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The Social Implications in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts

What are social implications? We might ask first: What is meant by "social"? Obviously the answer is: Anything that involves two or more people as distinguished from a situation that concerns one person, or individual, alone. To satisfy one probable inquiry at once, we hasten to say that we want to forestall any suspicion as to any inclination toward a social gospel by stating that the message of the Gospel as we find it in the Holy Scriptures, although commonly proclaimed before social groups, is definitely addressed to the individual, since faith is clearly a matter of the individual, as Luther brings out so beautifully in his exposition of the Creed.

But what about "implications"? The dictionary says that an implication is a deduction, a fact or truth involved or implied in another statement, an inference. An implication, therefore, may accompany a primary statement or a fundamental proposition in such a way as to suggest an additional or subsidiary truth, which will not, indeed, invalidate or even weaken the first truth but will present or open up a further line of thought. In keeping with this definition and explanation we might state that the term "social implications" emphasizes the fact that social situations involve certain adjustments in relationships which may differ from similar relationships in which individuals are exclusively or primarily concerned. In the religious field these social relationships may not affect the fundamental or essential position of a Christian directly, but they certainly may have an indirect bearing upon his relationship to his God and Savior.

One fact must be kept in mind throughout this discussion. Contrary to the opinion voiced by exponents of the social gospel, the teaching of Jesus was primarily concerned with matters of doc-

trine, of creeds. This is evident not only from His many discussions on questions of doctrine in a more or less systematic form, as when He speaks at length of Himself as the Son of God, of His essential unity with the Father, of the Trinity, of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, of the Word as a means of grace, of the way of salvation through regeneration by the water and the Word, of the universality of redemption, of the Church and its functions, but also when He uses the parabolic form of teaching, speaking of the relationship of men to the kingdom of God (not as a visible entity, but as a power within them, Luke 17:21) and of the effect of this inner strength in cementing the inner union of all those who have been gained by the Gospel for the truth of salvation. And as for the Book of Acts, surely even the most superficial examination of the various sermons and addresses recorded by Luke must convince the unprejudiced reader that the doctrines of sin and grace, of regeneration through the Word and the Sacraments, of the person and work of the Savior, of the Holy Ghost and His work, of the truth of the Scriptures, of prayer and a life of sanctification under the guidance of the Word, are found throughout the book and call for unquestioning acceptance. These considerations are fundamental for the proper understanding of the discussion which is now to follow.

But what about social implications not only with regard to the field of social service but also concerning other situations which involve social contacts? Perhaps it will serve to clarify matters if we distinguish clearly between the social gospel and social service. The distinction is well made in an editorial review appearing in the *Associated Lutheran Charities Review* (Vol. III, No. 5, Dec. 1939): "Gospel is a word with only one meaning to any Lutheran. It means 'good news,' the good news of salvation. Used without any qualifying term we always understand it to mean the good news of our salvation from sin through faith in Jesus Christ. And the man who believes that is a Christian. But when the word 'social' is used to modify 'gospel,' then 'gospel' means the 'news,' no longer 'good' to us, that we are saved from sin through social adjustments, through the efforts of society, through man-made laws and ordinances, and the like. The man who believes that is not a Christian, for he rejects Christ the Savior. Naturally, no one can believe and teach at one and the same time that men are saved through faith in Christ and His blood and that they are saved by man's efforts—his own or society's. . . . It may be perfectly true that there are people who have abandoned the old Christian Gospel of salvation and have sought an 'escape' in social-service work. For that matter, they might have sought their escape in astrology, or theosophy, or

Spiritualism, or even in the dead ritualism of mere churchianity. But that doesn't prove a thing, certainly not that the social gospel and social service are identical, and most certainly not that the Christian Gospel and social service are antithetical. . . . Social service is a term commonly used today to designate service to society, or the social order. The words mean just that. . . . Social-service workers do not pretend as social workers to teach the way of salvation from sin; they are merely hard-working people who are trying to save people from the evil effects of poverty, unemployment, physical or mental illness, exploitation, and the like. So far as the service they are supposed to render is concerned, religion is out of the picture. Spiritual service is recognized as exceedingly helpful, but it is left to the Church to perform such service. . . . As a *Christian* he is motivated by Christian impulses, the love of God and the love of fellow-men; as a *clergyman* he is equipped to render, and he does render, spiritual service to men above all other things; as a *social worker*, called by a church-supported agency, he is trained to render, and does render, helpful service to homeless children, helpless aged folk, the poor and the outcast." The same distinction is brought out in Yelkington's recent book "*That the World May Believe*," when he writes (p. 37): "Love that is deep enough to live or to die for the salvation of the souls of men for eternity will never be unmindful of the distress of the present. While social service is to be in no sense a substitute for the eternal Gospel, yet it is always a by-product of a genuine compassion and is a mighty aid in securing a hearing for the Gospel. When people see the love-light of a sincere concern for them in their every-day problems, with the rarest exception, they will have ears to hear and hearts and wills to respond to the spiritual instruction of the one who thus has proved their friend."

These expressions certainly should go far toward clarifying matters with regard to the distinction that obtains between the service rendered in dispensing information concerning the way of salvation and in directing the hearts of men in the ways of unselfish service. The Christian message is not an unrelated sound suspended in thin air. Scores of passages in Scripture witness to the fact that faith must become functional, active in love, not only by changing the nature of the individual and his attitude toward the Savior but also by causing him to become busy in the interest of others. We cannot escape the challenge of the Savior: "Who-soever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many." Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45.

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This challenge of Jesus as to the necessary and inevitable activity of faith in deeds of love is fully supported also by the references to His own ministry as found in the accounts of the inspired writers. One of the most thought-provoking of these passages is that found in Matt. 8:16, 17: "When the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils; and He cast out the spirits with His word and healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." The evangelist thus clearly teaches that the miracles of healing of the sick were included in the prophecy of Isaiah. In other words, the Lord included a form of social service in His ministry. Nor does Peter hesitate to include also this part of Christ's activity in his preaching concerning Him when he states: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him." Acts 10:38. Possibly the same consideration caused Luke to introduce the Acts of the Apostles with the significant remark: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach," Acts 1:1, so that the ποιεῖν of Jesus is obviously placed next to His teaching as a significant part of His public ministry.

That our Savior did not dissociate His teaching, by which He intended to work faith in Him as the Savior of mankind, from life, but definitely linked up His miracles with social situations, appears from the gospel account time and again. The very first miracle of Jesus, as recorded by John, chap. 2:1-11, concerned a social situation, namely, that of a shortage of wine at the marriage feast of Cana. And most of His subsequent miracles, signs, and wonders were intended to alleviate some sort of human need or suffering; that is, they were included in what we now term social service, the situations as pictured by the evangelists involving social implications. We have, among many other incidents, the healing of the son of a courtier of Capernaum, John 6:46-54; the miracle in Peter's home, Mark 1:29-34; Matt. 8:14-17; Luke 4:38-41; the cleansing of the leper, Mark 1:40-45; Matt. 8:2-4; Luke 5:12-16; the restoring of the paralytic, Mark 2:1-12; Matt. 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26; the healing of the lame man at Bethesda, John 5:1-47; the miracle of the man with the withered hand, Mark 3:1-6; Matt. 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11; the healing of the centurion's servant at Capernaum, Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; the raising of Jairus's daughter, Mark 5:21-43; Matt. 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56; the healing of two blind men and a dumb demoniac, Matt. 9:27-34; the feeding of the five thousand, Mark 4:35-44; Matt. 14:15-21; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:4-13; the healing of the daughter of the Syrophenician

woman, Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 15:21-28; the feeding of the four thousand, Matt. 15:30-38; Mark 7:31-8:9; the healing of the demoniac boy, Matt. 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:27-43; the healing of the man born blind, John 9:1-41; the healing of the man with the dropsy, Luke 14:1-24; the raising of Lazarus from the dead, John 11:1-44; the healing of blind Bartimaeus and his companion, Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43. This list is long and significant. As foolish as it would be, on the strength of these miracles, to attempt a defense of the social gospel, so foolish it would be, on the other hand, to deny the implications of these miracles. It may be said of them all that they were performed to manifest forth the glory of the Ambassador from on high, to have men acknowledge His almighty power. But in performing them, the Savior also helped those who were in distress, in need and trouble of body and mind. His loving-kindness and tender mercies clearly appeared in His doing good to those who were in need of such ministrations.

Just as obvious, however, are the social implications in the history of the early Apostolic Church as related in the Acts of the Apostles. When the apostles, as the representatives of the risen Lord, performed miracles, it was not in keeping with the false notions of the Jews who requested a sign from heaven from Jesus, Matt. 12:38, 39, nor even in response to the pleas like that of the courtier of Capernaum, to whom the Savior said: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe," John 4:48, but with the definite purpose of rendering aid to those who were in bodily need. Immediately after the Pentecost miracle we are told that "many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles," Acts 2:43. Yet they were not in the nature of magicians' performances but had the object, as a rule, of alleviating suffering. This is evident from the story of the healing of the lame man at the door of the Temple, Acts 3:1-11; the restoring of Aeneas to health, Acts 9:32-35; the raising of Tabitha, or Dorcas, from the dead, Acts 9:36-41; the healing by Paul of the cripple at Lystra, Acts 14:8-10; the driving out of the spirit of a python, Acts 16:18; the special miracles wrought by the hands of Paul, Acts 19:11, 12; the bringing of Eutychus back to life, Acts 20:10-12; and others.

Greater importance and impressiveness must be attached to other facts presented in the Book of Acts. For example, the first corporate action by the congregation of Jerusalem of which we have record is that which concerned the proper care of the widows who were neglected in the daily ministrations. Acts 6:1-3. In a similar way, one of the first recorded activities of the young congregation at Antioch in Syria is described in the words "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send

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relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea; which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." Acts 11:27-30. The first corporate action of the congregations which had been established by Paul and Barnabas and further built up in their Christian relationships on later visits by the apostle and his companions had distinct social implications; for it had as its object the succoring of the poor brethren in Judea. 1 Cor. 16:12; 2 Cor. 8:10-13; 9:1-14 (cp. Acts 21:17, 18).

However, social implications include not only the helping and befriending in bodily need, but they concern also other social situations in which the principles of regard for others and consideration of others find their application. Our Savior did not hesitate to present and apply such principles in connection with the law of love whenever the occasion seemed to call for teaching of this kind. He had occasion to do so when He was invited by Simon the Pharisee and the latter did not observe the customary amenities of correct social usage. It is true that the lesson which Jesus presented at that time concerned that of forgiveness, but His starting-point was the situation as it was presented upon His entering the home of His host and not being treated in the manner which was regarded as obligatory under the circumstances. Luke 7:44, 45. A similar situation was offered when the Lord was again invited to the home of a Pharisee, for, as Luke records: "He put forth a parable to those which were bidden when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms." Chap. 14:7. It was not a fictitious scene that the Lord described but an actual occasion, and the lesson that He attached applied directly to the situation, although Jesus added the thought which all the guests were to heed, as a principle in similar settings everywhere: "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," v. 11. To say, in these two instances, that Jesus merely used the social situation in which He found Himself as a convenient starting-point for a lesson which He had in mind would hardly be doing justice to the narrative. The Lord wanted to teach the principles of love and consideration for others in connection with actual cases, in other words, to give ethical instruction. It is evident that the principles of Christ's teaching with reference to human relationships affect practically every conceivable occasion or setting.

This thought could well be expanded on the basis of all Christ's teaching concerning the interrelation between believers as well as the relation of believers to others with whom they come in contact. He expressly declares that He wants the believers in Him to be the salt of the earth, plainly in the sense of counteracting the influence of corruption. Matt. 5:13. In the same para-

graph He tells the believers that they are the light of the world, not, in this instance, because they are to bring the light of salvation to others, but because they are to let their light so shine before men that they may see the good works of the Christians and glorify the Father which is in heaven. Vv. 15, 16. The same situation is presented in Matt. 6:1, where the Lord earnestly admonishes: "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them." Then He gives the rules applying to the giving of alms. It is in the same spirit that He gives instructions concerning prayer, fasting, the laying up of treasures in heaven, sinful worry, unauthorized judging and condemning, the duties of parents, and other topics. Throughout these paragraphs we find that the Lord is speaking of social situations, of cases to which He applies the law of love.

We reach the same conclusion when we regard certain negative discussions of the Lord. The most powerful example of this kind is that offered in Matt. 23. Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees for laying heavy burdens on the shoulders of men, for calling attention to their alleged good works, for loving the uppermost rooms at feasts and honor before men, for shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men, for devouring widows' houses, for compassing sea and land to make one proselyte and then making him twofold more the child of hell than themselves, for giving false values to oaths, for stressing insignificant matters and forgetting the weightier matters of the Law, for cleaning the outside of the cup and the platter while the inside was full of extortion and excess, for being like whited sepulchers, and for building the tombs of the prophets while denying the substance of their teaching. Every one of these references contains a social implication; it applies the principles of the law of love and of consideration for others to actual life situations. And every one may be transferred and applied to a similar situation and case in the life of the world today. On the negative side, therefore, as well as on the positive we find that Jesus threw the spot-light of correct ethical conduct on actual relationships as they obtain among men.

It is not difficult to make the application of these facts to the life and work of the Church in our days. Firmly as we hold, and are bound to hold, to the fact that the essence of the Gospel is the message and proclamation of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the one Redeemer of mankind, Jesus Christ, just so definitely we should bring out in our teaching that the faith wrought by the Gospel-message is not an abstract philosophy, to be reserved for detached meditation and prayerful adoration only, but, as Luther puts it, a living, active principle, which is constantly asserting itself. In the living microcosm of man there is no such thing as

saving faith in the abstract, because faith is life and therefore is bound to show its life. All the changing social situations of every person's being are inevitably influenced and governed by faith, as it emerges from the heart in sanctification, in works of love, in the stewardship life, in missionary endeavors, in a Christlike conduct toward all men.

These facts must be remembered if the teaching ministry of the Church is not to fail. We must not, we dare not, reach the stage when we depend upon occasional, sporadic injections of new life from without. The body which receives food, no matter of what excellent quality, at only irregular intervals cannot achieve a healthy growth or maintain its strength, while the body that is regularly nourished by food, though not so excellently prepared, will be able to endure the stress and burden of the day and to give a creditable account of itself. Even so the church-body that does not depend upon occasional injections of spiritual power but requires all its pastors to be a true teaching ministry, rightly dividing the Word of truth and giving to all the servants their proper food at regular intervals, may depend upon a growth that will produce results. It may take some years or decades, for education is a slow process, but the final results will both justify and repay the efforts made.

P. E. KRETZMANN

Reason or Revelation?

(Continued)

Making reason the norm, that is, in reality, the source of religious teaching, is a wicked, evil, noisome thing. We have shown that rationalism is engaged in a *wicked*, evil business. It is, at the same time, and necessarily so, an evil, noisome, *pernicious* thing. "*Ratio inimica fidei.*" (Luther, IX, p. 157.)

When reason rules in theology, there can be no certainty of faith; for then there is no certainty of teaching. Reason knows nothing of the God of salvation. It can only speculate. It deals only in guesswork. The rationalist can therefore never be sure of his theology. He does not know what he is going to tell the anxious seeker after truth tomorrow. He does not know whether that which he is proclaiming today is the absolute truth. What has reason accomplished in philosophy, its own proper field? Which philosopher has answered the important questions with which philosophy deals, once for all? Did the system of Aristotle give us finalities? Did Kant and Hegel and Schopenhauer succeed? And when reason now comes and offers to solve our religious problems, we shall tell her: You cannot set your own house in