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Adolf Stöcker: A Christian Socialist Advocate of the "Free Folk Church"*

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THE AUTHOR DISCUSSES THE IMPORTANCE OF ADOLF STÖCKER'S UNDERSTANDING of the Gospel in sociopolitical terms as it affected the "free folk church" movement in 19th-century Germany.

Readers will note but perhaps not agree with Stöcker's design for the church's social ministry. Students of 19th-century Germany will remember with distaste Stöcker's anti-Semitism.

Struggling against the threat Marxism presented to Christianity and against the pervasive individualism in the established church which prevented taking the social implications of the Gospel seriously, Adolf Christian Stöcker (1835—1909) emerged as one of the important Christian Socialists in late 19th-century Germany.¹ He is noteworthy in the history of Christian Socialism as one of the first figures in

the German evangelical community to understand the Gospel in sociopolitical terms.² The consequences of this social interpretation of Christian faith led Stöcker into the public arena, as evidenced in his work as court preacher in Berlin (1874—1890), member of the *Reichstag* for most of the last 30 years of his life, head of the Berlin City Mission (part of the Inner Mission movement), and as the primary figure in the Christian Socialist Workers' Party formed in 1878. It should be noted that Christian Socialism was one of the ways evangelical Christians in Germany responded to the social problem—the generic crisis of human existence provoked by industrialization.³

* The term "free folk [people's] church" is a translation of the German *freie Volkskirche*.

Stöcker offers the following commentary on his definition of the key term. "We wish to be free and independent up and down the line; we wish to be churchly and not to abandon the church of the Reformation. We wish to think, feel, and act socially; nationhood and Christendom must interpenetrate one another." *Reden und Aufsätze von Adolf Stöcker* (Leipzig: A. Dechertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), p. 265.

¹ For examination of Stöcker's Christian Socialism see my study, "Christianity and the Social Problem: Adolf Stöcker's 'Christian Socialist' Alternative to Marxist Socialism in Nineteenth Century Germany" (unpublished dissertation; Duke University, 1969).

² For an elaboration of Stöcker's theology for social change, see my article, "Christian Socialism: Adolf Stöcker's Formulation of a Christian Perspective for Social Change for the Protestant Church in Nineteenth Century Germany," *Lutheran Quarterly*, XXII (May 1970), 185—98.

³ For an exploration into the various Protestant responses to the social problem consult William O. Shanahan, *German Protestants Face the Social Question: The Conservative Phase 1815—1871* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1954).

An integral part of Stöcker's Christian Socialism was his effort to bring about a "free folk church" involved in the needs and problems of the common man. This work, significant in its own right, had considerable influence on churchmen in the subsequent decades. Daniel Borg's assessment of churchmen during the Weimar Republic reveals something of this impact.

To a large extent, Weimar churchmen derived their inspiration from Adolf Stöcker. One might call him the apostle to the Weimarians, for the course of events since his death seemed to justify his views. Stöcker had perceived that the reality of the Christian state had become increasingly questionable and drew conclusions that Dibelius could assume to be representative of the Weimar church—the need for a free church performing its social mission within the context of Christian conservative thought.⁴

Stöcker's theological position was the framework for his Christian Socialism and for his work to bring about a "free folk church." He took traditional formulations of God's reconciliation with man as his starting point. He assumed the doctrine of *sola fide*, but he modified some traditional formulations of that doctrine by a renewed emphasis on works as the manifestation and verification of faith. It was this emphasis on the necessity of works as the outgrowth of authentic faith that became the basis for his social interpretation of the Gospel. Yet it should be noted that there is no sense of works-righteousness in his position. He had no doubt that faith precedes works. His concern was that works would in fact follow faith.

⁴ Daniel R. Borg, "Volkskirche, 'Christian State,' and the Weimar Republic," *Church History*, XXXV (June 1966), 206.

Stöcker's insight into the social nature of Christian faith led him to reinterpret the more traditional individualistic understanding of faith. Opposing the almost exclusive concern for the status of souls which he believed characterized the evangelical churches in Germany, Stöcker also called for a concern for the needs and problems of the whole man and society. He judged the prevalent emphasis on the individual to be one of the basic problems in the existing evangelical churches.⁵ From his perspective this gross misinterpretation was due primarily to an overemphasis on the church as the *congregatio sanctorum* ("congregation of holy people") and an insufficient stress on the church as a missionary and service community.⁶ Stöcker's interpretation of the Gospel was important because it added the social dimension to both faith and works. No longer could faith or works be considered solely in an individualistic or personal context. Faith was understood to be as much communal as personal. Works were as much social as individual.

The Gospel, in Stöcker's interpretation, was "a great social force" to be manifested in the renewed life of individual Christians and in the Christian community involved in the process of social reform and humanization.⁷ "Christianity belongs in po-

⁵ This theme is present throughout Stöcker's writings. See, for example, Adolf Stöcker, *Wach' auf, evangelisches Volk! Aufsätze über Kirche und Kirchenpolitik* (Berlin, 1893). Hereafter cited as *Wach' auf*.

⁶ This is a consistent criticism of the church in Stöcker's work. See *Wach' auf*.

⁷ Adolf Stöcker, *Christlich-sozial. Reden und Aufsätze*, 2d ed. (Berlin, 1890), pp. 192—93. Hereafter cited as *CS* (2d ed.). (The translations in this article are mine.)

litical, social, and industrial life."⁸ As a necessary manifestation of Christian faith and love, social action was an inseparable part of Christian mission.⁹ The impetus for this reinterpretation of Christian faith had come from Johann Hinrich Wichern and the Inner Mission movement. The point now was to socialize that impetus.¹⁰ Utilizing a Biblical image, Stöcker asserted that Christianity has always had a great role to play in the sociopolitical realm of life as the "salt of the earth."¹¹ Accordingly, it was his belief that the commission given to the church was to prepare the world for the coming kingdom of God.

It is essential that Christians carry the vision of the Kingdom of God into the world, working and struggling, believing and praying, witnessing and suffering, so that as much as possible will be glorified in the light of Christ. Christians, then, cannot just authorize but must be engaged in the practice of Christian morality in the world, in order to win others and to endeavor shaping this world by the ideal of the Kingdom of God.¹²

Properly understood then, the Gospel was to become "the *magna charta* for the toilers and heavy laden, for the poor and the distressed."¹³

There was a definite connection between Stöcker's political and social activity and his understanding of the activity of God. The coming kingdom promised by God

was present, in capsule form, in the Christ-event and in the redeemed community. Thus the church was to act to prepare the world for the complete fulfillment of this promise. It is evident that for Stöcker the primary focus of the Christian community should be rooted firmly in this possibility of shaping the world by the vision of the kingdom of God.¹⁴

As Stöcker viewed human history, Christianity had played an important role in the process of liberating man from various forms of bondage. It was clear that "Christianity is the great event in world history from a social point of view."¹⁵ It was Stöcker's objective to capitalize on this tradition, thereby unleashing Christianity's power as a social and liberating force in his day.

Within this perspective lasting social activity had to be based on a religious-ethical foundation. Only such a basis could sustain a person or community for the continual work in the process of humanization. Without this foundation such activity would necessarily be tentative.¹⁶ Within Stöcker's Christian Socialism the doctrine of redemption provided the grounding for

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 217—35.

¹⁵ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 11. As Daniel Borg points out, "it is generally recognized that the leading figures of German Evangelical churches before 1918 were politically conservative, ardently nationalistic, monarchical in sentiment, and quietistic in relation to outstanding social issues." "*Volkskirche, 'Christian State,' and the Weimar Republic*," p. 186. With the obvious exception of the last point, this characterization fits Stöcker. This illustrates just how similar, and yet how different, Stöcker was vis-à-vis others in the German evangelical community.

¹⁶ See Stöcker, *Christlich-sozial. Reden und Aufsätze* (Bielefeld and Leipzig, 1885), p. 473. Hereafter cited as *Cs*.

⁸ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 193.

⁹ See Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. 231.

¹⁰ Adolf Stöcker, *Reden und Aufsätze*, ed. Reinhold Seeberg (Leipzig, 1913), p. 159. Hereafter cited as *R und A*.

¹¹ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 248.

¹² Stöcker, *R und A*, pp. 230—31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

the proper religious-ethical framework. Understood socially, redemption changed not only the man but his relation to others and to his environment.¹⁷ Man's redemption, with both its personal and its social consequences, provided the only adequate basis for the work of humanization. It is evident, then, that Christian faith was not an addendum to his social position but its very foundation. Christian love, the magnetic force which drew people into community, was necessary to create a common concern for the needs of the other.¹⁸ Only the authentic Christian community working toward shaping this world by the vision of the kingdom of God could provide the sustaining force for the ongoing movement of the humanization of man and society.¹⁹

Even though the Bible furnished no readily applicable formulas for solving social problems, it did provide the fundamental framework within which the problems of society could be approached.²⁰ Though it did not reveal specific social programs or economic guidelines to resolve immediate or long-range problems, the Bible did point to the necessary impetus and spirit of concern to deal with these problems.²¹ Thus Stöcker viewed Christian love and duty in social terms, which were at variance with the individualistic and personalistic ethics that prevailed at his time.²²

Stöcker's social interpretation of the Gospel was interrelated with his under-

standing of the communal nature of Christian faith. Not only was the church an assemblage of Christians but, more importantly, it was a Christian assembly. He understood this emphasis on the communal nature of the church to be in opposition to the notion of the church as a collection of pious individuals.²³ Stöcker saw a wholeness and unity in the Christian community. Clearly dependent on the Romantic notion of *Volk*, Stöcker's "free folk church" conveyed the idea of an organic unity among people so that an authentic Christian was necessarily part of an authentic Christian community.²⁴ It is evident, therefore, that he used the term *Volk* in opposition to the individualism that he thought was so prevalent in the evangelical community in Germany. For Stöcker *Volk* pointed to both the social and organic bases of the Christian community. Yet it must be noted that while his notion of *Volk* conveyed the social nature of the Christian community, he understood this concept in a Teutonic context. Stöcker's belief that there was something in the German *Volk* that made it unique had both political and theological importance, which was particularly evident in his ardent nationalism, his anti-Semitism, and his identification of "Protestantism" and Germany.²⁵

²³ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, pp. 143—85.

²⁴ The idea of *Volkskirche* ("folk church") runs throughout his writings. See *Cs*, pp. 458 to 468. For an expanded treatment of the influence of the Romantic tradition on Stöcker, especially as it relates to his ideas of *Volksgeist*, *Volksseele*, and *Volkskirche*, see Helmuth Schreiner, *Macht und Dienst; Adolf Stöckers Kampf um die Freiheit der Kirche* (Gütersloh, 1951), pp. 47 ff.

²⁵ See Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 29. For an exploration of these positions, see my study, "Christianity and the Social Problem."

¹⁷ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 192.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 249, and *Wach' auf*, p. 206.

²¹ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), pp. 190—91.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Stöcker's "free folk church" was not an involuntary association that one would be affiliated with by virtue of birth or parental belief, nor was it completely a covenanted society of believers of the Anabaptist variety. Stöcker sought a community somewhere between the inclusive national church and the exclusive sect. He wanted to take what he thought was best from both these forms and work toward a community that would be inclusive, yet would be based on a common voluntary confession of faith.

The Christian community as "free folk church" assumed primary importance in Stöcker's theology of social change. As the exemplary form of human community, the church had the potential power to transform the rest of society. Since he believed that such power was clearly illustrated in the early church, Stöcker called for the existing church to recover its authentic and pristine character.²⁶ He assumed that within the true church the Word of God provided a unique source of power. Because the existing church was incapable of speaking to and dealing redemptively with the problems of man and society, Stöcker was convinced that this power was either absent or not being utilized.²⁷ It was evident to him that the churches in Germany were not representative of God's reconciling activity in the world. In dogmatic theology, said Stöcker, the church is described as the "church militant," but where, he queried, is the militant activity in our church?²⁸ Rather than isolation from or accommodation to culture—two extremes

²⁶ Ibid., p. 190.

²⁷ For an elaboration of this theme, see his collection of essays *Wach' auf*.

²⁸ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. 375.

that he saw in the evangelical churches in Germany—Stöcker called the Christian community to utilize the power of the Word of God to confront and speak prophetically to the world. Only in such manner could the church represent God's redeeming activity in the world, but it could carry out its prophetic role effectively only if free from outside control and influence.²⁹

As Stöcker analyzed the situation, the German evangelical community was dependent and weak.³⁰ Summarizing his analysis, he claimed, "We are sick, and our sickness lies in the social position of our Church."³¹ He diagnosed the major cause of this sickness to be in the nature of the existing church and concluded that the primary problem was that as a territorial church (*Landeskirche*) the Christian community lacked control of its own affairs. Temporal authority had overstepped its bounds in the divine order by usurping the authority of the church.³² Stöcker recognized that during the Reformation the creation of territorial churches may have been a necessity. The problem was that this expedient and temporary measure had

²⁹ Wilhelm Meyer contends that Stöcker's concern for the independence of the church led him to a concern for the public life of the German people. *Evangelische Kirche und deutscher Staat in der Gegenwart nach evangelisch-reformatorischen Grundsätzen im Anschluss an Adolf Stöcker* (Bonn, 1935), p. 15. Quite the reverse, however, seems to be the case. Stöcker's basic concern for the humanization process forced him to realize that if the church was to play an active and prophetic role in the public life, it would have to be independent from the control of the state.

³⁰ Stöcker, *Cs*, p. 418.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 433—34.

³² Ibid., and *Wach' auf*, p. 161.

become normalized so that the church was used for political support and benefit.³³ Blame for this could not be placed totally on the state, however. Historically, the indifference of the church in Germany to its outer form, especially its relation to the state, had been a contributing factor in allowing this situation to develop.³⁴

It was evident to Stöcker that the status of the church as a territorial church was a major factor blocking the possibility of a renewal of the religious-ethical fiber of the German people. Unless the church would be free it could not be the community of the Word of God. "Without freedom there can be no truth."³⁵ As the guardian and representative of divine truth, the church was to present the truth of God to the world so that mankind would have the possibility of authentic life.³⁶ Such a catalytic effort would be possible only if the Christian community were a "free folk church."

It was primarily on the basis of the orders of God's creation that Stöcker attempted to make his case for the freedom of the church. In the created order, Stöcker said, both the state and the church have ordained functions and purposes. The state was to provide order and stability for a godless society. The church was to be a community of worship, witness, and service. This meant that church and state were to be independent both institutionally and legally. By this, however, Stöcker did not mean to imply a compartmentalization of reality that would eliminate the

church from any active role in the public life. Misunderstanding the divine orders as mutually exclusive had led the church to be indifferent about the world and had contributed to an individualistic understanding of existence in the world.³⁷ Stöcker did not want to fragment reality, but to recognize the differing functions of the state and the church within the divine order.³⁸

From Stöcker's vantage point it was as important for the integrity of the state as it was for the existence of the Christian community that the church have an independent status. Only thus could the state remain a *Kulturstaat* ("culture-state").³⁹ Therefore, the proposals of Liberalism to free the state from the church and priestly influence were not acceptable. By relegating the church to an otherworldly sphere, Liberalism falsely assumed that Christianity was legitimately concerned only with the private life,⁴⁰ and thus it obviated the social and prophetic mission of the Christian community.

Since both state and church had a common cause in working toward the humanization of man and society, there was to be no conflict between them, but a functional relationship between them within the divine order. Nevertheless there was one essential difference between them: the state was part of the natural order while the church was part of the order of grace. The role of the church was to create the proper climate of concern that would be manifest in the concrete action of the

³³ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, pp. x, 332.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁵ Stöcker, *Cs*, p. 464.

³⁶ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 64.

³⁷ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, pp. 194—95.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³⁹ Stöcker, *Cs*, p. 424.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

state. Thus, according to Stöcker, church and state must be complementary, each fulfilling its own function and purpose within the divine order.

Since the church was called to serve humanity, the Christian community was to be the agent of reconciliation in society. While one could not fragment or delimit Christianity as political, socialist, or party Christianity, one should work for the pervasive influence of Christianity in public life through Christian politics, socialism, and parties.⁴¹ It is clear, therefore, that Stöcker did not believe that the church as an institution should be involved in political life as a political party. Its role in the sociopolitical arena was a more indirect one, namely, to cause and sustain a renewal of the religious-ethical spirit of man and society. Thus the church would maintain its freedom and integrity as a reconciling force in society. As an agent of God's reconciling activity, the church could not be tied to a particular class, interest group, or party, yet Christians would have to play an active part in the public life of society. Here Stöcker claimed that while religion and politics cannot be mixed institutionally and still maintain their own freedom and independent integrity, yet on the personal and noninstitutional collective level the two are inevitably mixed.⁴² He thought that the Christian community as a formal body would have to transcend partisan issues, yet speak out on such issues as economic injustice and social oppression.⁴³ Here again Stöcker tried to distinguish between the action of Christians and the role

of the institutional church. The church as institution was to provide the necessary context within which Christians as individuals or as a body could respond to social problems.

Stöcker considered his struggle against the territorial church to be one of the authentic Christian community against the established church. This struggle would determine the very existence of the authentic community of the faithful. His conception of the "free folk church" independent of state control is not to be identified with the notion of an absolute separation of church and state. This idea of separation sounded too much like the two-realms division for Stöcker. He thought rather of an independence from the state which would not preclude mutual relations between church and state. Stöcker was not so much fighting for the church's freedom from the state as he was fighting for the freedom of the church's influence in society. His primary consideration was the kind of freedom that would allow the church to be the true church, free from outside influences, especially state control. The rationale for his position was based more on theological considerations of the nature of the church than legal or constitutional considerations.⁴⁴

Stöcker's concern was to recover the real significance and character of the church

⁴⁴ Detlev von Walter in a generally perceptive analysis of Stöcker's understanding of the church, maintains that for the court preacher the problem of church dogma and the form of the church was inconsequential to the public life. *Die freie Volkskirche als Ziel Adolf Stöckers* (Rostock i. Meckl., 1937), p. 41. Stöcker, however, considered church dogma and form to be factors producing problems in the public life. These, therefore, had to be altered in order to come to terms with the public life in Germany.

⁴¹ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. 232.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 197—99.

⁴³ See Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 19.

as the body of Christ, the representative of God's activity on earth. This, he was convinced, could be done only by breaking the political stranglehold on the church.⁴⁵ It was impossible, he thought, for the Christian community to exercise its prophetic function within the context of the territorial church. Because the church was dependent on the state, there was no chance for it to speak out against the state.⁴⁶ Furthermore, since Stöcker firmly believed that the evangelical church in Germany had to understand itself on the basis of prophetic and evangelical thought and action in the social and political spheres, the church had to be free in order to fulfill its God-given task.⁴⁷ "If only the Church had the freedom to live its unique existence within the divine order, a new history of Protestantism would begin."⁴⁸

Stöcker believed that the authentic church had to live in a dialectical relation to the world—in the world yet not of the world.⁴⁹ He believed that the church was not simply the visible historical community but also the invisible fellowship of the body of Christ. The primary focus in his

theology, however, was on the church as the manifestation of God's activity in the world. He was concerned that since so much emphasis had been placed on the purity of the church and on the saving of souls, the church had become ineffective in its ministry to the world. The true church was not only the place where the Gospel was preached and the sacraments administered, but it was also the vanguard of God's saving activity in the world. To Stöcker this meant that the Christian community must become an effective social force in the world—that is, a "free folk church."

Stöcker was quite aware of the fact that the church had become unpopular and irrelevant to many in the working classes. It was obvious to him that historically the church had been primarily interested in the established classes of society, supporting and preserving their advantage. His call was for a shift in emphasis on the part of both the church and society at large to the working classes and their needs and problems.⁵⁰ He believed that social problems and struggles must be brought into the church. But this would be possible only if the church were free from outside controls.⁵¹ Only a free Christian community involved in the lives of people would redeem the church itself and make it again a vital force in the lives of Germans and German society. It was therefore only as a "free folk church" that the church could have its *raison d'être* as the body of Christ.⁵²

Stöcker characterized the authentic Christian community as a gathering of the

⁴⁵ Meyer, *Evangelische Kirche und deutscher Staat*, pp. 31—33, claims that in actual fact the court preacher sought a *Reichskirche*. This, he claims, is the logical conclusion of Stöcker's attempt to bring the evangelical community and the German state together as a Christian state. Such a conclusion, however, misses the distinction Stöcker sought to maintain between the "free folk church" and the state, even a Christian state.

⁴⁶ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. 166.

⁴⁷ See Adolf Stöcker, "Die Leitung der Kirche. Ein Weckruf" (Siegen, 1877), p. 26.

⁴⁸ Stöcker, *Cs*, p. 427.

⁴⁹ See Adolf Stöcker, *Wandelt im Geist! Ein Jahrgang Volkspredigten über freie Texte* (Berlin, 1889), pp. 264 ff.

⁵⁰ See Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 161.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵² See Stöcker, *Cs*, p. 428.

faithful around the Word of God and the sacraments and around the work of service and mission. The church was to be a community of fellowship, worship, mutual concern, and service. He assumed that freedom from external influence was necessary.⁵³ The work of the Christian community in social reform was a necessary aspect of its inner reform and reconstitution.⁵⁴ The church could win back the common man only if it was once again concerned about public life.⁵⁵

The social question is not evil, but a good question. What is asked is the best form of human community in order to bring the greatest number of men into a good living situation. One cannot create a world without suffering, the world is no longer Eden. One cannot create human hearts without sin, even the Socialists cannot do this. But one can, if one wants to, have a great deal more good will and peace among men on earth, if only more people would act dutifully and have love for their neighbors.⁵⁶

Stöcker was well aware that the Christian community could not create a new world. Nevertheless he believed that it

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 467—68. Stöcker's understanding of the church as community was derived from the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. To Stöcker this meant a deemphasis on the hierarchical organization of the institutional church and a lessening of autocratic authority in the organization. He advocated the democratic involvement of all members of the community as a logical consequence of the priesthood of all believers. He favored all types of participation of the laity in the life and work of the church with the exception of lay preaching. Schreiner, *Macht und Dienst*, p. 72, interprets Stöcker's understanding of the priesthood of all believers in terms of *Demo-Diakonia*.

⁵⁴ See Stöcker, *Cs*, p. 497.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 507.

⁵⁶ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 162.

could be instrumental in improving the conditions of this world. The church, then, would have to be both a servant and a force in society, playing both a passive (reconciling) and an active (judgmental and constructive) role.⁵⁷ Only a "free folk church" would have the freedom to serve and become a reconciling force in society. But, as Stöcker noted, that would be no easy task, for the church was "weak in her impact on the public spirit."⁵⁸

Just as the Reformation and the Pietist movement had brought about significant revivals in the church in Germany, Stöcker was convinced that the stirrings and struggle over the issue of freedom and the issues created by social problems were the beginning of a third major revival in the German evangelical community.⁵⁹ Although Stöcker maintained that the time at which the church would be free from outside influence was completely in the hands of God,⁶⁰ and that all one could do was to pray and wait, he worked actively for that day.

Stöcker assumed that there was an intimate relationship between the religious-ethical spirit of the people and the general social condition of the people. The great task of the Christian community was to inject into the world the insights and the dynamic force of Christian faith and thereby to bring about a religious-ethical renewal of the German people.⁶¹ Such a renewal was necessary to resolve social problems. While the church itself could

⁵⁷ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. 311.

⁵⁸ Stöcker, *Cs*, p. 508.

⁵⁹ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 137.

⁶⁰ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. xvi.

⁶¹ See Adolf Stöcker, "Die Lage unserer Kirche" (Berlin, 1887), p. 20.

not become directly involved in politics, its mission was to cause and sustain a reformation of the people. This was a necessary condition for effective social reform,⁶² so that the church would have to provide an appropriate communal context and an impetus for the ongoing humanization of man and society.⁶³ Stöcker saw no possibility for meaningful reform without a reformation of the German spirit and a renewal of the German people. The burden for this task fell on the church.⁶⁴ The active involvement of the church in social problems could not remain on the personal level alone, but the Christian community had to become a dynamic social force pervading all of society. It had a unique role to play in the divine order as an authentic community creatively involved in the ongoing humanization of man and society.⁶⁵ His optimism regarding this task can be illustrated by the following statements:

We call out to our people, "Wake up, my Germans, the time for sleeping is past." So in times past Martin Luther awakened his people. So again a Protestant consciousness must be sounded out. . . . Our people are not lost to the Gospel, we must only seek them out.⁶⁶

The primary significance of Stöcker's conception of the "free folk church" was its value as a critical tool, although it did not clearly formulate the actual workings of such a Christian community. Internally the "free folk church" concept pointed to Stöcker's belief that the church could not

simply be concerned with the salvation of individual souls or merely with personal problems, but that it also had a necessary social role to play. The church, if it was the Christian community, had to be the church of the people, actively involved in social problems. This was in accord with his view that Christianity was a public and communal faith, not just a private and personal faith. Thus the Christian community would have to be understood as communal and organic, not just as a collection of individual Christians. In this regard Stöcker's critique had the effect of undercutting the basis of the existing established church. Externally his notion of the "free folk church" pointed to the fact that the church could not be the body of Christ if it was dependent on outside forces. The Christian community would need the freedom to speak prophetically to society and to work redemptively in it. This aspect of his critique had the effect of undercutting the existing relationship between church and state in Germany. However, such questions as how a "free folk church" with a confessional basis could exist without becoming a sect, or how a community with a confessional basis could be inclusive, or how such a church could be in yet not of the world, or how one would decide what forms of social action were appropriate for the church as institution and for Christians as a collective body were left unresolved. In one sense this lack of a clear definition of the constitution of the Christian community was a strength of Stöcker's position. Whether intended or not, Stöcker provides a formal definition of the nature of the church which must then be materialized historically. Stöcker maintained that even though the essential communal nature

⁶² Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. 150.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 151—53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶⁵ Stöcker, *Cs* (2d ed.), p. 212.

⁶⁶ Stöcker, *Wach' auf*, p. 183.

of the Christian community remains constant, how it is materialized in a given context depends on that context. The full implications of the historicity or contextuality of the church, its role in society, its redemptive function, and its communal form, would probably have been disavowed by

Stöcker, but the seeds of such a view were planted in his position. Coupled with his rediscovery of the social dimension of Christian faith, this became the constructive legacy of Adolf Stöcker's view of the "free folk church."

Alma, Mich.