

2-1-1940

The Church and Social Problems

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Recommended Citation

Arndt, W. (1940) "The Church and Social Problems," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 11 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol11/iss1/12>

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wieder eine entschiedene Betonung, damit wir nicht in ein falsches Fahrwasser geraten. Hierzu sollte man auch die Bemerkungen Luthers vergleichen, die ihm in einer Disputation über die Anmaßungen des Papstes im Jahre 1539 aus dem Munde aufgefangen wurden. (XIX, 1958—1961.) Eine gründliche Beschäftigung mit Luthers Schriften, auch auf dem Gebiete seiner öffentlichen Disputationen, wird reichen Segen zeitigen.

B. E. K r e s h m a n n

The Church and Social Problems

These brief remarks are intended to introduce a series of articles dealing with the topic mentioned in the caption, articles which, God willing, will appear in this journal during 1940. While we should feel extremely sorry if our Church and its ministers, instead of studying and preaching the Word of God, should devote themselves to the debating of sociological questions, we cannot ignore the situation which confronts us, realizing that on every side these matters are made the subject of religious discussion and that our Christians are vitally affected by them. Our church-members are looking to the clergy for guidance and counsel. Certainly it is the duty of pastors to tell their parishioners what the Word of God says on the social questions that perplex them. It is not at all the intention of the editors to publish articles which will solve knotty problems of statesmanship and public civic policy. They hope, however, that through the projected examination and discussion our ministers will become more clear in their own minds on what principles the Scriptures contain with respect to social problems and on the proper and most effective way of bringing these principles, with their application, to the attention of our people.

There are a few fundamental thoughts to which this introductory article is to draw attention, thoughts which, I trust, will find confirmation and elucidation as the series progresses. That the Church Universal is a spiritual body, consisting of the true believers throughout the world, regardless of race, nationality, or outward church connections; that it is built by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, every true disciple of Jesus constituting a stone in that unspeakably grand structure; that this Church is not a visible body with headquarters of wood and stone and a huge register of paper or parchment containing the names of all members, a body organized to compete with the kingdoms and republics of the world, — these are great truths, the full acceptance of which can here be presupposed.

Without further ado, I shall speak of the local Christian con-

gregation. It, too, strictly speaking, consists only of those who truly believe in Jesus as their Savior and hence are members of the household of God. What makes them members of the Church is faith, that invisible creation of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Joined to each other by an invisible bond, they become aware of the fellowship to which they belong when their hearts' convictions are confessed. Then these believers recognize one the other as what they are, members of the body of Christ, Christian brethren. They agree to form a permanent group in which they will jointly use the means of grace, have a shepherd or shepherds to feed them with heavenly food, assist each other in extending the kingdom of God, and, in general, fulfil the functions which the Word of God assigns to Christian congregations.

The great question for us is whether the aims of such a group are entirely spiritual or whether the idea of temporal and secular gain for the members of the congregation enters in when the outward fellowship is established. These lines are written in the conviction that, where Scriptural principles are followed exclusively, the aims of Christians in forming a local congregation are entirely spiritual. Truly Christian congregations are not established to be societies for mutual protection in times of unemployment, famine, illness, and other distress. To establish such societies I do not consider wrong; but the congregation is not of that kind. Congregations, furthermore, are not founded as clubs working for a certain laudable civic end, as that of keeping the elections pure or eliminating slum districts or fighting vice. It is not wrong to establish clubs with such aims; it may even be necessary at times; but the congregation is not such a club. When I am asked to furnish proof, I can merely say that the congregations described in the New Testament did not have worldly aims and objectives and that such directives as are given for them do not include secular ends. The local congregation is described as having the power of the keys, Matt. 18:17 ff., and as gathering around the Word, Acts 2:42-47. It is admonished to pursue this very course, Col. 3:16. It is described as having meetings with prayers, teaching, prophesying, and the observance of the Lord's Supper. (Cf. 1 Cor. 11-14.) These are all spiritual matters.

It is highly important that this truth pertaining to the aims and purposes of a church should not be forgotten. How easily, if it is neglected, a congregation can be changed into a mere club for civic betterment we have seen frequently enough here in the United States.

But if from the above anybody should draw the conclusion that Christians are not to be concerned about social problems, he would commit a grave error indeed. That the congregation's

aims must be entirely spiritual does not imply that the individual Christian may consider his duty toward his fellow-men fulfilled if he speaks to them about heavenly, divine things. The Christians are to be the salt of the earth and to abound in good works. It is a tremendous responsibility which they bear with respect to the world about them. Certainly Paul means everything he says when he admonishes his Christian readers to do good to all men, Gal. 6:10.

Nor is the congregation as such without any obligation in this respect. It must preach the Word, and its authority indeed ends where the message of the divine Word ends. But this Word contains not only Gospel, but Law as well. Instruction in the Law of God will show the individual Christians how they are to conduct themselves toward each other and toward those that are without, what attitude they must assume toward the state, what course they must pursue when efforts are made for civic improvement, etc. The signs of the times must be pointed out, so the individual church-members may be forewarned and be able to warn others. It must be remembered that the Christian message treats not only of justification but also of sanctification in its many-sided unfolding.

There enters the consideration that congregations, according to the Scriptures, must have shepherds and pastors who are to furnish the members of their flock the spiritual food they need, the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, making the necessary application, giving, on the basis of the Word, counsel and instruction in the various difficult situations that may arise.

This, then, is the thesis I submit: We must carefully differentiate between the functions of a congregation as such and those of the individual Christian. If this distinction between the duties of a local congregation and those of the individual Christian is observed, the confusion which reigns quite universally concerning the proper attitude toward social problems will end. It will be recognized that the Church, as such, has no obligations beyond the preaching of the Word, as mentioned above, but that the individual members of the church indeed have a full share of responsibility in this regard. As it is, many a Christian abstains from active participation in worthy civic enterprises because he thinks that as a Christian he has to eschew all this-worldly aims. He transfers what is true of the congregation to his own status and thus falls into error. The sectarian churches, on the other hand, quite commonly commit the mistake of transferring what is true of the individual Christian to the congregation as such. Since the individual Christian must work for pure elections and oppose the crooks, they think the whole congregation must join in a

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public crusade against corruption at the polls and possibly elect a strong committee to fight this evil. We probably in our pulpit discourses and in our church papers have often been silent on great social issues because we realized that according to the Scriptures it was not proper for a Christian congregation to assume the functions of a civic or political club, and on that account we neglected to tell our Christians what instructions the Word of God places before them as to their civic duties, and we did not help them to apply these instructions correctly.

The above thoughts naturally will be examined in the articles which, as said above, have been projected. Perhaps not much that is new can be said, but it is hoped that at least some fogs now hovering over the subject of the attitude of the Church toward social problems will be dissipated and the pertinent Scripture teaching will become more distinct and definite in our thinking. If, with the help of God, this is accomplished, the gain will be worth while indeed.

W. ARNDT

Entwürfe über die von der Synodalkonferenz angenommene Epistelreihe

Quinquagesimä

Hebr. 13, 12—21

Am Mittwoch treten wir in die Passionszeit ein. Unser Text ist recht geeignet, uns auf diese Zeit vorzubereiten.

Wann wird unsere Feier der Passionszeit eine segensreiche sein?

1. Wenn wir der Leiden unsers Heilandes und der Frucht dieser Leiden gedenken
2. Wenn wir in rechter Dankbarkeit ihm treulich dienen

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Text, B. 12. Jesus hat gelitten. Wieviel und schwer er gelitten hat, wollen wir uns in den kommenden Wochen vergegenwärtigen. Zweck seiner Leiden war, „auf daß er heiligte das Volk durch sein eigen Blut“. Vgl. Tit. 2, 14; 1 Joh. 1, 7; Hebr. 9, 11—15. 22. Dieses Blut ist das Blut des ewigen Testaments, des ewigen Bundes, den Christus zwischen Gott und Menschen gestiftet hat, B. 20; vgl. Hebr. 7, 22—28; 8, 6—13; 9, 27. 28. Durch diesen Bund ist Gott der Gott des Friedens geworden, der seinen Zorn wider die Sünder, Eph. 2, 3, hat fahren lassen und nun versöhnt ist, 2 Kor. 5, 18—21. Das hat Gott bewiesen dadurch, daß er „von den Toten ausgeführt hat . . . unsern Herrn Jesus“, B. 20. So ist Christus nun der große Hirte der Schafe geworden. Die Schafe, die er durch sein Blut sich erworben, die er durch sein Wort zu sich gerufen