God's Law to this State. It is to act as did the prophets of old, interpreting God's will, awakening and enlightening the public conscience. The Church is to be the conscience of the community and its government.

There remains some doubt in the mind of this writer as to the validity of this thesis. In just what manner is this to be done on the level of the local Church? What does the Church hope to accomplish thereby? These are questions that lend themselves to further research and study. Nevertheless, what has been said by these men is here presented in its essence.

It is said that the Law of God is found in every ethnic culture that fosters the discipline of civil righteousness. The Church is the custodian of this theocentric law of love. Hence it is the responsibility of the Church to see that society follows this law. "The Church must

²²Greenslade, op. cit., p. 13.

²³Supra, Chap. IV, c.

proclaim that law of love in all its relations."²⁴

Besides its primary mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ by baptizing, preaching and teaching and ministering to the spiritual needs of its own

the Church is also God's witness in the world, testifying like the prophets of old, John the Baptist, Christ and His Apostles against sin and wickedness, private and public, and shedding light and the judgment of God's Word on the thought, lives and deeds of men, whether in high or low places. The Church will therefore, by moral and spiritual means seek to permeate society with its own ideals.²⁵

So long as it does not neglect its supreme task, the Church should therefore willingly cooperate with all men of good-will in promoting the humane ends and constructive cultural processes of civilization and its "civil righteousness." It should do this, not as an end in itself, but as a "school-master that leads to Christ," and because, when done from Christian motives, such activities are wholesome and God-pleasing.²⁶

The Church uses the Law to admonish the conscience of society.

Its endeavor must be to awaken insight as to what a right order, worthy of the name, demands; a sense of responsibility before that which love requires towards others; and the awareness that to fail here is to let loose powers of destruction. The witness of the Church must be equally clear whether it confronts the patent disregard of the law of God, or veiled resistance which seeks to hide its true character behind a screen of Christian terms. . . . If it becomes necessary for the Church to rise in protest against the

²⁴Carlson, op. cit., pp. 68ff.

²⁵American Lutheran Church--The Board of Christian Social Action, "Christian Social Living," A Compilation of Statements Formulated by the Commission on Social Relations (Columbus, Ohio: Board of Christian Social Action, 1948), p. 25.

²⁶A.L.C.--the Board of Charities, op. cit., p. 12.

violation of God's law, this means only that the Church fulfills the responsibility to the state which God has given her.²⁷

Luther wrote along these lines about preachers of the Word.

It is His will (God's) that those who are in office and are called to do so shall rebuke and judge their gods (rulers) boldly and openly. . . . So then, this verse teaches that to rebuke rulers is not seditious, provided it is done in the way here described: namely, by the office to which God has committed that duty, and through God's Word spoken publicly, boldly, and honestly.²⁸

The Church, then, admonishes the community and its government when the Law of God is not followed. Whenever it is followed the Church cooperates in whatever way it can to continue this.

These are the views of current Lutheran theologians. However, historically, this was the view of Calvin. For him the Church was the conscience of the State. To fulfill her mission, God provided the ministry and the consistory. The ministry was the authoritarian teaching office and the consistory was the disciplining agency. This is usually known as the Genevan theocracy. However it was a theocracy only in so far as the Church assisted the secular power as a spiritual guide. The secular power was charged with regulating the conduct of men according to the Decalog. The Church had only the duty of interpreting it. The State was the will of God in action, according to the counsel and direction of the consistory.²⁹

²⁷Gustaf Aulen, "The Church and Social Justice," This is the Church, edited by Anders Nygren, translated by C. C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), p. 320.

²⁸Martin Luther, "Psalm 82," translated by C. M. Jacobs, Luther's Works, XIII, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 49.

²⁹F. E. Mayer, The Religious Bodies of America (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 209.

It should be noted that this particular view is the opposite of that which most conservative Lutherans have felt in the past. Most have felt that the way to fulfill the Church's social responsibility is to help the individual member to be a Christian in all his callings, as was indicated above. This view would have the Church be instead or at least in addition, the conscience of the State or government in a community, rebuking and exhorting them on the basis of God's Law. As was said above, the theological validity of this view and its implications, together with the application on a local Church level, are things that must yet be studied.

F. Conclusions of the Study

1. The Church is the creation of the Holy Spirit and consists of all in whom He has worked faith in the vicarious atonement of Christ.
2. The Church becomes visible in that place where the Gospel is taught and the Sacraments are administered.
3. Those who gather in this place for the purpose of administering the Word and Sacraments are members one of another inasmuch as they are members of Christ's Body, the Church. Thus they are that true community God wills in Christ Jesus.
4. The Spirit creates and maintains this community through the administration of the Gospel and the Sacraments.
5. The Local Church has a responsibility to maintain itself as a community by the administration of these means to all phases of the lives of its members. This means that the local Church must give especial attention to helping its members lead sanctified lives towards one

another. This is its first responsibility towards itself as a community.

6. The local Church also finds itself in the midst of a larger community consisting of all the people in this area permanently settled.

7. Because these people are by nature sinful and self-centered their natural tendency is to destroy the community. To prevent this God has willed Government to maintain the community by force.

8. The Church and Government are both creations of God and work towards the maintenance of the community. However, they differ as to their ultimate goals, means and motivation.

9. Towards this larger community the local Church has the following social responsibility:

- a. by evangelism to bring about the conversion of the individuals in the community and thus let Christ rule in their hearts.
- b. to educate, guide and motivate its members to fulfill their social responsibility in all their callings.
- c. and some say, inasmuch as it is possible to be the conscience of the community and its government by preaching the Law.

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