

MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53097
Social Problems and the Gospel

Essayist: PROF. E. E. KOWALKE

I

When the ills that commonly accompany our conditions of life develop to the point where they cause constant and wide-spread suffering, and when a great many people determine that something must be done about them to relieve the suffering, then we begin to call those ills social problems. The social problems of one age or of one country are, however, not always the same as those of another age or country. Conditions that in Germany today are considered social evils that must be attacked with all the energy of a united nation may be looked upon by another nation as being no evils at all but rather as blessings. One cause of the bloody war between the States in our own country was the violent disagreement between the North and the South over the proposition that slavery was a social evil. What appears to one group or to one age to be a social problem may appear to another group or age to be an essential part of social well-being.

Similarly, generally recognized blessings may in any country in the course of slow time develop into conditions that constitute what is called a social problem. There was a time not long ago in our own country when a bumper crop was the occasion of national rejoicing. Since then we have become accustomed to hearing that bumper crops of wheat and cotton and overproduction of little pigs have created conditions that make the plight of the free and more or less independent farmer a national social problem. It is an amazing phenomenon of our national scene that within the space of three generations the free white and independent farmers and laborers have succeeded the Negro slave as Social Problem No. 1. It is not at all unthinkable that we may yet see the discontented worker resorting to violent revolution as the only solution of his particular social problem. It has happened and is happening in other countries, and it may happen here.

There is no universal agreement as to what constitutes a social problem. Social problems vary greatly according to the times and the character and the customs and conceptions of people. Even in a small community not all people will agree in designating a certain condition as a social problem that needs attention. Witness, for example, the wide difference of opinion regarding the necessity of doing anything at all about liquor consumption. If there is little agreement as to what constitutes a social problem, there can of course be no agreement regarding the means of correcting social evils.

Yet there are in our own country and in our time certain conditions that are quite generally conceded to be acute social problems, and in many instances the fact that there is violent disagreement of opinion only accentuates the problems. Few people would deny that the appellation "social problem" properly applies to the present wide-spread unemployment; to the conflict between worker and employer; to the unequal distribution of wealth; to the condition that permits one third of a nation to be ill housed, ill fed, ill clothed, while at the same time production

of foodstuffs is curtailed by law; to the control of crime, the care of the mentally diseased, the control of certain social diseases, the utilization of national natural resources, the problem of peace and war. These are undoubtedly some of our more prominent social problems.

Whatever these problems may be, they all have a common origin. Ultimately they all originate from a condition of life that man brought upon himself by going counter to a plain and simple word of God, when he chose to put his trust in the devil's word rather than in God's. That condition of life is outlined in Gen. 3: 16-19: "Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto thy wife and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." There is the parent root of all social problems of all times and all peoples. In the conditions of life there imposed on man all social problems are present as in the germ. From the conditions imposed on the woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee," there have grown such problems as the feministic movement, birth control, the divorce evil, the big and little conflicts that arise from woman's efforts to shake off the curse of pain in child-birth and the yoke of man's dominion over her.

The root of all other social problems is found in these few words: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life." The source and spring of every littlest thing that goes into the sustenance of our physical life has this curse upon it. That is a condition of the soil that is permanent and inescapable. In spite of the beauty, productivity, and the vigorous life of growing things which God still preserves, there yet lies upon all these things a curse for man's sake. Man is doomed all the days of his life to a struggle with a soil that for his sake has been cursed. That soil will indeed yield him sustenance, clothing, and shelter, but only at the expense of the sweat of his brow; in sorrow shall he eat of it; he will always have thorns and thistles to combat, and finally his body itself will return to the dust from which it came and which gives it sustenance. This is a fundamental, unchanging fact of life, which we must accept if we hope to understand life at all.

This fact explains the presence of social problems in the life of every people of every age and climate since the day when Adam was driven from Paradise and cherubim were set to guard the entrance with a flaming sword against his return. The curse on the soil explains the ever-recurring and ever-changing and developing problems of man's maladjustment to his sources of life. It explains soil erosion, drought, crop failures, and crop surpluses, the discontent of the worker, economic ills, and the miseries of our

physical life. In sorrow woman bears children; in sorrow man wrests his bread from the soil; and unwillingly and painfully he plods the path that leads him back to the dust whence he came. And the blame for all this, according to God's word, lies clearly and solely upon man himself; for whatever man may say or think, God's word is clear: "For thy sake" the soil is cursed.

This curse and the resulting ills of life must not be identified with the death-sentence threatened in God's original prohibition: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" is not identical with "thou shalt surely die." The continuation of physical life through a period of sorrow until the final return to dust was not a reprieve, let alone a remission of the original death-sentence. That original threat of death, following disobedience, was punctually and accurately fulfilled on the day that Adam sinned. Although physical life continued, for almost a millennium in the case of some of the antediluvians, spiritual death ensued instantly, and completely. That spiritual death was not a mere trance of the spiritual powers nor a mere weakening of them; it was not just an illness and temporary disability. It was death, real and complete death. You were "dead in trespasses and sins" must be taken literally. Our physical ills and all the pains and troubles of life are not that death to which St. Paul refers when he writes to the Colossians: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses."

There is hardly another error in all theology that is so productive of heresy, confusion, and of misconception of everything that Christ and His Gospel teach as the failure to accept unconditionally and unreservedly the fact of the complete spiritual impotence and death of natural man. Of the natural man one does not expect anything but error and misconception in spiritual things. The Church should be clear about that and do its work with that assumption. The great damage is done in the Church by those who are looked upon as teachers of the way to life but who do not face the fact of man's spiritual death and instead compromise with original sin by assuming the presence of some remnants of spiritual life and power in those of whom God says that they are dead in sin. The inevitable result is that such teachers do not preach Christ as the sole and only effective source of spiritual life. And the result, again, of such preaching is self-righteousness, error as regards the need and effectiveness of child baptism, as regards the power and effectiveness of the Word itself, as regards the work of the Holy Spirit and the means the Spirit employs in the enlightenment and sanctification of men. Denial of original sin and misconception of the nature of spiritual death is at bottom, too, the cause of all the misapplied efforts of the churches at finding a solution of the world's social problems. If the cause is denied, how is it possible to apply an effective remedy?

In the very curse upon the soil from which all our social problems originate, there lies also a partial remedy, which God Himself provided as a means of mitigation. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." God did not deny man bread. In those words lies a promise of reward for labor expended. The soil shall yield not only thorns and thistles, but it shall continue

to yield bread. That is a fact that natural man can and does know and always has known. No special revelation is necessary to teach him that it is possible for him by his own efforts to lighten labor, to heal sickness for a time, to provide shelter, comfort, and ease for man while on his journey back to dust. No special enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is necessary to make an inventor or a healer of natural man. He has by nature the necessary power within himself to become that. And what a deal of sweat of man's face has been expended on mitigating man's sorrows, healing his diseases, and providing him with bread. In fact, all the work of the world is devoted to that one end. But the sweat from man's brow, although it may ease his sorrows, does not provide redemption. It does not quicken him who is dead in trespasses and sins. It is a means of physical relief but not at all a means of spiritual regeneration.

But the world has always identified the pains and sorrows of life and physical death with the death denounced in God's original prohibition addressed to Adam. Consequently it has also always believed that the way back to Paradise is through removal of those pains and sorrows. It has always believed that physical happiness, freedom from bodily ills, and mental ease constitute the kingdom of God. It has never acknowledged the reality of spiritual death. It looks upon pain and sorrow as the beginning and end and sum of all that is wrong with the world, whereas these sorrows are but symptoms, outward physical manifestations, of the spiritual death which came upon all men when Adam rejected God and His word. Social problems are indeed symptoms of the real evil, but they are not that evil itself.

Since natural man does not know the real source of all his ills, man has naturally directed all his powers toward providing himself with the only salvation he knows of or considers desirable. He believes firmly in the redemptive power of sweat, and hope rises eternally in his breast that he will some day find the formula that will remove the curse of Gen. 3:16-19 and regain Paradise. When his hopes do not rise quite so high as complete removal of the curse, he still persistently attacks the problem with his best native efforts.

The best minds of the ancient Greeks spent themselves in the search for the *kalon*, and behind that search lay the expectation that the *kalon*, when found, would bring Elysium to the every-day world. The philosophy of the eighteenth century finally led men to spill their blood in two great revolutions on two hemispheres in the hope of establishing a perfect order, ruled over by equality, fraternity, and liberty. The very best minds in the world today are devoting themselves with a religious zeal to the search for a cure of the more devastating diseases that cause pain and sorrow and death. What is the purpose of the work of all the inventors of the world but to perfect labor-saving machinery and other devices and formulas that may make the world a better place to live in?

When a scientist or inventor achieves some measure of success, he is hailed as a social benefactor, and as like as not a monument is raised to his memory. If we look for the central idea behind such movements as Humanism, Feminism, Prohibition, Trade Unionism, Marxism, Fascism, New Deal, Share-the-Wealth,

Christian Science, Evolution, Pacifism, and many more in the realms of science, philosophy, economics, politics, and pseudo-religions, do we not find that all more or less directly either strive for, or promise, a more abundant life and some surcease from pain and sorrow? It seems that nearly all the genius and serious labor of the world is concentrated on the attack on the problem raised by Gen. 3:17: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."

Is all this labor and expenditure of human genius effective in solving man's social problems? It certainly is—up to a certain point. Natural man has all the equipment necessary to wrest from the soil a fairly comfortable life, to mitigate sorrows, ease pain, heal diseases, keep his body alive for a time, avoid wars, establish just governments, eliminate social and political injustice, establish pleasant and just working conditions, in short, provide a more abundant life and give others a square deal in social contacts. He can do these things if he only will.

All these objectives lie well within the scope of man's natural powers. They all lie in the province of the flesh, and the decision to act justly or unjustly in such matters is a matter of his free will and requires no special enlightenment by the Holy Spirit. It is wholly possible, by the exercise of no other power than men's own natural free will, to establish such relations between employer and worker that the social problem of mass unemployment and exploitation of the laboring man would be eliminated from our national life as a pressing problem. In individual cases that is being done, and it can be done on a much larger scale. Natural man, dead though he is in trespasses and sins, still has all the gifts of mind and will necessary to deal with social problems in such a way as to remove from them the gross injustices that make them so galling to great numbers of the people.

We confess that in our Augsburg Confession, when in Art. XVIII, on Free Will, we quote St. Augustine approvingly and say: "We grant that all men have a free will, free inasmuch as it has the judgment of reason; not that it is thereby capable without God either to begin or at least to complete aught in things pertaining to God, but only in works of this life, whether good or evil. 'Good' I call those works which spring from the good in nature, such as, willing to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn divers useful arts, or whatsoever good pertains to this life. For all these things are not without the providence of God; yea, of Him and through Him they are and have their beginning. 'Evil' I call such works as willing to worship an idol, to commit murder, etc." Here Augustine says in simple language that man has the free will under God's providence to avoid making social problems out of the ordinary ills of human life and to correct social ills when they have grown to such proportions as to cause unnecessary suffering.

And yet, in spite of all, the headway that scientists, politicians, and humanitarians at their best may make in their concerted attack on social evils, their work must remain fundamentally ineffective, for they cannot remove the basic cause of those ills. For one thing, they do not admit a cause beyond the outward ills themselves and do not recognize them as symptoms of universal spiritual

death. Again, their aim, if they consider their work as being religious, rather than merely political or economic, is a false one, for they are concerned only with the removal of physical ills of the flesh and commonly assume that, when this end has been accomplished, then the kingdom of God has come, and man is saved. Their efforts can and will mitigate evil conditions; but where one evil condition is corrected another will arise, for the conditions of human life that create social problems are permanent, being inherent in the soil that God Himself cursed for man's sake. Even if all men tried honestly to be just, there would still be social ills and social problems; for all of these things, including natural man's talents and efforts, are under the Law and under the curse. The good works of natural man, howsoever virtuous they appear, howsoever humanitarian in their aims and beneficent in their effect, are yet works of the Law. Just as the Law curbs sin and holds it within bounds of reason without curing it, so the humanitarian efforts of men guided by reason, pity, and natural love have the effect of relieving many a social burden and solving many a social problem, without, however, removing the cause. That cause will remain and will continue to produce social problems all the days of man's life.

II

For a proper understanding of the relation of the Gospel to social problems it is essential to keep clearly in mind the fact that the Gospel of man's complete deliverance was announced before the curse that was expressly laid upon the soil from which man was to derive his sustenance. In Gen. 3:15: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her Seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel," the whole plan of the Gospel is contained. Standing alone, this sentence is dark and mysterious; but we who are now in possession of the whole history of the promised Seed of the woman know that the whole Gospel revelation through the centuries was but an unfolding, up to the fulness of time, of that original proclamation.

The order in which the great sentences of God are recorded in the first three chapters of Genesis is significant. First is the prohibition, which also contains the death-sentence upon the sinner: "In the day in which thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." On the day that Adam sinned, death surely ensued for him and all his children. Next comes the free proclamation of the Gospel of deliverance from death in Gen. 3:15. And finally there comes the curse upon the ground, placed there for Adam's sake.

That curse does not contradict the preceding Gospel, does not limit it in any way, and certainly does not nullify it. The two exist side by side. "Cursed be the ground for thy sake" is addressed to the same man for whose sake the promise of redemption by the Seed of the Woman had been given. All the days of his life, man will be subject to the pains and sorrows of physical life. That is a settled condition in this world. And that is the case even though the Gospel of deliverance applies fully and completely to him.

The Gospel of the cross of Christ nowhere promises for this life perfect health, bodily comfort, economic ease. On the contrary, Christ unceasingly reminds us that he who would be His

disciple must take up his cross and follow Him. The cross is never a comfortable load for our flesh. Scripture, throughout the Old and New Testaments, constantly reminds the child of God that, holy and perfect though he be in God's sight, yet in this life he cannot expect a return to the physical condition of the original earthly Eden. The child of God walks through the valley of the shadow of death; that is his physical condition. And yet he fears no evil; that is his spiritual condition as created by the Gospel. The entire Twenty-third Psalm presupposes this double condition of life. So also the eighth chapter of Romans, where tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword are presumed to be familiar experiences of the Christian, who yet may know absolutely by the Gospel that none of these things in the smallest way can separate him from the love of God. No, the Gospel does not give a promise of freedom from physical ills and social problems here and now, and the application of the Gospel to any individual is in no wise dependent on the previous or subsequent removal of such ills. The Gospel does, however, promise the unlimited love and care of an all-wise and omnipotent God in the midst of all the ills that this life may produce.

The Gospel does not nullify the curse on the soil, but it does nullify for the believer in Christ the death-sentence that followed man's sin. The Gospel proclaims the raising of the spiritually dead to an eternal life. "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses." The Gospel does assure us that in spite of our weakness, which shows itself in our miserable sinfulness, we are nevertheless saints, dressed before the eyes of God in the perfect righteousness of Christ Himself, blameless and without fault in the judgment of the Judge of all things. According to the Gospel, whatever our outward condition of life may be, whether slave, invalid, criminal, millionaire, or inmate of an asylum, if we but believe in Christ, we are perfect and unblamable before God, dead unto sin, but alive forevermore unto God, new creatures. There is no middle ground between spiritual death and spiritual life. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." That sentence provides for no middle ground, or intermediate state. When God says, "Arise from the dead," the spiritually dead lives, and lives completely in spite of all physical and economic imperfections. Social ills no more inhibit his spiritual life under the Gospel than Gen. 3:16-19 inhibits the power of the Gospel proclaimed in the Protevangel of Gen. 3:15.

The source of this spiritual life and perfect blessedness is to be found in no other name and power than that of Christ, the promised Seed of Woman. They are not to be found in humane working conditions, in the establishment of peace among nations, nor in any ideal social order that men's ingenuity will be able to devise. Such works are all works of the Law, and they have no part in bringing spiritual life into being nor do they in any way prepare the dead bones for the reception of the breath of life. The breath of life comes from Christ alone, and it is He alone who can preserve it. Man is not saved by works of the Law. Any deviation from this fundamental truth is a denial of Christ. The suggestion that a betterment of social ills is an establishment of the

kingdom of God is such a deviation and is therefore not of God but of the devil. There can be no compromise on this point. Our salvation lies in no work of man, even though it appear as bright and virtuous as the work of angels.

We hear much from preachers, social workers, and moralists about the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. The same term, kingdom of God, or kingdom of heaven, is likewise very familiar to us on the lips of Jesus and His disciples. Christ tells us that the kingdom of God is come unto us. Our chief prayer asks that God's kingdom come. Even so does the humanist speak of bringing the kingdom of God into men's lives. So it behooves the Christian to know what the term means, lest he be led astray by false prophets who use terms identical in sound with those used by the Gospel but meaning something quite different.

The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, as this term is commonly used in Scripture, is the kingdom that was established by the fulfilment of the promise given in Gen. 3:15. It is that kingdom in which Jesus, the crucified Savior, is God and Lord and whose subjects are those sinners who believe in Him, are justified and saved by His grace, and who live before Him as children of God here in time and hereafter in eternity. It is a kingdom, as Christ expressly says, that is not of this world. It is established solely by the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins and free justification through faith in Christ. It is maintained wholly by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of this same Gospel of forgiveness in Christ. It is not a kingdom of meat and drink but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is a kingdom that is within us and may exist as perfectly among slaves as among freedmen, in the poorhouse as in the palace. It is in no wise dependent on outward conditions of life, is as perfect in the Christian who dies on the battle-field as in the Christian who dies in the pulpit. It may flourish in a community where social conditions make life outwardly miserable and may have departed wholly from a community that lives outwardly in the greatest ease and comfort. It is a kingdom of joy in the Holy Ghost, not of joy in the gifts of the world. In it reigns the peace that Christ gives, not the peace that the world can give. When men speak of establishing that kingdom by clearing slums, freeing slaves, or even by feeding the poor, they are emptying the Cross of Christ and are substituting the solution of social problems for the forgiveness of sins and the raising of the dead to life by the grace of Christ.

The term "kingdom of God" may secondly refer to God's omnipotent rule over all created things as Creator, Preserver, and Judge. It is the kingdom in which God rules absolutely over all nature, over men, demons, and angels. It is that kingdom of which the psalmist speaks when he says: "He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap. The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught; He maketh the devices of the people of none effect; . . . He fashioneth their hearts alike; He considereth all their works." The Lord may build up a kingdom to power and wealth and then let it crumble to forgotten dust. In this kingdom rules the inscrutable God, whose way is upon the great waters and without whose will not a sparrow falls from the roof. A whole

people may publicly renounce Christ and His salvation, but they do not thereby dethrone God and rid themselves of His rule. We do not pray, and need not pray, that this kingdom come. It is there even though no syllable of the Gospel should ever be heard in the land. This kingdom is independent of the Gospel. It is the kingdom of God's almighty power and justice under the rule of His rod of iron, as distinguished from the kingdom of His grace in the hearts of men.

The third sense, already referred to, in which the term "kingdom of God" is commonly used, finds no sanction anywhere in Scripture. It is sometimes referred to as Utopia and is a dream kingdom existing in the imaginations of men. It is a popular dream, however, and men love to contemplate the establishment of such a kingdom here on earth in which human reason and human virtue reign supreme and from which all social evils have been removed by law or by science. It is a dream of the triumph of man over environment and over the evil in human nature. The Bible refers to that kingdom indeed, but still calls it the kingdom of this world. If such a kingdom were established, it would no doubt be a more pleasant and peaceful place to live in than, say Sodom or Gomorrah, but it would still be far from being a beginning of the kingdom of God. It might be humane and decent, a kingdom of humans rather than of beasts, but it would not be a kingdom of God. That dream kingdom of a world made perfect by better laws and by the rule of common sense and decency is only a modern version of the tower of Babel: it strives toward heaven but still remains a thing of this world, under the law and under the curse, doomed to failure.

The Scriptural interpretation of the kingdom of God and its Gospel has never been a popular one. Man has by nature neither an understanding of, nor a desire for, the things of the Spirit; and both Gospel and the kingdom of God are distinctly such things of the Spirit. Natural man has, however, an understanding of the kingdom of this world. One of the strongest natural desires of mankind is to make this world a good place to live in. It is a favorite occupation of philosophers and politicians to draw plans for a more perfect world. The great majority among men do not want war, violence, rampant vice, or gross injustice. Most people are by nature rather soft-hearted, sentimental, and easily moved to sympathy by a tale of human suffering. Men do not ordinarily kill, steal, exploit the weak, for the pleasure they get out of such deeds but rather because of a perverted desire to establish a more comfortable berth for themselves. The urge to recover Eden by fair means or foul is strong in the human heart. In short, natural man wants with all his energy to make a kingdom of heaven of this world, and he will follow in the mass any leader who seems to give the best promise of building a kingdom where there will be security and comfort in this life.

Such promises are the stock in trade of most great political leaders, who, if they do not call their promised land a kingdom of God, do nevertheless hold out the promise of a better life and a square deal for the less fortunate citizens. Such a promise was held out by the builders of the tower of Babel, who made the first recorded attempt to establish by man-power a kingdom of God on earth. But the kingdom of righteousness and of joy in

the Holy Ghost, the distinctive emblem of which is the cross and a crown of thorns, has never had a popular appeal. The reason for this is perfectly clear if one but remembers that the kingdom of God is in every respect a pure kingdom of God, whereas man is by nature hostile to the things of God.

The attitude of the malefactor on the left of the crucified Savior is typical of the natural conception of what a savior of man ought to be and of the kind of kingdom he ought to establish on earth. "If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us," he cried, meaning that then only would he grant Him the title of Christ if He would save him from bodily pain. He desired no other salvation, wanted no heaven but earth, no savior but one who would give him release from bodily misery. That man was a symbol of a collective desire. The other malefactor represents the penitent sinner, whose spiritual eyes have been opened and whose conception of heaven and of salvation is expressed in the humble prayer "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." The one looks for joy in this world, the other for joy in Christ. The general opinion, too, of the rulers of the Jews and of the mass of the people, and even of the disciples at the time of the crucifixion, was that, if Jesus were really the Christ, He would really have saved Himself and come down from the cross of pain. They could not conceive that such degradation and bodily pain could be compatible with the kingdom of heaven.

In the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, Jesus Himself takes great pains to demonstrate that the kingdom of heaven that He proclaimed was something quite different from the bread-and-fish paradise dreamed of by men. Jesus had just healed many sick, and as a result a great crowd followed Him up into a mountain, where He taught them many things till late in the day. Then out of pity for their hunger He fed the multitude of 5,000 with five loaves and two small fishes. That miracle caught the fancy of the people and roused them to enthusiasm. They were quick to see the possibilities that lay in following a leader who could feed an army of five thousand with five loaves and still have twelve baskets of food left over. That led them to declare: "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world." And they sought by force to make Him a king. And then, significantly, Jesus "departed again into a mountain, Himself alone." He turned His back firmly on that kind of acceptance of His person and teaching. He was indeed that Prophet and the promised King of Israel, but not in the sense in which the multitude understood those terms. They were thinking in terms of food and an earthly kingdom; they were looking for a king who would solve their social problems for them. On those terms they would have accepted Him with joy; but Jesus departed from them into a mountain, Himself alone.

The very next day the people found Him again after a search on the other side of the sea and flocked about Him. They were determined to make a popular leader of Him. But He was determined to tell them the unpalatable truth. "Labor not for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life," He said, correcting their conception of what constituted the kingdom of heaven. When they inquired what work they must do to acquire the meat that endureth to ever-

lasting life, He answered: "This is the work of God that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." Then they demanded proof that God had sent Him and characteristically cited Moses' provision of manna to feed the hungry. Give us also bread from heaven, as Moses did. And then Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." Then the Jews murmured at Him. So long as they thought He was preaching a kingdom in which the sick were healed by a word and a touch and in which the hungry were fed by a miracle, they were ready to make Him their king by main force. But the moment they understood that He was preaching a spiritual kingdom of faith, in which He himself was the Bread of Life, they were ready to stone Him.

If Jesus had consented to become their social leader who would turn stones into bread and who might even lead them to victory against Rome, not only all the Jews in Palestine would have hailed Him with hosannas, but all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them would have been His. That was no empty promise which the devil made in the wilderness. That promise would have been fulfilled. What people would reject a leader who could turn stones into bread, pay taxes with coins taken from the mouth of the first fish they might catch, heal all their sick, raise their dead, and solve all their social problems with a wave of the hand! That would have been a Messiah in whom the soul of the world would have delighted. That was the kind of Messiah the devil wanted, too: threescore years and ten of an earthly Paradise — and then eternal damnation for all. For the root evil of sin would have flourished unhindered even under such leadership and would have borne its inevitable fruit of death.

Nor was it only the unthinking, uninstructed masses who wanted that kind of Messiah. Even Peter, after his beautiful confession that Jesus was the Son of the living God, was still obsessed with the idea of a kingdom of this world and of a savior from social ills. What else lay behind the horror that he expressed over Christ's revelation that He must suffer many things at the hands of the high priests and be killed? Peter would at all costs have saved Him from such a fate. "Be it far from thee, Lord! This shall not be unto Thee." Peter would have prevented the sacrifice on the cross. Jesus' own horror of the worldly conception of His Gospel and His kingdom implied in Peter's words is indelibly impressed on Peter's mind and on ours, too, by the strongest rebuke that Christ ever directed to a disciple: "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offense unto Me."

Those efforts that would turn the Gospel of Christ into a social program devoted to the correction of social evils and that would persuade men that the kingdom of heaven consists in a solution of social problems are, according to Christ Himself, conceived by the devil and are an offense unto Him. Such efforts are an offense unto Christ especially when they are sponsored by a Peter, who knew the Gospel and should have had a better understanding of its application. Churches must make up their minds with whom they will stand, whether with Satan, who correctly held out a prospect of brilliant worldly success and world-wide acceptance if only Jesus would confine His Messiahship to turning stones into bread; whether with the Jews, who demanded as the

price of their acceptance of Jesus as the promised Prophet that He give them manna to eat as did Moses; whether with blundering Peter, who would spare Jesus the pain of dying for Peter's sins and save Him for an earthly kingship; or with Jesus, who says that man shall not live by bread alone, that His kingdom is not of this world, and that this is the work of God that men believe on Him whom God hath sent.

III

In spite of everything that has been said, the Gospel does affect the social problems. It remains true that the Gospel was not given to solve social problems for men; it remains true also that the Gospel is not hampered in its effectiveness by the acuteness or mildness of the social problems in a community; and yet the Gospel does touch the social problems and does solve them in its own way.

The Gospel is effective when an individual repents and believes in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of his sins. But a family is not saved by the faith of a father. The faith of a majority in a congregation does not make children of God of all members. The Gospel works always with the individual, and there is no such thing as Christianizing a community except by establishing the saving faith in Christ in each and every heart. The Gospel works with individuals, not with conditions. Through the individual, however, it does affect conditions.

Where there is a true Christian, there we have also a heart attentive to such admonitions as that uttered by St. Paul in the name of Christ in Eph. 5 and 6: "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us. . . . But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. . . . Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light. . . . Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Holy Spirit. . . . Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord. . . . Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself. . . . Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. . . . Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. . . . Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh. . . . Ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master is also in heaven." In so far as the faithful subject of the kingdom of heaven gives heed to such admonitions, he does solve many a social problem, not necessarily for himself, but rather for those who live with him and have dealings of any kind with him. The Gospel does solve social problems by the good fruit of love toward all men, which it bears in the life of him who accepts it. The Gospel affects social problems according as it changes the man who accepts it.

That pastor serves the flock well which God has entrusted to his care, and also serves his country well, who faithfully preaches this Gospel whenever and wherever his sacred call may direct and who strives to build up every member of his congregation "till they all come, in the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Surely that is enough to occupy a man's

time if he is conscientious in this work. His calling as pastor of a congregation, whether it be small or large, will provide him with ample opportunity to testify for Christ without busying himself in other men's affairs and being ambitious to take over the functions of the police department and the rest of the government. As for what goes on outside the bounds of his specific call, he must observe Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without, God judgeth."

Furthermore, the Gospel solves social problems for the Christian himself, not by removing difficulties from his life but by giving him the spirit to endure them. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant, . . . humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Jesus was no reformer of governments, led no crusade for better housing or better working conditions, organized no campaigns, did not drive the harlots off the streets; but He did drive the money-changers out of the Temple who were making a market-place of the Lord's house; He did help those who came to Him in need and with faith; He rebuked the false prophets, who spread their false doctrines in the name of God; He forgave sins, preached His Gospel, and patiently endured the most intolerable social and official injustice.

A man may well find, as he repents and accepts the righteousness of God at the hands of Christ, that his personal problems of life are not at all simplified but may be greatly multiplied. Consider the case of Abraham. One of the first things he encountered when he entered the Promised Land was wide-spread drought and famine. Jacob's real troubles in life, social and otherwise, began after he wrestled with the Man at Peniel and was told that he had power with God and with men and had prevailed. The hardships of Israel in Egypt were hardly to be compared with the difficulties of the forty years in the wilderness. The Gospel does not necessarily remove hardship, but it does give the Christian the spirit of Christ to endure whatever cross the educating hand of the all-wise God may see fit to lay upon him for his own spiritual good.

But this slow and invisible process working through the individual by changing him fundamentally is and always has been unpopular. The temptation to establish the kingdom of God by organized reform movements has often been too alluring even for religious organizations to resist. What makes this temptation irresistible to man's natural instincts is the fact that such mass movements do get results. Those results are visible and can be pointed to with pride. Even the unreligious will acknowledge them as being practical and worth while. They elicit praise from all sides and are hailed as evidence of life in the church. If the churches get together and settle the strike at the automobile factory, they will unfailingly get a great deal of favorable publicity in the newspapers. And that gaudy bait of publicity has been known to attract even otherwise sound Lutherans.

It is, moreover, comparatively easy to rouse enthusiasm in a congregation for that kind of "church-work" which involves

doing something with the hands and which gets quick visible results. Christ says, "Labor not for the meat that perisheth." The people then ask, "What work shall we do?" If Christ should then answer, "Make up a thousand Christmas baskets for the poor in the city," or, "Sew a bale of bandages to send to Spain," they would finish the work in a week, have their pictures taken, and let the rest of the world know what a good thing they had done for the kingdom of God. But when Christ answers, "This is the work of God that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent," the mass today, too, loses interest.

The Old Adam in all of us wants visible, tangible results, and wants them quickly, and sometimes gets them, too, as Sarah did when she grew impatient with God's slowness and brought Hagar in to Abraham. Sarah had waited ten years for God to keep His promise to Abraham; but when she put her practical hand to the work, she got immediate results, — disastrous ones, as the event proved. But those methods get results, and that is why so many churches succumb enthusiastically to any gospel that promises a solution of social problems. They can see social problems and can point to improvements in conditions; but they cannot see original sin and spiritual death, nor can a picture be taken of the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Many a high priest of today is as impatient of the slow, quiet working of the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ as were the high priests in Caiaphas's time.

We remember how after the World War there was a general indictment of the churches for failing to prevent the war. Because the Church did not function as an international riot squad, it was rebuked, even by its own members, as a weak and ineffective body. There may be much that is wrong with the churches; but that criticism was unjust, for it was based on a complete misconception of the Church's mission on earth. That same misconception is to be observed when, after a general meeting of a large church-body, we usually read in the papers that the meeting has given birth to a resounding resolution to be laid at the doorstep of some legislative body.

The Oxford World Conference of Churches offers another example of that kind of work for the kingdom of God. In a book that discussed the World Conference of Churches from the point of view of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Eugen Gerstenmaier writes: "The Church must, on the basis of its Christian beliefs, devote every effort to awaken among the traditionally Christian powers a new feeling of solidarity and must so strengthen this feeling that among these powers the consciousness of unity becomes the basis of, and the condition for, a united league." The author then demonstrates how the churches can cooperate in economic matters in such a league of Christian nations. There we have the Church's being used to solve the world's business problems. If that program is followed by the World Conference of Churches and by the Evangelical Church in Germany, these bodies will be resigning their divine calling and entering upon a career of world politics and economics.

In Germany even Luther has been repeatedly drafted into the support of the economico-political interpretation that is being put upon the Gospel and the kingdom of God. In a book on Luther's

hymn *Ein' feste Burg*, published in 1936, Georg Wolfram asserts that, when Luther wrote "the Kingdom ours remaineth," he referred to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and that by "the old evil Foe" Luther meant the Turk. In that strain the book interprets the whole hymn. There is a strong tendency in Germany to secularize that hymn and to make of it merely a patriotic song in which "the Kingdom" of the last line of the hymn refers to the German nation as such. There is perhaps no stronger movement on foot today among the churches themselves than the secularization of the Gospel and the effort to identify the kingdom of God with an improved kingdom of this world in which a formula for the solution of social problems is gospel.

Occasionally, and from the most unexpected sources, there come protests against this abuse of Christ's Gospel and the function of the Church. A recent issue of *Time* uttered a mild criticism of that abuse when it introduced a news story with the sentence: "As thoughtful U.S. churchmen know, many a U.S. cult has prospered by promising, and to some extent producing, visible results here and now." Even the *Chicago Tribune* rose in editorial protest last February against a statement made by Alfred Landon to the United Methodist Council. Mr. Landon was reported to have said: "Christianity has a great stake in the preservation of democracy." The *Tribune* correctly retorted: "We think that, if our radical preachers would abandon their political activities in favor of their religious function, the preservation of both Christianity and democracy would be better served. The organization of economic justice, which the Council announced as one of its goals, we are old-fashioned enough to believe, is more likely to be furthered by clergymen who devote themselves to their pastoral duties and the inspiration of their flocks to right conduct, rather than by preachers who become partisans of political or economic programs."

If a Christian feels that social conditions have become intolerable and that he must do something practical about forcing a change, there are ways open to him that are legitimate before God and man. Let him use his right of the vote to put good men into office and to force bad men out. Or let him become a candidate for the office from which he thinks he can best lead the attack against the evils that trouble his community; let him get himself properly elected and then conscientiously use all the laws on the statute books and all the police powers available to him to correct the abuses as best he may. If he is a clergyman and wants to plunge into the business of righting public wrongs, let him resign his office as preacher of the Gospel, take office under the law, and throw all his weight into the effort of administering the laws of the land and creating the best social order that those laws make possible. But let him not imagine that he is furthering the cause of the Gospel or promoting the kingdom of God. He is now operating with the law, is using the sword of government, which God Himself ordained for the punishment of evil-doers and the reward of them that do well. He is no longer in the service of the Word of grace and forgiveness but in the service of the word of law and civil justice.

But if he is a preacher of the Gospel, let him preach the Gospel of free forgiveness to all, whether slave or free, Jew or

Gentile, employer or employed. Within the scope of the Gospel that he preaches there are three ways in which it affects social problems, two of which have already been mentioned at length. The first is, by the preaching of the Gospel to sinners and, by the power of the grace of God, making new creatures of them, who shall live before God in righteousness and who by their lives as children of God refrain from creating conditions of life that others might suffer from.

Secondly, the Gospel affects social problems by filling the Christian with the Holy Spirit, who engenders in them the spirit that was in Christ also, a spirit of humility, which turns the other cheek, does not avenge itself, but commits judgment to God, patiently bearing whatever cross of social problems God sees fit to impose.

Thirdly, the Gospel affects social problems by the fact that it alone of all the forces and powers at work in the world has the power to make of sinners sons of God, whom God Himself acknowledges as His sons and heirs. For the sake of these children God does wonders in the world. We remember that the unspeakably wicked holes of Sodom and Gomorrah would have been preserved from catastrophe if but ten such children of God had been found in them. How do we know but that God is even now preserving this country of ours from unendurable social problems merely for the sake of those who have not bowed the knee to Baal? We do know that the destiny of this economic, political, social world is not peace, prosperity, and outward happiness, but rather destruction by the wrath of God. And we know that God withholds that consuming wrath only because of those sinners who have been washed by the blood of the Lamb or who are yet to come to the knowledge of Christ through the preaching of the Gospel. When the Gospel has attained its end and brought the last of the elect into God's fold, then will come the end of all things. Then, and then only, will come for the believers the consummation, when there shall be no tears, no pain, no death, and no more social problems.

Let us who have the Gospel trust its power and not be tempted to use carnal methods in building our spiritual temple of God. We shall never be free from the temptation to follow the crowd and to prefer present results to promised perfection with God. May God strengthen us by the Gospel that we do not with Esau despise a promised birthright and sell the kingdom of heaven for a mess of pottage in this world, which passeth away!