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The Church and Social Problems

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Gospel of *grace*, let him laud the "grace" of God as much as he will. The Catholic theologian has much to say of the "grace" of God gained for us by Christ, but since he is talking, not of the gracious forgiveness of sins, but of the *gratia infusa*, we and the premillennialists spurn his teaching as a detraction of the Gospel. Pelagius himself, the archenemy of grace, ascribed the salvation of men to "grace." He chose to call the natural abilities and achievements of man "grace"; man owes his nature, his free will, to God's grace! (Cp. *Lehre u. Wehre*, 31, p. 8.) Did that put him among the champions of the Gospel of grace? We are not putting the dispensationalist in the same class with Pelagius and the Catholic theologian, but we do say that his recognition of a certain measure of "grace" in the Kingdom dispensation does not take him out of the class of the detractors of the Gospel. He remains in that class as long as he maintains: "The essential elements of a grace administration—faith as the sole basis of acceptance with God . . .—are not found in the Kingdom administration." (P. 416.)

There is an axiom in Lutheran theology that every departure from the teaching of Scripture will sooner or later vitiate the article of grace. Chiliasm is a case in point. TH. ENGELDER

The Church and Social Problems

There can be no doubt that the chief aim of the Christian Church, in fact the one aim which the Church as such is to pursue, is that assigned to her in the Great Commission, namely, to preach the Gospel of the salvation of men through the mercy of God in Christ to all nations. It was in this sense that John the Baptist performed his ministry, in preaching repentance and remission of sins, in accordance with the prophecy of his aged father: "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins," Luke 1, 76. 77. It was thus that Jesus Himself carried out the duties of His ministry, when He preached: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the Gospel," Mark 1, 15. In this spirit St. Paul looked upon his apostolic office, as when he writes to the Romans: "As much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," Rom. 1, 15. 16. He repeats this thought in practically every one of his epistles, as when he writes, 1 Cor. 9, 16: "For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." The attitude

of St. Peter is set forth in the opening of his first letter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you," chap. 1, 3. 4. And St. John just as solemnly declares: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. . . . The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," 1 John 1, 3. 7. If this fundamental truth concerning the Church's obligation is ever denied or set aside, the Church will have lost her right of existence.

But while we thus emphasize the Church's fundamental duty and obligation, we dare not overlook the fact that the Great Commission also contains the words: "teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you," Matt. 28, 20. This surely includes such statements of Jesus as found in John 13, 14. 15: "If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you." Peter declares concerning the Savior: "Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil," Acts 10, 38. What Jesus Himself did He laid upon His disciples as an obligation, as a way of giving evidence of the faith that lived in their hearts. The situation is well put by St. Paul in the clear statement: "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision but faith which worketh by love," Gal. 5, 6. That is undoubtedly the thought behind the strong statements of St. James, especially in chapter 2 of his epistle, which therefore agrees so perfectly with numerous passages in the epistles of Paul, as when we are told, Eph. 2, 10: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." In other words, the Christian religion and all the orthodoxy in the world has no value in itself, as a mere head knowledge, but must become functional, must be carried into execution in the life of the confessors of the Savior. Sanctification must be most intimately connected and integrated with justification. All believers must learn to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, Jas. 1, 22.

These truths were not only theoretically held in the early Church, but they were definitely followed, not by way of making salvation contingent in any way, shape, or form on good works but of having the good works come as the inevitable consequence of a living faith. For that reason we find that systematic char-

itable work, which included the solution of some very difficult social problems, was one of the first endeavors of the congregation at Jerusalem. Evidence of this interest is found in the first accounts of the church. The Christians of Jerusalem practised a voluntary community of goods: "And all that believed were together and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need," Acts 2, 44. 45. "Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need," Acts 4, 34. 35.

The first official joint effort of the congregation at Jerusalem, strange to say, was not the sending out of missionaries or even of emissaries to investigate the status of the newly established congregations in Samaria (for that was done by the apostles, Acts 8, 14) but the problem of giving adequate support to the widows of the Hellenistic Jews. We are told that the Grecians murmured against the Hebrews because their own widows were neglected in the daily ministrations, possibly because the apostles, being themselves full-blooded Jews, were not so familiar with the Hellenistic Jews, especially not with those who were the offspring of mixed marriages. It was for this reason that the Twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them in a congregation meeting and presented the difficulty to them. And the men who were then appointed by the congregation to attend to this business all bore Greek names, for thus would the objections of the Hellenists most fitly be met. But it was a project in social work which was here carried out, and the apostles sanctioned this systematic charitable endeavor. It seems that somewhat later, when the size of the congregation in Jerusalem had been considerably reduced by the persecution following the trial and stoning of Stephen, the need of special assistants of this type was no longer apparent, for the gifts of the brethren in Antioch in the days of the famine under Claudius Caesar were sent to the elders of the congregation in Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, Acts 11, 30.

This incident, by the way, shows that the congregation at Antioch also engaged in the alleviation of the needs of poor brethren, for we are told that, when Agabus signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world, the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, Acts 11, 28. 29. They were evidently acting in a concerted effort, in a systematic charitable endeavor; they were carrying out a form of social work.

About the middle of the fifties we are told about another

cooperative effort along the same lines, one which was undertaken on an even larger scale than that of the year 43/44, when the Christians of Syria assisted those of Judea. St. Paul writes, 1 Cor. 16,1: "Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye." A few years before, Paul had made a trip through the Galatian territory, and he may have remained in close touch with these congregations during his entire Ephesine sojourn. He had arranged for a collection to be made for the brethren in Judea, who were evidently in distress again, in a depression which extended over a number of years. He now, in a systematic manner and with the assistance not only of the Galatian congregations but also of those of Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, etc.) and Achaia (Corinth and others), planned to bring relief to the brethren in Judea. Cp. 2 Cor. 8 and 9. The collection was planned on a large scale and evidently involved a considerable sum of money, 2 Cor. 9, 20, so that the apostle deemed it advisable to have the congregations elect representatives who were to be in charge of the amount which was to be transmitted to Jerusalem. The names of at least some of these delegates are recorded in Acts 20, 4, the congregations at Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, and Ephesus being expressly named. It seems that all of these men actually made the trip to Jerusalem with Paul. Acts 21, 15—29.

One more point should be noted in this connection, namely, that, in keeping with the story of the Good Samaritan, the Christians did not confine their charitable endeavors to the members of their own congregations alone. Charity began in the churches and was certainly practised there, but it did not end within the congregations. The statement of St. Paul with reference to charitable work says: "As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," Gal. 6, 10. And St. Peter writes: "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity," 2 Pet. 1, 5—7. The same thought is conveyed by St. John, one of his great admonitions reading: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth," 1 John 3, 18.

In all these statements and in all these historical accounts there is not one word which would justify the "social gospel," the idea that we are to build the kingdom of God in an outward, visible manner, by making the amelioration of living conditions among the poor, the adjustment of difficulties between labor and capital, the reduction of delinquency among the youth, and other problems the aim of our church-work. But such by-products of

the preaching of the Gospel as are specifically named in Holy Scripture might and should engage the attention of churches everywhere, especially under the social conditions which have been brought about in our country by the aftermath of the World War, the increasing mechanization of our civilization as a consequence of the industrial revolution, overproduction and high pressure salesmanship, the growing participation of women in industry and the professions, and other factors. Many of the present-day problems arising from these conditions must be considered by the churches of today if they desire to give full service to their own members and to others who may be in need of assistance.

What does this work comprise? As a matter of fact, it includes all systematic charitable endeavors such as Christians individually and congregations and groups of congregations have done heretofore in keeping with the Word of God. What the Lord says in Mark 14, 7: "Ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will, ye may do them good," and when He enumerates some of the least of His brethren in Matt. 25, 35, 36, and what He implies in Matt. 10, 42: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, He shall in no wise lose his reward," has ever been taken by Christians for their guidance in taking care of the poor, the sick, the orphans, the aged and infirm. The institutions which have been erected and are being maintained by Christians, such as hospitals, children's homes, sanatoria, schools for the blind, for the deaf and dumb, for feeble-minded and epileptics, for old folks, bear witness of the fact that good works are being practised in keeping with the Word of God.

But social work does not confine itself to the relief of such as are in trouble. It has a wider field of activity, and prophylactic measures are employed by social workers quite as largely as remedial measures. Educational sociology sponsors the thesis that it is far better for society to have all its members, young and old, become well-integrated units in the social fabric than to carry out elaborate programs for the removal of maladjustments and the rehabilitation of social misfits. In other words, the former programs of indiscriminate giving and even of planned relief have been supplemented, and in part replaced, by a new objective, that of developing well-adjusted and integrated personalities. The prime function of the Church in this connection is to take care of the spiritual needs of men, to apply the means of grace, and to apply them properly to each individual case. Its program of education, however, need not be confined to the informational side alone, to the imparting of the truth of salvation. For it is clear that the ethical contents of the Holy Scriptures may be brought out in

a much more systematic fashion than that which is usually observed in catechumen classes dealing with the Ten Commandments and with the Third Article or in catechism sermons on the same parts of the Catechism or in the regular sermon series. Christian educational sociology is under obligation to teach and to make functional the correct Biblical information concerning man as a unit in the social order; concerning the family and all the problems connected with the home; concerning the state and government, property and inheritance, citizenship, trade, and industry; concerning the Church as the third *Stand* according to the ordinance of God; concerning the problems of rural communities and of the city (congestion and unhygienic living, drunkenness and drug addiction, sinful amusements, the social evil, poverty, crime, and other maladjustments). It is quite impossible to cover these and other topics in public preaching and teaching alone. In fact, in work of this type the emphasis on the way of salvation should always be paramount. But the needs of the situation may well be met by a full educational program in connection with the work of the various societies operating under the auspices of the congregation, such as the young people's society, the ladies' aid, the men's club, and other associations and guilds. This work should not be done in a sporadic and haphazard fashion but in a systematic manner, according to a well-defined and progressive plan. The topic plan adopted by the Walther League represents the best program of this type yet offered in our circles. One has but to consider the topics which are presented for discussion, such as: You and Your Education; You and Our Machine Age; The Unemployment Problem; Social Agencies; You and Your Newspaper; The Problem of Disease; The Problem of Crime; The Problem of Peace; You and Your Radio; You and the Movies; The Organization of Your Church; Your Church and Your Congregation; Inner Missions; Home Missions; Foreign Missions; Your Church Periodicals, and a score of other topics of equal importance, and one will realize that here is a program which will definitely build up the social consciousness of our people in keeping with the highest ethical standards of the Scriptures. There can be no doubt that the Church has the opportunity and the obligation to do its share in the field of Christian educational sociology.

What *form* will Christian social work in a Lutheran congregation take? One type has till now been used with universal approbation, namely, institutional work, sometimes in charge of an individual congregation, but more often carried on by an organization comprising a number of congregations, the association thus functioning under the auspices of the Church. Thus we have institutional work for children, for the aged, for the sick, for defectives, and we might have some for delinquents. If institutions

doing work of this type are not actually owned and operated by church organizations, congregations or pastors may obtain permission to do spiritual work in community or state institutions. With this may be combined some form of relief work, also holiday cheer and similar projects. There may even be some hospital social service under proper professional direction.

But there are possibilities for greater and better service in the field beyond the scope of the ordinary pastoral theology approach. In almost every congregation there are opportunities and needs for family welfare work, also known as family social-case work. This deals with social maladjustments connected with incompatibility of temper, unemployment, alcoholism, ill health, and sins against the Sixth Commandment. Most cases of this type require a delicate and tactful handling lest they precipitate a crisis. Then we have the types of social work which come under the heading of children's aid and protection, of psychiatric service, of probation and parole, of vocational guidance and personnel work. To this work, which is largely with individuals or with families, we must add the group work which deals with problems like the direction of leisure time and the development of efficient Christian citizens. This field alone is so comprehensive that it is commonly subdivided into sections pertaining to the optimum citizen, the domestically efficient person, the vocationally efficient person, and the physically efficient person. At first blush it may seem that these objectives are none of our concern; but if our Christian schools are to educate for life and if our various church societies are to serve as agencies in assisting to keep our members with their church and to become efficient and active members, it will be well for us to study late developments along these lines. Very frequently it will be found that the best way to accomplish some of the objectives referred to below will be to have the entire Lutheran community, under the auspices of the congregations, take charge of both the education and the practical application of the aims connected with Christian social work.

Nor is this all. In most communities, not only the urban but also the rural, various organizations exist which have some social work project as their objective. We have tuberculosis societies, provident associations, family welfare groups, boys' clubs and girls' clubs, big brother organizations, nurseries, clinics, associations for occupational therapy, park and playground associations, and scores of other societies. We are not concerned with those which operate under the auspices of some church or church organization. But we should be interested in all associations which are operating on a non-sectarian basis, possibly as state or municipal projects. There are definite and wonderful possibilities for some degree of cooperation with such organizations, in order to serve our un-

fortunate Lutheran brethren and others who may be in need of some assistance. It may be possible to make an arrangement by which a Lutheran worker is placed on the staff of some social-service organization, the salary being paid wholly or in part by a Lutheran organization and the work divided proportionately. Or the agency will be glad to put on Lutherans as part-time or volunteer workers. This is not a mingling of Church and State, but it is a way of carrying out the duties of a Christian citizenship.

It stands to reason that the Lutheran pastor will try to have as comprehensive a view of Christian social work as possible, so that he may give proper direction to any enterprise coming under this heading. It will be well to remember in this connection a few statements in an essay by Pastor V. Gloe, entitled "The Theory and Practise of Christian Social Work," read at the Detroit meeting (1936) of the Associated Lutheran Charities. He states, in part:

"Every pastor should seek to familiarize himself with the needs for Christian social work existing in his parish. Every congregation has its socially inadequate, its widows, its needy, its underprivileged, its unemployed, its handicapped, its mentally deficient, its delinquents, its alcoholics, its domestic maladjusted, etc. The house-going pastor soon discovers who these people are and what their problems are. . . . Give your congregation opportunity to express its love in the field of Christian social work.

"To help him understand the social needs of his people, every pastor should devote some time to the study of the social sciences. The Bible has much to say about social conditions and social relationships. A careful study of the Bible from the viewpoint of its social implications is therefore highly necessary. However, it is advisable that the pastor should also be a student of the social sciences. In every modern pastor's library there should be a few good books on economics, psychology, sociology, and social work. A little regular and systematic reading in these texts will give the pastor an understanding of fundamental economic, mental, and social processes, which in turn enable him better to understand the problems of his people."

P. E. KRETZMANN

Approaches to Bible-Study in a Metropolitan Center

To many of our people the Bible is a closed book, not because of the difficulty of understanding it, but because the approaches to it, outside of the sermon, have always been rather ponderous and seemingly uninteresting. A fortunate impatience and natural rebellion against such an attitude has caused us to seek new approaches to Bible-study which would be thoroughly dignified and