

7-1-1949

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Richard C. Caemmerer  
*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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### Recommended Citation

Caemmerer, Richard C. (1949) "The Christian Pastor and Courtesy," *Concordia Theological Monthly*: Vol. 20, Article 40.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol20/iss1/40>

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# *Concordia* *Theological Monthly*

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Vol. XX

JULY, 1949

No. 7

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## The Christian Pastor and Courtesy\*

By R. R. CAEMMERER

### I. THE NEED

Who has not heard this comment: "People are not as courteous as they used to be. . . . Young people do not show thoughtfulness for their elders and employers the way they used to do. Folks don't seem to have the manners of the past." In part these reactions are only a symptom of the march of time; the Golden Age always lies in the past. In part, however, the observations are true. Courtesies are folkways, habits of action, and attitude. American civilization causes folkways to break down; for it is materialistic and puts the emphasis upon acquisition of things rather than on the character of people; and it is moving through a phase in which power, the power of the nation or of government or of military might, dominates society.

The processes by which courtesy deteriorates are not abstract, but practical. The family is the training ground for patterns of courtesy; as family ties loosen and family organization disintegrates or succumbs to competition of the other forces of daily life, its training function declines. Courtesy thrives on thoughtful and unhurried associations of people; as industry with its mass organization and impersonal response toward human values pervades more and more of life, the contacts of man and man become hasty or selfish or perfunctory. Courtesy thrives on noble examples; as people turn from the demonstrations of great art and literature to mercenary amusement

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\* This is the summary of discussion by the Department of Practical Theology of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

and the spectator sports, their practice of personal courtesies becomes less and less significant. Education is a chief reliance of society for the training in habits of character; as the accent in education shifts to the vocational and as its method fails to surmount the problem of great numbers, the thoughtfulness for the individual vanishes from its yield.

The Christian pastor is not untouched by the folkways of the community in which he lives. He himself suffers from the tensions and speed of the mechanized world. As the details of his office increase in number and complexity, he himself has less leisure in which to cultivate the arts and practices of courtesy. More than this, the pastor is responsible for the training in courtesy of his people. He needs to be himself a leader and exemplar in courtesy; he has the responsibility of saying the words and outlining the practices which train for courtesy. Our time infinitely complicates this task. Contemporaries of this writer speak with one accord of the amazing change that has come over the work with teen-age youth during the past twenty years; and other areas for the concern with courtesy present problems equally as acute.

## II. THE CHRISTIAN BASIS

The word *courtesy* has in itself no specific Christian connotation. Traditionally it describes an artificial structure of manners prevailing amongst the members of the ruling class in medieval Europe. The man of the court was assumed to have those manners; the man on the soil was assumed to be permanently handicapped as a boor or a rustic or a villein. Ultimately the word came to signify the attitudes and practices of the person who was so thoughtful toward the other that he would practice good manners — manners which were simply the expedients and symptoms of thoughtfulness. In that sense courtesy becomes a Christian characteristic. The word is used in the Authorized Version for the friendly mind or disposition (*philophroon*, 1 Pet. 3: 8; Acts 28: 7; similarly *philanthroopos*, Acts 27: 3; the correlated noun is translated kindness).

If courtesy is not a sham courtliness, but the reflection of a genuine kindness of the heart, then it is in the Christian man a reflection of his life in Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself sought the welfare of men, even of those who mistreated Him, and did so with a sincere and loving heart; thus He became a pattern

of truly Christian kindness, forethought, and courtesy (Phil. 2: 5-8; Eph. 5: 2; 1 Pet. 2: 23; Matt. 11: 29). In the Christian man the Lord Jesus enables these qualities of thoughtfulness, considerateness, resourcefulness in kindness, which make for *agape* in the true sense (Romans 12; Peter 2; Galatians 5; Matthew 5).

### III. MAKING THE BEGINNING

If the pastor is to train others in courtesy, he needs to begin with himself. Only so will the words about courtesy which he speaks take hold in the habits of people; only so will the manners and practices of courtesy be interpreted as a way of life and not merely as the imitation of artificial codes. Such blueprints of the pastor's piety as 1 Timothy 3; 2 Timothy 2; Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5 describe practices and attitudes which are basic for Christian courtesy. Since the pastor is in continual contact with people, he will have abundant opportunity to put these patterns of behavior into effect.

The habits of courtesy begin, and unfold themselves as genuine, where we are, with people whom we know well. Hence the pastor's life in his own family, his concern for the comfort and well-being of wife and children, his manners in the offguard and leisure moments, will be his first test of courtesy. That test is applied, not when the pastor says, "Who is looking? How am I behaving?" but when he is simply desirous of the good of those who are close to him. One of the primary breakdowns in courtesy lies in habits of speech. Particularly in the family, people will allow themselves crabbed and censorious language toward each other; they will give vent to irritations and criticize unpleasantly. These thoughtless and selfish habits the pastor will overcome as he puts to work the injunction: "Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3: 8).

The pastor deals with many individuals. Since most of these contacts are professional and official, he will normally not be unmindful of the amenities of courtesy. And yet some simple facts need continually to be refreshed in his thinking. He may remember to rise when a woman enters the room, or to offer her a chair, or to procure one for her; he may be alert to the comfort of his guest or counselee in his study. But he may forget to keep quiet and listen; he may overlook the devices of kindness and sympathetic attitude which break down

the barriers of reticence and achieve friendly expression and full rapport with his client. He may forget to temper the voice which is accustomed to large rooms and groups to the bedside or bedside speech. Where he is host—in his own home or office—he may forget to assume the responsibilities for other people's comfort. Where he is guest—as in the sickrooms and living rooms of other people—he may forget to put himself in the humble position of a guest. As he succeeds in maintaining a uniformly thoughtful attitude, he will make his ministry of the Word, to the sick or well alike, one that is not hampered by awkwardness and crudity.

Most ministers have to speak a great deal. They become self-conscious and may begin to press or otherwise distort their speech. The courteous pastor will seek to free his speech from such distortions and any reflection of a spirit that extends itself above others. He will seek to talk, to groups or individuals alike, as a workman of God who has an honorable and meaningful message to say, but one which is not made greater by his person. Hence his speech will surmount slipshod elisions and thoughtless slang; but it will also avoid pompous or technical jargon.

Much of the pastor's activity with groups seems to be so routinized that it allows little expression of courtesy. Actually every group activity provides a large field of opportunities for it. The pastor's dress, his attention to personal bodily cleanliness, to hair and beard and breath, his clean linen, his choice of appropriate custom, all signify his thought for the reaction of the other person, his desire not to obtrude his person, but simply to be a trustworthy and helpful man. Group worship necessitates not merely correct manipulation of liturgical forms, but such posture, handling of vestments and service books, pace and decorum, that suggest the pastor's absorption with the task of guiding the worship and mood of worship of his people. Particularly in group meetings which involve exchange of opinion and discussion the pastor has significant opportunity for courtesy. If he steals the spotlight, pre-empts time for discussion, insists upon his way, he will create the illusion of an opinionated boor in action. His courtesy, however, will be of service if he himself succeeds in being quiet and attentive during the comments and discussion of others and if he takes the lead in safeguarding time for the expression

of as many different views as possible, even of people who may be shy.

In the neighborhood the pastor walks streets and moves through shops and offices conscious of being a clergyman. Actually he is by the majority of folk in an average community thought of simply as a citizen and neighbor. If he allows his consciousness of profession to pervade his speech and demeanor, he may seem merely pompous. Worst of all, if he thinks of himself as falling under the censure or criticism of the many who see him, his manner may become completely blatant or defensive. Many a pastor can persuade himself that his time is pre-empted to the uttermost by his parish. As a citizen he needs to be especially thoughtful therefore of the courtesy which he owes to his fellow citizens by way of concern for community interest, as a good neighbor and a friend of all whom he meets. He must be known in his neighborhood as a man of courtesy — not the courtesy of artificial manners dictated by books, but the courtesy of a man concerned about people, aware of their needs and always ready to do what he can for them.

#### **IV. THE TRAINING FOR COURTESY**

This activity of courtesy in action not merely pervades the pastor's entire relation to other people, but it becomes one of the most effective techniques by which he trains others. The business of the pastor is to contribute to the spiritual life of the people in his flock. This life is the life of love. Even as the Lord Jesus was bound to men by the impulses of His love, so the men in Christ are bound to one another in the bonds of kindness and courtesy. These bonds are forged by the Spirit of God; and the pastor is an agent in strengthening them, and in training his members to strengthen these bonds in each other.

The pastor consciously or unconsciously trains others for courtesy, in all of his contacts with them. He reveals the activity of love in his own behavior, by his forethought and considerateness, his effort to equalize and adjust burdens in the group, his concern to be a worker and not merely a director of tasks. If the pastor can succeed in presenting a consistent picture of this thoughtfulness, his program of training will be reliable. The moment that he becomes self-seeking or inconsiderate in any sphere of his relation toward people, the defect

of this segment of his ministry will vitiate the others. The pastor's training for courtesy operates on every front of his relations with people and is effective in the proportion in which he succeeds in being consistent. His individual counseling, his group work, his catechetical classes, his social contacts, all provide the possibilities; and each possibility becomes essential for the total result.

The pastor will find opportunity for direct instruction in courtesy. In personal counseling this will happen where he deals with deficiencies in personality or with clashes in temperament. And he can outline the goals of considerateness and the expressions of true love which are essential for overcoming the malady in question.

In his group activities the pastor has a number of opportunities for teaching courtesy directly. Here it is important that he does not set up artificial codes of manners as the expression of Christian courtesy, but that he relates it to Christian life and love as a whole. This implies a method of teaching which will be rich in discussion and in the actual participation of the learner. Christian courtesy will need to be set forth as an answer to problems which exist in family and community. Only so can the pastor contribute to the development of habits of courtesy which will be genuinely an expression of the culture of his group.

The pastor will find that in the groups with which he works he is in competition with a number of other forces which dictate the attitudes of people toward each other—schools, fellowship clubs and labor unions, family clans and occupational practices. Hence the pastor will be concerned in not merely speaking about courtesy or advising to courtesy, but in helping his people to construct associations in which they can practice the habits of courtesy. The Christian congregation, both as a whole and in the components of its groups of young or old, male or female, administrative or recreational, provides such an exercise ground. The pastor needs to enlist the co-operation and leadership of members of these groups in an attack upon this problem. These leaders must in turn demonstrate the same consistent character of considerateness which we have described for the pastor. For example, a young couple which serves as counselors for a junior youth group needs to be consistent in its expression of courtesy across the

entire range of activities, recreational or devotional or educational.

A neglected area in all of the educational work of the church is the family. In utilizing the family for training in Christian courtesy the pastor may find it necessary to devise fresh expedients. The family should be an ideal training ground for courtesy. Here parents and children are associated in both work and play. Here they may take occasion to recognize and enlarge courtesies and kindnesses which tend to be submerged in the press of routine and the humdrum of everyday life. Hence the family provides ideal opportunity for defining Christian courtesy as humble kindness in action, as kindness which does not fail. The Word of God is rich in primary descriptions of these household virtues. It now behooves the pastor to seek to reach the ear of parents and children; to discuss the lags and hurdles for courtesy with them; to discuss the place of good manners and forethought in safeguarding household courtesy. In order to facilitate this discussion, the pastor will need additional group opportunities with parents. Units of the children's church membership classes devoted to the Table of Duties will provide opportunity to make the approach with them; group discussions in the youth organizations will serve to refresh these insights thereafter. In all of the discussion of family courtesy the pastor will seek to keep religious values uppermost and to make the life of Word and prayer basic to it, a continuous source of supply for the spirit essential in maintaining this courtesy (1 Peter 2).

Since courtesy is a matter of everyday life, it is compounded of many small and obvious details. The pastor will need to set himself for a discussion of the obvious. He will find, however, that often the obvious has been overlooked. The capacity for courtesy has broken down because people have forgotten to use sweet words rather than crabbed ones; they have construed their life together as a search for personal comfort rather than the comfort of the other; they have allowed habits, such as smoking and the general trend toward self-indulgence, to limit and obscure their sense of thoughtfulness for the other person. The training for courtesy is ultimately the reinstating into the mind of these qualities of thoughtfulness and this conquest of self-indulgence. It is a training for love. Hence it is so thoroughly essential to the concern and the ministry of the Christian pastor.