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## \*THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS AND MODERN SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

BY REV. WALTER L. LINGLE, D. D.,

*Professor of Church History in  
Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.*

The subject assigned to me is "The Teachings of Jesus as They Bear upon the Solution of Modern Social Problems." For the sake of clearness it may be well for me to define or illustrate what is meant by the expression "modern social problems." We mean such problems as those which arise from the constant conflict between capital and labor; the problems which are created by extreme wealth, extreme poverty, and ignorance; the problems of marriage, divorce, the social evil, and child life; the problems which follow in the train of the terrible liquor traffic; and the problems that flow out of race prejudice and culminate in cruel war. These problems are not new, but they are more acute, more menacing, and more insistent in the complex civilization of the twentieth century than ever before in the history of the world.

Many human solutions have been proposed ranging through the whole gamut from extreme Individualism to extreme So-

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\*This article is the substance of an address delivered in the auditorium in Charlotte, N. C., on January 23, 1916, before the fourth annual convention of the North Carolina Conference for Social Service.

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

BY REV. JOHN F. CANNON, D. D.,

*Pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Mo.*

When Nehemiah left the Persian Capital, and went back to Jerusalem with authority from the king of Persia to rebuild the broken walls of the city, and restore order to the distressed community, he was met by opposition. The people of Samaria were bitterly jealous of Jerusalem, and it grieved them exceedingly that a man was come to seek the city's good. Hence Sanballat and his associates set themselves to thwart the pious and patriotic effort. At first they ridiculed the work. They made merry over the efforts of those feeble Jews to build a wall that would be a defence for the city. "If a fox go up, he shall even break down the stone wall," was Tobiah's jest. But, in spite of their ridicule, the work progressed. Then they tried threats. As loyal subjects of the king of Persia they threatened to come and fight against Jerusalem, and put a stop to the rebellious undertaking. But the work was helped rather than hindered by their threats. Then they changed their tactics, and resorted to cajolery. Assuming the guise of friendship they sent the invitation to Nehemiah, "Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." Let us confer together as those who have common interests, and work together to promote them. But Nehemiah was not deceived by this show of friendship. He knew they had no interest in the work upon which his heart was set, and would give him no real help. So he replied, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease whilst I leave it and come down to you?" This bit of history is instructive, and, if I mistake not, contains a useful lesson for the Church in this generation. The Church is in the world, as Nehemiah was in Jerusalem, for a great and very definite work—a work to which she has been commissioned by her King,

and for which He has equipped her by His grace. As to the nature of this work we are not left in doubt. Upon the foundation which God has laid she is to build up a spiritual temple composed of living stones—human beings redeemed by the blood of Christ, and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit—“an habitation of God through the Spirit.” To this end she has been commissioned by her Lord to preach repentance, and remission of sins through His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem. She finds her charter in His final command, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” The Apostle James gives his conception of the Church’s mission when, in the Council at Jerusalem, he speaks of it as God’s visiting the nations, “to take out of them a people for His name.” We have Paul’s conception of it in these words: “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation: to-wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” In the light of such Scriptures the Church’s mission is clear. She is sent to testify to all men “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”; to call them into reconciliation with God through Christ, and to lives of fellowship with Him and obedience to His revealed will. In the language of our Confession, “Unto this visible Catholic Church, Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world.” This is her business, the end of her organization,—an end great enough surely to engage every ounce of her energy, and every moment of her time.

In the discharge of her mission the Church has from the

beginning met opposition. At first it was the opposition of contempt and scorn. Christians were a feeble folk, a despised sect, everywhere spoken against. But, in spite of contempt, "the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly." Then persecution was tried; open and violent opposition; but this has never been a permanent hindrance. The blood of martyrs has ever been the seed of the Church. So Satan's final policy has always been to seduce the Church into friendly alliance with the world; to turn her aside from her divinely appointed work by having her make common cause with worldly agencies and for earthly ends. The temptation is a subtle one, because the ends aimed at may be altogether desirable and good; but not the ends for which the Church has been commissioned and sent into the world. "The good," as the old proverb has it, "is often enemy to the best." When something that is good is allowed to take the place of the best it becomes a snare. When a worthy, but subordinate end is allowed ascendancy in the life and endeavor of the Church over her chief end, she is snared into unfaithfulness and failure. Is this not a danger to which the Church is peculiarly exposed in our day, and in our land?

In general, she is tempted to come down from the plane upon which she has been called to move and labor, to ground which she can occupy in common with the children of the world—to leave Jerusalem for the plain of Ono. She is tempted to turn her attention from the spiritual to the material realm; from the heavenly to the earthly; to occupy herself less with the unseen and eternal, and more with the seen and temporal: to shift the emphasis in her thought and effort from the life that is to be, to the life that now is. Let her but follow this course, and it is confidently promised that she will find enlarged influence and usefulness.

In particular. 1. She is advised, if she would prove her worth to the world, to join hands with reputable civic organizations or parties in an effort to improve civil and governmental conditions. She is advised to use her influence, her

organization, her activities for shaping civil legislation, for controlling elections, and determining policies of State. She is sometimes taunted with the fact that the saloons of a city exert more influence in political affairs than all the churches. Now the ends contemplated in such advice are eminently desirable, and should be diligently sought by all good citizens. But they are not the ends which the Church has been sent into the world to accomplish. They belong to a sphere which she has not been commissioned to enter.

The Church and the State are both ordained of God; but for different ends, and with different functions. They are as planets that revolve in different orbits, and there is safety only when each is confined to its own track. Should the State, through her courts and legislative assemblies, assume to dictate the policy of the Church, it would be quickly resented as an unwarranted intrusion. Let the case be reversed, and is not the intrusion just as unwarranted and dangerous? Civil legislation is a function of the State, not of the Church. It is a carnal weapon. It implies force. Behind it lies the power of the sword—a power which the State has been authorized to wield, but from which the Church has been strictly enjoined. Whenever she tries to use it she wounds herself. If anything has been written large in the past history of the Church, it is that, whenever she has assumed the functions of the State, and tried to control civil affairs, she has crippled her own influence, and hurt rather than helped the Commonwealth. This has been one of the fatal errors of the Church of Rome, and, in consequence, she has blighted every country in which she has gained ascendancy.

The Church does most to purify and bless the government under which she lives when she steadfastly pursues her own appointed business, preaching the gospel of Christ and teaching people to observe all things which He has commanded; inspiring them with zeal for righteousness, with the fear of God, and regard for man, then leaving them to discharge their duties as citizens without any dictation from her.

2. Again, the Church is persistently urged to devote her attention and energies to fostering and promoting humanitarian enterprises of one kind and another. She is invited to address herself to the work of improving the social and economic conditions of the people; to the extirpation of disease, the better housing of the poor, the abolition of child-labor, the regulation of hours for work, etc., etc.

In a word, she is advised, if she would prove herself worth while, to pay less attention to the life to come, and more to the life that now is; to care less for the souls of men, and more for their bodies; to be less zealous for saving them from future punishment, and more for saving them from present miseries. Now it is admitted that the Church has a ministry to the bodies of men. As I understand the New Testament office of Deacon, it was designed to minister in those things that are needful for the body. And it would be a great gain for some of our Protestant churches if that side of their life and activity were more fully developed. The Church, like her Lord, is to be responsive to every form of human need. In His name she is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and minister to the sick and suffering. But this a subsidiary ministry. It is not the end of her calling, but a means to a higher end. Her chief business is to feed the multitude, not with the food which perisheth, but with the food which abideth unto eternal life. Falling short of this she will accomplish little for the good of mankind. Suppose we cure a man of tuberculosis, secure that he is well housed, and clothed and fed, and add a score of years to his life; then leave him to live in estrangement from God, and die in sin—we have done very little for him, and very little for society. In short, the calling of the Church is not to reform social and economic conditions in this world, and make it a decent, safe and comfortable place in which to live: but to gather from the world a people unto the name of Christ, who shall live and reign with Him in that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

3. In meeting such issues as we are considering, the Church

finds safe guidance in the example of her Lord. His own word is, "As My Father hath sent Me, *even so* send I you." He thus draws a close parallel between His own mission from the Father, and the Church's mission from Him. "Properly speaking," as Godet says, "there is only one mission from heaven to earth: it is that of Jesus. That of the Church is included in His. As there is but one mission, there is but one force for fulfilling it: that of Jesus which He communicates through His Spirit." The Church is His Body—the Body in which He dwells by His Spirit, through which He perpetuates His presence among men, and carries on His work in the world. Through His Church He is continuing the work which He began "in the days of His flesh." This being true, it follows that the Church is to find in His personal ministry a type and model of her ministry. As He was in the world, so is she to be. He has left her an example that she should follow in His steps.

In the light of that truth, let us next inquire what was the attitude and bearing of Jesus toward the political, social, and economic conditions that prevailed in His generation? (a) First, as to political conditions. He came into the world, and lived His life under the reign of the Caesars. It was an iron rule—strong, but, in many respects, cruel and oppressive, and marred by gross corruption. The people of Palestine were divided as to their attitude toward it. Some were for rebelling, and casting off the hated yoke. Others were for submitting to it; and still others apparently for a middle course. Between these parties discussions were rife, and feeling ran high. But we look in vain in the life of Jesus for a single act or utterance showing that He concerned Himself about such matters. So far as the Gospel narratives show He went through life, as has been said, without so much as casting a glance at the Roman eagles. On one occasion, after He had wrought a great miracle in Galilee, the people sought to take Him by force and make Him king. Under His leadership they would throw off the Roman yoke, renounce al-

legiance to Herod, and reform the abuses of his reign. But the movement was abhorrent to Him. He sent the multitude away, constrained the disciples to take ship and cross to the other side of the lake, then withdrew into a mountain to pray. On another occasion, the Pharisees sought through subtlety to draw Him into alignment with one or another of the political parties of the day. They sent some of their disciples with the Herodians to ask Him a question. Approaching Him with a great show of respect, they said: "Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest Thou for any man, for Thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, what thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?" That was a living issue; it divided the people. He saw their hypocrisy, and rebuked it. But He did not evade the issue. Pointing to the image and superscription of Caesar on the coin which they showed Him, He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." The fact that Caesar's money was current among them showed that they were under Caesar's government in fact if not by right. They sustained some relation to Caesar. What that relation was, and what obligations it involved it was not His province to decide. They must do that for themselves in the use of their own judgment. But such obligations as were involved He bids them faithfully to discharge, at the same time being sure to render to God the things that belong to Him. Thus He laid down a principle of permanent and far-reaching application, and one which furnishes safe guidance for every honest conscience. At the same time He avoided the entanglement in which His enemies hoped to involve Him. Again, when He was arraigned before Pontius Pilate the charge preferred against Him was that, He claimed to be a king, and so made Himself an enemy and rival of Caesar. Pilate asked Him, "Art thou then a king?" He gave an affirmative answer, but added, "My kingdom is not of this world." Thus in effect saying, Caesar's kingdom is



of this world; Mine is not. His is a kingdom of force; Mine a kingdom of love. His is advanced by the power of the sword; Mine by the power of truth. His is a kingdom over the bodies of men; Mine over their spirits. His is for the protection of their material and temporal interests; Mine for securing their spiritual and eternal interests. The two are entirely distinct: their domains are different: there need be no conflict between them. Here, too, He laid down a great principle for the guidance of His Church as, in obedience to the great commission, she goes unto all nations and proclaims His gospel under every form of human government.

Yet, while the attitude of Jesus was one of absolute non-interference with civil affairs, He brought a spirit into the world and inculcated principles which have elevated, purified and humanized every government in which their influence has been felt. Following His example the Church will always prove a blessing to the Commonwealth by which she is sheltered.

(b) Again, when Jesus was on the earth He lived amid social and economic conditions which were far from being ideal. There were conflicting interests and opposing classes. There were social and industrial wrongs, inequalities of privilege and opportunity for which the laws of the land provided no adequate remedy. How did He bear Himself toward such conditions? His attitude is clearly revealed by one incident in His life. He had been speaking to the people on high spiritual themes—trust in the providential care of God, the duty of confessing Him before men, the joy of being confessed before the angels of God, dependence upon the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, etc. One of the company rudely interrupted Him with the request, "Teacher, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." The intrusion of such a demand in the midst of such teaching betrayed the man's spirit. It was as if he had said, "I care nothing for these things about which you have been speaking, the Heavenly Father's care, the joy of being confessed before the angels,

etc.; what I want is my share of the paternal inheritance. Use your influence for getting me that, and I will believe in you." Jesus answered, "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you"? That is not the mission on which I have come into the world. There are magistrates whose business it is to adjust such matters. Look to them. So much is clearly implied in His answer. Then He said unto them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." That was his message to both men—the complainant and the defendant. Only let them get rid of the spirit of covetousness, and they would not need a judge or divider; they would divide the inheritance between themselves, and it would be a righteous and generous division. Here, as always, He aimed at the root of the trouble. Instead of dealing with outward symptoms, He sought to remove the underlying cause of this and all similar differences. That was His mission. He was among men, not as a social reformer, but as a Saviour from sin. The Church in our day is confronted by conditions similar to that which Jesus here met, and in no uncertain tones the same demand is made of her. There are those, and their number seems to be increasing, who openly say that they have no interest in the spiritual message which the Church bears for the world. They care nothing for the promise which she holds out of eternal life; their concern is for this present earthly life. They care nothing for the promised inheritance in the world to come; what they want is their full share of the inheritance in the world that now is. They say to the Church, "Use your influence for setting social conditions right, for remedying industrial wrongs, and securing our earthly well-being, and we will give you our patronage; otherwise we have no need of you." How shall the Church meet that demand? If she would follow the example of her Lord, and be true to the mission upon which He has sent her, she will refuse to become a judge or divider over men. She has one message for men of every class and condition—her Master's message: "Take heed and

beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." That is her message to both the complainant and the defendant, the employer and the employee, the capitalist and the laborer, the buyer and the seller. Get rid of covetousness; "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you even so do ye also unto them." "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." Let these messages be heeded, and every vexing social problem will find an easy solution. All social injustice and oppression will be remedied. But until it is heeded all attempts at remedy will be disappointing. Here lies the mistake of the average socialist. He dreams of a social system characterized by justice, unselfishness and brotherly love; and he hopes to build it up through legislative enactment out of unjust, selfish and unloving people. It is an idle dream. As well attempt to build a strong and stable house out of rotten timber. The Church cherishes a like ideal, but she seeks to attain it by another method. She is seeking through the use of God's truth, and by the power of the Holy Spirit to make unselfish and righteous people; to bring men and women by a renewal of their natures under the great law of love—love to God and love to man. And she is seeking it in the only possible way. Mankind cannot be made unselfish and loving by law, whether human or divine. The experiment has been tried on the grandest possible scale, and has failed. "What the law could not do," although given by God Himself from Mt. Sinai, law enacted by man can never do.

"How small, of all that human hearts endure,  
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure."

The needed change can only be wrought by regenerating grace—that grace of God which "hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and right-

eously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works.”

To testify of that grace is the mission of the Church.