Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 7 Article 31

4-1-1936

Biblical Methods of Poor-Relief

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mus gewachsen ist. Es fehlte viel; treue Christen waren sich dessen auch wohl bewußt; sie kannten auch die Mittel, wodurch allein die Gemeinden gebessert werden können, die Gnadenmittel; sie wirkten mit diesen Mitteln, hier mehr, dort weniger treu und gewissenhaft; ihre Arbeit war auch nicht vergeblich, es wurde besser in der Kirche. Aber den Pietisten ging das nicht schnell genug; sie suchten andere Mittel neben Wort und Sakrament, wodurch das Werk beschleunigt werden sollte. Theo. Hoyer.

Biblical Methods of Poor-Relief.

We begin this study on the premise that no apologies are necessary for discussing the subject of poor-relief in these days of confusion and distress. Five years of the so-called "depression" lie behind us, and in spite of all that has been attempted by public and private agencies to bring back normalcy, some twenty million of our fellow citizens are still "on relief." This terrible plight of our friends and neighbors has become the concern of every thinking man and woman in America. The Christian in particular finds this situation a direct challenge. Again and again he is confronted with the perplexing problem: "Just what is the obligation of the modern Christian over against the poor?" The question deserves clear thinking and demands it now. The time has come for us to search deeply in the Scriptures for enlightenment and on the basis of divine truth to find an answer for this perplexing question.

Following a good old Lutheran custom, the writer, after carefully studying all the Scriptural references to the poor and needy, wishes to propose seven theses which, it is believed, will help clarify the issues involved. The first two of these are rather introductory, pointing out the existence and extent of the Christian's duty to his needy neighbor, while the last five deal directly with channels or methods of poor-relief.

1.

Scripture teaches plainly that the Christian has a clear duty over against the poor and needy.

The poor are referred to in the Bible over two hundred times. Besides this there are many references to the widows, the fatherless, and the needy. A careful examination of these many passages shows that God commands, exhorts, and expects the Christian to protect and to provide for the poor and needy. God Himself is their constant Champion and Defender and Strength, Is. 25, 4; Ps. 140, 12. And we are told that His wrath and vengeance is poured out upon those who oppress the poor and withhold from them the necessities of life, Amos 4, 1—3; Ezek. 22, 29—31; Matt. 23, 14.

The Book of Genesis has nothing in particular to say about the

poor. But beginning with the book of Exodus, we find them mentioned, provided for, and protected by the writings of Moses. Through this great leader God gave very plain and specific laws for the care of the poor and needy among the Israelites. The stranger, too, was to be protected and not oppressed. Ex. 22, 21—27; Lev. 25, 35—38; Deut. 10, 19; 15, 7—18, etc.

We find some twenty-five references in the Book of Job to the poor, the needy, and the fatherless. This is highly significant; for Job probably lived before the time of Abraham, and the religion of Job pictures the primitive religion of the patriarchs in its highest purity, both as to faith and to duty. To find so many references to almsgiving and kindness, to the poor and needy, and to the fatherless and widows, shows that already among the ancient people of God, before the Ten Commandments were set down in writing, God's people were fully aware of their duty over against the poor and needy. Job 5, 15. 16; 6, 27; 20, 10. 19; 22, 9; 24, 3. 9. 14; 29, 12—16; 30, 25; 31, 16—22; 34, 19. 28; 36, 6. 15.

The psalmists of Israel also pleaded the cause of the poor, Ps. 41, 1; 82, 3. 4; 113, 7; 140, 12, etc. Solomon does likewise in his Proverbs, Prov. 14, 31; 19, 17; 22, 9; 25, 21, etc.

The prophets repeatedly champion the cause of the poor and needy and warn against their neglect and oppression. Representative passages are: Is. 58, 6—11; Ezek. 18, 7—9. 16; Dan. 4, 27; Zech. 7, 8—10, etc.

In the New Testament we find the same teaching continued, Matt. 19, 21; Mark 10, 21; Luke 14, 13. 21; 16, 19—31; Gal. 2, 10; Jas. 2, 3—6, etc. Christ showed Himself the Friend of the poor. The apostles did likewise, and we know that this spirit of love was developed in the early Church to a high degree. In fact, the love of the early Christians for the poor and distressed set the heathen world agog. In heathenism there was nothing like it. So impressed was the pagan emperor Julian with Christian love and care for the poor that he commanded Arsacius, the high priest of Galatia, to imitate this Christian virtue, saying: "It is disgraceful, when there is not a beggar found among the Jews and when the godless Galileans support our poor as well as their own, that our people should be without help." (Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, page 326.)

Not only does the Bible show us that we have an obligation to the poor, but it also very specifically points out just what the extent of this duty is. This shall occupy our attention in the next thesis.

2.

Scripture teaches plainly that the Christian is to provide for both the spiritual and bodily wants of the poor and needy.

Since the Bible emphasizes the fact that man is a twofold being,

having a material body and an immortal soul (Gen. 2, 7; Matt. 10, 28), it is to be expected that man's twofold needs, the bodily and the spiritual, should be spoken of throughout the inspired volume. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to show that the Bible repeatedly admonishes the child of God to make provision for both the spiritual and the bodily needs of the poor.

Spiritual Needs.

The spiritual needs of man are supplied through the means of grace, the preaching of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This need shall receive but a passing glance at this time. Suffice it to say that the work of "Inner Missions" is largely in behalf of the poor and needy, but it is a mistake to think that all the spiritual wants of the poor and needy can be taken care of by such specialized missions. Congregations should always consider it one of their highest privileges to deal out their Bread of Life to the needy living within the shadow of their spires. "When Decius, the emperor, demanded of Laurentius, the deacon of the church of Rome, the church's treasures, he promised after three days to produce them: in which time having gathered together the blind and the lame, the infirm and the maim, at the time appointed he brought them into the palace; and when the emperor asked for the treasures he had promised to bring with him, he shows him his company: 'Behold,' says he, 'these are the treasures of the church, those eternal treasures which are never diminished, but increase; which are dispersed to every one and yet found in all.'" (Cave, *Primitive Christianity*, p. 294.) In past centuries the poor were the jewels of the Church; let us beware in this modern day that we do not regard them merely as mill-stones around the congregation's neck. We Lutheran dare not side-step this duty to the poor.

Bodily Needs.

The bodily needs of man referred to in the Bible are divided into two classes: *general needs*, such as are common to all men; and *special needs*, such as affect only some. Among the general needs mentioned in the Scriptures are the lack of food, clothing, shelter, family-life, and justice. The special needs mentioned are those brought on by the lack of health and those resulting from some sort of affliction or from oppression or from divine visitation. We shall now review the extent of the Christian's duty over against these needs of the poor and distressed in the light of Scripture.

No doubt one of the best-known sections in the writings of Moses which deal with the bodily needs of man is Deut. 15, 7—11. This statement is so plain it needs little comment. I shall call your attention only to the fact that Moses admonishes his people to provide for the poor and needy "sufficient for his need in that which he

wanteth." It is understood of course that this reference does not include the luxuries which the poor might desire; but it does refer to the necessities of life, to which the poor are entitled according to God's command, provided the need is not the result of man's refusal to work. The lazy man and the idler are accorded no sympathy in the Bible. St. Paul speaks of them very definitely when he says: "If any would not work, neither should he eat," 2 Thess. 3, 10.

That God would have the Christian provide food, clothing, and shelter for the poor we see in passages such as Prov. 22, 9; 1 Kings 17, 16; Ezek. 18, 7; Matt. 25, 35. 36, etc. Job very beautifully refers to his provisions for the bodily needs of the poor when he says: "If I have withheld the poor from their desire or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel myself alone and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; . . . if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless when I saw my help in the gate, then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade and mine arm be broken from the bone," Job 31, 16—22. Another very wonderful reference is Is. 58, 6. 7.

To-day our country is filled with millions in need of the common necessities of life. Unable to obtain work, bread-winners everywhere are obliged to look to the bounty of charity for food, clothing, and shelter. The great majority of these people are not seeking to avoid honest labor. Only a few years ago they were among the nation's happy army of self-sustaining laborers. They gladly and enthusiastically walked off with their dinner-pails in the morning to their daily tasks and returned at night with smiling faces to enjoy the cheer of their homes and the companionship of their loved ones. But all this has changed for many. Factories are closed or working part time. The machine, the "iron man" of industry, has displaced millions of honest laborers. Unused dinner-pails stand mockingly on the shelf. The home of the unemployed is no longer a place of cheer. Millions are on the verge of despair. Surely we Christians dare not let our candle of love for our neighbor be snuffed out when the light is so badly needed.

The special bodily needs of the poor, such as are brought on by sickness, affliction, divine visitation, and other like causes, also lie within the province of Christian charity.

We may freely say that Jesus was particularly mindful of the special needs of the multitudes that pressed upon Him and that He expects us to do likewise, Matt. 25, 35. 36. Through just such deeds the righteous will reveal their saving faith on the day of Judgment.

Many of the special needs of the poor can be relieved only by professional and institutional care, and the Christians will, wherever possible, support such projects. The ancient Church gave the world

its first hospital and other institutions of mercy, and in so doing, she boldly met the challenge of the special needs of the poor as they presented themselves to her attention. Surely we, the children of the ancient Church, purified by the purging fires of the great Reformation, will not fail to emulate the example of the children of God of past ages?

The child of God, says Scripture, is also to be concerned with the cause of social justice. "Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy," Prov. 31, 9. Isaiah takes up the same theme in his first chapter when he says: "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow," Is. 1, 17. Another very clear reference is Psalm 82. Here God directly enjoins upon the civil rulers to "do justice to the afflicted and needy." Ancient Job knew the meaning of social justice, Job 29, 16. 17. Speaking to the king of Judah, God through the lips of Jeremiah cries out: "Execute ye judgment and righteousness and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor," Jer. 22, 2. 3. Other references are Lev. 19, 15; Deut. 1, 16. 17; Neh. 5, 1—13; Zech. 7, 8—10. Certainly, in this day of social legislation the Christian should be concerned with laws respecting the poor. It is the plain duty of rulers to protect the rights of the poor as well as those of the rich; and in a land of democracy, where every citizen is a part of the government, the Christian is in duty bound to use his influence to safeguard the rights of his needy neighbor. The old adage "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" also applies to this business of charity. For while we must expect to have the poor with us always, still we have the duty, plainly set forth in Scripture, to take every precaution to avert such poverty as necessarily results from injustice and oppression.

Having reviewed the scope of our duties, let us now turn to the subject of agencies, or channels, at our disposal for the relief of the needy. The purpose of the next thesis, then, will be to show that there are times when every Christian must personally help the poor.

3.

Scripture teaches plainly that in some cases the Christian must act personally in relieving the wants of the poor and needy.

It will not be necessary for us to dwell long on this well-known truth. Accordingly, we shall summon only a few witnesses to establish our case. "Thou," says Moses, referring to every Israelite, "shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land," Deut. 15, 11. Job's poor-relief evidently was all given by his own hand, Job 29, 16. The outstanding example of direct charity is the story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10, 30—37. Speaking of this case, Jesus said: "Go and do thou likewise."

Scripture tells us that the Christian has a very definite duty to his own flesh and blood and to his fellow-Christians. Paul in his First Letter to Timothy says: "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel," 1 Tim. 5, 8. Centuries before, Isaiah had proclaimed the same truth to the hardened Israelites of his time, Is. 58, 7. To the Galatians Paul writes: "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," Gal. 6, 10.

In our modern complex civilization personal assistance of the poor does not always suffice. In fact, in many instances the task of poor-relief is not practical for the individual Christian and must be borne by collective efforts. Under such circumstances the congregation is charged by God to be the agency of poor-relief. Our next thesis will deal with that phase of the problem.

4.

Scripture teaches plainly that the Christian congregation also has a duty over against the poor and needy.

There is nothing new nor startling about the statement that the Christian congregation should be an agency for relieving the wants of the poor and needy. The first Christian congregation in history, organized in the city of Jerusalem, according to the 6th chapter of Acts, became an agency for such Christian service very shortly after its founding. Other congregations followed its example as they sprang up through the missionary labors of Paul and the other apostles, and this became the rule throughout the length and breadth of the Apostolic Church. That practise has been followed down through the centuries in one form or another, and we Lutherans must stand on that principle to-day. This truth has been upheld by the leaders of our Church from its earliest beginnings.

In his well-known book *Die rechte Gestalt*, published in 1863, Dr. Walther dwells at length on congregational poor-relief. He says: *"Die Gemeinde hat zum dritten sich angelegen sein zu lassen, dass alle ihre Glieder auch im Irdischen wohl versorgt seien, an den noetigen Lebensbeduerfnissen nicht Mangel leiden noch in irgendeiner Not verlassen seien."* (P. 38.) In English this statement would read about like this: "The congregation, in the third place, should take it upon itself to see to it that all of its members are provided for also in respect to earthly things, that they do not lack the necessities of life nor be forsaken in any need." As proof, the writer cites Gal. 6, 10; Deut. 15, 4; Rom. 12, 13; Gal. 2, 9. 10; Jas. 1, 27; 1 Thess. 4, 11. 12.

In addition to pointing out the congregation's duty, Scripture also points out how it might proceed in this matter of congregational

poor-relief. "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables," said the apostles. "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom ye may appoint over this business," Acts 6, 2. 3. The early Christian congregations were consistent in the practise of choosing out men whose special duty it was to supervise the work of charity, and according to history the number in the early Church was usually seven. "In many places," says Uhlhorn, "the number of seven was felt binding after the analogy of the seven at Jerusalem." (Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, p. 163.) This method of carrying out congregational poor-relief was common to all Christian congregations for at least 300 years and did not change until the false views of monasticism began to creep into the Church, changing the whole plan of Christian charity by transferring it from the congregational supervision to the supervision of other organizations. This change of method brought on a great deal of abuse both in respect to doctrine and to practise and played a significant role in the corruption of the medieval Church. In fact, we might say that the charity of the Church of the Dark Ages became a curse throughout Christendom. Thousands of people were enticed away from productive labor to the shelter of the monastery and the convent, where they sustained themselves through the bounty of alms.

As corruption crept into the Church, the Christian's love for the poor also cooled off. To overcome this, the Church began to teach that the giving of alms was a meritorious work procuring the forgiveness of sins for all who gave liberally. In due time the fundamental motive of Christian charity became changed completely, and men no longer gave to the poor out of love to God and man, but men now gave their alms to gain the favor of Heaven.

The Church of the Reformation recognized this corruption and taught again that faith in Christ and not almsgiving procures the forgiveness of sins and that the relief of the poor is a duty of the Christian congregation. Luther in his church postils, on the Gospel for the day of St. Stephen, says: "In this incident you see, first, how a Christian congregation should be organized; to this end you behold a true picture of a spiritual ministration which the apostles are here carrying out. They provide for the souls, are busy with preaching and praying, but also see to it that the body is provided for, choosing out certain men to distribute the provisions, as you have heard. Thus, the Christian order provides for both body and soul, that no one suffers need, as Luke informs us, and all are well fed and well provided for both in body and soul." (XI, 2754 ff.; quoted by Walther in his *Pastorale*, p. 298.)

In this time of national need Christian congregations must by all means take the distress of the poor to heart. The congregation as

such should place this work in the hands of members especially designated for this purpose, and an honest effort should be made to carry out this Christian duty.

There are times, however, when a congregation cannot bear the burden of caring for its poor and it must look to others for help. Our next thesis will deal with just such a situation.

5.

Scripture teaches plainly that Christian congregations should assist one another in the relief of the poor and needy.

Should situations arise — through droughts, famines, floods, fires, storms, wars, epidemics, unemployment, depression cycles, and the like — whereby a whole congregation becomes so impoverished as to be unable to provide for its poor and needy, it becomes the duty of other congregations not so afflicted to contribute to the needs of the impoverished congregation. In such a situation in the early days of the Church the congregation at Antioch sent assistance to the congregation at Jerusalem, Acts 11, 27—30. Other congregations did likewise. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul announces the fact that "it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem," Rom. 15, 25. 26. And in writing to the congregation at Corinth, Paul says: "Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye," 1 Cor. 16, 1. 2. According to this congregations throughout the length and breadth of Christendom sent contributions to the needy congregation at Jerusalem.

From all this we conclude that there are times when Christian congregations are in duty bound to assist one another in the relief of the poor and needy. This was done by the Church in the past; should it not, we ask, be done now?

The possibility, however, of wide-spread poverty throughout an entire synod or denomination brings a question to our attention at this time which must also be dealt with fairly and frankly. The question is this: "Should emergencies arise as a result of disasters, droughts, earthquakes, wars, storms, floods, fires, epidemics, unemployment, depression cycles, and the like which make it impossible for affiliated congregations to assist one another in the care of the poor and needy, to whom should these unfortunates then turn for help?" With over 20 million of our fellow-citizens on public relief, including hundreds and thousands of our fellow-Lutherans, it is only right that the Church should face the situation and ask what can and should be done under such conditions. If this depression were local in its extent, affecting only a few of our synodical congregations, it would be the plain duty of the unaffected congregations to aid those in need. But since this depression has struck all parts of our country as well

as other countries, rural as well as urban districts, large as well as small congregations, we are facing a situation in which the burden of poor-relief may have grown beyond the ability of the joint Church. What then? Scripture again comes to our assistance and shows us a way in which this wide-spread emergency can be met in a God-pleasing manner. What this way is we shall now show in the next thesis.

6.

Scripture teaches plainly that the State also has a duty to relieve the wants of the poor and the needy; and when necessity demands it, the Christian may also turn to the State for help.

We take up the discussion of this thesis with a deep sense of humility, for we are well aware of the fact that we are now steering our ship out on a sea which to date has not been very well charted. Leaders of our Church, in writing on the subject of the care of the poor and needy and having in mind normal conditions, have contended that it is a shame and a disgrace for Christians to be forced to accept relief from the State. Dr. Walther, for instance, in his *Pastorale*, p. 297, says: "A Christian congregation dare not console itself by saying, There are civil funds and institutions for the relief of the poor. No Christian congregation should have its poor taken care of in this manner; the State should rather see that it is not forced to levy taxes to support the needy *Christians*, but only those who would otherwise be forsaken by all the world. The Christian congregation should look upon it as a disgrace to have her poor and needy provided for by the State." This statement, we are convinced, is correct under normal conditions, when the question is not one of ability, but of willingness. If the ability is there to take care of its poor, then by all means the Church should not disgrace itself by trying to shift one of its bounden duties to the civil authorities. But we are not now speaking of normal conditions; we are discussing emergencies in which the ability of the Church to meet the full load of poor-relief does not exist. Under such circumstances we say the Christian may also turn to the State for help without disgrace to himself or to his Church. We are convinced that this is plainly taught in Scripture.

Public Poor-Relief Rests in the "Divine Right" of Rulers.

As we now enter into the subject of public poor-relief, we wish to point out first that the State is one of the three divine institutions appointed by a wise God for the welfare of humanity and has as one of its specific duties the care of the poor.

The old scoffed-at doctrine of the "divine right" of rulers is a Biblical principle, upheld by both Lutheran and non-Lutheran Christians. The reformers pointed out this truth repeatedly, and Luther mentions it frequently in his writings. Scripture is very

clear on this point in both the Old and New Testaments. It is God, says Daniel, "who removeth kings and setteth up kings," Dan. 2, 21. The power to rule inherently belongs to God, but He has seen fit to delegate some of this power to man (2 Chron. 9, 8) and has set up civil governments as the instruments and agencies through which this delegated power is to be exercised, 2 Chron. 19, 6. Of Solomon we read that he "sat on the throne of the Lord as king," 1 Chron. 29, 23. In Psalm 82 civil rulers are called "gods." In the Augsburg Confession the reformers reminded Charles V of this fact. (*Trigl.*, p. 357.) Both good and wicked rulers rule by "divine right." Nebuchadnezzar was a wicked monarch; yet Daniel said: "Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom," Dan. 2, 37. 38. What was taught in the Old Testament was again emphasized in the New. Paul says: "There is no power but of God," Rom. 13, 1.

It is clear, then, that all rulers receive their right to rule from God and are responsible to Him for their administration. As such they are bound to do for man what God Himself would do, namely, to provide for the welfare of the people and to protect their rights, Rom. 13, 4. Among their duties falls the responsibility of caring for the poor and needy, Ps. 82, 2—4; Dan. 4, 27; Jer. 22, 3. 15. 16. The problem of human welfare in all its phases is fundamentally the problem of the State. This fact is recognized by Lutheran writers when they say: "The proper domain in which civil governments are to exercise their authority are all affairs of men which pertain to the secular, or temporal, well-being of the individual, the community, and the commonwealth." (*Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 145.) Four hundred years earlier, the great Bible students of the Reformation stated this clearly in the 28th Article of the Augsburg Confession when they said: "For civil rulers defend not minds, but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments in order to preserve civil justice and peace." (*Trigl.*, p. 85.)

Public Poor-Relief also Implied in the Fourth Commandment.

What has been said so far regarding the duty of the State to the poor and needy is certainly also in harmony with the teachings of the Fourth Commandment. We are convinced, on the basis of sound Lutheran interpretation of Scripture, that the duty of public poor-relief, under certain circumstances, is plainly implied in this head commandment of the Second Table. In our study of the Ten Commandments we learn that civil government is embraced in the estate of fatherhood. Luther in his remarks on the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism says: "In this commandment belongs a further statement regarding all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and govern. For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents." (*Trigl.*, p. 621.) Farther on

in the same treatise Luther speaks as follows: "The same also is to be said of obedience to civil government, which (as we have said) is all embraced in the estate of fatherhood and extends farthest of all relations. For here the father is not one of a single family, but of as many people as he has tenants, citizens, or subjects. For through them, as through our parents, God gives to us food, house and home, protection and security. Therefore, since they bear such name and title with all honor as their highest dignity, it is our duty to honor them and to esteem them great as the dearest treasure and the most precious jewel upon earth." (*Trigl.*, p. 623 f.) It seems to us, then, that upon the principle that the government is the larger parent, or the *patres patriae* as the reformers call civil rulers (*Trigl.*, p. 621), it should be plainly evident to all that, when necessity demands it, the Christian may go to the larger parent, the government, for material relief, such as food, clothing, shelter, institutional care, and the like. This is in full agreement also with Luther's remarks on the First Commandment: "For our parents, and all rulers, and every one besides, with respect to his neighbor, have received from God the command that they should do us all manner of good, so that we receive these blessings not from them, but, through them, from God. For creatures are only the hands, channels, and means whereby God gives all things, as He gives to the mother breasts and milk to offer to her child, and corn and all manner of produce from the earth for nourishment, none of which blessings could be produced by any creature of itself. Therefore no man should presume to take or give anything except as God has commanded, in order that it may be acknowledged as God's gift and thanks may be rendered Him for it, as this commandment requires. On this account also these means of receiving good gifts through creatures are not to be rejected, neither should we in presumption seek other ways and means than God has commanded. For that would not be receiving from God, but seeking of ourselves." (*Trigl.*, p. 587.) Consequently, when unemployment and other unavoidable conditions force the needy to ask their daily bread from their government, they may do so without a feeling of shame; for God himself has instituted these civil rulers and has given them their power and laid upon them the care of the poor, the needy, and the distressed. Thus, when the needy go to the government for food, clothing, shelter, etc., in a time of necessity, as is being done by millions to-day, they are in reality going to God Himself, and the food, clothing, and shelter which the government provides for them actually are being provided for by God, who uses the civil rulers merely as His agents, channels, and instruments for this purpose. This fact should be pointed out by our pastors in their sermons, and the poor and needy who are now receiving their sustenance from the State should be taught to look upon the civil

rulers as God's agents and to thank God for the provisions that are made. A general consciousness of this truth on the part of both Christians and non-Christians would do much to prevent and root out corruption and abuses in modern programs of public poor-relief.

Public Poor-Relief Must Rest on Law.

Not only does its divine charter bind civil governments to the obligation of protecting the poor and needy coming under their jurisdiction, but we see in Scripture that God also reveals the proper methods whereby such rulers are enabled to put their programs of poor-relief into operation. God provides for the situation by permitting civil governments to enact laws which have as their purpose the insurance of adequate provision for the poor and the protection of their rights. Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, was the trail-blazer in this type of legislation.

Among the many civil laws given by God through Moses were the so-called "poor laws" of the Israelites. We shall briefly discuss a few of them.

The Legal Right to Glean.

Gleaning in the fields and vineyards was the legal right of the poor, the fatherless, and the widows. It was because of this law that Ruth went to glean in the fields of Boaz, Ruth 2. This law was set forth in Leviticus as follows: "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger; I am the Lord your God," Lev. 19, 9. 10. This law was repeated and somewhat amplified in Deut. 24, 19—22. The point we wish to observe is that the right to glean was a legal right given to the unfortunate Israelites and to the strangers within their gates, Lev. 23, 22. It was a part of the Hebrew system of public poor-relief.

The Legal Right to Trespass.

In addition to the above law of gleaning, the Civil Law of Moses also gave the Israelite the right to satisfy his hunger by what is termed trespassing. "When thou comest into thy neighbor's vineyard," writes Moses, "then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbor, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor's standing corn," Deut. 23, 24. 25. We cannot say that this law was given alone for the poor and needy, but we are sure it was given for the benefit of the hungry. On one occasion Jesus and his disciples availed themselves of this legal right of trespassing, Luke 6, 1—5.

The Sabbatical Year.

Another very specific "poor law" of the Old Testament was the law of the Sabbatical year. "Six years," said Moses, "thou shalt sow thy land and shalt gather in the fruits thereof; but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still that the poor of thy people may eat," Ex. 23, 10. 11. The claiming of debts was also unlawful during this year, Deut. 15, 1—4. And the Hebrew bond-servants were to be set free in that year, Deut. 12, 12—18.

The Law of Wages.

The laws of Moses were very definite in regard to the wages paid to the poor. "Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor and setteth his heart upon it," Deut. 24, 14. 15. God wanted no "chiseling in" on the wages of the poor, Jer. 22, 13. In Leviticus the Law stated that the poor of the Israelites were not to be compelled to serve as bond-servants, but employed as hired servants, Lev. 25, 39. 40. While no definite sum is stated as to what should constitute a day's wages, the principle is given that the laborer should not be oppressed. Putting it in modern language, we would say the Bible clearly teaches the duty of paying a "living wage." Paul says: "The laborer is worthy of his reward," 1 Tim. 5, 18.

The Legal Right of Justice.

It is a well-known fact that the rich are frequently favored in the courts. "He that has the money has the power" is a truism which needs no statistical corroboration to be believed among us. God sought to avoid this corruption among the Israelites through a clear law on equality of justice. Lev. 19, 15 we read: "Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor nor honor the person of the mighty; for in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor." The law as given in Deuteronomy insures justice also to the stranger, Deut. 1, 16. 17; 24, 17. Other well-known references are Ps. 82, 2—4; Jer. 22, 15. 16; Is. 3, 13—15; Neh. 5, 1—3.

We are led to conclude, then, that the duty of protecting the rights of the needy and of providing for their wants is fundamental to all civil government. And when our own Government, national, State, and local, enacts laws for the protection and relief of the poor, it is but following out its God-given prerogative. That such laws may not always be effectively administered and that abuse may creep in through the inefficiency and corruption of public officials we readily admit, but even under such conditions the underlying principles of public poor-relief are not affected whatsoever.

Summing up our argument, we would say, then, that the individual Christian, the local congregation, and the affiliated congre-

gations have a duty to the poor. But they do not have the sole duty. The State, as we have shown, also has this duty; and since each has the duty, each is bound to fulfil it according to his own measure and degree. If the burden to care for her poor lies within the power of the Church, then certainly she should not seek to shift this burden to the State. But when an emergency exists, it is the clear teaching of Scripture that the government must also assume its part of the load. The only question that remains to be answered is this: "When should the Christian call upon the State for relief?" The answer to this question is also found in God's Word.

The Ministry of the Word the Church's First Duty.

In our enthusiasm to insist upon congregational poor-relief let us not overlook the fact that the primary duty of the congregation is the Office of the Keys. The first duty of the Church is always the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Dr. Walther points to this primary duty of the Church in his brilliant book *Die rechte Gestalt*, where he says: "The congregation is in duty bound in the first place to see to it that God's Word dwells richly in its midst and is made effective." (P. 31.) This is a Lutheran principle which is frequently mentioned in the confessional writings. The apostles well knew that their first duty was the ministry of the Word; for we read that, when the care of distributing food to the needy widows became too burdensome for them, they turned it over to others, saying: "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables," Acts 6, 2. It is this very principle which so plainly distinguishes the Lutheran Church from those who to-day so strenuously advocate the preaching of the so-called social gospel. We Lutherans by all means must insist on the practise of congregational poor-relief. We must continue to regard it as a necessary work of Christian love; but we must also definitely maintain that the first duty of the Church is the ministry of the Word, the spreading of the Gospel that Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. If the resources of the congregation permit its caring for the poor besides providing for the ministry of the Word, then it should by all means care for its poor and do it gladly, as was done in the Apostolic Church. But if her resources are not sufficient to permit both, the congregation should stick to her first duty as jealously as did the apostles, and she may with a clear conscience turn to her poor and say: "God has given you a larger parent, the State. You must in this emergency turn to that parent for the relief of your temporal needs."

We come now to the last possible situation that might arise, namely, that the State as well as the family and the Church is unable to provide, or neglects to provide, for the needy. To whom shall they turn in this case? There are times when such situations arise, and

under such circumstances there is but one thing left for the needy to do. They will be forced to solicit aid from private sources. Our concluding thesis will deal with this type of poor-relief.

7.

Scripture does not forbid the Christian to solicit relief from private sources when necessity demands it.

The giving of alms is always spoken of in Scripture as a laudable work, Matt. 6, 1—4, etc. In the three well-known cases of alms-seeking mentioned in the New Testament there is nothing recorded that leads us to infer that God in any way disapproved of soliciting alms. Jesus stopped to bless blind Bartimaeus, Mark 10, 46—52; Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom by angels, Luke 16, 22; and the impotent man was granted the permission to arise and walk, Acts 3, 6. Of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, we read: "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God," Acts 10, 1—4. We do not hesitate to say, therefore, that, when the State as well as the family and the Church is unable to provide or fails to provide for the poor and needy, they may solicit aid from individuals or from groups or agencies organized for that purpose, such as welfare boards, community chests, endowments, or the like. And when this is done, the admonition of Jesus, it seems to us, still applies: "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away," Matt. 5, 42.

When soliciting aid from private sources becomes habitual, we usually refer to it as begging. This type of poor-relief is fraught with many dangers to society. The early Christians looked upon begging as shameful and for three centuries after the founding of the Christian Church did not permit their poor to beg. However, indiscriminate almsgiving was practised by the Church on a large scale, and as a result, as time went on, begging became an ugly octopus that spread out its gluttonous tentacles in all directions. "In every town," says Uhlhorn, "there were crowds of beggars. They filled the highroads and went from place to place, lay by hundreds in the public places, and especially before the churches, naked, hungry, shivering from cold, sick, and emaciated, calling on passers-by for assistance, showing their wounds, their sores, their deformities, and trying in every way to excite compassion." (*Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, p. 243.) The sermons of the great preachers, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and others, were full of references to the beggars and to their plight. Conditions grew worse with each passing year, and we read: "So great a multitude of beggars had in the reign of Valentinian II congregated in Rome that the emperor caused an investigation to be made and all beggars capable of work to be expelled from the city. Beggary could no longer be suppressed, as indeed it never can be by merely compulsory laws; hence the attempt was made to organize it, this age being in this respect also

the precursor of the Middle Ages." (Uhlhorn, *ibid.*, p. 272.) Monasticism now began to flourish in the Christian world, and under it beggary increased until it became a curse upon the fair name of Christendom. Luther, in his appeal *To the Christian Nobility*, written in 1520, bewails the evils of mendicant monasteries and begging. He says: "It is one of the most urgent necessities to abolish all begging in Christendom. No one should go about begging among Christians. It would not be hard to do this if we attempted it with good heart and courage: each town should support its own poor and should not allow strange beggars to come in, whatever they may call themselves: pilgrims or mendicant monks. Every town could feed its own poor; and if it were too small, the people in the neighboring villages should be called upon to contribute. As it is, they have to support many knaves and vagabonds under the name of beggars. If they did what I propose, they would at least know who were really poor or not." (*Luther's Primary Works*, Wace and Buchheim, p. 70.)

The Protestant Reformation did much to root out the flagrant evils of mendicancy, and to-day we have comparatively few professional beggars on our streets or roaming through our land. We believe it is complimentary neither to the Church nor to the State to have hordes of professional beggars plying their trade in a land as resourceful as ours. Modern social science as well as Christianity knows of better ways of caring for the poor. There are students of both the Bible and society who regard professional begging as an unnecessary evil, subversive of the best interests of a community and fraught with many dangers, as history only too vividly portrays. But the fact remains none the less that Scripture does not forbid it. In some instances it is still the only way available for the poor to obtain the necessities of life and the care and protection needed. And we are forced on the basis of Scripture to declare that, when circumstances force one to do so, even the Christian may beg with a clear conscience. Whether or not he solicits his help from individuals, groups, or agencies does not alter the principle involved, unless such soliciting would involve a denial of one's faith.

What the outcome of this depression is going to be no one seems to be able to foretell. One thing, however, is plain: the problems of the poor and needy are so vital and fundamental to community welfare that they should receive the most earnest attention, not only from government officials, but from all consecrated Christian leaders as well. It may be that as a result of the present economic crisis the foundations of a new era are being laid. The past is gone. The future lies before us. Let us meet it with courage and faith, and by all means let us not forget the poor. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoreth Him hath mercy on the poor," Prov. 14, 31.

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