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### The Relationship of the Church to the National Culture in America

By ERNEST B. KOENKER

**A**s one considers the cultural complex of America today, there are a number of questions which might present themselves to the Christian living under the Word. What are the values which underlie our national culture, and is there any sense in which these are being absolutized today in some kind of Messianism? Can one say that the Christian churches in America, or the Lutheran Church, have profoundly shaped our culture, or have the churches themselves been thoroughly shaped by the culture? In view of the loss or muffling of a dynamic Christian witness in many of the American denominations, what can one say about the opposition of the Lutheran bodies in America to the disintegrating, secularizing forces at work in local and national communities? We must agree that the distinctive task of those brought under the gracious activity of Christ in His kingdom is to save sin-laden souls, not to redeem some lofty conception of "culture" or to "Christianize the social order." The approach of those joined to Christ in the fellowship of the faithful, moreover, must be via the individual, since it is the individual person who counts in the eyes of God. Yet in its music, architecture, means of communicating the Gospel—in innumerable respects—an organized denomination exists in a unique cultural milieu. Like Paul, we must all be students of that milieu in order to preach the Good News as effectively as our talents permit. In many respects we simply presuppose the existence of the cultural life. In carrying on the work Christ has assigned His followers we must take a positive attitude

toward culture, though there are some cultural forms which we may have to reject.

It will, perhaps, be well to point out at the outset the specific question understood to be involved in our topic. Since such a topic may be subject to considerable misunderstanding, it will be helpful to rule out certain misconceptions. We are not dealing with the problem of Church and State—at least not directly—or with an historical study of the churches and American culture. Nor are we primarily concerned simply with the Christian critique of facets of our cultural life, though some criticisms are inevitably linked to the subject. Rather the question is: What can one say of the relationship or relevance of a denomination living in obedience to the Word to the spheres of social and political life? Are there certain recent developments in the cultural situation in America which we should take into particular consideration? And in keeping with the above, to what extent can a denomination accept, profit by, and bless the cultural life of America, and in what sense—in view of its primary concern for the Gospel and a kingdom not of this world—is it to remain forever distinct from the social, economic, and political situation in which it finds itself?

If one can accept the generalization that styles of church art and architecture alter with a change in devotion or spiritual attitude, then a commonly observable illustration of our problem is to be seen in contemporary church architecture. The simulated Gothic which most American Christians—Protestant and Roman Catholic—love and prefer for their new churches suggests not only that they fail to live on intimate terms with the artistic and architectural milieu of their time, but also that their devotion has many "Gothic" overtones and predilections. The situation suggests that the churches are not listening too closely to the sounds and voices of the national culture and that, further, they are not wholeheartedly interested in making significant use of many means at their disposal. Theology, worship, and the ongoing life of a Christian denomination thus almost imperceptibly influence such matters as art and architecture, and if one is to disclaim such influence or refuse to show any consideration for changing conceptions of art as it serves the work of a particular denomination, he will find that he is simply copying outworn or inadequate styles.<sup>1</sup>

INVOLVEMENT AND TENSION IN THE RELATION  
BETWEEN CHURCH AND NATION

From the New Testament considerable evidence has repeatedly been marshaled for the view that the call to faith in Jesus Christ releases the Christian from his involvement in the affairs of his time and place. The citizenship of the Christian is now a heavenly one; he is no longer a stranger or foreigner, but a fellow citizen with the saints and member of God's household. Whether he is a Jew or a Greek, bond or free, these matters are no longer of any significance for him. Only the event of his incorporation into the Spirit-filled body of the elect is important. The attitude is felt to be expressed in the statement from the early Church, "Let grace abound, and let this world pass away. Maranatha." The view that sees the concerns and responsibilities of this world dissolved in the new dispensation through Christ has been with us in sects and individuals throughout the centuries. Lutheranism, on the other hand, in view of the *Gottgebundenheit* of the faith relationship, has repeatedly been charged with slighting the present world in favor of eternal values.

To be sure, in a flight from social and political responsibilities Christians have been in no wise unique; yet their flight represents a serious misunderstanding and foreshortening of their vocation as Christians. Careful reading of the New Testament will indicate that the Gospel does not call the believer out from the responsibilities of the world; rather it deals with him in the circumstances — sometimes comfortable and exalted, but more often mean and narrow — where it finds him. The Christian continues to live within the context of historical circumstance and in the cultural situation, including learning, art, law, and government, of his time. Within these circumstances the call to repentance and faith cannot be to some strictly vertical dimension but affects all the Christian's activities, his understanding of his self and his destiny, his literature and philosophy, his political responsibility. Thus the Gospel never dissolves the ties of the Christian with his national community; on the contrary, it recognizes the God-given contributions, the protection, the orderliness, the patterns of meaning in his cultural activities which each national group uniquely supplies. As God has set the solitary in families, He has set the families into local and

national communities. Therefore, with all his gratitude to God for calling him out from the meaninglessness of the old age, he is now more a part of, and must be most grateful for, his particular nationality. In regard to the peculiarities of national cultures Paul's humility, self-sacrifice, and adaptation may serve as a guide. He became a servant to all in order that he might gain some, to those living under the Law, without the Law, to the weak—he adapted himself for the Gospel's sake (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Similarly, a missionary church as well as her individual missionaries must adapt its techniques to changing conditions of life in society. Thus Lutheranism rejects the cultural detachment of the earlier Barth, which ignores the fullness of human existence—man in his art, science, and philosophy. The discontinuity he emphasized may in certain circumstances lead to passivity or helplessness. Yet Barth himself was forced to resist the demonic distortion of a cultural system which had been emptied earlier of a concern for the ultimate and unconditioned in life.<sup>2</sup> As Barth recognized the loss of depth and meaning in a culture which had disclaimed its dependence on God's Law and power, he was driven to a recognition of the intimate relationship between religion and culture, sacred and secular. Yet it is questionable whether Barth's theology provides room for the cultural concerns represented in university education.

It was through a conjunction of historical circumstances and a Lutheran understanding of the nature of the Gospel that the Lutheran Church in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Lapland, and Iceland was able to enter a most fruitful association with the national cultures. While not denying, and in fact always promoting, a unity that transcends national boundaries, it recognized the God-given call of the State Church as well as of the individual to service and fidelity within the national community. It should be stated, however, that the pattern of Lutheranism would not permit a Church, in so far as it remained true to the Gospel, aggressively to dictate in political and social matters in a Calvinistic sense. In fact, Bishop Billing's statement at Stockholm represents a typically Lutheran outlook on faith and work, "The social task of the Church lies not by the side of her religious work, but is entirely implicit in it."<sup>3</sup> Werner Elert has pointed out that the motivation of Luther and the Church of the Augsburg Confession in translating the Bible,

introducing the German language into the Mass, creating the German chorale for use in the service, was the furthering of the proclamation of the Gospel. The enrichment of the national culture was, according to the fathers of the Reformation, an incidental contribution. In other nations, too, the fusion of historical and ecclesiastical forms with the forms of the national culture became characteristic of Lutheranism. A Christian culture, according to a Lutheran understanding of the term, can never refer to a situation in which the Holy Christian Church — usually identified with a particular denomination — directs all facets of cultural life, but can only refer to a situation in which these facets of culture are open and usable for the promotion of the Gospel. Thus Grundtvig's problem regarding the reception of the Gospel was precisely Luther's problem, and their solutions are closely related.<sup>4</sup> In Germany the pattern of *Landeskirchen* was a part of this development, though the pattern demonstrates the thorough religious division which has split German lands and manifests certain reprehensible features as well. Thus, for example, the student of liturgical history must study the *Kirchenordnungen* of the territorial churches and different lands. The educational program of the churches, from elementary schools to universities, was always permitted to develop along diverse, national lines. In their theology and polity the national churches developed characteristic, unique systems. Scholars at the universities, theologians, and churchmen engaged in very lively debates with one another, but the exchange did not involve the attempt to superimpose a uniform system on the neighboring community.<sup>5</sup> In this respect the Lutheran churches rejected the universalism or internationalism previously and subsequently sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church<sup>6</sup> and the autonomy of the national Church as held in certain Calvinistic lands. It may be said that when the traditional cultural patterns, molded to a considerable degree by Christian influences, break down in one of these communities, then alien forces intrude to shape men's lives and thoughts.

Great leaders like Söderblom, for example, while recognizing the dangers and perversions of provincial narrowness lurking in such a situation, were grateful for the benefits of establishment. The Christian Church in Sweden could avoid some of the temptations to associate itself too closely with a class or classes of the

community. At the same time the Lutheran national churches contributed immeasurably to the order and general well-being of the nation. Bishop Sormunen of Finland in his *Our Folk Church and the Spirit of Lutheranism* has described the contribution of the Finnish Church to the life of the nation in the following terms:

The folk church has both the right and the duty to speak to the nation the unbribable language of truth, for the church is the keeper of the soul of the nation and the spiritual mother of the nation. The work of the church has lifted this nation into the light of history, fashioned a unified nation out of quarrelsome tribes, given the nation both its literacy and its literature, and above all the comfort and the strength which the nation has needed to endure long and heavy periods of persecution.<sup>7</sup>

It has been the contribution of these Lutheran national churches to show the manner and value of an intimate relationship, without dictation or domination, of the church in the life of the nation. In keeping with the Lutheran understanding of responsibility in and through the world the churches in these lands prepared the people to grapple with their everyday problems by using the resources of a Christian education and Christian standards of justice and love. They did not seek to withdraw to some supranational sphere or to a culture-denying existence. However, in America today we are dealing with a subreligious as well as sub-Christian culture. Our people are not so much violently opposed to the preaching of the Gospel as unable to ask the right questions or even to be concerned with the vital spiritual issues. Moreover, in no other country can one witness a similar blithe assurance of existing in a state of personal perfection—unrelated to responsibilities toward family, community, or nation—which one can trace in the history of American denominations. In other words, a conception of the *Beruf* or calling in Luther's sense has been lacking. Nor can one easily match the record of identification of Christianity with conventionality and legalism which one finds in much of American religious life. These two features actually characterized what passed for Christianity in a number of American denominations. The annals of escape from responsibility within one's calling are only equaled by the overoptimistic attempt to "Christianize the social order."

The hazards and shortcomings of a denomination's program of adaptation to the cultural milieu may be seen in Karl Barth's bitter denunciation of the bourgeois German Church; this Church had so blessed the "Christian culture" of Germany that no tension remained between Church and society. One was even encouraged to question whether the Church still discharged a distinctive function in society. Barth and his friends rendered their greatest service to the churches in Europe by their call to dissociate the Christian faith from a disintegrating bourgeois culture and by pointing to the cultural helplessness of man. Earlier Kierkegaard's *Attack on Christendom* had scored similar perversions on the part of a complacent Danish Church; there could no longer be any question about strengthening the power of religion: he could only say that Christianity—in its primitive, vital form—had ceased to exist. The Evangelical Church in Germany had to experience by way of "*Kulturprotestantismus*" and the "*Bündnis von Thron und Altar*" the manner in which Christianity may be robbed of its essential character. The quest for understanding and co-operation ended in weakness and dissolution.

With all of the Lutheran Church's interest in meeting men where they stand, in employing their common language and appropriating their forms of thought, it must maintain a state of unrelieved tension with the culture in which it stands. Christians must never become so absorbed in the problems and techniques the world offers that they lose the eschatological dimension of the Gospel. In saying this, one should specify that it is not simply prudential considerations which should motivate the Christian in what he does within the social order, but what is basically a Christological concern. The Lutheran heritage in Christology is particularly suggestive here, but Athanasius already strongly emphasized the manner in which the Incarnation ennobled fallen, dehumanized, and dying mankind. With Christ's coming in the flesh all things are now different for man, even though the old Adam still exercises his power in the life of the Christian, and St. Paul's words are applicable, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Although Christianity has made immense contributions to our Western and specifically our American culture, it is itself endangered by the centrifugal



forces in that culture. It has formed what Toynbee calls the vital, religious culture ray in Western civilization;<sup>8</sup> yet with the rapid transformation of this civilization it can remain the central spiritual strand and integrating force only by remaining true to the distinctive, Biblical message of sin and grace. In its work the Lutheran Church must proclaim the whole counsel of God, including the first use of the Law, the *usus politicus*. Society as a whole and the state are to be governed by a dynamic of God rooted in His creative activity; these are not independent or self-sufficient units. God is at work in all spheres of life; and in terms of the Christological approach, at least, no area of culture can be disdained in terms of what has commonly been understood as profane. At the same time that we protest against any totalitarian or omniscient state we must acknowledge with profound gratitude the order and justice actually operative in the social and political life of our country. To our Church has been entrusted the ministry of the Word, including Law and Gospel; only when we have preached the Law in all its power to strike the conscience and convince of sin can we proceed to the proper task of Christ's Church, the proclamation of the Gospel. No man is exempt from the requirements of the Law, nor can he boast of his inherent goodness before its demands. Likewise no area of life should be unrelated or left irresponsible to the will of God for the Christian citizen. It was the custody of the Law by the Norwegian Church that enabled officials of that Church to answer the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs on the education of children in the Nazi spirit.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, the extent to which the struggle of the Church in Norway was a joint struggle on the part of the Norwegian people is seen in two slogans of the occupation: "The Church amidst the people," and "All that concerns the Norwegian people concerns the Norwegian Church."<sup>10</sup> Yet the Church does not deal with a nation or state as if it were dealing with a "Christian state" or "Christian culture" — totalitarian in the sense that its norms and standards are Christian. It is primarily through the person of the Christian, who has been sensitized to the demands of both God's Law and His love, that the Church affects social, economic, and political affairs, but there are areas of necessary collaboration in which government officials will be grateful to learn what light the Gospel can throw

on the problems they face. The Church's contribution may not be made in a theocratic or dictatorial manner but in what Berggrav has called "an appeal to the conscience of political or secular authority."<sup>11</sup>

*Special Considerations in Terms of the American Situation*

When we direct our attention toward some comparatively recent developments in America, we dare not think of the American situation in isolation from European customs and institutions. In many respects Asian scholars are correct when they describe the underlying unity by the term "Euramerica." The American religious, political, and social inheritance stems from the deep roots of a European past, and in spite of all transformations arising from the American experience they remain a part, in their basic features, of what is commonly termed "Western civilization."

Yet the vitality and the success of the American experiment have brought out certain features characteristic of the North American scene. For example, the influence of John Locke's scientific and philosophical theory has been so decisive in stressing the freedom and independence of the individual in regard to his religious, political, and economic relations that these features have developed along lines quite inexplicable to many Europeans. Traditional *laissez-faire* philosophy has penetrated and dominated such extensive areas of our thinking that no possible alternative other than the Communist utopia seems to present itself. In actual practice the ideology of self-regulation has been supplemented by far-reaching measures to curb inflationary prices and debilitating depressions, but large segments of the population are still intellectually and temperamentally committed to a creed which has had to be overcome in practice to prevent widespread suffering and injustices.<sup>12</sup>

In view of the wide ranges of social and economic opportunity which our natural resources and unrivaled productive capacity have provided, individual Christians and churches are inclined to rest quite complacently in the prevailing state of well-being and ignore instances of real suffering or injustice. The churches in America are expected in many quarters to support the socio-economic *status quo*; they are to bless the material prosperity and expanding economic power which enabled America to turn the tide of defeat in two world wars. According to popular interpretation the remarkable

success of the American experiment is the result of divine providence and America's righteousness. Many churches and individual Christians have become so captivated by the popular mythologies that the tension necessary to protest the involvement of many of our denominations in the world is altogether lacking. It is against this aspect of American life that a whole series of American novelists, including Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway, have protested with power and bitterness. What they see is, as Perry Miller describes it, "*Ein Amerika der Fügsamkeit, der Angst, der Standardisierung und der Selbstzufriedenheit.*"<sup>13</sup> Christopher Dawson has described the influence of a highly technical civilization in both democratic and totalitarian societies as follows:

In the U. S. A. no less than in U. S. S. R. we are conscious of the victory of the mass over the individual. Moreover, we see in America how material prosperity and technical efficiency produce social conformity, so that without any intervention on the part of the state, men of their own accord tend to think the same, and look the same, and behave in the same way. None of these things is peculiar to the United States. It is only that in America the standard of material prosperity is higher and the counter-balancing forces of authority and tradition are weaker. And consequently the United States has been the pioneer of a popular hedonistic mass civilization which is the chief alternative to the totalitarian ascetic mass civilization of communism.<sup>14</sup>

It is remarkable that in an America where but a few years ago regional and ethnic differences combined to suggest the transplanting of the older nations to a new land the incredible strength of the media of mass communication should now suggest standardization and diffusion to a dead level. Many of the older minorities are being absorbed through the pressures of the great purveyors of stereotypes, and there is evident a lack of awareness and/or means of promoting the welfare and growth of many special-interest groups.

It should be clear, however, that the entire complex of America's unparalleled productive strength, military and political power, becomes the setting for unparalleled temptations to misuse or abuse this power. Even in the employment of our strength for the benefit of others these people suspect and resent us. It should not be sur-

prising, then, to learn that the Russians, even when attempting to be honest, still interpret America's aims as warlike. With envy, fear, hatred, and suspicion rampant in our relations with other nations and with pressure toward thought-control and conformity in our press and educational institutions, the churches remain one of the few remaining centers of independent thought and activity, with deep, potential resources of moral-religious strength.

For a nation which has enjoyed such remarkable technical development and material success the trend toward conceiving society in autonomous terms is quite understandable. Since the will of God and His guidance of historical events are not disclosed by any *prima facie* evidence, the possibility of interpreting the creative power underlying events as well as events themselves in strictly biological terms immediately suggests itself. God's guidance of all of men's affairs, inside and outside the nation, is either directly or tacitly denied. As a consequence the nation is not only deprived of a supreme, nonidolatrous God to whom it may acknowledge devotion and responsibility, but also an independent criterion for the judgment of *hybris* is lacking. Reinhold Niebuhr has rightly pointed out:

. . . it will make a difference whether the culture in which the policies of nations are formed is only as deep and as high as the nation's highest ideals; or whether there is a dimension in the culture from the standpoint of which the element of vanity in all human ambitions and achievements is discerned. But this is a height which can be grasped only by faith; for everything that is related in terms of simple rational coherence with the ideals of a culture or a nation will prove in the end to be a simple justification of its most cherished values.<sup>15</sup>

The trend toward autonomy is encouraged by the school of thought in legal theory which interprets justice in strictly sociological terms, guided by the principle of the "common need." In political theory a large group are dogmatically opposed to the introduction of metaphysical or theological considerations. The Deweyan group is committed to the social relativism of what the public conceives its interests to be. In such a case the consequences of an act are important rather than motivation or principles. In education, the distinguished educator Dr. James B. Conant, former president of Harvard University and now U. S. high commissioner in Germany,

demonstrates his autonomous interests when insisting on a single system of public schools to act as the great vehicle for democracy by minimizing class distinctions, providing fluidity in our social and economic structures, and understanding between segments of a variegated population.<sup>16</sup>

Associated with the tendencies just mentioned is a religious quality of devotion directed toward democracy or toward the national state. In many cases the religion to which people give their devotion, on the basis of which fundamental decisions are made, is actually a very crass materialism or faith in democracy. Gabriel Marcel has suggested that the modern omniscient welfare state is experienced by many people as the providential working of God Himself. He writes:

There are different levels at which men understand the word God. It is true that the State in our time, even in countries where it has not reached the totalitarian phase, has become more and more the engrosser and dispenser of all sorts of favours, which must be snatched from it by whatever means are available, including even blackmail. In this respect the State *is* properly comparable to a God, but to the God of degraded cults on whom the sorcerer claims to exercise his magic powers.<sup>17</sup>

It is understandable that for those sections of the population for which God has become a thin abstraction, an alternative—the state or nation—should offer itself as the chief center around which the manifold activities of life are organized and unified.

One seldom finds the idolization of democracy carried to the extent to which H. M. Kallen of the New School for Social Research in New York City has gone. He has scored Christianity's failure to reach any agreement on the term "God," the confusion prevailing regarding the content of inherited cults and dogmas. One must turn from the indefinable content of traditional ideas to the *how* of scientific method, which is democracy in the realm of ideas. The other pole of democracy, its manifestation in public affairs, is its new, free way of life:

For the communicants of the democratic faith it is the religion *of* and *for* religions, the faith in the way of life, which keeps impartial peace between them and assures to each its liberty on equal terms with the others. . . . Democracy as such a way of life, science as such a way of thought have so worked that belief attributes to

them powers of salvation from fear and want, from bondage to nature, to men, and to creeds, which surpass all else that the present knows or the past records. . . . The religion of science and democracy is no less a religion than any other; the god of its devotions is invested with powers operationally no less supernatural and no less subject to being denatured into a sacred cow. In certain respects, however, it is a new species of the genus religion. For, being the religion of religions, all may freely come together in it, each the peer of the others and equal in rights and liberty.<sup>18</sup>

The confidence many segments of the population as well as scientists in America have in the scientific method, while lacking the religious implications of Kallen's Shintoism, yet presents a significant feature of the cultural scene as the active pastor confronts it. The prestige of science and the methods it has used in gaining unprecedented material advantages has made it a hidden criterion or hidden ideal in many areas of thought and life. The mythical "common man" is vaguely aware of the fact that scientific theory is progressively exploring new areas, e. g., in astrophysics, theory of light, and atomic structure, from a background of theory altogether distinct from common sense notions and everyday experience. An unbounded confidence is often held in the possibility of applying to human behavior the same method which has been of such value in the natural sciences. For example, Dr. Conant in his *Modern Science and Modern Man* has words of encouragement for the social scientist: "So, too, in the whole field of the social sciences, it seems to me probable that a hundred years hence the historians will be able to separate out the science from the empiricism and both from the charlatanism of the 1950's."<sup>19</sup> One need not point to the limitless possibilities for the manipulation of men—for economic and social advantages, for political salvation, for relieving strife and tension, should the social scientists realize their ambitions. The very attempt on the part of certain scientists to arrive at a final "scientific picture of man" betrays a misunderstanding of man in his uniqueness, standing out above nature, which can only degrade him. One does not find the European development so strange as described by Johannes Schattennmann in his "Course of Society Since Luther":

During the War a staff surgeon with rank of major was arrested in Warsaw on the charge of corruption. To the military police

under whose conduct he was being taken away he said: "Yesterday I was a human being, today I am a number, tomorrow I shall be a corpse." Is this not the curse of modern civilization? From *homo religiosus* of past cultures, through a numerical existence in a decaying society that effaces the personality and materializes all, into a totalitarian state maintained by brute force! And what would remain after the concussion of an atomic war?<sup>20</sup>

One might also remember that Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World* were not understood by their authors to be unmindful of the American scene. In any case, actual tendencies in society make Toynbee's prophecy that in 2002 procreation will be government-controlled not too fantastic. Not only must our pastors and teachers point out the impossibility of reaching "a science of man," but they must protest attempts to manage men as if they were a part of the order of nature. For example, the following overconfident picture of the character and applicability of scientific data has serious ramifications for the Christian conception of man and the world:

But, at the present time, they [statesmen] are deciding without understanding the basic principles of human behavior and of group interrelationships. And, moreover, frequently they make their decisions without information which would be extremely relevant and which frequently would solve the problems for them. I therefore suggest that some system be set up whereby experts can make available to the representatives of the people the information which can help them in coming to their final policy decisions. . . . This is the scientific assumption on which we must proceed — that it is as possible to understand and to predict human behavior as it is to understand and predict any other phenomenon in the world. . . . It is just as possible to use propaganda techniques for fascism, as Goebbels did, as it is to use them for democracy, as we can do in the future. We must recognize that the control of the Hippocratic oath of the scientist is our best way of solving this problem.<sup>21</sup>

The boundless optimism shown in these cases indicates the extent to which the idea of progress has captured men's imaginations. One of the largest corporations in America expresses the idea in its motto, "Progress is our most important product." So keen is the struggle for technological advance that American as well as foreign

scientists are reluctant to admit alien contributions to atomic theory, jet engine development, and the like. Elementary aspects of truth are ignored in the interest of asserting the superiority of "the American way," particularly its unassailable technical superiority. Directors of scientific research assume there will be no end to the "good things" their research can give men. However, these "goods" promised men are related to a purely immanent source; and the idea of progress operates, as Bury held, as a substitute for the Christian belief in providence. When the idea is tied to the scientific method, as in the case of the social scientists mentioned above, in an endeavor to emphasize the plasticity and possibilities of human nature under improved conditions, its conflict with the New Testament teaching on the kingdom of God is more evident. The Christian belief in the gradual deepening and culmination of the Kingdom is attenuated enough in the modern world. On the other hand, a confidence in man's perfectibility has endured despite the tragedy and pessimism caused by world events. The widespread secularization of the Christian conception operates as a challenging alternative to the Christian interpretation of history.

#### THE LURE OF OLD VALUES AND REFUSAL OF THE PRICE

Though the pastor finds himself confronted with unusual difficulties in an urban, highly mobile society, he will find that the Gospel makes as great a contribution to people living in such a culture as to those in a simpler folk society. The history of the Christian Church demonstrates the manner in which St. Paul's statement, "And in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17) is exemplified in diverse cultural patterns. To be sure, in its Biblical setting this verse has a cosmic significance, but it is nevertheless applicable in a narrower — cultural or societal — context. The lives of Christians, expressing in their various relations the divine Agape, become the cement with which the configurations of cultural life are held together. In carrying out this work it is significant that the Christian Church has never faced the same withering away of values which it has maintained through the centuries or the same insistence on maintaining a morality without religion that it faces today. In many areas it is being suggested that the Judeo-Christian tradition, though one element operative in developing our conception of the



dignity and value of the individual, is no longer needed for the preservation of basically self-sufficient, independent values. The Christian faith, however, insists that secularized standards of value repeatedly become distorted and are robbed of their dynamic power when divorced from their basis in Christian love. In a significant recent article, "Value, Positivism, and the Functional Theory of Religion: The Growth of a Moral Dilemma," William L. Kolb points to the dilemma in which many social scientists find themselves. In their understanding of values and religion they recognize the necessity of accepting the validity or ontic status of certain values or religious beliefs as a condition for personal stability and social cohesion; yet their positivism can acknowledge no validity in these values:

The dilemma can be stated briefly as follows: a sociologist who believes that people must believe in the validity of values (functional theory of religion) but that such values actually have no validity (moral and ethical positivism) must either deceive his public or help in dissolving the forces which hold society together. The choices involve a dilemma because neither is morally satisfactory.<sup>22</sup>

From quite another perspective a church historian, Winthrop S. Hudson, draws attention to the gradual attenuation of religious vitality in American society. The churches in what Hudson calls the "Great Tradition," operating from a voluntary basis rather than from establishment, had made a distinctive contribution to American thought and life. But as they developed more clearly into social agencies and saw their task to be one of binding their community into a common family on the basis of a minimal commitment, they lost ever more of their inner strength:

In a very real sense, however, the very success of the free churches in this respect was ultimately to be an important factor in their undoing. For the strength and vigor of the culture which the churches had brought into being led men to discount the importance of the churches and to neglect the springs from which the power and vitality of the culture had been derived. While faith could be nurtured by the culture apart from the churches, the Christian character of the culture could not be maintained apart from the churches. When churches became complacent and satisfied with the achievements of the past and failed to enlist an

active concern for the renewal of spiritual life in the personal experience of individual men and women, the distinctively Christian character of the culture began to be dissipated and its vigor and vitality tended progressively to diminish.<sup>23</sup>

Another church historian, Robert Hastings Nichols, has pointed out that certain factors inherent in the denominational situation contributed to the secularization of the churches themselves. Some of these factors are an individualism centering during the Great Awakening and in later revivals in conversion, regeneration, and a Biblical legalism; isolation on the frontier from older conventions and any church consciousness; stress on the role of lay activity and leadership, together with acceptance of majority decision in church affairs, including doctrinal matters; the conception of the church as a voluntary association of the converted.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps one can say that only when these factors are further overcome in the denominations most concerned, the Baptists, Congregational-Christians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, can they effectively combat humanistic and secular tendencies. The history of these denominations in America demonstrates again that only when a church body is marked by a measure of exclusiveness in its conditions for membership, its theological position, and its political and social ethos, can it hope to stem the forces working toward disintegration in itself and in society. The churches which have attempted to fit "the mood and standards of a community" and hold their membership "open to all"<sup>25</sup> have awakened to find themselves more shaped by the forces of the community than shaping them. Though one can point to signs of a theological revival and return to discipline in a number of church bodies, one may question whether these denominations are either able or willing to pay the price of reformation. If a reformation comes, it will not be in peripheral matters but must involve radical re-examination, including a renewed understanding of the Gospel itself and the requirement for evangelism and discipline in the fellowship He established.

#### SPECIFIC AREAS OF MINISTRATION

In their primary significance the problems involved in the relation of the Church to the national cultural in America do not center in politics or culture, but are, as suggested previously, the-

ological problems. A church body contributes more by holding fast to its primary responsibility of faithfully administering Word and Sacraments than by a far-flung concern for insuring America's survival as a people or transforming the social order. One is entitled to be suspicious of the extensive concern in recent years in some quarters for "Christianity and Culture." Some of these individuals would have found it more profitable to restudy basic theological issues, which give form to cultural matters. As some results have shown, however, the concern has become entangled in theories or history of culture rather than in leveling a prophetic criticism on our culture. They have permitted themselves to be lured into a "dilettante's garden," where they are not pressed to restudy their presuppositions. The old Scholastic axiom *Agere sequitur esse* still holds true here. On the other hand, the disclaiming of the problems at issue here would result in a church body living in some kind of self-imposed Ghetto so far as affairs of the world are concerned; it becomes more dishonest—though not so naively optimistic—than the work of the saviors of society.

Since a responsible treatment of our topic demands that one be quite concrete in dealing with the issues, one may point to four areas where a church body may make a special contribution today. These are, in themselves, not new areas. In fact, they are simply perennial concerns. Yet it is by a constructive approach to recurring problems that significant advances can be made. We need find nothing foreign in Lenin's appropriation of Liebknecht's phrase: "If in one day circumstances change twenty-four times, we will simply change our tactics twenty-four times." The underlying interest, however, of "renewing all things in Christ" must remain more constant than that of revolutionaries or imperialists.

First, if a church body is to be more imaginative and adaptable in conveying the love of God in Christ, it must approach people, particularly non-Christians, not simply by their reason but by the many sense impressions through which their opinions are formed. This does not mean that one can ignore rational thought processes, since the Gospel comes to the whole person, also as a reasonable being. For many centuries now many responsible leaders in Christendom have been inordinately fond of the Aristotelian picture of man as a rational animal. While attempting to give full recogni-

tion to the manner in which man stands out in his uniqueness above nature, we must not ignore his involvement in nature. In a recent book by an Anglican devoted to the English worker, *The Church and the Artisan Today*, Roger Lloyd writes:

For years our appeal has been too exclusively addressed to his reason. How rational, how logically inevitable the Gospel is! In sermon after sermon and book after book we demonstrate this, supposing in our innocence that most people accept Christianity because they see it as a rational explanation of history and experience, or reject it because a long pondering of it has made it seem irrational. But in fact hardly anyone arrives at deep convictions as a result of any such process. Reason fortifies convictions already formed. But it does not form them. It does not even change opinion into conviction. By itself, it sets nothing in motion. In all of us our sense impressions play a larger part than reason does in making us what we are and determining our actions and relationships.<sup>26</sup>

There seems to be little reason for us simply to lament the low level of audience appeal on the part of television, radio, and movie audiences. Not only have many church-sponsored programs been subject to similar criticisms so far as quality is concerned, but, with a few exceptions, they also have shown the same deplorable lack of inventiveness that characterizes commercial enterprises. It is probable that attitudes and impressions are formed regarding the Christian faith and life by means of the mass media of communication which constitute the single, decisive impression of Christianity or a church body today. Our missionary task takes on an entirely different perspective, so far as the American scene is concerned, in the light of the new media which we may employ. Certainly the multitudes in America who have not actually been alienated from the Christian faith, but because of mobility or advancing age have drifted away from active membership, pose a very great challenge to evangelism.

A second area centers our attention not on media or techniques, but simply on the local congregation itself. As the congregation, the body of Christ in a particular locality, becomes increasingly the fellowship, the *ekklesia* of the New Testament, these problems of its relation to the world will fall more clearly into focus. Again one must assert that the New Testament description of the divinely

founded and divinely nourished community must be our criterion at the present time. Many people are lost today in a vacuum between the narrow community of their family and friends and the larger community of the nation, where a sense of belonging is conveyed by means of slogans, anthems, public ceremonies, and other "contrived" symbols. All the interest a denomination must devote to its organization and its many functions notwithstanding, the local congregation must still recognize as its ideal, and judge its own success in terms of, the New Testament vital community of the faithful. There can be little doubt that Christian congregations have sought to give their members that sense of belonging, of community, and meaningful patterns of life, which, for example, the anxious heroes of Kafka's novels are seeking.

The Christian fellowship offers communion with Christ as Savior and Lord of the Church through the Word and the Sacrament of the Altar. Next to the Gospel it is, therefore, devotion and obedience to Christ that the Christian Church offers her members. With it, however, it offers them real fellowship or brotherhood with one another. It is in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist that the fellowship character of the *ecclesia* is most marked. The fellowship character of the common meal is given a more profound, a divine meaning in what St. Augustine calls the *sacramentum unitatis, vinculum caritatis*. We have evidence that in Germany, Austria, Norway, and Finland the fellowship character of the Christian Church was rediscovered under the pressures of World War II. Certain of the sect-type churches in America now appear to offer a fellowship and brotherhood which the more respectable denominations do not possess. Certainly in their task of winning others to join the community-in-love our local churches must deepen their fellowship in a difficult, largely urban environment. They must reject the view of the church as a social organization existing alongside others. A local congregation should be known in the community primarily through the Word it has to proclaim. Through the Word it sustains and edifies its members; and though love is not a unique possession of this Christian community, it should shine here more clearly and unwaveringly than among those outside its membership.

Third, the educational program of a church body should be re-

examined in terms of its effectiveness in the contemporary milieu. If it is true that the fragmentation of the Christian approach to life has resulted in many activities, including education, being taken over by other agencies, then we must explore means which, even at considerable sacrifice, will reassert the spiritual center of life. What the Christian faith can contribute to the educational process—to curriculum and the individual personality—is an integration it would otherwise lack. The elementary and secondary schools of our Synod can also present norms of conduct to meet the *anomia*, the normlessness, of our society, illustrated by the teen-age gangs found in cities from coast to coast. So far as the field of higher education is concerned, there can be no doubt that in the present situation in American education a Christian college dedicated to the Word and its faithful declaration can make contributions to the total development of our youth which cannot be forthcoming from the large, state school. The spiritual development of the student can be given the same careful consideration shown his growth in the other areas, and he can receive the support of a community of Christians in adjusting himself to the standards of life in society and his vocation. Our schools as well as our local congregations must become bulwarks against, rather than contributors to, the depersonalizing forces in a technological and scientifically oriented society. At the same time the schools of our Synod must continue to re-examine the quality and character of their work and refuse to operate on the basis of the inertia or expediency which have often characterized Christian education. In their work these schools should keep alive the quest for the source of knowledge and meaning in all things and thereby remain true to a classic tradition in Christian education. In the struggle against the forces of evil rampant in the world the Christian Church has been given no assurance that the judgment of history will be on its side, but through education it can throw its weight on the alternative representing God's Law and Gospel, working toward a just and equitable social order.

A fourth and final area is again quite intimately related to the preceding: in our entire approach to our congregational members we must overcome the still common cleavage between layman and clergy. With due consideration given his preparation and opportunities, the layman must be recognized as a first-rate Christian.

A considerable measure of distrust in the competence of the laity has encouraged his being treated as a proletarian in the work of the congregation. Yet pastors are aware of the fact that in the rational society only a movement presupposing a broad base of comprehension and operation has a chance of success. In educational work a dim view of the layman's interest and abilities may result in a lower expectation than his capacities would merit. Thus in the realm of higher education, on the view that the doctrinally trained and sound clergyman is the ideal type of Christian, insufficient effort has been made to encourage the development of lay theologians. It is felt not only that he lacks the linguistic tools for Biblical interpretation and comprehension of the terminology of dogmatics but also that his aberrations will vitiate the effectiveness of his work. Each Christian as a priest still has a responsibility for the material and spiritual welfare of his fellow Christians, and he exercises his priesthood within the context of his calling, where the primary contribution of the Christian to the welfare of society is made. He should be prepared and urged to discharge his priesthood and calling in the highest degree.

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#### NOTES

1. A classic study on this basis for the centuries indicated is Emile Male, *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (Pantheon, New York, 1949).
2. Cf. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948), p. 61.
3. Conrad Bergendoff, "Lutheran Ethics and Scandinavian Lutheranism," *Christendom*, VI (1941), 620.
4. *Morphologie des Luthertums* (Munich, 1931—32), II, 125—131.
5. Cf. Otto Piper, "The Lutheran Contribution to Theology," *Proceedings of the First Institute on the Church and Modern Culture*, Valparaiso University Press, where the writer differs with Elert's interpretation of Lutheranism's alternation between aloofness and identification in terms of *diastasis* and *synthesis*, and suggests rather the term *prudent ministration* as pointing to the purpose underlying protest or engagement.
6. The struggles of the Roman Catholic Church to maintain its internationalism through the centuries are well known. It may be noted that the recent proscription of the training of worker priests in France is a part of the Ultramontanist, supernational interest. Cf. *The Christian Century* Sept. 16 and 30, 1953.
7. Translated by T. A. Kantonen from Eino Sormunen, *Kansankirkomme ja Luterilaisuuden Kenki*, in his "Lutheranism as a Cultural Force in Europe and America," *Proceedings of the First Institute on the Church and Modern Culture*.
8. *The World and the West* (Oxford, New York, 1953), *passim*.

9. Cf. Arne Fjellbu, "Luther as a Resource of Arms in the Fight for Democracy," *World Lutheranism of Today* (Augustana Book Concern, Rock Island, 1950), pp. 81—97. Note the reference to article by Leiv Aalen, *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift*, 1948, pp. 19, 20, and "cordiality." "From what the Confession teaches about the first use of the law it should really be evident that it is in no way its intention to assign any independence or autonomy in relation to the law of God to the social and political ethos. The tendency in this direction finds its cause in the fact that the doctrines of Luther have been overgrown by all sorts of modern 'isms' which have co-operated to isolate the influence of Christianity from modern cultural life and make it a province of cordiality." (Psalm 94.)
10. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
11. "The Task of the Church in the Field of International Affairs," *Ecumenical Review*, II, No. 4, p. 336.
12. Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 105.
13. "Das Amerikabild des amerikanischen Romans und sein Einfluss auf Europa," *Universitas*, 8. Jahrgang (1953), p. 460.
14. Quoted from *The Month* (January 1947), by J. H. Oldham, "A Responsible Society," in *Man's Disorder and God's Design* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1948), III, 145.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 150.
16. Cf. James B. Conant, "Education: Engine of Democracy," *Saturday Review* May 3, 1952.
17. *The Mystery of Being* (Henry Regnery, Chicago, 1951), I, 32. A danger of quite another sort facing democratic governments is pointed to by Werner Kägi, "Von der falschen Verabsolutierung der Demokratie," *Reformatio*, II, Juni 1953, 275 ff. Kägi discusses certain absolutistic-totalitarian tendencies arising from the disregard of definite values in the democratic conception of man and society. The kernel of democracy is understood to lie simply in the principle of majority decision; in this respect one aspect of Rousseau's theory, involving his transfer of sovereignty from princes to people, is emphasized to the depreciation of all legal norms prior to and transcending the state.
18. "America's True Religion," *Saturday Review*, July 28, 1951.
19. Doubleday Anchor reprint from Columbia University Press (New York, 1952), 132.
20. Originally published in the volume *Zur Politischen Predigt*, translated by Dr. Edgar C. Reinke for the *Cresset*, XVI (April 1953), 25.
21. James G. Miller, M. D., in round-table discussion, "Psychological Techniques for Maintaining Peace," May 28, 1950, No. 635, p. 6. A critique, of uneven quality, of some of the excesses of social scientists is to be found in A. H. Hobbs, *Social Problems and Scientism* (The Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Pa., 1953), *passim*.
22. *Social Forces*, XXXI (May 1953), 305.
23. *The Great Tradition of the American Churches* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1953), pp. 108, 109.
24. "The Influence of the American Environment on the Conception of the Church in American Protestantism," *Church History*, XI (1942), 181 to 192.
25. Hudson, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
26. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), p. 85.