

-Social Justice and The Gospel -

1. Introduction: Social Justice and The Gospel

Study LFS. 43, 'The Christian Revolution: Liberation Theology', discussed the matter of the responsibility placed upon the Christian Faith for social justice throughout the world. Liberation Theology has as its thesis the fact that theology must be primarily in praxis, rather than in mere stasis. Whilst this would seem commendable there are many questions which must be answered. The posing of praxis may be fair enough but is such praxis essentially Christian? For example, the accepted fact of the Marxian analysis as scientific and authentic may itself be called in question. It may not be scientific, and it may not be authentic for truly Christian praxis. Be that as it may, our aim in this study is to examine the Biblical bases of social justice.

In LFS Studies 29 and 30 the whole range of Christian Ethics has been examined, both as to its basis and practice. There should be no need to repeat that material in this study, but the reader is advised to study these two treatments, and also to examine LFS. 28 which deals with the (Biblical) nature of law.

We assume, for purposes of our paper, that the Christian Faith does posit social justice, and that it is a component of its life and practice.

2. What Is Social Justice?

That question may receive many answers. This is because not all agree on the intrinsic nature of man. What is justice under a totalitarian system may appear to be injustice to one living under a free form of democracy. Roughly speaking, it means fairness of opportunity and practice. It is the opposite to inequity. However, in the Biblical use the actual term justice is almost non-existent. It is not found, as such, in the N.T., and rarely in the O.T. Modern translations use 'justice', where formerly the word was translated 'judgement'. An examination of the words in Hebrew shows the affinity between judgement and justice. The verb **shaphat** and the noun **mshtat** (not excluding the verb *din*) relate to a number of elements. When God judges He does this with discernment. He judges impartially, and so His pronouncements are fair, and lead to fairness of treatment, and true justice. This is for Israel, and this is for the nations of the earth.

In a passage such as Jeremiah 9:24 God says, '... let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practise steadfast love, justice (or, judgement) and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the Lord.' Here love, justice and righteousness are close to being synonyms. Certainly each of these must be understood in context with the others. Hence in Isaiah 42:1-3 the anointed one (Messiah) is to 'bring forth justice' and will not desist until 'he has established justice in the earth'. Thus the

‘coastlands wait for his law’. The subject is quite profound for law (Torah) is associated with mishpat. Yet the law in Israel is not so much executive legislation as it is ‘the way’, i.e. the teaching which shows a man (and nation) which way to go. The law has a number of stimulating motives for obedience. These in fact are intrinsic to it. The lack, generally, of punitive measure in Israel, places practice of the law more on motivation than simple fear of punishment.

Social justice in the Biblical sense involves knowledge of God, of man, of the nature of creation, of covenant, and the ultimate purposes of God. At the same time, the intuitive idea of fairness is included. The God Who judges must judge. He judges fairly. His judgements are with a view to the rightness of His world rule, and the betterment of conditions for human living. However, this is only part of the Biblical picture, for in it the sinfulness of men and nations is taken into account. It is the Day of the Lord which will bring decisive and conclusive universal judgement, punishing the evil elements and constructing new heavens and a new earth in which only righteousness dwells. The true fairness which humanity requires, and which is congruous with God’s good intentions for His creation will then obtain. In this sense the vindication of God will be seen, and His historical fairness shown forth and justified.¹

It is a simplistic view of creation and history which demands at each point of time an obvious, immediate, and successful justice. The matter is too complicated for such simplistic demands and solutions. Such a view as we shall see ignores the basic fact of man’s rebellion against God, his gods and his goals, and is often a powerful subjective drive which is related to his own rebellion against authority, and other significant allied factors.

D. J. Clines prefers to tackle the matter of justice from the angle of man’s responsibility, that is social responsibility.² He posits three elements, namely, responsibility towards our fellows as individuals, towards the institutions of the society in which we live, and to the state as governor of ourselves as citizens. Justice is something we look for, even demand, and when we see it lacking in our own or others’ situations, are generally indignant. When the onus is on us to practise justice, or to see that justice is done then the demand is also upon us to understand the true nature of justice, and especially, as is our subject, social justice.

3. Elements Related To Social Justice

(i) Introduction: The Biblical Elements

The Scriptures virtually constitute Salvation History.³ Theological topics, when we consider them, have to be seen, each one, in relation to the whole. We have noted that justice in history must be seen in the light of judgement at the end-time, and establishment of mishpat in all the earth. Hence justice, like almost any other subject, must be seen in the light of the doctrines and

¹ See LFS. 33, The Vindication of God. This treats the whole subject of theodicy, which is itself related to justice.

² David A. Clines, ‘Social Responsibility in the Old Testament’, INTERCHANGE, No. 20, 1976, A.F.E.S. Sydney

³ For a treatment of Salvation History see the notes under that title, N.C.P.I. 1977.

action of creation, covenant, redemption and matters eschatological, the last also being related to apocalyptic. Any attempt to treat justice atomistically or in reductionist fashion will distort understanding. Biblical social justice abstracted from its Scriptural ethos will not be true social justice. It needs to be understood in its own milieu.

(ii) Creation and Its Implicates for Social Justice

Nothing can be fully understood of social justice apart from the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of creation. For man to be made in God's image presupposes what the whole Scripture tells us of God, that He is love, holiness, truth, goodness and righteousness. These are not abstractions but dynamic elements of the Creator-God. Hence the man He creates is intended to reflect, in action, these very elements. Such a truth presupposes man's care for God's creation which itself includes his fellow-man. Man is not designed for idolatry, for covetousness (which is idolatry), or for any other form of evil.

Cain's statement, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' is therefore patently wrong and insincere. The one-flesh union of husband and wife presupposes the one-family nature of parents and children. All such justice is contingent upon man acting fully in that image in which he is created. The Decalogue is a clear statement of how man lives in conformity with his creational being. It is irrelevant to ask whether such commandments are purely of Israel, confined within Covenant, or adduced from other elements. The Decalogue is a fine statement of love to God and to fellow man, and respect for one's own person, especially in the light of man's high creation.

Any consideration of justice which does not return, time and again, to the nature of God and man as created must become adrift from its true centre. Judaic-Christian thinking also has a clear doctrine of creation. Passages such as Gen. 1:31, Eccles. 3:11, Psalm 8:3ff, Prov. 16:4, I Tim. 4:4, 6:17, I Cor. 10:26, 11:7, show us that the creation is functional. Its essential nature is for good. This truth, however much it may have been handed down by tradition, was received by Israel as a nation in the wilderness, and it was the doctrine of creation which gave meaning to its Decalogue.

The law of the Sabbath is rooted in creation (Gen. 2:1-3, cf. Exod. 20:11). There is motivation to keep it. God blessed it. Likewise, in creating mankind as male and female, He blessed this union (Gen. 1:28), that is He purposed their union. Christ points out that that union is rooted in the principle of creation (Matt. 19:4-6, Gen. 2:24). The law against killing which is pronounced in Genesis 9 is on the basis of man being created in the image of God, and the mandate to him to fill up the earth and rule it. As for true worship of God, that is inherent in creation, also. This given in, the whole Decalogue is rooted in creation. Later elements which define for us the purpose of God in creation show us that the nature of creation obtains permanently. At the same time creation is moving dynamically towards its goals, and that movement is part of its essential being. This too must be understood when examining the nature of justice. (Cf. Ephes. 1: 9, 10, 11, 3:9-11, I Cor. 2:6ff, etc.)

On the basis, then, of creation, we assume that all men have social responsibility. Again, if we look at Genesis 1:28ff, where God gives His working mandate to man to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over it, then man's capacities will be needed for such a work. The mandate requires a strong relational living in the sphere of creation. It requires fairness in all respects. The renewed mandate in Genesis 9 (after the Flood) insists that man must be allowed to fulfil the programme without interruption of murder. We assume that any other social neglect or cruelty is likewise condemned. So, we repeat, all men have social responsibility: none is specially exempted from what it means to be man.

(iii) Covenant and Its Implicates for Social Justice

(a) General Covenant.

Some theologians discover a covenant in creation: man receives blessings of creation and is so obligated to obey. In this sense it is said to be a covenant of works. Not all agree this is the case. However, what is clear is that when man rebels against God as he did in Adam and the fall, then he has set himself outside of God. He deserves only judgement and alienation from God. It is interesting to note Genesis 3:15 in which God promises a deliverer from evil and a destroyer of that evil. Herein is some act of grace implied. The story of Cain and Abel, and God's mercy on Cain, is another indication of God's grace. However Genesis chs. 5-6 show the growth of violence, i.e. the failure to take up social responsibility, and in fact the exercise of social irresponsibility. It is this which God punishes by the method of the flood. The flood is followed by Noah's act of gratitude and submission, i.e. the sacrifice, and God responds with the universal covenant, ensuring the modes and rhythms of creation will continue uninterrupted by a flood. This is covenant par excellence.

(b) Ahrahamic Covenant.

However, it is the Abrahamic Covenant which is most significant.⁴ This will prove, ultimately, to be universal: 'In your seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed.' Man may have relationship with God through covenant, albeit he is sinful. Genesis 18:25 shows Abraham's belief in God that He is truly the God of justice, whilst Genesis 26:4-5 shows Abraham's obedience, and fulfilment of true justice. The covenant, we might say, is particularised in the seed of Jacob. The codes which formed the basis of Israel's life and economy are far beyond anything contemporary with Israel. (Cf. LFS. 29, pp.4-7.) What matters here is that covenant is the grace of God which stimulates those under it to obey God and exercise social responsibility.

The New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34, Matt. 26:28, Gal. 3:6-18, II Cor. 3:1- 17), as we shall see, in particular carries full obligation to obey the will of God, i.e. the law of love which is what true obedience is all about. This, of course, implies social justice.

(c) Social Elements of the Mosaic Covenant.

The basis of all covenantal ethics, as Jesus pointed out, was the relationship of God's people with Him, i.e. love to God, and so love to neighbour. Even this was based not on legalism per se but on God's grace of deliverance, namely, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, therefore'. It was then an ethics of gratitude and evoked (responsive) love. God and man must be seen in the light of this love. The legalistic ethic says unequivocally, 'Thou shalt ... shalt not ...'. It is also rooted in the action of liberating love.

This is shown in Exodus 20:22 - 23:33, and in principle by the statement, 'You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan (Exod. 22 :21f).' Of course these and other injunctions are to be understood in the social ethos of Israel.

⁴ See LFS. 37, The Biblical Meaning of Covenant.

Israel was composed of tribes or clans, and their life was wholly social. One person, as such, did not seek to accumulate wealth. The crops, the produce, in prosperity or poverty were all used by the clan, together. Loans were interest-free (Exodus 22:25). All land won by the conquest of Canaan was communally owned. However, land not won by conquest was bought, and when purchased belonged to the one who had paid for it. Thus another aspect of ownership grew up alongside. The development of village life, intermarriage between clans, the growth of cities and the like made the social life more complicated. Nevertheless in the midst of this widows and orphans were to be protected, where in fact they often had no rights.

In the Deuteronomic parts of the covenant-code the former injunction to rest the land in the seventh year also becomes an injunction to remit debts, ‘... every man shall release what he has lent to his neighbour: he shall not exact it of his neighbour, his brother, because the Lord’s release has been proclaimed’ (Deut. 15:1-6). Here social remission is on the basis of God’s remission. It is also to be noted that Levites, because of their peculiar ministry, were without means of support. The tithe went to support them, so that no one in Israel should have been indigent. Deuteronomy 15:4-6 says, ‘There will be no poor among you ... if only you will obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all this commandment which I command you this day.’ Social justice then would work out in obedience to the Law, which was itself teaching and direction rather than absolute legislation.

Summing up, we can say that the laws God had planned for Israel, if kept, were the guidelines for a society in which the poor did not need to exist (excepting, of course, famines, etc.) because there was social awareness, there was motivation for caring and providing, and law was not obeyed because it was the right thing to do, so much as it was the way of rightness, the way of true social living, concern and caring. It was practical love, and the paradigm was God’s prior love in releasing His people and caring for them.

(d) The Covenant and the Prophets.

The prophets are not understood unless seen in the light of covenant, and the law not as legalistic but as true ethical (and social) living. Whilst they give the appearance of rejecting the sacrificial cultus it is only the hypocritical observance of it that they criticise. It is best to see most of their injunctions within the covenantal parameter. The prophets need to be examined closely in order to understand their views of social justice, but it is to be doubted whether they are speaking so much universally as that they are speaking to Israel particularly. Whilst this does not mean such social justice does not have universal connotation, it does mean that they were addressing Israel primarily.

Many of the prophets looked to a day which was to be a new day. It was to bring a new covenant and this covenant would transcend the old. It was linked with the coming Kingdom of God, and Messiah. There are passages which suggest the establishment of mishpat and so social justice, par excellence. The fact of the Day of the Lord and just retribution makes more tolerable the fact of injustice in the now-time. It indicates that God cares.

(e) The New Covenant.

Prophecies such as Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:24-28 (and other such passages) speak of obedience from the heart which will issue with this covenantal love and grace. The N.T. ethic is one of gratitude and love, as also one of understanding the true import of the law of love. We will examine this later because it relates strongly to the demand for social justice. Generally speaking the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and the Revelation all occupy themselves with the practicalities of social justice.

(iv) The Kingdom of God and Its Implicates for Social Justice

The Kingdom of God in its broadest sense is the rule and reign of God over His creation. There may be many rebels and much rebellion within that reign but it is, nevertheless, the Kingdom of God.⁵ Other aspects are that Israel can be said to be God's Kingdom in that it was in a special sense under his reign and rule, though not without much rebellion. The Kingdom of God is that power which God effects to fulfil His purposes, and that power is seen (a) In the shaping up of His people and (b) The eschatological action of God in ensuring His universe is ultimately under His control in true righteousness, for all eternity. There are, then, many aspects to the Kingdom, many of them epochal, constituting history as God works them out.

The central thought nevertheless is that God is King of His creation. He has set a functional order for that creation (Gen. 1:31, Prov. 16:4, I Cor. 10:26). To disobey it is to disobey the King. To obey His will 'on earth as it is in heaven' is the Kingdom in its essence. For our purposes we simply need to see that God's order is true mishpat, that is that all mankind is called to come under the righteousness of God. All are called to obey His true order. Were that done there would be no question about social justice. It would be the simple order of the creation. Israel is expected to obey in a way that other nations will not. They are God's covenantal and Kingdom people. However, Israel disobeys and is punished by exile. In the N.T. the natural expectancy for Israel - especially as the prophets have outlined that expectancy - is that this nation will constitute the Kingdom. Jesus, however, predicts that Gentiles will sit down in the Kingdom and its (Israelitish) sons be cast out (Matt. 8:11-12 = Luke 13:28-29).

Whilst neither Israel after the flesh, nor the church are the Kingdom they are related to the Kingdom. Their life must be that of the Kingdom, i.e. under the reign and rule of God. Hence we would expect to find what we may call an ethics of the Kingdom. This ethics is what Jesus discloses in the N.T. The Sermon on the Mount is given in terms of the Father-King (God), and the obedient children (or sons) of God. In the Acts the outworking of these elements can be seen in the care for the needy, the poor, and the widows. The Epistles continue the theme, enjoining care and concern for the poor, the refugees, the orphans and widows. They also speak against immorality and state clearly that such things are not of the Kingdom, and to do them is to be disinherited of the Kingdom.

The thrust for obedience, as we have seen, is love and gratitude, linked with the New Covenant of grace. The mediator of the Covenant is also the Messiah of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is 'the Kingdom of the Son of His love'. It is the 'Kingdom of Christ and of God' (Col. 1:13, Ephes. 5:5). Paul speaks of it as 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17), and as 'power' (I Cor. 4:20).

What we do know of the Kingdom in practice is that it was Christ 'going about doing all manner of good and healing all those who were oppressed of the devil,' that is it was the destruction of evil forces, the rehabilitation of depressed and oppressed people, and it was the bringing of relief and succour to the sick, the demonised, the guilty and sinful. It was no mere detached and remote sovereignty, but God serving His people. It was social justice in action, amongst other things. Likewise in the Acts and the Epistles its action is expected to be the same.

The final action of the Kingdom is shown under Messiah in passages such as Phil. 2:9-11, 1 Cor. 15:24-28 and the Book of the Revelation, especially 5:1 onwards. This action is to destroy all evil and bring the kingdoms of this world

⁵ For a wider treatment of the whole subject see LFS. 14, The King: the Kingdom of God: the Kingship.

to become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ (cf. Rev. 11:15).

(v) Eschatology and Its Implicates for Social Justice

A purely humanistic approach to history which presupposes the natural goodness of man, and his ability to handle his universe does not make an allowance for the Biblical doctrine of suffering. Suffering is per se wrong and unnecessary. It arises from natural disasters on the one hand and human ignorance (lack of education) on the other. In the first case it is arbitrary; in the second it is redeemable, i.e. human beings can be taught. Their powers can be brought into play.

The Biblical view of suffering involves the alienation of man from God by his (man's) own rebellion. It also is related to Divine punishment and chastisement. However, what concerns man is whether or not there is a viable theodicy. Eschatology is really the rationalisation of theodicy, although few may see it that way. In the Book of Job the matter of suffering is discussed and the various rationales propounded. In the Psalms the subject is raised time and again, often without an explanation. The Book of Ecclesiastes discusses the emptiness of human existence, but does not apply an explanation. Biblical eschatology recognises the social injustice, selfishness, crime, violence and evil that is in the world but sees it as ultimately punished when true righteousness triumphs in the person and Kingdom of Messiah, and in the handing of the Kingdom to the Father-God.

Orthodox evangelical theology sees God working sovereignly in all this, and doubtless calling in man as His servant from time to time in order the effect the eschaton. However, liberation theology takes the view that where the Biblical hope is revealed it is in order to stimulate human activity and cooperation to effect those goals.

Whatever the reasoning, hope for the end-time can be shown to be a powerful motivation for present ethical obedience, including social justice.

(vi) Conclusion: Many Elements to be Considered

It can now be seen that we cannot tackle the subject of social justice and the Gospel outside the above factors of creation, covenant, prophetism, the Kingdom of God and its concomitant eschatology. When this context is missing the subject cannot be viewed properly. Also, when it is seen that God is Lord of creation, covenant, prophetic proclamation, salvation history, the Kingdom of God and the eschaton, then it is seen that social justice is primarily a work of God and not of man, however much God may involve man in its outworking. God alone is the Initiator.

4. The Problem of Man's Rebellion

Interest is shown today by humanism, messianism, and utopianism. This interest in social justice is espoused by ideologists. The practice of social justice may or may not be linked with ideology. What, however, is missed by many is the basic factor of man's alienation from God, and his continuing sinfulness. We need to examine these elements.

(i) The Rebellion of Man Against God

The account of Adam's rebellion in Genesis chapter three (cf. Romans 5:12ff), and of man in general in Romans 1:18-32 gives us the clue to much of the injustice that is in the world. When man rejected God he necessarily rejected the truth. He, in fact, 'exchanged the truth of God for a lie'. Hence his thinking, though logical enough, is biased against God and His creative purposes. Man has had to re-rationalise things-as-they-are into things-as-they-are-not-really. Also, in this action he has had to create his gods. Whilst no god exists essentially, yet man must have gods. He must have powers by which he can account for the world as it seems to be. Hence, then, the occult. Hence also man's insistence upon the autonomy of his own reasoning. Hence also man's reasoned religions and philosophies. Hence his shaping of ideologies.

(ii) The Principle of Alienation

In our previous study (LFS. 43) we pointed out that Hegel saw human alienation as a dynamic element in the dialectical struggle. It is a factor which matures man. We saw that in Marxism alienation is regarded as harmful to man, and to be dispensed with. It rises from the use of man by man, the exploitation, especially of the working class by not allowing a man to embody himself in s work, but using him as a medium of production of goods to be sold.

Whatever truth there may be in the analyses of Hegel and Marx the Biblical truth is that man is alienated from himself because he is alienated from God. Were he not alienated from God by his own rebellion he would not be alienated from himself, and from others. The practical effects of his alienation are not only to cause existential suffering within himself, but to put him into competition with other human beings. Not enough has been made of the fear of death which pervades man. This fear of death does not arise primarily from competition with others, but from fear of judgement (Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 John 4:18). It is fear of death which stimulates to competition, and so gives rise to social injustice, inequality, and so on.

(iii) The Principle of Selfishness

Much that man does in life is to prove himself to himself. He seeks to do this - perhaps unconsciously - by proving himself to others. Some would also see it as man's attempt to prove himself to God. Jesus spoke of those who 'love the praise of man more than the praise of God', and Paul of those whose praise is 'not from men but from God'. To receive the praise of men is a powerful motive. It must mean that when one is praised by man one is more secure in the acceptance of others. This helps (it would seem) one to accept oneself. Such acceptance has to substitute for one's not being accepted of God.

In any case man is in competition. It is a simplism to blame any ideology or system for the alienation of man. These elements most surely contribute to it, or exacerbate it, but they do not cause it. Not, anyway, on the Biblical analysis. It is equally a simplism to see an ideology as destroying the alienation of man, for his alienation does not primarily arise from his society and its structures. To change such structures may provide a better milieu for living, but it cannot dissipate his alienation. Only when man is reconciled to God does his alienation give way to reconciliation with God, man, himself, and creation. He will still find alienating forces within that creation, but they cannot create an essential alienation.

What is more, his reconciliation to God will tend to destroy his own selfishness, his false concepts of God,

man and creation, including his contemporary life. Becoming a person in the community of the Holy Spirit, and a member of the Kingdom of God he will cease to be contingent for his personal peace, harmony, and life upon the material world around him. Also he will not be a man of material politics. All life, for the alienated person has to be politicised if he is going to obtain benefit.

(iv) The Marxist Analysis

Is the Marxist analysis correct? If it believes in the goodness of man, can it then be authentic? That it makes an analysis of man's problem in alienation is without doubt. That it makes an astute analysis is also without doubt. Marxism has also arrived at a dogma, namely that of dialectical materialism. Dogma may relate to analysis and even follow it, but analysis is not dogma. Whatever the value of analysis the acceptance of dogma from the analyst is quite another thing. For Marx 'the forces that shape history are economic forces -⁶ those arising from our productive activities in work as we endeavour to control the materials of nature ...' An appreciation of this one-way determinism is rather fundamental to grasping Marx's idea of the nature of man. 'The determinism which Marx sees inherent in history (dialectical materialism) is what will bring man to his true being. This is the Marxist solution to man's dilemma which is caused by economic circumstances.

What is disturbing is the process through which mankind must go to reach that liberated state.⁷ This form of socialism (Marxist) rejects private ownership of the means of production, seeks state control of the everyday life, the subordination of the individual to the power of bureaucracy, and this involves the destruction of private property, of religion, of the family and of marriage, and the introduction of wife-sharing. If these seem to be radical statements they are contained within Marxism and have been attempted when communism has come into power. Marx, of course, envisaged these elements as the process through which humanity had to pass before reaching true communism where no one possessed anything. To have a wife or children is to possess something. Hence the dogma of dialectical materialism is the answer to the condition of man, according to the Marxist analysis. It is whether this dogma, that is the praxis by which man is dis-alienated, is true or not is what the Christian has to decide. Some have opted to accept the analysis and to adapt the dogma. They seek a Christian-Marxist solution to the problem of social injustice.

(v) The Problem of Flesh

The Christian and Marxist views of man greatly differ. Whilst the Christian believes in the electing purposes of God (predestination) this is not a determinism inherent in the economics of history. It is the personal Creator-Father- Redeemer who works. For this reason there must be a clash in approach to the matter of social justice. We have mentioned that man is in rebellion against God. The Scriptures see him as controlled by flesh. This does not mean simply by his physical flesh, i.e. his body, its desires, etc., but by man's desire to have things as he wills. Flesh is to use the creation for one's own purposes rather

⁶ Harold Fallding, 'The Marxist and Christian Views of the Nature of Man', INTERCHANGE, Vol. 22, A.F.E.S., Sydney, 1977.

⁷ A brilliant critique of Marxism is found in the Essay 'Socialism in our Past and Future', by Igor Shafarevich in the volume, From Under the Rubble, by seven Russian dissidents. Fontana/Collins, England, 1976.

than the purposes for which God has created it, and placed us within it. The flesh per se is man's real problem when it comes to anything of his life, no less social justice.

The true answer then is for man to come to know God, and to relate to him, and relate in knowledge of God's Trinitarian nature. Man, created in that image, must find his true correlates in affinity with God. To know God as He is, is to know man as he is, creation as it is, and oneself as one is, and to know the appropriate functional principles and operations of the universe and this vis-a-vis the turmoil caused by sin in the world.

(vi) The Problem of Impatience

Whilst there is a certain form of quietism, and forms of laziness and indolence found within the church, the opposite of these is not necessarily social activism that has an impatience with theology or current Christian practice. If theology should produce praxis, then praxis must be seen to be the will of God. It is about this that there is current debate, and this debate is interminable. The theology of hope appears to demand action in the present with a view to the promises of the eschaton. Indeed not to participate in social activism seems, in the eyes of some, to betray the Gospel. Caution is looked upon as rationalising indolence. Nevertheless a true Biblical knowledge is essential to a true Biblical praxis.

5. The Knowledge of God: The Serving God

(i) The God Who Works and Serves

Probably one of the most neglected aspects in the study of the nature of God is God the Server. Jesus said, 'My Father has always gone on working (always goes on working) and I also work.' He meant that God is the Worker. If we understand that God has satisfaction with His work, then we can also understand that man, being the image of God, must also find his fulfilment in work, in creation, in usefulness, in serving.

How much, and in what sense, then, is God the Serving God? We know that theology rightly stresses His transcendence. Yet what is meant by transcendence? Is it merely that God is above the mundane? Is His transcendence a detachment from His creation, or is He 'above all' only in order to be 'through all and in all'? Might we need to revise our categories of transcendence and immanence? The truth is that God is the Working God. He works in creation, in sustaining that creation (providence), in redeeming and ultimately restoring it to its true form and eternalising it in glorification. God serves as Creator, as Redeemer, and as Father. Likewise His Son serves Him, and serves with Him in the matters of creation, providence, redemption, and the renewal of all things. The Holy Spirit serves both the Father and the Son, and serves with them in the works we have just nominated.

(ii) Man Created to Work and Serve

Man (i.e. man and woman) was created as a working person and race. Gen. 1: 28ff, and 2:15 show him as a workman before the Fall. It is not that he has to work as a punishment, or that creation did not require his service prior to the Fall, but simply that the Fall introduced an element of sorrow into that work. Paul's injunction, 'If a man will not work, neither let him eat,' is designed for

the deliberately lazy. The injunction against stealing is primarily seeking to attain security apart from work. In Ephesians 4:28 Paul says, 'Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need.' The principle here is not only of working, but the truest rationale of work, namely 'to give to him that has need'. In other words, work is primarily for others.

He primarily works for God. This is the concept behind the creational man- date (Gen. 1:28ff, cf. 9:1f). Perhaps it is better put that he works with God. This is the principle of Matthew 5:16 - our works are His works (cf. John 14:10f). The concept of such service lies in the sonship of man. Israel is corporately the son, and must serve God (Exodus 4:22 and parallel passages). 'Israel is my son. Let him go that he may serve me.' Israel is the servant nation for God (Exodus 19:5-6, cf. Isaiah chs. 42-66, especially passages such as Isaiah 44:21, 'Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you, you are my servant'). The Suffering Servant of these latter passages of Isaiah refer in some cases to the nation, in some cases to the holy remnant, and in some cases to the mysterious suffering Servant himself who is to come. In the baptism of Jesus Isaiah 42:1 is invoked ('My servant, mine elect in whom my soul delights'), and in Matthew 2:14f, Hosea 11:1 is used, 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son.' The Gospels attest to the obedient Sonship of Jesus, uniquely relating to the Father, and doing His will (cf. John 3:35, 5:17ff, Matt. 11:27, etc.).

In Israel, and indeed in the Book of the Revelation the prophets are called the servants of God. The Book of the Revelation also discloses the serving celestial creatures - the living creatures and the angels. The elders also serve, and in fact all mankind. In Revelation 7:15 the redeemed 'serve Him day and night in His temple'.

(iii) The Serving Community

The principle in Israel was that the Lord was one Lord, and Him only should Israel serve. The word serve equally means worship. When Israel served other gods, then it did not serve God. Equally it profaned God in the eyes of the heathen nations. In one sense, when it served God it served the nations also. It was the true witness to the true God. The judgements which come upon it are for failure to serve. When Christ comes he serves the Father as the Son, and in this sense what subordination there may appear to be never means inferiority. He taught his disciples the great principle 'Let the greatest amongst you become as the youngest, and the leader as the one who serves.' He said this at a time when he took a towel, girding himself, and serving them by washing their feet. He pronounced himself, 'I am among you as one who serves.'

It is this mystery of service that we must examine. Philippians 2:5-11 is a commentary upon it. The Son actually wished to serve his created humanity by identifying with it in the incarnation and crucifixion. It is a pity that such an act has been called 'the divine condescension', and has been seen as humiliation rather than true humility. It is doubtful whether Christ looked upon it as humiliation so much as the opportunity to truly express the nature of God in service. This is seen in the principle Paul enunciates 'count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus...

Surely this means that the primary act of God is service, and the primary act of man will be service. One does not seek to serve God and mammon (money, riches, wealth, security), but God only. As a result one then serves man, whom God is serving. This is the key to all true social justice. It is also the test of true service, for many a social activist may be primarily serving his own ego.

(iv) The Flesh and Service

In Romans 1:22-25 Paul points out the principle that rebellious man served the creature (gods, creation, etc.) more than the Creator. 'More' here means 'rather than'. To serve the creation prior to God is to idolise it. On the one hand it may mean a selfish use of creation which naturally leads to social injustice, and on the other hand an attempt to harmonise that creation into an integrity apart from God. This is the aim of ideologies. The flesh seeks to rationalise the creation to its own ends apart from God, and opposes the Spirit who is the Spirit of creation and who knows its functional ways and seeks to lead man into true creational and redemptional harmony, and holiness of living, which is living commensurate with the true order of things.

We have, then, to admit the possibility of two things (at least), namely service done in the Spirit and service done in the flesh.

6. A Survey of Social Justice In The Scriptures

We are now in a position to look at the matter of social justice within the Old and New Testaments, and see what patterns, principles and paradigms are set out for us in these. Our task is made easier because we recognise the relationship of these elements to creation, covenant, prophetism, the Kingdom of God, and the things of the end-time.

(i) Social Justice in the O.T.

(a) Creation, The Patriarchs and Israel.

We have seen that in creation care for one's fellow man is inherent. The breakdown in relationships between man and woman when the relationship with God was changed is borne out in the murder of Abel by Cain, and his refusal to accept the guilt of it. His criticism of the punishment is typical of undischarged guilt. The joy of Eve that another son Seth is given in place of (the righteous man) Abel is a sign that she is for true godliness. The calling on the name of the Lord from the birth of Seth's son Enosh is a sign of godliness in 'the sons of God'. It is when they wed 'the daughters of men' that tragedy is increased. The wickedness of man is great in the world and the earth is corrupt in God's sight and filled with violence. This must mean social injustice, and the judgement is the flood. (See Genesis chs. 4-6.)

Following that judgement the families of the earth are nominated, and out of Ham comes Nimrod who sets up a kingdom as a hunter of men. The logical outcome is to build a city so that the creational mandate of spreading across the earth is rejected. Thus at Babel they commence a tower (cf. Gen. 10:9-10, 11:1-9). This tower is erected as man's rebellion against God, and his intention to do what he wills (Gen. 11:6).

The story of Abraham is of a man who had seen the glory of God (Acts 7:2), become His friend, and who had received a covenant. He was obedient to God (Gen. 26:5). Morality is extant as is exhibited in the cases of Pharaoh and Abimelech (Gen. chs. 12 and 20). In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah God's judgement is upon evil.

We have partly examined the codes which Israel knew. In these was social justice for the nation. Whilst the codes were clear enough the development of the people from being (temporarily) nomadic in the wilderness, to agricultural

life in Canaan, and then to life which was partially city-oriented, and partially industrial, caused problems in the outworking of social justice. The links which many had with the idolatries of the land further confused social issues. It was to such confusion and rebellion that the prophets spoke. As we have suggested, these prophets need to be studied closely. At the same time, whilst their ideas of social justice may well be used universally, they were primarily directed to Israel, and to Israel as God's people chosen for His will and plan.

(b) The Prophets and Social Justice.

Some of the elements and proclamations of the prophets are set forth as follows : -

(1) Eighth Century Prophets: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah.

Amos. Herdsman of Tekoa, prophesied to the northern Kingdom in the days of Jeroboam II (c. 760 BC.). Days of affluency and consequent moral and spiritual degeneration. He spoke against:- Social injustice (oppression of the poor, dishonest trading, injustice, 2:6-8, cf. Exod. 22:26-27, Amos 5:11-12, 8:4-6), moral degeneration in the pride, luxury and indulgence of the wealthy (3:12, 15, 4:1, 6:1, 3-6), religion divorced from morality in that religious practice was without true morality, and reproof was disliked and coming national ruin utterly ignored (4:4-5, 5:10, 14, 18-20, 21-24). Amos demanded justice (5:24), insisted that privilege went with responsibility (3:2), that God was righteous and impartial in His judgement and moral government (4:12-13, 9:7-8), and that He would punish any rejection of His law (2:4). See also 1:2, 2:8. Amos also has, with other prophets, a balance of judgement and hope. See 9:8-9, 11, 14-15, cf. Ch. 5. 'Seek Me and live' (v.4), 'Seek the Lord and live' (v.6), 'Seek good, and not evil, that you may live' (v.14).

Hosea. A younger contemporary of Amos. Chs. 1-3 seem to relate to Jeroboam's reign, but chs. 4-12 belong to the period following his death - troublous times when there was national disorder and anarchy with misrule. Violence and corruption were evidenced. Kings were assassinated (4 of them), and up until 721 B.C. when Samaria fell and the people were carried into Assyrian captivity, the prophet prophesied.

The great word of Hosea is 'chesed' or 'loving-kindness'. This is exemplified in Hosea's personal experience. He had forgiven and restored his wife. This God would do with Israel - He would love the people of Israel, although they turned to other gods, He would 'love them freely' (14:4). The renewal in love, however, is not one of a foolish gratuity - for, 'I will betroth you to Me for ever: I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord' (2:19-20, cf. Micah 7:18-20).

Isaiah and Micah. These two prophets were contemporary in Judah with Amos and Hosea in the Northern Kingdom. They had two great elements in common.

(i) **Condemnation of Social Injustice.** They had this in common with the Northern Prophets. See Isa. 5:7-8, Micah 2:1-2. See also Isaiah 33:14ff. The poor were exploited and oppressed (Micah 3:2-3). As in the Northern so in the Southern Kingdom - justice was perverted with bribery and corruption (Micah 7:3). Kilpatrick (The Doctrine of the Prophets) comments 'As Micah gazed upon the modern improvements in Jerusalem, the strong fortifications and the stately palaces upon which, no doubt, the nobles congratulated themselves, it seemed to him as though they were constructed of the lives of men and cemented with human blood.'

Amos has been called the prophet of justice. He opposed the thought that God favoured Israel. He insisted that God's very choice of (now rebellious)

Israel was the just basis for His punishment of them (3:2). He sought justice in the social realm. Hosea has been called the prophet of love. Note, however, that this love is not merely abstract. It is the true knowledge of God, the result of which is social justice. In 4:1-6 Hosea links the social injustice of the land with the lack of knowledge of God. Hence in 6:1-3 he urges a return to God and knowledge of Him out of which healing will come for the land.

Isaiah, from a textual point of view, is a book composed - in the view of many - from a number of prophecies, and perhaps not all by Isaiah himself. Others contest this view. What is a constant, however, is the social emphasis of the writings. In numerous places from the beginning of the book to the end the prophet's denunciation is upon wrong treatment of the poor and the afflicted. Isaiah 58:6-14 is a classic passage on what might be called 'social fasting'.

(2) Prophets of The Chaldean Period.

The two prophets **Jeremiah** (c. 627-575 BC.) and **Ezekiel** (592-570) were at one period contemporaries, although the places and occasions of their message were different. Jeremiah's ministry began in the seventh century, extending into the sixth. The central event of the historical background is the fall of Jerusalem in 586. At this point comes the culmination of Jeremiah's prophecies and the pivotal point of Ezekiel's prophetic ministry. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem even after its fall until he was forced to go to Egypt (Jer. 43:6-7), but Ezekiel was carried off to Babylon in 597 some eleven years before the (final) fall of Jerusalem. It has been said that in the years preceding this final fall Ezekiel was a denunciatory prophet (i.e. chapters 1-24) but after 'a consoling pastor' or 'watchman'. His final chapters 25-32 speak of judgement upon foreign nations and chs 33-38 are messages of hope for Judah and Jerusalem.

Teaching Common With the Other Prophets.

- (i) **Religious Formalism.** Jer. 6:19-20, 7:22-24 denounces a religious formalism (scrupulously so) which is divorced from moral obedience.
- (ii) **Social Injustice.** Key passages are Jer. 9:1-9, 22:13-17, cf. 5:28, Ezek. 18:5-9, 22:6-12, cf. 22:29. Evils condemned are deceit, falsehood, slander, treachery, civil injustice, oppression of the poor, crimes (murder and violence), dishonest gain, using a neighbour's service without wages, disrespect of parents, sexual immorality.
- (iii) **Idolatry - religious infidelity.** See Jer. 1:16, 2:13, 19, 3:1ff, cf. Ezek. 16:8. These passages deal with God (as in Hosea) as husband to a faithless wife - with 'many lovers' and 'committing adultery with stone and tree' (Jer. 3:9).
- (iv) **Judgement.** Judgement and 'the day of the Lord' (Ezek. 30:3) are dealt with. Jer. 4:20-22 shows the land will be laid waste because of sin. This would be stayed off with justice and return to true moral obedience (cf. Jer. 5:1, 7:3-10, cf. 35:15). The social sins of getting wealth quickly by unrighteous means is involving them in judgement (Jer. 17:11, 22:17, Ezek. 22:13). Because of their sins God had already taken away His peace (Shalom), steadfast love (chesed), and mercy (rahamim) - Jer. 16:5.
- (v) **Restoration.** A study of the references listed here will cover the following points:- The restoration of at least a (the) remnant, the restoration related to a 'righteous Branch' of the seed of David who would 'reign as King and deal wisely' and 'execute justice and righteousness in the land', his name being 'the Lord our righteousness'. The restoration would be the action and evidence of God's steadfast love, but this was for His name's sake primarily. His Spirit would breathe into the dry bones and restore life. This would involve the cleansing and renewal of His

people. This would involve repentance, and moral response and action by the people themselves. See Jer. 23:5, 6, cf. 33:15-16, Ezek. 37:24-25, Jer. 33:11, Jer. 24:6-7, Ezek. 11:17-19, 36:21-36, cf. 39:7, 21-29, Jer. 4:4, 14, cf. Ezek. 18:31.

(3) Prophets of The Restoration.

These prophets, **Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi**, are almost exclusively occupied with the rebuilding of the Temple. Social justice and true (heart) obedience to the law are stressed - see especially Zech. 8:16-17. Malachi touches upon matters related to the social-moral life of the community, both in their giving of tithes, in their pure marriage (i.e. not to foreign women and so to foreign gods) - see Mal. 1:10, 3:1, 10. Fidelity to wives is enjoined (cf. Gen. 31:50, Mal. 2:14-15). God's hatred of divorce is declared, and emphasis on moral purity and faithfulness is enjoined - cf. Mal. 2:15-16.

(4) Other Prophets.

Daniel, Obadiah and Jonah are other prophetic books which relate to the ethics of Israel. Daniel's emphasis is on the coming Kingdom which has moral connotation. Jonah relates to God's love and compassion for men, not only of Israel. In addition Joel speaks of the restoration in a way that outlines grace but speaks of the Day of the Lord. This, however, not without the promise of the universal outpouring of the Spirit. The Day of the Lord is to cause people to return and repent, God's love being towards them who do so (2:12-13).

(5) Value of Prophetism.

We can see from the above that the prophets reminded the people of their social and ethical obligations in covenant under the law, and revealed the intrinsic meaning and worth of the same. Yet again they pointed to the Covenant-God who would brook no disobedience, but would punish it, even though His love accompanied His justice. The various treatments of the Kingdom of God, the New Covenant, the Day of the Lord were all with a view to fortifying ethical purity and social justice. In the long run conscience has connotation with the great attributes of God - His holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love.

In the N.T. the same power of prophetism is present, especially in regard to ethical behaviour with a view to the end-time.

(c) Social Justice in the Writings.

The Book of Proverbs is high in sensitivity to social justice. It is in fact a book of morals or ethics. Some of its language is strikingly like that of the prophets, e.g. 'To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice' (cf. Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8). Part of the purpose of the book was:-

'That men may know wisdom and instruction,
Understand words of insight,
Receive instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice and equity...' (1:2-4)

It is Yahweh the Lord who gives wisdom and 'stores up sound wisdom for the upright', guards 'the paths of justice', and is a stronghold to one 'whose way is upright'. A number of things are an abomination to the Lord, e.g. false balances (11:1), diverse weights and measures (20:23, cf. 16:11), lying lips (12:22), a man

who justifies the wicked (17:15). Six things, or rather seven things are listed together as an abomination:

‘haughty eyes, a lying tongue
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness which breathes out lies,
and a man who sows discord among brothers.’

Perhaps most powerful of all is the emphasis upon the poor and treatment of the same. Saying, ‘the poverty of the poor is their ruin,’ the writer states, ‘He that oppressteth the poor insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours Him.’ He also says, ‘He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,’ and ‘He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor’ (cf. 10:15, 14:31, 19:17, 22:9). Very telling is the statement, ‘A righteous man knows the rights of the poor,’ as also, ‘Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.’

Other of the Writings emphasise the social responsibility. Job 31 is a cry of Job to vindicate himself in his concern for holiness, ethical purity, social righteousness, and is very moving. In this he includes responsibility to the poor, to the widow, the orphans, servants, the naked and the hungry. Likewise the Psalms (e.g. 41:1, 72:13, 82:3, 113:7) speak of men, of the special Son-King, and of God who consider the needs of the poor, yet not the poor only but the oppressed, the barren woman, and other disadvantaged.

We can say in conclusion that the O.T. writings are socially conscious and sensitive. There is no division in them between the sacred and the secular. To worship God is to serve man, especially in his dire needs.

(ii) Social Justice in the N.T.

Many have taken the Song of Mary to be a special document. It certainly speaks of putting down the mighty from their seats and exalting the humble and meek. It must have had connotation with the physically poor, as indeed Jesus’s proclamation that he had come to preach good tidings to the poor. It is the poor who are blessed. Is it then a gaffe to take away poverty from the poor since they are blessed? The idea of poor in the O.T. was often the dispossessed. In Israel one was not naturally poor, although one may not have been rich. Oppression was what would make one poor. However, in the N.T. the poor are primarily those who live humbly, and whose spirit is gentle. Hence when it comes to social justice one helps the poor. With Jesus riches are dangerous. Rare is the person who can live with them and not be contaminated.

Yet the ethics of Jesus are all-embracing. To do righteousness is to do the will of the heavenly Father. Doing ‘good’ is not necessarily good unless it is according to the will of the Father (cf. Matt. 7:21ff). The Pharisees are condemned for devouring widows’ houses, but also for all elements which are not in accordance with the true nature of the law, however many precepts these same people may have evolved.

Nevertheless, although in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus penetrates to the real meaning of the law - namely love in action - yet that law is known. Social justice is expected in the context of the covenant. Thus when the new company of believers is born, so to speak, at Pentecost, they carry on with concern for the poor - the daily distribution - with special thought for the widows and the needy. Thus there is a continuing collection for the poor at Jerusalem throughout Europe and Asia.

Paul's social ethics are not new, although, in the context of a Gentile population and the church which is composed of Jews and Gentiles, males, and females, slaves and free-people his interpretation of these ethics comes through with new force. We have already seen his doctrine of work, and the principle of service. With all the apostles love is the driving force. Hence John speaks of having this world's goods and seeing one's brother in need. One must give because He gave. True loving is giving. True loving is concern, and so on.

However, in all of this there is no politicising of the Christian ethic. In fact there is no politicising of God, neither Father, Son, nor Spirit.

The Book of the Revelation is primarily theodicy. It explains the catastrophic events of history as all being under the hand and purposes of God. The crucified Lamb is the one who handles history. Evil powers demand to be served, and in this sense man's service to God and his fellow man is requisitioned for evil. Babylon is without doubt the great world system ultimately to be destroyed, but again there is no politicising of the Gospel. There is no meeting evil force with parallel tactics. There is only domination of evil, persecution of those who have the testimony of Jesus, and ultimate victory of good by the use of the sword (Word of God) which goes out of the mouth of Christ. It is with the Word that the nations are smitten.

All of this action of the New Testament seems a far cry from modern Liberation Theology with its politicising of the Gospel of Liberation. The ultimate justice which God effects is the defeat of all evil, and the justification of Himself and His people. This being so, where is the question of current social justice? The answer must lie, as it does throughout Scripture - the Revelation included - in the fact of the Kingdom of God.

7. Social Justice and The Kingdom of God⁸

(i) Kingdom Requirements for Current Living

It is axiomatic that the life of the Kingdom is that of God's true ethic, of holiness of life, of actions of love, care, and concern. It is axiomatic that in the ultimate the Kingdom will defeat all evil, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ and He shall reign forever!'

What, then, are we to understand concerning the Kingdom in the now-time? How does it relate to current social justice? What is our part in current social justice? The answers are not simple.

The first answer must be that all men are responsible for social justice and the life of the human race. All are responsible to fulfil the creational mandate. All are keepers of the brethren by fact of the image of God in them, and they being in the image of God. All are required to fulfil the functional principles of God's creation, and this even without the grace of redemption. We may say the very grace of creation obligates them to obey God in full.

The Fall does not ameliorate this demand of God. The demand simply accords dignity to man. His refusal to obey undignifies him.

The second answer is that all Christian believers are responsible to do good

⁸ The reader is recommended to study the article by Christopher Sugden (INTERCHANGE, No. 22, 1977) entitled 'The Kingdom and the Kingdoms: the relation of eschatology to contemporary political attitudes

unto all men. They are enabled to do this by virtue of regeneration. They are assisted to do this by the power of God, and their membership of the people of God and the Kingdom of God. This now-time, however, is not the fulness of the Kingdom. This Kingdom is to come yet, in all its fulness, in which time total social justice will prevail. However, even now this Kingdom is not politicised, although its members are expected to relate to, and be part of, this world. They have been sent into the world as light and salt. They are to penetrate the systems in which they live, bringing light and preservation (from moral decay) and pungency (where life is tepid and tasteless). Being of the Kingdom they are to bring the judgemental and edifying elements of the Kingdom to their world.

The third answer is that the primary task of the church is that of proclamation. If those of the Kingdom are to offer the elements nominated above, then beyond all they are to serve by proclamation. The greatest good that can be done for a man is to bring him into regeneration, and the thrust of love for obedience to God and the service of his fellow-men. It is a fact often missed in interpreting the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25) that the parable is not told to urge to social justice, but rather to show that such will be unconscious, one hand not knowing what the other hand has done. The key to it is that what has been done has been done to 'these my brethren', and such are those proclaiming the Gospel! That is why Paul can say, 'Do good unto all men, but chiefly those who are of the household of God.'

The demands made in Matthew chapters 5-7 are not merely for some future time (or dispensation, or millennial kingdom), but for now. Only members of the Kingdom can live this way. They must do so. In this sense the Kingdom is exercising its dynamic within the present world structures, but it is not politicising them. Nor is it saying, 'Change the hearts of men and you will change society.' There may be truth in such a statement, but it requires a change in all hearts to fully change society, and even then the struggle of evil powers against that society is still current. The hearts of men must be changed but the Scriptural stance is that there is convulsive agony in the whole of creation, and also in those who have the first fruits of the Spirit! Without pessimism at all it is recognised that the Kingdom is interlocked in battle with the powers of darkness and rebellious men. The outcome of that struggle is only finally at the end-time. Even so, there is no mandate to adopt a laissez faire attitude, or to opt for individualised and privatised faith. His faith must operate out where men and women live, in life in every aspect, and no less where politics are operating.

(ii) Christian Social Realism⁹

This surely means that in whatever ways and by whatever means which accord with personal integrity, the truth of the Gospel, and the creational mandate that every believer should strive for social justice. His primary task is proclamation by whatever gifts are given to him, and by whatever are his functions within the body of Christ, but concern for the poor, amelioration of all forms of suffering, the uplifting of man's dignity and the healing of persons and nations - if these things are possible - should be his concern. His problems arise when his modes and methods threaten to destroy his personal Christian integrity. His problems compound themselves when he sets goals which are not Scriptural, or when he avoids those which are.

⁹ A positive treatment of Christian Realism is given in the December issue of 1979 of ZADOK CENTRE NEWS (A.F.E.S. Canberra, A.C.T.). It would be pointless for this LFS. Study to attempt a similar coverage of the subject.

(iii) The Dynamic of the Community of God

We have ventured very little (in this paper) to examine the Person and nature of God, especially in His Trinitarian Being, nor of the implicates of His Being for man who is made in His image. The Persons of the Father, Son and the Spirit all imply correlates in man to the Person and Being of God, and the obligation upon him (man) to use his powers and gifts in the service of God, creation and his fellow man.

When the community of God is considered, especially as the community of the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ as the Family of the Father, and as under the Lordship of His Son, then we see that participation in social justice is not by an individual or so many individuals, but out of the community of Christ, and in the generated powers of that community. Action must be under the will of the Father, the Lordship of Christ, and the guiding of the Holy Spirit. This is in no way to spiritualise it in the sense this word is sometimes used, i.e. to reduce it to religious, devotional, and private categories, but to spiritualise it in the sense that the people of God follow the Spirit Who, being the Spirit of creation, redemption, renewal, and the eschaton is involved in all that happens in this world, and calls His people to follow him.

...ooOoo...

NOTE: LFS. Studies 43 and 44 are complementary. LFS. 54 ("The Christian Man and World Politics: A Social Theology") completes the triad of studies on social justice and action. These should be read in conjunction with LFS. 28, 29, and 30.

¹⁰ Cf. 'The Church and Social Transformation: An Ethics of the Spirit', L. O. Hynson, Article in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1979. W.E.F. Colorado Springs, U.S.A

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