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The Study of Social Religion and Social Reconstruction

J. L. GILLIN, PH.D.*

Only quite recently has the Bible been studied for the social significance of its teachings. One has only to remember that Biblical Theology has been the title under which a most careful study of the Bible has been carried on. Somewhat recently in some quarters, considerable interest has been manifested in the study of the Bible for the light it throws upon our social problems. Such books may be cited as Shailer Mathews, *The Social Teachings of Jesus*; Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, and Wallis, *Biblical Sociology*. It was quite natural that the social teachings of the Bible should not be studied so long as the Christian Church held to the idea that salvation is an individual matter and pertains chiefly to man's state after death. With the rise, however, of the conception that salvation is a matter of the here and now, as well as of eternity, and that the individual does not live his life in a social vacuum, but if saved at all must be saved in his social relationships, more attention has been given to the teachings of the Bible as to social relationships.

When one studies the Bible from the angle of its contribution to a system of right relationships among men he wonders that this emphasis of the Bible has been so long neglected. Let the question once arise in men's minds, what has the Bible to say as to man's relationships with his fellows, and from almost every page of the book, statements flash forth of fundamental significance. The Bible was born out of man's social experiences and is pre-eminently a book dealing with social relationships. The religion of the Bible is a social religion. By social religion I mean a religion having to do with man's relationships to others, both divine and human, and supplying ideals and motives for the adjustment of his relationships to others in the interests of justice and right between himself and others. From this definition you will notice that I conceive that even theology or the doctrine of the nature of God and his relationship to man, and man's relationship to him is a doctrine of social relationship. The very term by which Jesus taught us to speak of God "Our Father" calls up the intimate and fundamental institution of the family.

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Why the church has allowed a theory in regard to social relationships to grow up without any reference to Christian principles is beyond me, unless it be because Christianity has been largely concerned with heavenly rather than earthly matters. As a result of this neglect, social theory both in economics, politics, and sociology has placed its chief reliance upon the interplay of the selfish impulses and interests of men to work

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out socially useful relationships. There is some indication that these selfish and socially undirected forces in humanity do tend to establish a certain equilibrium and secure certain social adjustments. Nevertheless, dependence upon these forces give us the *laissez faire* philosophy in politics, economics, and in social life. Man is not only a selfish animal, but as Kropotkin long ago pointed out, even among animals, the unselfish activities, which he called mutual aid, have played an important part both in the survival and the evolution of societal forms. Dependence upon the interplay of selfish forces in economics, politics, and social welfare, has been a signal failure, because it was a dependence upon only a part of the forces that make for right social relationships.

Social ideals and unselfish motives must be invoked also to perfect our social relationships in the interests of justice and kindness, and the development of opportunities for individuals. Ethics can give us the naked ideals, but ideals clothed in moving personalities and motivated not only by self-interest but by personal example, inspired by the religious appeal, must be invoked also. Men are still moved by the tremendous appeal of a personal example.

Religion furnishes both the ideal and the motive power for the production of the right social relationships. It does not concern itself with the technique of economics or politics or sociology. It does, however, supply social ideals and certain neglected motives, which society cannot safely ignore. Upon individuals it exercises the motive of fear. For those who have escaped the bondage of fear, it brings to bear the appeal of allegiance to a heroic character, who was inspired by his devotion to a God of righteousness. Thus it provides a means of social control in the interests of social justice to the individualist who is concerned with a fear for his own salvation. On the other hand to the social religionist, the fear to which the ancient prophets of Israel appeal, fear for the welfare of the group, or nation, is a powerful dynamic factor. That the motive is not an unimportant one, the recent great war has demonstrated in every country. When men are willing to die for their country, it cannot be said that the fear of destruction of the country has no weight in the determination of social action. Thus religion furnishes both the motive of fear and the motive of love which expresses itself in patriotism when applied to the group. The latter it ennobles with ethical ideals and softens the hatred which patriotism without it too often carries in its wake.

Moreover, religion also, especially the Christian and the Jewish, provide a dream that is international in its scope, namely the Kingdom of God. The international socialists have conceived of such a social organization of the world. But it lacks the religious appeal to secure justice between groups and interests. The "Kingdom" of Jesus and the Christian Church is a dream that embraces all that is good in the socialist's international party. It lacks the shortcomings of the socialist's dream, because it embraces within its horizon, not only the welfare of the poor and the laborer, but the welfare of the rich as well. It is

brotherhood not for a party but for the whole human family. It is motivated by the patriotic appeal without the national hatreds. It is based upon the demand for social justice between all classes of society, the rich and the poor, the educated and the ignorant. It is the incarnation of democracy based upon the religious ideal of the brotherhood of man inspired by the example of Jesus Christ.

If the Bible contains the teachings to which I have referred; if the non-Christian philosophy, economics, political science, and sociology, of the present day have been unable to solve our problems; and if they lack the motives necessary to bring selfish human nature under the control of the ideals of justice, mercy, and mutual helpfulness, why should not the young men and women of our colleges be instructed in the teachings of this book? So far as I can see, there can be no answer to that question, except the historical answer that the social teachings of the Bible have been neglected. Those teachings that make for social unity and the disappearance of social conflict have been overlooked, while it has been used as the source-book of divisive and hate-begetting theological doctrines. Is it not time that our emphasis be changed and that the church begin to take an interest in the social problems that stare us in the face at every turn, and upon the settlement of which depend not only the perpetuity of our nation but the establishment upon earth of a social order in which justice for all shall be the dominant note? That is the Church's opportunity and responsibility in education.

The College Curriculum in Religion

HENRY COE CULBERTSON, D.D.*

In preparing a curriculum of religious education for undergraduate students one problem is whether such courses should teach intensively a limited aspect of the subject, or whether the aim should be to give a bird's eye view in a survey course. The great universities will probably always offer a great number of courses in which the student's attention is concentrated upon a thorough study of a particular phase of the subject. The University of Chicago, for example, offers courses in the Relation between Science and Religion, the Religion of the Prophets, the Moral Problems of the Old Testament, and other courses of study in the Psalms and in the individual books of the Bible. My own preference in offering courses to undergraduate students is to give a survey of the subject so that the student may have a general knowledge and introduction to the entire field and be able to follow up in his individual reading any particular branch of the work that he has occasion to use. For example, I offer a survey course in Old Testament history, pre-

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