

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

SOCIALIZING THE CHRISTIAN ORDER.

BY REVEREND JOHN HENRY BARBER, M. A., TH. D.,
CLINTON, MISS.

In this article the writer sets for himself definite limitations. In preparing it, many inferences and interesting lines of thought suggested themselves to him, and may do so to the reader. But the writer disclaims responsibility for any inferences which he himself does not make and discuss. Two things, however, should be mentioned: first, this article is not written out of a spirit of antagonism to social studies and social activities, but rather the contrary is true; second, in nowise is a plea being made for so-called church union.

A frequently used expression in religious discussions to-day is "social service." Everywhere there is an insistent demand for applied Christianity. This is not strange or exceptional. In every department of thought, theory is asked to prove in practice its right to exist. There is applied mathematics, with the resulting wonderful engineering feats; applied educational theories, with the various educational reforms; applied chemistry, with the resulting fresh interest in foods and their right preparation; applied theories of heredity, resulting in the subject of eugenics, and so on. It is natural that men should demand applied Christianity, with results that can be subjected to scientific, rational and practical tests. Instead of Christian leaders becoming petulant because of this situation, they should hail it as their opportunity to approach the solution of the problems of today. But they must be prepared to hear some men claim, though erroneously, that Christianity is a failure.*

Not only are men who are not Christians demanding that Christianity apply its teachings to the problems of today, but increasingly men in the ranks of Christianity

*See Century for February.

are demanding the same thing and seeking earnestly to accomplish it. Hence the increasing use of the term "social service." But not all Christian leaders take such a view. Two views diametrically opposed to each other appeared recently in the same magazine.† The first writer seems to insist that supernatural religion (of which he is an exponent), and social service are antagonistic, and condemns the latter: "As long as one believes that man is by nature good, that things are constantly growing better, and that if we only keep on following the natural course of development all will be well, then one will look upon the activities of social service as the acme of religious devotions." The second eliminates supernaturalism. "Supernaturalism, the expectation of something or other which is to come down from the stars, should be consigned by all socially minded men and women to the museum of ecclesiastical and theological antiquities." May it not be suggested that both men are in error? A supernatural religion is the only kind of religion that can do effective social service among men with sin in them, and it is the duty and privilege of supernatural religion to do just that thing.

There are men, whose love for Jesus and devotion to His cause cannot be questioned, who are asking seriously if Christianity is not in some measure failing, and if so, what is the reason? Those who raise this question trace the trouble, not to the teachings of Jesus, but to the failure of His followers to apply His teachings to social conditions; to a one-sided ecclesiasticism; to an unwholesome other-worldliness. And believing that, they are insisting on a programme of Christian activity that has as its definite object the "Christianizing of the social order." So vigorous is this movement becoming that some lovers of Jesus and men equally devoted to His cause are fearful that social service on the part of Christians will result in mere humanitarianism; that the need for the regenera-

†The Atlantic Monthly, February, pp. 161-169.

tion of the individual life will be, if not actually denied, definitely discounted.

This line of cleavage between Christian thinkers, leaders and workers is fast becoming more distinct, and is calculated, in the writer's judgment, to produce two warring factions, the extremes of which will be as usual, radicals and reactionaries, with the other Christians in between in no constructive frame of mind.

To come to the point at once, the question of prime consideration is not that of "Christianizing the social order," but one of socializing the Christian order. And this is not a mere juggling with words, but a change of word-order to point out a fundamental difference. This simply means: evangelism comes first, issuing in regenerated individuals, and then those individuals must be related to one another in their activities in a truly social way. To Christianize the social order, it is necessary to make those now Christians truly social in all their inter-related living. And right along with this there must be incorporated newly regenerated individuals. In other words, the socializing process cannot get ahead of evangelism and remain social in the Christian sense; and yet the socializing process should keep pace with evangelism, which is not sufficiently emphasized.

The most comprehensive statement of Christianity's greatest defect is this: There is a continuous process of "building an anti-Christian social order out of Christian material."* One cannot do better than to ponder this statement, and as he does so the stupendousness of its truth will be driven in on him. Men who claim to be evangelized act from anti-Christian motives. Christ has a definite word here.† The ruling motive in the non-Christian world was then and is now, to get, to exercise authority, power; the ruling motive in Jesus was to give, to serve, and He expects the same of His disciples. The

*Prof. C. S. Gardner: Sermon-Lecture.

†Matthew 20:20-28.

most paralyzing thing in Christianity is the fact that most Christians, from the richest to the poorest, from the most educated to the most illiterate, from the most refined to the most vulgar deal with one another (to say nothing of their dealings with non-Christians) on the pagan basis, while professing to be followers of Jesus. As long as evangelized material goes into a worldly (self-centered) social order, the kingdom of God, that is, the socialized Christian order cannot come.

Recently before the Commission of Congress on Industrial Relations, the most prominent banker of this country on being asked as to his knowledge of the relation between the employer and the employee replied, as reported, that the question or condition involved was too large for him. He answered sincerely, confessing ignorance, or he took advantage of that occasion to insinuate that it is a matter of indifference to the employer. Now here is a Christian who out of either ignorance or indifference is apparently not concerned with the social issues of his tremendous power.

To bring about a Christian social order out of Christian material instead of an anti-Christian social order out of Christian material is the most difficult task confronting Christians. There is no short cut to it. The pulpit, the press, educational institutions, all forces that mould character, have a large part to play. Thus to state the problem does not, it is true, solve it, but it makes easier a more rational and progressive attempt to do so.

Against putting primary emphasis on socializing the Christian order instead of on Christianizing the social order, it may be objected, first, that this would lead to a Christian exclusiveness and pharisaism paralleling that of the Jews in Jesus' time. Certainly, favors interpreted as favoritism lead to decay. And that is what happened in the case of the Jews. But just here let it be emphasized that this definite attempt to socialize the Christian order cannot be divorced from evangelism. Just as the attempt to Christianize the social order without evangelism as

the forerunner sooner or later results in a mere humanitarianism, so the attempt exclusively to socialize just those who at any given time are Christians, would lead inevitably to formalism. That is the reason why those periods, when creed-making and theological hair-splittings monopolized the field, were characterized by dry-rot.

In the second place it may be objected that the thing insisted on here has been realized by the Roman Catholic church, or practically so as far as the hierarchy could dominate its members, and hence is not wanted. It should be noted in reply that the Roman Catholic church does not measure up to a truly socialized Christian order. Neither does the radical position look to that end, for it makes social progress a matter of definite evolutionary development in which no supernatural factor is at work. It does not give primacy to Jesus as a factor in society and cannot, therefore, claim to be a part of the kingdom of God. The Roman Catholic church came into being by taking on the form of the Roman Empire, incorporating the latter's unregenerated mass of individuals; also because of its teaching that salvation results from the operation of certain sacraments, it has not, through the centuries, given first place to the teaching that there must be regenerated individuals out of whom to build a truly socialized Christian order. In the radical position it is the unregenerated society that one finds, and in the hierarchical order an overwhelmingly unregenerated society. For God to be eliminated from their work by the radicals makes that work hopeless; and on the other hand, for God to limit Himself to any institution to be directed by imperfect men would be to put into the hands of the men composing that institution a tyranny beyond the mind of man to conceive.

For an institution to claim such power—and the Roman Catholic church does—proves thereby it is hopelessly anti-social.

But precisely what is meant by socializing the Christian order? It is to make all the actions of Christians with one another express the principles of Jesus. It is to look upon these principles as having their starting point within the individual and their field of activity at every point where the individual Christian touches other Christians. There ought to be a clear-cut conception (and a continuous realization of that conception) of a Christian social order into which the newly regenerated individual comes. It is not possible for this order ever to reach such a stage of development that a child by virtue of his natural birth becomes a member of it, for there must be regeneration for each person; yet this socialized Christian order should be so completely the embodiment of Christ's principles that instantly one is regenerated he inherits the fellowship of an organized Christian social activity. While to take Christians living among men constituting an anti-Christian order, and develop them into a Christian social order is a complex problem (one that Christians since apostolic days have not resolutely and persistently faced), and one that can be done only by the Holy Spirit working through men, yet it can be more and more realized. To take any other position would be to confess the impotency of Jesus, and to cut the nerve of all Christian endeavor; it would mean the elimination of Christian education. If education means anything, it means that through it there is secured a social control over social development. If there can be no social development fundamentally Christian, then there is nothing to exercise Christian social control over, and hence no need for Christian education.

In educational institutions that are Christian—in universities, colleges, and young people's organizations—there should be given place to the study of Christian sociology. Mathews speaks of Christian sociology in this way: "Just as the philosophies bearing these names are respectively the gifts of Hegel and Aristotle and Bacon, so Christian sociology should mean the sociology of

Christ; that is, the social philosophy and teachings of the historical person Jesus the Christ.”* Again he writes: “So everywhere we find developing in the New Testament a sort of Christian sociology. That is, a theory of social life which pre-supposes the regenerating influence of God’s Spirit.”†

This does not mean that Sociology in the widest sense should not be studied. A very simple and yet fundamental statement is that an individual continuously modifies his environment and is continuously modified by it. This means that the individual and social aspects of the human being are inseparable. It cannot be known where the one stops, and the other begins. In fact, neither one is, exists, apart from the other.

Moreover, a man has this social side to his life just as truly when not a Christian as when a Christian. Christianity simply means the putting of a new factor or ingredient into the human being, who goes right on being a person with the two aspects of life—the individual and the social. “The goal of his (Jesus) efforts was the establishment of an ideal society quite as much as the production of an ideal individual.”* Of course, for how can there be an ideal society without ideal individuals and vice versa. An ideal individual isolated from other ideal individuals is unthinkable, a contradiction in terms. To put the two things, “an ideal society” and “an ideal individual,” in opposition to each other is to fall into a serious logical and exegetical blunder. The kingdom of God as Jesus sees it is made up of human beings who are fundamentally individual and social beings but with Jesus in them. Hence the product of their lives is to be very different from the product of other human beings who do not have Him in them. That is, the kingdom of God is a distinct group life, and is as truly on this earth as it will ever be elsewhere; for it is composed of human

*Mathews: *The Social Teachings of Jesus*, p. 3.

†Mathews: *The Social Gospel*, p. 147.

beings related to one another and to a common Father through a common Saviour. And that is all the kingdom of God can ever be in time or eternity. This does not mean that it is perfectly realized at any point. The kingdom of God is a system of personal relationships, human and divine, and the possibilities of these relationships are more and more to be discerned and enjoyed; "love never comes to an end."*

So much for a statement of the importance of seeking definitely to socialize the Christian order and of the study of Christian sociology as one means to that end. What has the Bible to say on this subject? In seeking an answer to this question the Great Commission will be studied first.† The programme there given covers in outline the field of Christian activity. In it there are three fundamentals, to be taken in the order there given and kept actually connected. These fundamentals may be stated as, (1) to evangelize, (2) to institutionalize, (3) to socialize. This is not the usual way of outlining the Commission, and the writer asks for it, therefore, a patient reading.

To evangelize is to get the life of God into men. That can be done only man by man. Circumstances may be such that great numbers will be converted in one day or hour, but the time element is not fundamental; it is the experience element that is vital. To evangelize one involves several things—repentance, faith, regeneration; but the essence of it is Jesus Christ coming into the individual. Souls do not overlap. The word personality means a segregation of consciousness. One soul does not actually experience *anything* for another. The law of assimilation is just as regnant in the world of religion as it is in the realm of the physical. What food is to the body through the law of assimilation, the life of Jesus is through faith to the spiritual man. The law that the

*1 Cor. 13:8.

†Matthew 28:18-20.

Christian lives by, the law of faith, is the identical law by which he comes to be a Christian. No word should have among Christians a higher rating than the word evangelism. It is not by underestimating or flouting that word but by using it sympathetically and comprehensively that Christians can render the largest service. Let it be settled once for all, that to evangelize involves Jesus Christ and an individual, and Jesus in that same individual by the latter's faith. And just as in the human being at birth all his possibilities are resident, so are all the possibilities of Christian character resident in the person evangelized. To evangelize is the first step, but it is equally true that it is only the first.

According to the Commission, Christianity involves a second step—baptism. The child is born into an institutional order. This fact constitutes a line of cleavage between man and the lower animals. History may be defined, inclusively, as the record of the inner and outer life of man. But not the inner and outer life of man as divorced but as two aspects of one thing. Nothing is truer than that man is under an impelling law to objectify his experience. It is now generally recognized, from the study of Psychology, that no experience is complete till it is institutionalized. This is merely saying in different words what the New Testament says, "Faith, if it has not works, is dead in itself."* The common characteristic of life, from the amœba to a Shakespeare, is activity. Where there is not activity, or an attempt to act, there is death. To show how activity by the human being is institutional, and activity by lower forms of life is not institutional, is not an easy thing to do; that the difference exists is apparent. To undertake an explanation here would carry writer and reader far afield. To continue the main line of thought, the human being experiences a thing and seeks to express that experience, that is, to institutionalize it.

*James 2:17.

Jesus knew the laws of experience, He created life, He is life. Just from this point of view comes, for to-day, an effective apology for baptism. Baptism is the first step of the Christian in institutionalizing his new experience. In the New Testament wherever conversion and baptism are both related concerning a new Christian, baptism comes immediately. There may be a few men of rare temperament who can live satisfactory lives to themselves without contact with any sort of institution. But if every Christian were to try that, the inefficiency of Christianity would almost instantly appear. That which hinders, paralyzes any movement is not for that movement right; anything that quickens, makes more intelligible, and hastens the accomplishment of a movement is for that movement right. Hence Jesus said to John: "Suffer it now; for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus institutionalized His own gospel. That is why He was baptized.

But that is not all. Literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, and music interpret life and feeling. They are simply institutionalized truth, beauty and emotion. But they interpret life according to well-defined laws. The thing expressed must fit the thing through which it is expressed, if it is really to be most effective. Jesus was baptized to institutionalize His gospel, and He was baptized in the way He was to teach most simply, exactly and comprehensively the truth of that gospel. Hence the second step in the Great Commission is not to be treated lightly. Men are occasionally bothered because of scant references in Christ's teaching to institutionalize life, and infer on the one hand that they should ignore what little He did say, or on the other that they are at liberty to expand that little without limit. Jesus said, however, quite enough as the efficiency and democracy of New Testament Christian life demonstrates.

The third step in Christianity's programme is to socialize those who have been evangelized and baptized. "Teaching them to observe all things whatever I com-

manded you" is the language used. It is easy to skim the surface of that statement. The man with a one-sided evangelism exhausts it with a hop, skip and jump theory of converting the world, which underestimates the tremendousness of sin in human nature, and at the same time does not make sufficient room for the full development of regenerated human nature. Two things about this part of the Commission should be said. First, very generally this scripture is quoted to include only the extension-side, the foreign missionary side of Christianity. The Commission comes simply to mean this: Go, make disciples of men, baptize them, and teach them to go and make disciples of others and baptize them; and so on. No careful reader of this article will charge the writer with opposition to work of evangelization even unto the ends of the earth. But the primary ground for such world-wide evangelization, so far as the Commission is concerned, comes in the first part of that Commission: "Make disciples of all the nations." Of course, since Jesus taught world-wide evangelization, it has its place in: "Teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you," but it is only one part of the programme of that teaching.

The second thing calling for stress is this: Too frequently the emphasis is put on the word "teaching," when there should be cumulative emphasis, the climax falling on the word "observe." The Christian programme is not exhausted in teaching Christian truth primarily to acquire information, but the teaching is to issue in the practice of that truth. If this were adhered to, it would make all Christian teaching, from the university down, further evangelical truth. "Notice," says Broadus, "that it is not simply teaching them the commandments of Christ, but teaching them to observe his commandments."* Bruce says: "The teaching is with

*Commentary on Matthew, p. 596.

a view not to gnosis but to practice, the aim not orthodox opinion but right living.”†

What, then, are the teachings of Jesus? His teaching about sin, repentance, faith, regeneration must receive their primary emphasis when one is being made a disciple and baptized. To this evangelized person Jesus says: Love God and your neighbor. He told the story of the Good Samaritan to point out who one's neighbor is, and what it is to love him. And that story will never be antiquated; it has within it the broad outline of all social service. It explains in practice what Jesus means by love; and that He expects Christians to love one another in that way, the writer has not a doubt; and if they do, they will love the rest of men and yearn for them to become disciples of Jesus and thus their brothers. For Christians to practice “all things whatever I commanded you,” they must love God as their Father and prove that love by loving one another as brothers, and that does not mean a mere emotional experience with reference to other Christians, but a constructive helpfulness, organized love. This is what the writer means by the word “socialize.” The Great Commission means then: Evangelize men; institutionalize their experience in baptism; and socialize them by organizing love in all the ways possible, gaining wisdom by each succeeding experiment, and in all things desirous of following the Holy Spirit.

Not only does the Great Commission call for a Christian social order, but running through the Bible is that idea. Only the briefest reference can be made. “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests.”¹ Israel was to have its system of worship and functions of various kinds, and yet the people as individuals were to constitute a kingdom of priests. This was on the condition, however, “if ye will obey my voice, indeed, and keep my covenant.”² The effectiveness of their work in leading the

†The Expositor's Greek Testament, *in loco*.

1. Exodus, 19:7.

2. Exodus, 19:5.

families of the earth to the true God depended upon the degree of approach to this ideal. Over and over the prophets had to emphasize that Israel's greatest enemies were not from without, but came from within. It was the nation that had to be exiled. Israel failed actually to become a kingdom of priests leading the rest of the world in true worship unto God; but God's purpose did not fail, for out of Israel came Jesus, through whom and His followers God's purpose concerning Israel is fulfilled. To his followers the Apostle Peter wrote: "But ye are an elect race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession,"³ having in mind, no doubt, the promise to Israel found in Exodus.⁴ Clearly the early Christians considered themselves the direct continuation of "spiritual Israel." In that way they justified their taking over bodily the Old Testament.

Mathews speaking of the early church says that it "developed a sense of social solidarity within itself."⁵ In this light the harsh saying of Jesus to the Syrophenician woman takes on new meaning. From this point of view the parable of the leaven is to be interpreted. For the post-millennialist (leaven being taken in a good sense) the parable proves too much, practically involving universalism; for the pre-millennialist also (leaven taken in a bad sense) the parable proves too much, a practical elimination of all that is good from the earth. The parable does not have primary reference to the external spread of the gospel, from regenerated men to unregenerated men, but to the continuous development of regenerated men in their inter-related possibilities. Again, in the final judgment scene, found in Matthew,⁶ emphasis falls on the social solidarity of disciples. This is an interesting but much misunderstood picture. There are several distinct things to note: first, there are only two

3. 1 Peter, 2:9.

4. 19:6.

5. *The Social Gospel*, p. 147.

6. 25:31-46.

groups; second, Jesus identifies Himself with the first; third, and how important! all their attention to Him was expressed by attention to one another. "Insofar as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it to me." This statement of Jesus is taken by some to mean that all that one has to do to be a Christian is to exercise a humanitarian spirit. There could not be a more erroneous exegesis of this scene. On the contrary, Jesus here gives a graphic picture of socialized Christianity. He is not even hinting that social service makes one a Christian, but that Christians are to be social one with another down to even "the least of these my brethren." Here brotherhood expresses itself in definite constructive helpfulness, not in mere pious wishes and platitudes. Those on the left are placed there because of their different nature, which shows itself in complete anti-social living.

Turning from Jesus to His Apostolic followers, one finds emphasis on the social solidarity among Christians. One does not find a simple reiteration of the teachings of Jesus, but, what is more interesting, an attempt to practice those teachings. First, there is the story of Acts.¹ Here "No one said that aught of the things which he¹ was his own, but they had all things common." It is not necessary, in this paper, to discuss whether this was an ill-advised attempt to form a communism of capital, or an attempt to form a communism of distribution;² but certainly it shows that those Christians felt the obligation to provide for the common needs; they felt a social obligation for one another that they did not feel for an outsider. Likewise the selection of the seven "deacons"³ to provide for the widows of the Grecian Jews gives expression to the same social obligation. The extensive collection from Paul's churches, for the poor Christians, enables him to discuss his principle of "the rule of equal-

1. 4:32; 5:11.

2. See Mathews', *The Social Gospel*, p. 146.

3. Acts, 6:1-6.

ity''⁴ among Christians in the matter of helping one another. That a unique relation exists among Christians Paul exphasizes: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith."⁵ From this point of view Paul's discussion of lawsuits is illuminating.⁶ It seems that the Corinthian Christians were having lawsuits with one another, which was to be condemned. Yet if they would have these suits, they should have a Christian for judge. "Dare any of you having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" Paul is not here advocating the instituting of an independent judicial system on the inside of Christianity. So far is he from this, that he says: "It is indeed a defect in you, that you have lawsuits one with another." Yet when difficulties arise among Christians, they should be able among themselves to settle their troubles.

No New Testament writer brings out the social solidarity of Christians more clearly than does John. "The members of the Kingdom alone are called brothers by Jesus. Outside of those that clearly refer to physical relationship, there is not a saying of Jesus preserved for us that does not restrict this most expressive term to the description of this new social relationship, possibility and nature of which it was his mission to reveal."⁷ To become a son of God, in John's teaching, is to believe "that Jesus is the Christ."⁸ And all who are thus sons of God love their common Father and one another. One's love for his Father and for his brother cannot be separated. In fact, John makes it very clear that the only way to prove one's love for God is to love God's children⁹; and as has just been shown, only those are children of God

4. II Cor. 8:13-15.

5. Gal. 6:10.

6. I Cor. 6:1-11.

7. Mathews' *The Social Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 68, 69.

8. I John, 5:12. Also see Gospel 1:12.

9. I John, 4:20.

who believe "that Jesus is the Christ." "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren."¹⁰

Christians should welcome everything that looks to the improvement of the condition of men; as, the purifying of politics, the bringing of justice to rule in all relations, the improving of the living conditions of laboring men, the giving to all a chance to receive an elementary education, if no more, the making of industry liable for accidents to those in its employment, the securing of old-age insurance, and of facilities for recreation. Everything that means the improvement of the economic and material relations of men should be striven for by Christians and welcomed by them when secured through others.

Yet the Christians just as frankly insist that all such improvements will not in themselves make men Christians, and that their existence does not necessarily involve the existence of a socialized Christianity. Such things ought to come to men in general as the teachings of Jesus are embodied in practice; and such improvements not only ought to come to men in general, but will come definitely to Christians in their relations to one another just insofar as the Christian order is truly socialized.

But there is a problem for evangelical Christianity just here. To say that political, economic and material improvements do not make men Christians is true and must be insisted on by evangelical Christians; but at the same time they must insist that Christianity leads to and issues in political, material and economic improvements, and that all Christians are under obligations to work for those things. To illustrate the problem. Here is an evangelical minister, the pastor of a church; in his pulpit he preaches the truth (but only a half truth) that material, political and economic improvements do not make men Christians, and he stops there. There are in his congre-

10. I John, 3:14.

gation politicians and unscrupulous business men who see their chance, and seek to create the impression that evangelical Christianity and social service leading to fundamental economic changes are antagonistic; that the world belongs to the devil anyway, and that they are, therefore, under no obligation to improve the conditions of men, but, while claiming to be Christians, may exploit at will their fellow-men, Christians and non-Christians alike. Partly because such one-sided preaching is engaged in and such inferences are made by unscrupulous men, partly because of that, many laboring men, and lovers of humanity, have come honestly to believe that "business" controls organized Christianity for anti-social ends. It behooves all Christians to rise in their might, and from pulpit, platform, forum, legislative hall, lecture room, street corner, business place, and by editorial declare such one-sided teaching to be false and such practices sailing under cover of that teaching infamous.