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The Case Against The Social Gospel

A Study in the Social Theology
of the Prophets

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THE CASE AGAINST THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

THERE IS A striking similarity between the times of the prophets and our times. The prophets, deeply concerned with the character of their social order, faced their current problems, and faced them as religious men. Under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, they laid down certain timeless principles for every social order. Hearing the voice of God in their own souls, applying the principles set forth in the Divine wisdom revealed to them, sternly conscious of the holiness and justice of God in their appraisal of human conduct, they brought forth principles relevant to the life of man and social orders in every generation.

1. *Social and political upheaval characterized their times.* The prophets knew the rise and fall of kingdoms, reigns of terror, murder in high places, social and political chaos, political and economic corruption, corrupt ecclesiasticisms and entangling international alliances. Theirs was not a peaceful world, they knew the meaning of that overworked word "crisis."

Our own times, since the first World War have been times of political, economic, social and religious controversy. Modernism rose at the beginning of the century to challenge and in some areas displaced historic Christianity. It was not the old "syncretism," the union of the religion of Israel with idolatry, but the "new syncretism," the accom-

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modation of Christianity to the new secularism, the new "scholarship," the new "science," the new optimism which was making the world "safe for democracy," the new naturalism, conceiving of every man as a child of God; the new utopianism which envisioned a new social order just around the corner.

Then came the challenge of atheistic Communism. In the name of a broader economic democracy, Communism challenged Capitalism, but limited human liberty and deprived individuals of basic rights in its totalitarian state. In fear of Communism, Capitalism in Italy and Germany, took fascist forms, bringing forth the corporate state, which, while exercising a certain amount of control over capitalism, was biased in its interest. Allied with this corporate state were arrogant nationalisms and vicious doctrines of the master race. All these remedies for Communism were as destructive of human values as the system they opposed and soon fell into disrepute.

Out of this welter of chaos came the second World War, with its millions of dead, widespread economic distress, and the emergence of two world powers, viewing each other with suspicion and distrust, Russia and the United States. The invention of the atomic bomb pointed toward an ominous future and the possible destruction of civilization. The prophets, in their times, laid down eternal principles applicable to their own social order. Today, in our times, we need to restudy these principles for our own guidance.

2 *The days of the prophets were also characterized by the neglect of true religion.* Joseph Parker says, in his comment on Judges 6:1. "The sixth chapter begins with the usual black line:—'And the children of Israel did evil in

the sight of the Lord'." A vivid picture of their state is given in the next verse (2). Israel was dwelling in "the dens which are in the mountains and caves and strongholds." The writer intimates that there is a close connection between Israel's sin and the state of affairs in Israel. It, too, is a picture of our own time: our departure from God and our bomb-shelters. Science triumphs in the invention of the deadly atomic bomb, but man cowers in fear before his invention and writes of the possible destruction of man. Man puts his trust in the weapons of war and then cowers in terror before their destructiveness. The long centuries have not taught the natural man that the shedding of blood cannot build the good society of which his sages have dreamed.

The prophets, noting the connection between sin and social and political distress, constantly thundered against sin, individual and collective. They often rebuked the people for their neglect of the revealed faith (Hosea 3:1), clearly indicating that it would lead to disaster, a truth which the modern social gospel scorns (Amos 3:13-15). The prophets, unlike their modern would-be successors, thundered against the empty ritualisms of their day (Amos 5:21-24), pointing out that God desired righteousness in His people rather than insincere offerings, no matter how magnificent (Micah 6:6-8). The prophets insisted that men found their greatest freedom and happiness, not in a certain political system, but in obedience to the will of God (Ezek. 11:1-9). Israel's distress, according to the prophets, was not due to a faulty political structure, nor an imperfect economic system, but to her neglect of the true faith of Jehovah and her disobedience to the will of God. A little old-fashioned to the modern social gospeler, but as fundamental as bread and water.

Religion in our times is decadent, and many varieties of syncretism flourish in every ecclesiastical group. Modern liberalism, with its denial of the authority of the Scriptures, its skepticism concerning the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, has led to a relativity in both faith and morals which is directly reflected in the degeneration of our social and political orders. The attempt to maintain Christian ethics and Christian moral standards in society, after the abandonment of the doctrines upon which they rest, has resulted in spiritual and moral decline. The widespread denial of the doctrines of Christianity by large sections of ecclesiastical leadership, has cut the nerve of the Church's resistance to the corruptions of the world, the unbelief of skepticism, the self-willed secularism, and the steady advance of Romanism. Like the days of the prophets, our day is characterized by widespread rejection of the true faith in favor of an inclusivist hodge-podge, the nominal adherence to this unholy mixture expressed in empty ritualistic forms, the divorcement of the fundamental doctrines of the faith from the fundamental ethical principles of the faith, and an ecclesiastical leadership which (like those of old) still stonemasons prophets who would recall the church to the faith which once made it a conquering host.

3. *The days of the prophets, as in our day, saw men and nations relying upon military might instead of depending upon God, Isaiah (31:1-3) and other prophets continually charged the Hebrews with depending upon military alliances and material resources, instead of depending upon the power of God to deliver them (Isaiah 7 and 8). Coupled with this was a false faith, faith in a God who looked suspiciously like a Jew, and who was intended to serve the national in-*

terests of a people who worshipped Him with their lips while their heart was far from Him. Such a people had no faith strong enough to sustain them in time of war, and their meagre resources only betrayed them into a false courage.

In our day, the very modernism which has encouraged pacifism, deplored the folly of war, advocated love and brotherhood, has by its unbelief undermined men's faith in the very God whose help the prophets said would suffice. That faith in God and the power of right which must take the place of military preparedness, is not possible in a nation where modernism has made uncertain every doctrine upon which the Christian faith rests. Men, who profess to abhor war in all its forms, who see the hopelessness of trying to build the good society by the shedding of blood, nevertheless, offer the world an uncertain faith and a God who has been decisively limited in His power to act by the naturalism which underlies liberal theology.

4. *The prophets spoke to a superficial age, for when great truths cease to be important, the material and the trivial mould the social life of the people.* The prophecies of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, reveal that large portions of the people were concerned only with the trifles of life, the luxuries of life, and too often, loved the corruptions of life. This has always been true when faith in the revealed truths of God decay, when an easy going syncretism characterizes the religious thought of the people, when the religious leaders deal lightly with sin. Under these circumstances the social, political and the economic life of a people show the effects of religious indifference.

The shallowness of our time is discernible in the shallow

views of sin held by the clergy and the terrific effects of sin seen in society. The advocates of the social gospel plan on a world scale and hold innumerable conferences concerning the problems of man, but always underrate human sin. They accept it as a fact, but they fail to reckon with it adequately as a force. When they ignore it, it upsets their idealistic and visionary plans, but they start in again building another Babel. They paint pictures of a future social order which are utopian—they do not reckon sufficiently with human sin. They easily envision Communism, Fascism, Democracy or Ecumenicity as the best approach to the world problem because they underrate sin. The prophets painted pictures of an ideal world, but only after God had settled His account with human sin in the Great Day of the Lord. Modern liberalism, rejecting the Biblical God, minimizing the atonement for sin wrought by Jesus, rejecting the hell for unrepentant man taught by Jesus, rejecting the idea of a future judgment for depraved men, offers to the world a message which the prophets would speedily reject as lacking in faith, facts and realism. Life today, with a popular religion which rejects or ignores the doctrines of Christianity, and a social order which disregards those ethics which only these doctrines can make effective, hastens to its fate. The prophets had a message to their times and to our times. The modern advocates of the social gospel have no effective message for our day.

The would-be successors of the prophets, rejecting the theology of the prophets, lack the realism of the prophets. They are impractical idealists, seeking to get a Machiavellian world to adopt the principles of the sermon on the Mount; they are socialists, endeavoring to get a greedy world to

adopt a just economic system; they are humanitarians urging the claims of human brotherhood upon a world where, "there is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10), where "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); utopian idealists, believing that every man is a child of God and potentially responsive to the appeal of love. Time has dealt kindly with the principles of the prophets for they came by Divine revelation from God; time has dealt harshly with the passing theories of the social spokesmen of our day, and their long row of uncompleted Babels testify to the ineffectiveness of the social gospels of men. The basis of the social gospel is not faith in the revealed Word of God concerning human affairs but rather faith in the human possibilities of religious men to build the good society—a faith unjustified by history and unpromised by current events.

R. V. Clearwaters has reminded us, "The prophets' age like our own, found individuals in dire need: not of metaphysics, supplying a new philosophy of life; not of sociology, supplying a new environment; not of psychology, supplying a new orientation; not of economics, supplying a new set of values; but personal faith in a personal God supplying a new heart."

I. The Social Gospel Is Deeply Rooted In a False Theology

1. *The prophets were convinced that the sinful heart of the individual is the source of the world's woe.* The classic statement, corroborated by Jesus (Mark 7:21-23), is found in Jeremiah (17:9), "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it." Jeremiah saw that changing the place of worship is not enough

and changing the forms of worship is not enough. He saw that changing the system is not sufficient, and that altering the machinery does not change the hearts of those who operate it. He saw that you cannot reform an institution by making changes on the surface, and that you cannot change the hearts of a people by writing laws in a book. Unless these laws are written on the heart of the citizenry, time has proven their ineffectiveness. The source of all the social woes is in the hearts of men.

In 1712 Jean Jacques Rousseau was born. He was a romancer, a dreamer, a rebel against society. He believed that man is naturally good, but corrupted by his environment. This school of thought found its religious prophet in Horace Bushnell, who while not agreeing with Rousseau in many things, nevertheless held that the child is by nature Christian and ought to grow up in Christianity as naturally as he grows up into citizenship. From this romantic idea of human nature came the liberal concept of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, based upon a non-Biblical conception of God and an unrealistic doctrine of man. Jeremiah and the Biblical writers held no such views of human nature. In spite of the growing consciousness in liberal circles of the sinful nature of man, their doctrine of sin is of Bushnell and not of Christ and Paul. To be wrong on the nature of man, is to be wrong on the possibilities of man. To overrate the moral possibilities of man is to become utopian and visionary, impractical dreamers.

2. *The prophets held that sins against humanity are primarily sins against God.* The prophets did not denounce iniquity in the name of humanity but in the name of God. They did not stress the rights of man but rather the righteous

will of God concerning human relations. They had nothing to say about human brotherhood in the sense that sinful men are expected to act like brothers. They knew they would not, and so addressed themselves to something more effective: their responsibility to a God who would punish them for their sins. When the prophets spoke of economic abuses or social evils they did not speak within the framework used by the religious socialists of our day, but dealt with the requirements of a holy God. Their language was the language of an outraged Deity, not the humanistic language of human brotherhood. They did not deal with surface eruptions on the face of society but dealt with the root of the matter: human sin against God. The prophets' message concerning the necessity for right dealing between man and man did not rest primarily upon any theory of the equality of man, nor any conviction concerning the solidarity of the human race but what a holy God requires of men. The social message of the prophets was God-centered; the social message of present-day liberalism is predominantly man-centered. The social message of the prophet was secondary, the religious message primary. The prophets were not only professed theists as the religious liberals, but actual theists in that their thinking and preaching began with God. Their social message was dependent upon their theology, and cannot be separated from it. They represented the righteous demands of God, as well as the human values of democracy. They were social prophets incidentally, not primarily.

3. *The prophets spoke in the name of a God whom they insisted is sovereign over nature and history (Isa. 44:1-8).* Hebrew prophecy and New Testament teaching is penetrated by this assurance of one sovereign God who created,

who sustains, and who governs all things, not through an evolutionary process but by His own free will. To the prophets God is completely sovereign. His word is law. His purpose is unchangeable. He is the absolute ruler of the universe. His counsels prevail. His plans are carried out. He cannot be ultimately defeated. He is not dependent upon the caprices or whims of men. The limited God of the modernist is not the God of the prophets. A limited God lacks the respect of sinful men, for sin respects only enforceable authority. The liberal idea that universal man is responsive to the persuasiveness of love is born of a false view of human nature. God's love has been spurned for centuries by willful men.

The modern social gospel, while paying lip service to the prophets, rejects the sovereign God of the prophets. The supernaturalism of the prophets is denied by the naturalism of the modernists. The God of the modernist is limited by denying Him that sovereignty ascribed to Him by the prophets whereby He can and does act independently of man, motivated by His own will alone. The modernist limits God by his definition of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, omitting from the character and personality of God some of His essential attributes, and compelling Him to act toward man in accordance with their own formula. Since the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man has become a liberal dogma, then perforce God must not do anything that violates this relationship! This automatically excludes the God of the Old Testament who was the God of the prophets, for He cannot be fitted into the framework of this sentimental humanism, neither can He meet the demands of sinful men who presumptuously

call themselves children of God—therefore they reject Him for a god of their own devising. Under modernism man has acquired sovereign rights which he uses to remodel God Himself—a more subtle form of the sin of Lucifer. The social message of modern liberalism has only a remote relationship to the social message of the prophets, for it is not based upon the same conception of God and does not agree on the nature of man—these are fatal divergences.

4. *The prophets proclaimed a God of purpose, which is fundamentally a righteous purpose, and would be accomplished in His good time.* If God is King, history has a meaning. If not, it is just a succession of events, without a purpose and without a goal—a cycle of endlessly revolving escalators, raising one culture to the surface as it sweeps another down into the abyss. It was thus, on the whole, that the ancients believed.

In the faith of the prophets, the course of history was the special sphere of Divine activity, the vehicle—as it were—of God's purpose to establish His reign of peace and righteousness. It was moving forward to a consummation. Man makes his contributions to the stream of history, but fundamentally it is not in his control. Men might delay it, but they cannot defeat the Divine purpose. The prophets rested with confidence in the unchanging purpose of God. They believed that God had mapped out a program and would carry it through. While empires changed and opinions shifted, the prophets held to this certainty. They stood unmoved when others doubted.

The prophets held that this controlling purpose is fundamentally righteous. While the prophets recognized that sin, suffering and misery were ugly, stubborn and persistent

facts in the world, they were also convinced that sin and its accompaniments was not a part of the original world order and would not dominate the Messianic age to come. Sin would be eradicated, for the character and purpose of God demanded it. Because the prophets believed this, they insisted over and over again that a punitive principle operates in human affairs. They predicted moral and political catastrophe when the laws of God were violated. They believed that a holy God had so constructed the universe as a moral order that when men violate the fundamental morality of things, certain consequences must be expected. That when men try to run this world contrary to the fundamental laws of a moral society, tensions, conflicts and possible revolutions develop and—unless corrected—disaster overtakes a nation, a social order or even a world (Gal. 6:7). The processes of history contain a punitive principle—the law of retribution. The prophets were outspoken preachers of this truth and applied it to the social and political situations in their times. They looked into the future and foresaw and foretold the great and terrible Day of the Lord when God's justice would settle with human sin.

The prophets did not envision the vague moralistic social order, called the kingdom of God by optimistic liberals, evolutionary in nature and progress. They envisioned an ideal order, called the kingdom of God because it would be established by Divine sovereignty, Divine intervention in the affairs of sinful men. They did not teach a gradual transformation of the social order, leaving man's nature in sin, but a sudden, apocalyptic entrance of God into human affairs, dealing sternly with the root cause of social stress—human sin. The prophets were radicals in that they held

to a conception of the social order, not where sin is subordinated and disciplined in the interests of the public good, but eradicated forever. Nothing short of this radical gospel of the prophets, with its Day of the Lord and Messianic reign will suffice to cure the ills of society. The feeble social gospels of men are not adequate to the disease. The final solution of the world's ills awaits the sovereign act of God in the return of Christ. Until then the social efforts of men will be disciplinary rather than curative, awaiting Christ's "world-wide empire miracle."

5. *The prophets were not utopian in their social views but evangelistic and apocalyptic* (Amos 5:4, 6; Zeph. 1:15-18). ✓
The prophets held that the sins of the individual, the lack of personal integrity, constantly corrupted the social order and brought it under the judgment of God. Immorality destroys both intelligence and conscience (Hos. 4:12). Sin corrupted man in both mind and heart (Hos. 5:11). They recognized the self-evident truth that we will never have a world better than the people who live in it.

The prophets preached no outward reorganization of society, for they recognized that the malady is deeper than human reorganization can cure. Through many generations men have dreamed of Utopias to be established by setting up better governmental systems. We have been tinkering with our political machinery for thousands of years. We have tried every conceivable political device. We have experimented with despotisms and dictatorships and autocracies and oligarchies and bureaucracies and monarchies of different types, and republics of various kinds, and lastly, American democracy and still the Golden Age is but a dream. Men still talk of building the Kingdom of God but the prophets declare

in unmistakable terms that there will be no Kingdom of God until the wickedness of man is dealt with.

The prophets would have disapproved of our slums, but they spent their time facing the real problem: the slums of the human heart. The prophets knew that men create slums, that the greed of man throws economic systems out of balance, that the sins of men will corrupt the most perfect social systems. They knew that the nature of man destroys every utopia he tries to build. To proclaim the theological fiction that all men are brothers and sons of God and expect sinful men to respond to it, was not a factor in the preaching of the prophets. They knew what was in man, and that not all men are moved by the persuasiveness of love.

The prophets were evangelistic in their approach to human sin. They condemned the sins of the social order, but they believed the way back to God must be taken by repentant individuals. Individuals sin, and individuals must repent and seek the Divine forgiveness (Isa. 1:18-20; 44:22; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25-26). The prophets knew that repentant, redeemed individuals have an immediate effect upon any social order, if those individuals have been given a full-orbed conception of the sinfulness of sin, both individual and social, and the will of God for man.

Modern religious socialism has been compelled to abandon some of its earlier ideas about saving society en masse and acknowledge that the individual must be reckoned with in the total social situation. Society sins en masse but must repent one by one. At the same time it has abandoned largely the supernatural doctrines of the Christian faith by which powerful conversions were wrought in the past and adopted a vague evangelistic emphasis which produces reli-

gious individuals as shallow as many of the ill-taught Christians of the past were one-sided. The social gospel has demonstrated its ability to stir human idealism in some select individuals, but it has no ability to produce men and women who will go into the world proclaiming the earthshaking message of the prophets. The supernaturalism of the Gospel produces faithful ambassadors of God's Word to man; the social gospel produces religious socialists, more humanistic than theistic. The prophets, preaching the full supernaturalism of the Christian position, denouncing all types of sin, thundering the woes of judgment on nations and individuals, constantly urging the people to repentance, exhorting them to turn from sin and find forgiveness by a gracious Jehovah: these are the only kind of men who have God's message for men and nations, for individuals and social orders.

The prophets were apocalyptic in their hope for society (Isa. 2:12-17; Dan. 2:31-45). The literature of the Old Testament is instinct with a Divine purpose and always points forward—to the coming Messiah and the universal reign of righteousness. The Messiah would not only be the Saviour of men but the ultimate hope of a world society, with its ever-recurring tensions, its periodic outbreaks of violence and its frustrated idealisms. The very essence of the religion of Israel was this expectation and faith in the coming Messiah in whom all the vexing problems would find their final solution. The prophets knew the limitations of man and the strength of evil. Therefore, they looked to God himself to send a Deliverer, the Messiah, and by the power of God the rule of the Messiah would be established and the good society would come into existence. The only alternative to the dreary

cycles of history as held by the ancients and some moderns, is the apocalyptic view of the Kingdom of God held by the prophets and confirmed by Jesus, for the nature of man prevents him from building the utopia of which noble spirits dream. The prophets looked forward with hope to the coming of the Messiah. This was their hope for the good society, as the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), the return of Christ, is the Christian hope for society.

6. *It was the prophets' doctrine that human ethics rest primarily upon the moral requirements of God.* "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8). The prophets were not mere pietists, they insisted upon ethical behaviour in every area of life as the requirement of a righteous God. They denounced those that blur moral distinctions, "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). The prophets have been called "ethical prophets" and rightly so. However, their ethics rested upon theology, not humanitarianism.. Their sociology was theocentric, not humanistic. They said much about the holiness and justice of God and nothing about what the modernist likes to refer to as "reverence for personality."

The standard by which the prophets judged was not an ethical code, nor any moralistic appraisal of the given circumstances. Their standard was what God had revealed to them of His nature, character and will for men. It was because they were so passionately religious than they were so deeply ethical. Their deep concern for the welfare of men was not mere humanitarianism, but their response to the will of God and the character of God. The impulse to human

brotherhood to which the social gospel appeals could never have produced the thunderous ethical teachings of the prophets. Only a vision of human sin as it is seen in the white light of Divine holiness could have produced such messages. The keen sense of ethics, the realistic vision of human sin, was born in the heart and mind of Jsaiah in a crucial religious experience (Isa. 6). He saw that goodness is fundamentally an inner goodness and secondarily a social goodness. The ethics of the prophets were well poised, theologically sound and properly related to the social order. They differed from the humanists in that their ethics were the product of a vital theism; they differed from the modern liberal in that they were based upon the absolutes of the Divine will instead of the relativities of human existence; they differed from the secularists in that they were held in view of the white throne of God's righteous judgment rather than the material welfare of man.

In our day liberals have attempted to discard Christian doctrine while at the same time attempting to preserve the Christian ethics based upon these doctrines. *S. G. Craig* (*Christianity Rightly So Called*, 1946, pp. 177-178) says, "The basic error of those who suppose that the ethics of Christianity are independent of its doctrines is their failure to perceive that the two are originally connected in such a sense that the one cannot live without the other. If the doctrines of Christianity are true, the ethics of Christianity are the only ethics that can justify themselves. On the other hand, if the doctrines of Christianity are false, it is impossible to vindicate either the reasonableness or the practicability of the Christian way of life. Those who think otherwise fail to realize that 'the Christian religion is a unity, a supernatural way of living,

based upon and inspired by supernatural facts and truths.' Let no one suppose then that zeal for Christian doctrines is a zeal for sterile intellectualism. Far from it. We can be intelligently indifferent to Christian doctrines only as we are indifferent to Christian standards of conduct." Trueblood, a liberal writer, unwittingly confirms this statement, when he says, "Here, then, is our predicament. We have inherited precious ethical convictions that seem to us to be profound, central and essential. But they have a curious inefficacy. *They are noble, but they are impotent.*" (The Predicament of Modern Man by D. Elton Trueblood, 1944, p. 51.) The ethical preaching of the prophets was based upon the will of God for man, the requirements of the Divine holiness, the proper fruit of sincere worship and the necessity for righteous conduct in view of the coming Day of the Lord when God will judge men and nations. The ethics of the prophets were thoroughly grounded in the supernaturalism of their faith.

II. The Social Gospel Is Based Upon A False Social Theology

1. *The social message of the prophets was based upon the Biblical conception of God.* The prophets were not the voice of a non-theological social gospel; nor the announcers of the new brotherhood of man, but the voice of the will of God. Their God was not the product of their quest for truth, neither was He the object of metaphysical speculation, nor did they use the language of modern philosophical theism, but they knew God personally and tremendously. Their God was the God whose character, will and purpose is set forth by all writers of Holy Writ and fully revealed later in Jesus Christ His Son. This doctrine of God was implicit in all their social teachings. Their teachings offer no support to

the social teachings of modern liberalism with its limited God, its naturalistic religious experience, its sentimentalized perversion of the Biblical God, its blurred conception of the justice of God, its idealization of man as a son of God and its superficial panaceas for our social ills.

The prophets emphasized in their social teachings that God is universally righteous, not simply righteous toward a people who had recognized Him as God. Nationalism always tends to make God a tribal God, overlooking or condoning the sins of His "favorite nation" while exacting strict justice from less-favored nations. The Anglo-Saxon world has for centuries believed in God as the tribal God of the Anglo-Saxon world, while at the same time paying lip service to His universality. The white man has likewise made God the God of the white race, His "favorite race." The prophets were not exponents of this sort of provincialism, or any form of racialism, but presented a God who is universally righteous in all His acts, bringing His own people under judgment even as other nations. The prophets went further and presented a God who made greater moral demands upon Israel, because of their possession of the Divine Revelation, insisting that high privileges bring high moral responsibilities. The God of the social gospel is presented as a universal God but he is not the God of the Scriptures. Rooted deeply in the theory of evolution, expressing himself through evolutionary processes, naturalistic and unable to work through miracle, socialistic in his program for the Kingdom, he is not the apocalyptic God presented by the prophets and later by Jesus. The God of the social gospel is the god of naturalism, not the God of supernaturalism.

2. *The social message of the prophets was based upon the*

Biblical conception of man. In our day we are witnessing a sustained debate between those who hold the individual and those who hold the social view of man. In the reaction from the older individualism, which too often regarded any claims upon him by society as subject to his ratification, there is the swing to the opposite extreme, which recognizes the claims of society upon him as absolute, and divests him of all rights save such as the community chooses to allow him. The prophets presented a balanced view of man in his relations to God and man, a view that presented his social responsibilities but which did not permit of a social or political disregard of his "inalienable rights" as an individual.

The prophets were champions of theonomous individualism. This was not the individualism of present day modernism which talks egotistically about soul freedom, of intellectual freedom, of unlimited free speech for all, including enemies of God and man; the right to interpret the Scriptures as they see fit, and other shibboleths of unlimited freedom. The freedom *under God* which the prophets defended was not the freedom *from God* which present day advocates of soul liberty desire, freedom to reject the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, to refashion God in their own image.

The prophets were exponents of theonomous individualism. The individual being ultimately responsible to God, has rights which not even a king could invade, and responsibilities to God which must be carried out regardless of competing loyalties. These rights and responsibilities are a part of the God-given gift of freedom to be used as stewards under God. Man, with the prophets, was not to use his freedom as Lucifer, but to use it as a Christian, a bond-slave of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1).

The prophets, on the other hand, refused consistently to consent to that totalitarianism which regards man as a mere fragment of the community, bound to reflect the will and spirit of the community, and forced to live for what his masters say is the "good" of the community. This is the totalitarianism toward which all forms of humanism tends. If man is to be judged primarily on a social basis, instead of a theistic basis, the foundations of a totalitarian social state is laid, and the doctrine of man's ultimate responsibility (the basis of the free state) to God is abandoned. It is no accident that theological liberals generally sympathize with those movements which tend toward collectivism. The older liberalism had a bias toward individualism; the new liberalism shows a collectivist bias. The prophets avoided the errors of the social gospel: they were jealous of the rights of individuals, they denounced sin as primarily against God, and yet they had a full orb'd and stern social message.

The prophets saw clearly the social relationships of the individual. As a member of a family he had definite responsibilities. As a member of a nation, his individual actions affected it. As a member of a covenant-nation, covenanted to God, he had corporate religious and social relationships. As a member of the great human family, he was urged to consider his relationships to the whole family (Micah 6:8). The prophets treated man in his relations to both God and society. They did not concern themselves with the relationships of those fragmentized men who are in rebellion against the Divine will. The prophets conceived of no effective brotherhood among God-rejectors as Marx and his clerical followers.

3. *The social message of the prophets was based upon an*

adequate conception of sin. Sin is regarded by many modern secularists as the transgression of certain taboos established by custom, or by the humanist as sins exclusively against the social good, and by some modernists as sins against one's own personality, or in the social sense as loss of direction. The prophets held no such views. Sin was primarily against God.

The harsh events of recent years have prepared many for a stronger definition of sin. The awful reality of human evil is no longer confined to out-of-print books on theology, but it is spread on the front pages of our daily press. The myth of inevitable and perpetual progress based upon the theory of evolution has been exploded by the impact of two world wars with their demonstration of the potential viciousness of the natural man. The optimistic shibboleths of liberalism are dead, but their ghosts still walk in the theological halls of liberalism.

To the prophets, sin against man is not the infringement of rights which are man's by nature, but the violation of rights which are his by the will of God. To deny these rights was of course to injure man; but it was more than this, it was sin against God. Justice and morality were never conceived as principles to which God Himself must bow, or which He must acknowledge; but principles which inhere in His character. The denial of justice to man is a sin against God and will be punished. This is the theological basis of the social message of the prophets. They denounced moral iniquity in the name of God and not in the name of humanity. The prophets were theists rather than humanists, yet they left imperishable messages that have never ceased to have a benevolent ministry in behalf of the downtrodden and oppressed. Yet they knew and preached that the nature of man is such that

he cannot build the good society, this awaits the intervention of God in history. Man has something in him that causes him to dream noble dreams of brotherhood, but he also has that rebellion against the Divine will implicit in his egotism which leads him to build godless Babels, sometimes nobly conceived but tainted with his own wilfulness and folly.

III. The Social Gospel Is Based Upon A False Eschatology

To understand the eschatology of the prophets, one must understand the view of history set forth in the teachings of the prophets. The core of their teaching is that human society grows and changes and comes to judgment within the encompassing, chastening and inexorable will of God. The prophets were certain about this (Isa. 40:12-14). The prophets insisted that when men attempt to determine the course of history they meet disaster, or confusion and frustration. The economic determination of history, as set forth by Karl Marx and his disciples, will lead to the anti-Christ. The moral determination of history as set forth by humanists and many modernists, depending upon the moral possibilities of man and the supposed moral structure of the universe, is doomed to disillusionment. Human idealism lacks the drive to control history. The prophets held to the Divine determination of history, not by the limited God of the theological liberals, but the sovereign God of the Scriptures. Eschatology, neglected by the social gospel, is the God-ward side of history.

1. *The prophets noted that the judgments of God operate within history upon transgressing nations* (Hos. 8:7). They not only insisted upon the punitive principle in history that results in disastrous consequences upon wrong acts (Gal.

6:7) but that God directly intervenes in history, bringing to pass certain specific judgments (as in Gen. 11:7) and giving history a new turn. They also insist that in the great and terrible Day of the Lord that God would balance accounts with stern justice (Amos 5:15-20; Isa. 2:12-17).

Just as man finds integration for his personality and life in a complete surrender to the will of God, so the prophets held that society achieves integration and harmony around the sincere worship of Jehovah and obedience to His law. Sin not only destroys fellowship between God and man, but between man and man and thus becomes a disintegrating and destructive force in society, creating antagonistic classes, destructive competition, nationalistic imperialisms, race hatreds and prejudices, and if unchecked, the ultimate destruction of that social order or nation.

2. *The prophets noted that an unrighteous social order is potentially a doomed social order, because of the destructive effect of sin and the righteous judgment of God sure to come.* The social order of the Hebrew kingdoms being what it was, the prophets in the name of Jehovah rejected it and prophesied its doom. They rejected it because it was based upon a religious syncretism (the very basis of the social gospel, the cooperation of believers and unbelievers in the church and the world). The religion of Jehovah was combined with idolatry, the current religious practices were formal rather than vital, social and economic life was corrupt with greed, love of luxury and disregard of the poor. The state trusted for security to worldly alliances with unbelieving nations instead of the power and favor of Jehovah. They saw that such a course must end in a judgment from a God of righteousness and justice. So, to the prophets their social order was doomed,

and in principle they foresaw the doom of all social orders built by sinful men, corrupted by sinful men, and based upon a syncretist religion evolved by religious and idolatrous men. The prophets would have had nothing to do with modern ecumenicity which worldly churchmen believe to be an instrument for bringing in the Kingdom of God. The prophets proclaimed that sin must be dealt with in justice before the Kingdom of God could begin. This would be done in the great and terrible Day of the Lord.

The prophets never proclaimed the view of many modern social advocates that by steady evolution and upward progress, man will attain the perfection of his nature. The prophets would have utterly rejected the modern notion of the divinity of man. The prophets would find themselves out of joint with modern religious liberalism, with its soft, sentimental God, its optimistic view of human nature, its unjustified faith in the ability of religious men to build an ideal social order, its naive assumption that a world of sinful men can be influenced fundamentally by the appeal of love. They forget that Perfect Love, who spake as never man spake, was crucified by men, even religious men, who did not respond to a greater love for men than we can possibly possess.

3. *The prophets predicted a catastrophic end of human society.* This was called "the Day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18). In this phrase the prophets are suggesting a contrast. The contrast is ever that of the difference between the day of man and the day of the Lord. The day of man is ever that of failure and breakdown, and the prophets saw clearly the difference between a social order under the direction of sinful men and the ultimate society under the rule of God. The day of man is the day of Jehovah's patience during which He waits

for the egotism of man to work out its own philosophies of life, and the freedom of man to demonstrate its powerlessness without the power of God. The Day of the Lord is the beginning of God's day and the end of man's day. Before God's world can come to be, man's world must end in futility (Isa. 1:2; 6:9-10; 1:21-26). The Day of the Lord is the day when God in judgment acts against everything that has been opposed to His righteous will. Until those who have rejected Him are consumed by the judgments of God, the kingdom of God cannot be set up. Every man who rejects the will of God in His own life is a liability to himself and to the social order of which he is a part. He is the real social problem, for those who reject the will of God for themselves will not submit to the Divine will for society. The prophetic teaching of the Day of the Lord directly contradicts that religious philosophy which finds expression in the modern social gospel.

The coming of the Day of the Lord was the basis of prophetic optimism, not the evolutionary philosophy of history held by many liberals. The prophets saw the world as it should be. The prophets also saw the world as it is. These two worlds clashed: the world of which the prophets dreamed and longed for and the world which men have made. They contradict each other. Who shall end the contradiction? The holiness of God makes the end of this contradiction inevitable. The prophets sometimes painted the Day of the Lord as a day of darkness, and sometimes as a day of light; sometimes as a day of tribulation, and sometimes as a day of rejoicing. No Hebrew prophet ended on the note of pessimism. These men saw the gloom and the darkness, saw the iniquity and the godlessness, but they saw beyond it. They looked through the darkness and saw the gleam of a coming day, and said

with Obadiah, "The kingdom shall be the Lord's" (21). This hope was not based upon the possibilities of man but the sovereignty of God. This is the true goal of history, the point toward which all creation moves.

4. *The prophets predicted the survival of a remnant from destruction.* The doctrine of the remnant (Isaiah, Amos, Zephaniah, Hosea) is based upon God's eternal purpose to create in Israel a people after His own heart. Since the future is His, He will not be prevented from realizing that purpose. Isaiah predicts that the Messiah will emerge out of the remnant of Israel. However, the prophecy is not exhausted for Isaiah looks forward to that glorious day when the expected Messiah would bring in the Golden Age of the world. So, as the prophets taught, the remnant of Israel will persist until the Messianic hope is fully realized in the Messianic Kingdom. The doctrine of a spiritual remnant is also fully set forth in both the Old and New Testaments.

The social doctrine of the remnant as set forth in the prophets is the same in principle as set forth in the New Testament, and colors the Christian view of history. The prophets held that the Day of the Lord would be so thorough in its judgment that only a remnant would survive (Amos). Jesus and the Apostles taught that their generation and the world was under the judgment of God, that there existed a spiritual remnant (Matt. 5:13). Paul paints a dark picture of social and religious conditions in "the latter days" (I and II Timothy) that correctly forecasts the social conditions of our times. The Revelation agrees with the prophets and with Jesus in putting the Golden Age of Universal Righteousness after God has judged the nations and the return of the Messiah-King. Paul predicts that the saved remnant, the true Church, will

be taken out of the world, thus recognizing their faithfulness to God and their remnant relationship to a corrupt world (I Thess. 4:16-18). The doctrine of an elect remnant, according to the election of grace, runs from Genesis to Revelation. Its many forms consist of the remnant of Israel, persisting as a people; the spiritual remnant of Israel, true to Jehovah in times of apostasy; the remnant character of the true Church in relationship to the world-order. World society is under the judgment of God because men are in rebellion against God. This is the teachings of Scripture and spells the doom of all optimistic schemes of social improvement by God-defiant men. The social hope is not socialism but the return of Christ.

5. *The hope of society: the Messianic hope.* From time immemorial some men have dreamed of a better world, and at times have envisioned an ideal social order. Plato put this dream into literary form in his famous Republic. He has had many literary successors of a lesser sort. This imperishable dream has brought forth many political remedies, a number of economic philosophies and several revolutions. Many religious panaceas have also been offered such as the church-state of Roman Catholicism, the converted world of post-millennialism, and the socialistic kingdom of God as set forth by Rauschenbusch, Gladden and later Stanley Jones. In politics it has brought forth democracy, socialism, communism and fascism. In economics it has brought forth capitalism and various forms of Marxism. In religion it has brought forth the social gospel of recent years, when men believed that the advance of democracy, the new science, universal education and moral man would build a new world. The collapse of the League of Nations, the emergence of Commu-

nism, Fascism and Naziism brought a measure of disillusionment. The rise of neo-orthodoxy brought the idealistic view of human nature under sharp criticism but its ghost still lives on. The social gospel of our day is still implicit with an idealistic view of man, a romantic faith in the moral and spiritual possibilities of man, a naive interpretation of the power of love and its shallow, sentimental doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The prophets did not belong to this school of thought, even though our modernists try to invoke their benediction. The prophets were theocrats rather than democrats, they looked for God to set up a Kingdom, not an ideal republic fashioned by man. Their message concerning a Golden Age depended upon the personal appearance of a Messiah to reign. Their ideal society was to be infused with an abiding glory that is the fruit of its obedience to the will of God as expressed by its reigning Messiah. Their optimism did not rest upon trust in man, or faith in man, but in the power of God. Around them they found men who cherished an optimism that was born of their confidence in human wisdom, or who had a shallow trust in God that He would not let them down, but the prophets did not subscribe to these hopes. Their hope was in the sovereign God rather than religious man. Their hope was in the coming of a kingdom but first the coming of the King-Messiah. This is also the New Testament hope. It is not the liberal hope, for it has no place in the social gospel.

6. *The goal of society: the Messianic reign of peace and righteousness.* The prophets' message set forth an earthly social order, under the rule of the Messiah (Isa. 9:6-7; 11:4; Jer. 23:5; Dan. 2:44-45; Mic. 4:3; Zech. 14:9). Man is ever eager to be the builder and founder of the Kingdom. The

prophets say he cannot be. Instead of trying to usurp what God has planned for Himself, man would be wise if he plays the part assigned to him. God will set up the kingdom; man will not build it. This is real optimism, for it depends upon the faithfulness of God instead of men whose record in the past has been so unsatisfactory. The prophets held forth the hope of a Golden Age under the personal reign of the Messiah.

The prophets held that the solution of the problem of evil is necessary to the righteous rule of the Messiah. They believed that the primary source of evil in the universe came from the primeval rebellion of Lucifer against the will of God (Isa. 14:12-17). He was followed by man in this for the primary sin of man is rebellion against the will of God, the substitution of self-will for Divine will. In his sin and subservience to Satan man takes on satanic aspects and carries on satanic activities, activities whose real character have been obscured by the endless rationalizations of self-righteous man. Satan as an angel of light has been hard to distinguish, for the most satanic ideas are often clothed in the language of idealism and even religion. The prophets conceived of the Day of the Lord as the time when God would settle His account with sin and sinners (Isa. 2:12-17) and the New Testament writers carried on the doctrine. The social gospel, rejecting the Biblical solution for the problem of evil, wrestles with it unsuccessfully.

The prophets taught that a groaning creation, with its cosmic disturbances and inherent enmities will be redeemed and contribute to the happiness of the new social order under the Messiah. The disorder of nature as we know it is the result of man's rebellion against God (Gen. 3:17-19). Paul

writes, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now" (Rom. 8:22). Nature is not only "red with tooth and claw" but in its fallen condition manifests its unbalance in floods, earthquakes, tornadoes and other violent phenomena. The prophets indicated a firm belief in the close connection between man's sins and natural disturbances (Isa. 5:6) and insisted that this would be corrected in the coming age of righteousness (Isa. 11:1-10; 35:1). The social vision of the prophets not only foresees redeemed humanity but a redeemed earth.

The social gospel, denying this fundamental teaching of the prophets, hopes to bring to pass an ideal social order in a world where nature may slay its tens of thousands on a moment's notice, or destroy millions of dollars worth of property leaving thousands of people homeless and many dead. The hope that science will find a way to make man immune from cosmic disturbances is a vain one. Even after the Kingdom of God (the Rauschenbusch-Gladden-Jones-Federal Council pattern) is set up in the world, according to their views we will still have the wreck of earthquakes, the eruption of volcanoes, the devastation of floods and other catastrophies. Our liberals also expect millenniums to come and go before their "kingdom" is realized—making the future dubious indeed. The social gospeler is the pessimist, for his hopes contradict history, his dreams contradict current events, and his faith rests in the "possibilities" of men, men who are making a sorry record in the present. The prophets were the optimists, for their hopes rested upon the power of the sovereign God.

The prophets predicted a warless world in the reign of the Messiah (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). Isaiah does not foresee a warless world coming by political devices, nor by international

alliances among unholy nations. He does not plead for arbitration, he does not advocate a league of nations, but he places his hope in an Arbiter, the coming Messiah. He does not place his faith in disarmament conferences, world courts, multi-lateral treaties or any devices which men have found of value. Isaiah knew that a warless world would only be realized when there was one world, and that world would come only when a King would come who, alone, could reconcile its conflicting interests and curb its greedy nationalisms. The prophets presented a Messiah of authority (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5; 33:15-16; Mic. 4:3).

The prophets predicted the solution of the "Jewish problem." The Jew is "the enigma of history" only to those who reject Divine Revelation. The past, present and future of Israel as set forth in the prophets is distasteful to both the modern Jew and the advocates of the social gospel, for both reject an authoritative Divine Revelation. Yet all the social idealism, all the education for democracy, all the world opposition to the Nazi philosophy, and a great war, still leaves the Jewish problem unsettled. Thousands of Jews are still homeless and, worse yet, unwanted. We still have the "wandering Jew." Discriminated against everywhere, yet strangely resistant to assimilation, the problem is unsolved. The Scriptures predict that the Jew will retain his group identity and refuse to be assimilated and he fulfills that prophecy (Jer. 30:11; 31:35-37).

The prophets, relating the prosperity and adversity of Israel at all times to their attitude toward Jehovah, consider the "Jewish problem" as primarily a spiritual problem, the problem of the broken covenant and the problem of the rejected Messiah, yet they looked forward to the regeneration of Israel

(Ezek. 20:41; 36:23; Isa. 60:1-22; 61). Zechariah (14:16-21) depicts a time when Jerusalem will be a great spiritual center, and the representatives of all nations will go up there to worship the King-Messiah (See also Isa. 2:3 with Mic. 4:2; Isa. 1:26; Jer. 3:17; 23:6; Zech. 8:3, 22). The prophets recognize that dispersed Israel will be an international problem and the only remedy offered is the exhortation to return in repentance to the true worship of Jehovah. The Jewish problem finds no answer in the modern social gospel which offers only the feeble idealism of democracy as a solution, but awaits the regeneration of Israel and the abandonment of dead Judaism for a living faith in the coming Messiah-King.

The prophets looked forward to the day of true religious unity, the true ecumenicity, when Jew and Gentile would unite in Jerusalem to worship Jehovah and His Son, the Messiah (Jer. 3:17; Zech. 8:22; 14:16). The world will not be truly one until it is one in the worship of Jehovah and the acceptance of His Son as Saviour. This will not come about by the efforts of a worldly church nor the clever promotion of unbelieving ecclesiastics but by the return of the Messiah-King in glory to reign.

The many "gods" of modern liberalism (intellectual polytheism), the many "faiths" of modern ecumenicity, the many "lords" of the Biblical critics indicate that man-made ecumenicity will be another Babel—unity without integrity, confusion without sanctity. The attempt in Daniel's time (Dan. 3) to secure religious unity around the golden image is one of many such attempts, and always around some creation of man, or organization of men. It is significant that Bible-believers consider fidelity to the revealed Word of God of more importance than ecclesiastical unity, and separation

from the world of more value than presenting a united (worldly) front to the world. The prophets agree in this, for they were not syncretists, nor collaborationists, but poured out their vials of denunciation upon the false religions of their times, in contrast to the theological indifferentism of the modern social gospel. The headquarters of the worship of Jehovah will not be Rome or Geneva but Jerusalem. Then shall come to pass the prophecy of Isaiah, "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). The prophets' vision of the ideal social order, while it includes peace and plenty, is primarily a society under the reign of the Messiah where the true God is worshipped and His will obeyed. This is a greater social vision than any of the substitutes of our day and rests upon a surer foundation—not the possibilities of man but the character of God. While this is futuristic the ministry of the prophets indicate that it did not cut the nerve of moral responsibility to their times. It is less futuristic than the social gospel which anticipates many millenniums before its dreams are realized. The prophets had a vision for the future and also faced the corruption of their own times.

**IV. The Social Gospel Depends Upon
A Worldly Ecclesiasticism Undermined by Unbelief
To Give Moral Stamina to Society**

1. *The prophets were fundamentalists in their doctrines and fundamentalist in spirit in that they would not compromise.* These used both experience (Isa. 6) and revelation as their authority (Hos. 2:14-15; 13:4; Isa. 1:26; Jer. 11:6-7). Touch the prophets wherever you will and you will find them in harmony with the theology of the fathers of Israel.

There is marked progress over the past, in that God's revelation of Himself and His will was steadily unfolding but no break with the past. The prophets were fundamentalists, in that they believed that in the resources of the revealed faith they had a gospel for their times and a solution of its problems if men would obey. They were fundamentalists in that they contended continually for the true faith of Jehovah against false religions, false prophets, and false priests.

2. *They were relentless foes of every form of inclusivism or syncretism.* Elijah was the forerunner of that noble line of successors through Paul, Luther, Wesley and those of our own day who resist to the last every attempt to corrupt the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). They saw clearly that there could be no compromise with the gods of Canaan and the religion of Jehovah. Frequently the priests and prophets were willing to support the easy inclusivism, so long as it was popular to do so and the people were willing to pay for it. This indifferentism to Divine Revelation is always the forerunner to some sort of accommodation to the world and its philosophies. But God did not accept the offerings of the indifferentists who were unconcerned about the heathen shrines in their midst. Many of the people found themselves very comfortable in an easy going inclusivist faith, without purity of doctrine or spiritual vitality (Jer. 7:30-31; 32:34-35; Hos. 4:11-14; Amos 2:7-8; 5:25-27; Mic. 6:7). Like many inclusivists in our day "they laid themselves down beside every altar" (Amos 2:8 R.V.). The prophets battled for the purity of the faith as well as purity of life, for in their thinking and preaching they were inseparable. They noted that religious inclusivism became a jumble of empty phrases and hollow ritualisms; the priests became professional careerists

and the prophets in many cases were time-servers and men-pleasers. This has always been the fruit of dead orthodoxy or indifference to purity of doctrine. Those who believe a Christian social order can be brought into being by a united church should study the history of the church, its frequent need for reform and its long record of resistance to reform and reformers. The prophets would not feel at home with their religious admirers today in the camp of modernism.

3. *The prophets denounced false priests and false prophets.* They did not hesitate to condemn false prophets, professional ecclesiastics and false teachers who had departed from the faith or from righteous living. Isaiah (9:16; 3:12) complains that many leaders had become misleaders. Jeremiah (5:30-31) mourned because many priests were unfaithful to God and the people seemed to approve. The false prophets strong in numbers and popularity were very influential. This told heavily against the true prophets, for the people could not believe that the one man who was standing alone was right, and that his opponents, who were many, were wrong. The seats and the trappings of office always affect the masses who are slow to come to the conclusion that the teachers under whom they find themselves are misleading them. To denounce the religious leadership of the day when it leads the people astray is a difficult ministry, yet the prophets and Jesus were forced to do this. The social gospel with its religious inclusivism has no demarcation line between truth and error and hence no false prophets. This destroys its spiritual life and moral impact.

4. *The prophets denounced hypocrisy in worship and empty ritualism.* The elaborate ceremonial system of Israel, in times of religious decadence and doctrinal corruption,

often became empty and meaningless. It was often a substitute for the faith it was intended to symbolize and sometimes an enemy of the faith because of its hypocrisy. The Israelites at times, like the modernists of our day, clung tenaciously to the forms of the faith after they had ceased to hold the essence of the faith. The prophetic denunciations of empty ritualism were vigorous and varied. People are shocked when prophetic reformers denounced respectable religious institutions, honored ritual, prominent religious leaders and popular religion. This the prophets were forced to do, hence their unpopularity. Because of this recurring tendency to substitute ceremonial for truth, and ritual for spiritual life, the need of prophetic reformers has been evident in every generation. It is significant that the modern social gospel and the growth of ritualism have been contemporaries in the non-liturgical churches. Under the guise of "worship" modernism has been encouraging that very ritualism which offered such bitter opposition to prophetic religion.

5. *Naturally, the prophets came into conflict with organized ecclesiasticism.* Here is the conflict of the centuries, conflict between professional religious leadership and the free prophet of God; between institutional religion and prophetic religion; between the true prophet and the false prophet; between separation and inclusivism; between spiritual reality and dead ritual. The conflict still goes on, with the social gospel today generally on the side of many of the religious ideas the prophets opposed. Organizations always tend to lose sight of the ends for which they were created and become ends in themselves. Then they reject the prophets who arise from time to time to recall them to the faith which gave them birth.

In the clash between Amos and Amaziah (7:10-17) we have a picture of a priest who desired the unity of the nation, though corrupt, more than the searching truth of God. Amaziah misrepresented to the king the character and the motives of Amos. In his arrogance, secure in his religious and social prestige, he belittled the prophet and represented him as an irresponsible, fanatical religious vagrant. Amos was considered an extremist by Amaziah with whom prudence had become a vice. Ecclesiastics, desiring unity more than integrity, invariably consider a prophet a disturber, for he undermines the established order so dear to the heart of religious leadership. Amaziah, himself a careerist, claimed that Amos was motivated by desire for personal advantage. Worldly ministers often measure others by their own motives and accuse others of their own sins. The prophets found their natural enemies in the representatives of an inclusivist ecclesiasticism. Yet the social gospel disregarding the testimony of church history, believes that through such an ecclesiasticism a new social order, called the Kingdom of God, can be born.

**V. *The Social Gospel Is More Social
Than Personal***

The prophets were primarily preachers of the will of God for their own times. Their emphasis was personal rather than social. They were not concerned about the influence of society upon persons, but they dealt chiefly with the influence of evil persons on society. To them sin did not reside primarily in human relationships but rather in man's relationship to God.

They were basically apocalyptic in their doctrines and in their social messages for they saw no contradiction between

their apocalyptic teachings and the duty of witnessing against sin, individual or collective. They not only believed in the evangel of Divine forgiveness for the repentant sinner, they also believed in exposing and condemning all forms of sin as an aid to intelligent and thorough-going repentance. Repentance is not fully evangelical unless it is a reaction against all forms of sin. They believed that before the great and terrible Day of the Lord dawned that men and nations should be faithfully warned. The prophets found nothing contradictory between the Messianic hope and the necessity of a faithful witness against the sins of individuals, social orders and nations.

1. *The prophets denounced the root sin—the sin of pride.* Augustine defined sin, “What could begin this evil will but pride, that is the beginning of all sin? And what is pride but a perverse desire of height, in forsaking Him to whom the soul ought solely to cleave, as the beginning thereof, to make the self seem the beginning. This is when it likes itself too well” (The City of God, Bk. 12, chap 13). Again (Bk. 14:13) he says, “What is pride but undue exaltation? And this undue exaltation, when the soul abandons Him to whom it ought to cleave as its end and become a kind of end in itself.” This pride expresses itself in every form of sinful behaviour and every form of unbelief. The intellectual polytheism of modern liberalism has its roots in that pride which refuses to acknowledge its creaturehood and presumptuously makes a god in its own intellectual or philosophical image. Unbelief in the churches today is partly the fruit of that pride of the intellect which expresses itself in the demand for unlimited religious freedom, an egotistic soul freedom closely related to the wilfulness of Lucifer. To the prophets, pride was a

basic sin, involving ultimately trust in man and his works rather than in the power of God. While Neibuhr, among the modernists, has said some caustic things about the sin of pride, the social gospel school of thought as a whole goes on trusting in the liberal shibboleths which are the fruit of human pride rather than faith in God. No wonder Amos denounced the sins of the proud rich (Amos 6:1, 3-7; 4:1) and Isaiah predicted that everything proud in nature was marked for destruction (Isa. 2:12-17).

The modern social prophet gets along fine with the proud women of Samaria, referred to contemptuously by Amos (4:1) as the "kine of Bashan." The modern social prophet self-righteously and safely confines himself chiefly to the proclamation of principles and the condemnation of systems, for it is too dangerous to condemn persons as the prophets did. The modern social prophet, since he is "constructive" and "positive" and deals with principles rather than persons generally occupies the better-paid pulpits and enjoys the capitalistic luxuries which his principles condemn. The modern social prophet gets along famously with the people denounced by Amos and the prophets, and worldly ecclesiastics like Amaziah have an honored place among them. The prophets came to grips with life, they denounced persons whom they held responsible for corruption. They did not live safely but dangerously. Unlike their would-be successors of today, they were barred from positions of ecclesiastical leadership. Ecclesiastical leadership, then and now, generally falls upon "safe" men, men who can preach the social gospel with the enthusiastic support of the very people who often corrupt the economic and social life of the people. The prophets were realists, blaming persons for the corrupt conditions. Therefore, they were

never considered for the pulpit of the FIRST CHURCH.

2. *The prophets condemned the abuse of economic power.* The prophets considered the use of money and power a very important sphere of human conduct and subject to religious criticism. In the characterization of the righteous and the wicked in Ezekiel 18, half of the traits in each of the contrasted descriptions concern its use or abuse. The same emphasis is found in Isaiah 58. In social injustice, which proceeds from the personal sin of covetousness, Isaiah saw the cause of Israel's fall (57:17). Wealth in itself is not evil, neither is political power, but the sin of man corrupts both wealth and power and leads to abuse. Selfish capitalism and tyrannical communism both proceed from man's sin which invariably corrupts any system which may be devised. The prophets, knowing that the love of money and the love of power are constant manifestations of man's sinful nature, did not advocate a change of system, but confined their ministry to the denunciations of abuses within the existing system. They held no idealistic views that a change of system would eliminate corruption. This does not mean that the prophets would oppose changes, but it does mean that the prophetic ministry deals with the roots of social behaviour.

Isaiah paid his respects to the economic abuses of his day. A Roman historian complained, "Great estates have ruined Italy." Isaiah exclaimed, "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field" (5:8). He knew that the concentration of the land in the hands of the few would create a great landless group, with luxury, sin and pride on the part of the rich; and oppression, suffering and possibly revolution on the other. He said nothing about the humanistic "reverence for personality," he did not mention "the brotherhood

of man," neither did he appeal to the humanitarian impulses of sinful man. He said sternly that men were out of the will of God, in rebellion against God, and committing sins against the people of God, and that God would judge them unless they repented.

Jeremiah adds his testimony against economic injustice (5: 27-29). Amos denounced every form of economic injustice and abuse in vigorous language (3:15; 6:4; 5:12; 6:6; 2:6, 7; 8:5-6). He showed clearly that it is the sin of man which corrupts the economic system. He would not have been convinced that the men of his times could operate any system justly unless they got right with God. While he was not a preacher of the social gospel, Amos was an effective prophet to his own times. Micah also faced the sins of society with sternness (6:10, 11, 12; 7:3). He mentions the deceits used by the rich and the lies which characterize their rationalizations and devices to retain power. We are reminded that lying is one of the outstanding sins of our times, religious lies to maintain ecclesiastical unity, privileges and power; political lying to obtain or retain votes; economic lying to bolster an economic system or hide its abuses; idealistic lying by which any system or organization is presented in idealistic terms and its failures and abuses glossed over. Our times are cursed by a plague of lies, making it difficult to judge accurately the character of a political administration; the worth of a candidate for office, or the truth of a theology. Even the ecclesiastical leadership of the day, using evangelical terms to convey alien meanings, have conformed to the times—times in which truth is hard to identify. Micah observed that organized religion in his day was on the side of the oppressors (3:11). The bias of the prophets is a bias in favor of the poor rather than

the rich, not in the class sense but in the sense of the poor as being the more defenceless and more often oppressed by the rich. In this respect they are truer to the heart of the Gospel than the modern social gospel which professes love for humanity but leaves rescue mission work to the fundamentalists.

VI. The Social Gospel vs. Prophetic Religion In National Affairs

The prophets were true patriots, in that they did not affirm that one's nation is always right and its every action against other nations should be defended. They never advocated the victory of the nation apart from the will of God. Believing that God is the God of the whole world, that He is holy, consistently righteous and uniformly just, they held their patriotism within this universal framework. The prophets did not advocate the abolition of nations, but taught that nations should function justly in their relationships with other nations. Nationalistic patriotism, which characterizes most of the nations of our day, is not the nationalism of the prophets, neither did they teach the internationalism of the social gospel.

1. *The prophets held certain political convictions which can be identified.* They were not mere carnal nationalists as many of the politicians of their times and our times. They were not interested in national glory and power at the expense of other nations. They were not class reformers. While they show a definite bias in favor of the poor this was not because of the superior merit of the poor but because of their comparative defenselessness. They did not belong to the "soak

the rich" school of politics, but they did condemn the showy extravagance, the social pride and the lack of compassion for others displayed by the rich of their day. They were never partisans in the modern political sense, but always partisans of Jehovah whom they considered an active participant in the affairs of the world. They did not think in terms of right and left as many of the modernists of our day, but in the more fundamental framework of right and wrong. They were not defenders of class privileges, neither were they apologists for social leftists. They knew all men as sinners, corrupting with their sins every social institution and every economic practice. The prophets, in religion, were radical conservatives, continually calling the people back to the fundamentals of Divine Revelation and opposing fiercely false religion, pagan cults, idolatry, professional priests and false prophets. Their radicalism in religion was matched by their radicalism in dealing with the sins of the individual and the nations, cutting into the social corruption with a surgeon's knife. This radical defense of the faith of Jehovah, together with their denunciation of all forms of evil, their continual clashes with professional ecclesiastics make them wholly unlike the social radicals of our day (the social gospelers who strangely enough are often the darlings of the rich), and the cheap politicians that curse our national life. The prophets were prophets, not parrots.

2. *The prophets were champions of the rights of individuals against the powerful state.* In particular, they championed the rights of the individual landowners against the growing aggressions of powerful kings and nobles. The ancient law of Israel held every man's homestead sacred and inviolable. When King Ahab was disappointed in not secur-

ing Naboth's vineyard, his daring queen procured it for him by trampling all fundamental rights under her feet. The matter might have passed and a dangerous precedent established, but the fearless Elijah vehemently denounced this theft and murder on the part of the royal family. The expropriation of the property of the people by an all powerful state would have received no support from the prophets. One of the strange developments among social liberals is that many have departed from the position of the prophets to give aid and comfort to a growing collectivism. Victorian liberalism championed the right of the individual, modern liberalism seems to be championing the right of the state over the individual, unless that individual is a social radical and then they champion his "civil liberties." Russell J. Clinchy (Faith and Freedom, 1947, p. 23) a liberal writer, says on this point, "Liberalism has fallen upon evil days. . . . Every grant of 'bread and circuses' is called liberal; every effort to increase the control of a centralized government is called liberal; all endeavor to replace the power of the reactionary tory with the reactionary radical is called liberal; and it has reached the point now when the term liberal is meaningless jargon, or a grim joke." The social gospel has lost its way. The prophets stood firmly against all autocratic and despotic practices on the part of the state.

3. *The prophets held certain convictions concerning foreign relations.* They were unalterably opposed to entangling foreign alliances which produced the same dubious partnerships as those in our day. (See Isaiah and Jeremiah). Their motives were primarily religious. They believed it to be wrong for a religious nation to pool its fortunes with an idolatrous nation for the admixture of means and ends was sure to be

morally objectionable; furthermore, it implied on the part of the religious nation a lack of trust in Jehovah to guide and deliver them. The prophets did not believe in the perilous game of power politics and their wisdom has been confirmed by the succeeding centuries. On the other hand, the prophets would have had no faith in the attempt of the social gospel to get sinful men to live together like brothers. They were not idealistic internationalists.

Isaiah expressed clearly the prophetic view that salvation for the nation lay only in repentance and in resting upon Jehovah for deliverance (30:15); that the feverish dependence upon questionable alliances and military measures was a denial of their faith as a covenant nation. In modern terms, he would have said that the strength of a nation lay in the integrity of its people, the purity of their purpose and their dependence upon God and spiritual values rather than the carnal weapons of men. This does not mean that the prophets were pacifists in the modern sense. We do not find in the prophets reasoned arguments against the use of force in international war after the manner of modern pacifist literature. On occasion, Jeremiah could call upon his fellows to repair to the fortified cities to defend themselves against the peril from the north (4:5), but they did see the folly of dependence upon horses and chariots rather than upon God.

Man's refusal to place His trust in God instead of the power of his arms guarantees the continuance of war. The arbitration of the council table offered by many social liberals as a remedy for international strife has not proven itself very effective. The nature of man, the pride of man, the greed of man, prevents him from putting his interests at the mercy

of a council composed of men and nations with competing interests. Furthermore, the more sinful his aims and interests, the less likely he is to submit them to arbitration. The veto power possessed by the great nations in the United Nations, indicate their lack of trust in the impartiality of others. The history of men indicate that the world will not be saved from its folly by arbitration but as the prophets proclaimed, by an Arbiter, the Messiah King.

The prophets doctrine of trust in Jehovah as a sound national security policy was fundamentally ethical in its nature, for Jehovah is holy and demands righteousness on the part of His people. Trust in God is regenerative in its influence and often makes men favorable to right decisions even to the damaging of their own selfish interests. To say that self-interest will finally achieve international peace contradicts all history. The prophets saw no possibility of peace by putting confidence in man or the devices of men, but looked forward to a warless world under the reign of the Messiah.

VII. The Prophets of Israel, the Ministry of Today And the Social Gospel

1. *The ministers of today are not the successors of the prophets and the apostles but their interpreters.* The modernistic assumption that the ministers of today stand in the prophetic succession is dependent upon two fallacies: a rejection of the unique character of the prophets as the bearers of an immediate revelation, and the new liberal doctrine of continuing revelation through the universal Church. Many advocates of the social gospel present the prophets as men of remarkable insight, deep religious experience, but not bearers

of an authoritative revelation from God in a unique sense. In preparation for the coming world church (they hope) theological liberalism has more and more stressed the idea that the canon of Scripture is not closed, that God's Word is still being revealed today in the insights of the religious and the concensus of religion opinion in the Church. The neo-catholicism of the liberal movement in theology is closely akin to the old catholicism as held by the Roman Church. Orthodox Christianity holds that the ministry interprets the Word of God, and that new prophets and new apostles have not arisen to speak authoritatively for God.

2. *The modern minister has a different relationship than the ancient prophets and the state of Israel.* The prophets functioned in a church-state framework, where the desire to do the will of Jehovah was affirmed as the national policy—a theocratic state. In our day, in many countries, church and state are separate in nature and in function (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13). In our day the state is not committed to any law higher than its own will. The democratic doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, in its practical outworking, is an unlimited sovereignty, whatever lip service may be paid to God. The power of religious opinion is felt but it is seldom determinative and then only when it has the strength of political pressure. The politics of the modern state are more Machiavellian than Christian, although idealistic principles are often professed for national ends.

The modern minister, unlike the prophet, does not live in a state in covenant with God, a state which God has promised to preserve, a state which is by the election of grace. He lives in a state which may or may not be preserved, for history records the death of many great nations. His state has no

peculiar mission under God to which he can appeal, although shallow slogans such as "making the world safe for democracy" are often used for propaganda. His nation probably believes that it is superior to all other nations, and favored of God, not by an election of grace but by an election based upon its superior merit. The prophets recognized the existence of nationalism and did not condemn it as such, but rejected the vicious forms of nationalism based upon superior merit, superior race or superior but unethical claims upon God's favor. Neither did the prophet endorse the vague internationalism so beloved by modern social liberals, for they did not hold to the idealistic view of the nature of man which constitutes the basis of the social gospel.

In our day the right of the minister to mould the political thought and course of the nation is not recognized as it was in Israel. His political activities will be viewed with disapproval by those who hold to the strict interpretation of the doctrine of separation of church and state. He will be viewed with suspicion by other religious groups or schools of thought which oppose his views. He will be a source of irritation to sinful, selfish politicians who do not enjoy having current political practices judged by Christian standards. If he participates actively in politics by holding office or participating in party councils, he becomes involved in the inevitable political compromises, to the impairment of his Christian profession and calling. The prophets in a church-state are not and cannot be, exact models for ministers in a modern separated state. However, he can, as the prophets, bring the Christian message to bear on the whole life of man.

***VIII. The True Minister of the Word
Has Much in Common with the Prophets***

1. *He has the same message concerning the character*

of God (Mal. 3:6), the nature of man (Rom. 3:23), and the character and fate of society (I Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). All Scripture and experience testifies to the fact that man is a sinner by nature and by practice, in rebellion against God. Society of necessity partakes of the moral nature of the people who compose it, and will be corrupted or ennobled by the principles and policies of the people who mould it. Its fate, according to the law of retribution which decrees that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" is foreknown. The prophets and Jesus, foresaw and predicted the direct intervention of God in history, bringing an end to man's civilization and setting up the Kingdom of God, not as its mature development but as its successor (Matt. 24). The ideal republic envisioned by Plato and the modern humanists, the triumph of the social gospel as Stanley Jones and others predict, are not in the expectation of the prophets or the teachings of the New Testament. He has the same message of judgment against individuals and nations as the prophets (Amos 4:12).

2. *The true minister of the Word of God has the same message of forgiveness for men and nations.* The judgments pronounced by the prophets upon the nation were always conditional judgments which might be averted by repentance and change (Amos 5:4; Mic. 7:18-19; Acts 17:30). Since we have no sure knowledge (Acts 1:7) of God's eternal purpose, it is our duty to witness to men and nations.

3. *The true minister of the Word of God has the same hope for society: a remnant shall be saved.* (Acts 2:16-21; 15:14-17). This remnant in the Old Testament period produced the Messiah (Isa. 9:2-7; 11:6-9). Jesus (Luke 18:8) asked: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Paul indicates the same foreboding in his

letters to Timothy. He says, however, that there was in the Israel of his day a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:5) even though Israel had largely rejected the Messiah. He also taught that a remnant, the true believers, would be taken out of the world by Christ Himself when He appears in the air (I Thess. 4:15-18). He indicates that, as in the days of Amos, when men are saying "peace and safety" that the Day of the Lord will come, involving sudden destruction (I Thess. 5:2-3). The remnant doctrine is also fully set forth and illustrated in the Revelation of John.

4. *The true minister of the Word of God has the same message of doom for man's civilization.* The prophets of Israel have been rightly called "the prophets of doom." The prophets of doom today are many, regardless of theology or no theology. Those who accept the authority of the Word of God preach the Biblical view of the future of human self-centered society. Liberal theologians, alarmed by the appearance of the atomic bomb fear that man is on the road to self-destruction. Others, disillusioned with all past schemes for world reform, discouraged with the nature of man and the perversity of nations, look with gloom into the future. There is no evidence in Scripture, history, or current events that man's day will not end in catastrophe as the Scriptures predict (Lk. 17:26-27).

5. *The true minister of the Word has the same hope for the future: the Messianic hope.* The Biblical writers taught that civilization is a road by which man travels, not a house for him to dwell in. His true habitation is elsewhere (Heb. 13:14) The hope of the prophets was the Messianic hope (Isa. 53); the hope of the Church is the "blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Thus, the social optimism of

the prophets and the apostles did not rest upon their confidence in man, but on their trust in God. Their social hopes did not rest upon the possibilities inherent within the religious man, but upon the promise of God to directly intervene in the affairs of men and set up the kingdom of which men dream but cannot build (Dan. 2:44-45). The kingdom of God, therefore, does not belong to the series of world empires, nor is it the final stage of an evolving civilization, it is something that comes in from outside and replaces them. It is the stone cut out of the mountain that crushes man's civilization and replaces it. The social hope of the true Church is the blessed hope of our Lord's return.

5. *The true minister of the Word of God has the same obligation as the prophets to witness against the sins of nations, classes and individuals.* Amos preached against the sins of the nations (Amos 1 and 2), against the sins of organized religion, against the sins of society. The sure fact of retribution, the sure doom of a sin-centered society, the hope of the coming Messiah-King did not prevent the prophets from preaching to their times. Neither should the blessed hope of the Lord's return prevent the church from bearing its full witness to its times, so it can be free from the blood of all men. This is the will of God as set forth in the prophets. Christians must not retreat into the ivory tower of religious contemplation, neither should they get so absorbed in the future as to forget their moral and spiritual responsibility to their own generation. The prophets did not fall into this error.

6. *The true minister of the Word of God must condemn the economic sins of his day if he preaches to the whole of life.* The Hebrew prophets knew nothing of socialism, communism, fascism or that intricate economic structure known

as capitalism. Theirs was a simple economy, based upon individual initiative. They did not attack the system but went to the root of the trouble: the people who composed it. They attacked the malefactors of wealth, the abuses of power, the greed and unscrupulousness of people in high places, the bribery of judges, the use of false weights and the shameless hollowness of the religion of the day. They had no political motive, they had no economic theory, their passion was to see the will of God prevail among men. They knew that sinful men will corrupt any economic system and that just men will use any system justly. They knew that any new system would be dominated by the same human and satanic forces that had corrupted the existing system. This does not mean that the prophets can be classed as reactionaries, blindly resisting social and economic change. They would insist however the change be real and not simply shifting power from one group of sinners to another.

7. *The true minister of the Word of God, like the prophets will not represent a political viewpoint but the theocratic standard of government.* The prophets did not advocate a change in the political structure of Israel, neither did Jesus or any of his apostles. The prophets did not believe in the sovereign rights of the people; but rather in the sovereignty of God and they summoned men to conform to it: kings, priests and peasant. They observed that good men rule justly and that bad men will bend good political systems to their own evil ends. They did not look forward to the triumph of democracy, nor the dethronement of kings, nor the socialization of property, but to a Kingdom over which the Messiah would rule and to which all men would submit. This is the political science set forth in the whole Scriptures. This again, does not mean that a minister must back a corrupt political

regime refusing to give his support to a more enlightened one, but it does mean that human politics are relative and must not take precedence over these basic and primary realities to which the prophets devoted themselves. The constant tendency of the social gospel to devote its primary energies to secular ends, is a sharp break with the emphasis of the prophets.

8. *The true minister of the Word of God, like the prophets, will devote little time in adjusting difference between groups and classes.* There is no doubt but that the prophets, men of God as they were, would have been glad to function helpfully in any human relationship when opportunity offered, but they did not permit these secondary tasks to produce the primary emphasis of their ministry. So the prophets held no conferences on a "just and durable" peace, not because they did not desire it but they knew that sinful men will not bring it about. They conducted no conferences on social and economic justice but did the more perilous thing: they denounced the people and the practices that prevented economic justice. The prophets would hardly have discouraged anyone from bringing a greater measure of justice into the world, but they did not conceive of these tasks as being within their mission and responsibility. They knew that the good can become the enemy of the best and that men can, as the liberal churches today, occupy themselves with secondary tasks while the primary task is neglected: the commission to preach the gospel to every creature. The prophets also knew that the necessity for such conferences and adjustments would be endless, for since man is a sinner his problems reappear in new forms after they have been "solved." The prophets were radicals in that they went to the root of all social and economic distress: men are in rebel-

lion against the will of God. The sin of man soon corrupts the "solutions" of men.

IX. The Church and the Social Problems of Today

1. *The confusion concerning the nature of the church and the content of its message, makes it difficult for it to present a united front to the corruptions of the world. We must recognize that there are various kinds of organizations calling themselves the church.*

(a) *The church formed after the New Testament pattern, accepting as its sole authority for faith and practice, the Holy Scriptures. This is what liberals now call the "sect type" of church. If it is a true church, it is a part of that believing remnant, that company of true believers whom Christ at His coming will recognize as His own. Such a church insists upon a definite experience of regeneration, as pre-requisite to membership. It requires definite Christian behaviour as the fruit of that experience. This is a church after the New Testament pattern.*

(b) *There is also the inclusive church, which does not require regeneration as a condition of membership, which does not enforce any ethical standards of behaviour, such as the state churches of various countries, the catholic churches (Eastern and Roman); churches which are fundamentally sacramentarian in emphasis, priestly rather than prophetic; and ceremonial rather than dynamic. Those who hold to the New Testament pattern insist that the inclusive church is a corruption of the New Testament church. The Protestant Reformation, the presence of the free churches in Europe, the evangelical groups in Eastern Europe are all protests against this inclusive type of church.*

(c) *Since the turn of the century, we have the liberal*

church, functioning ambiguously in the framework of a so-called evangelical denomination. It does not accept the Bible as final authority in faith, it does not enforce the ethical standards of the New Testament church in its membership, it holds only such religious truths that meet the test of human reason. Its social view is utopian rather than apocalyptic; its conception of God is paternal to the extent of almost excluding the governmental aspect; its fundamental religious philosophy is naturalistic rather than supernatural; its conception of Christ is more akin to the Unitarian view than the New Testament teachings. Its social objective is the leavening of the mass, instead of calling out the remnant.

(d) *We also have the worldly church everywhere, often giving lip service to Christian doctrines, but primarily organizational rather the prophetic; conforming to the world instead of challenging it.* Membership in it often carries no greater ethical obligation than membership in a respectable human society. It is the dead church of Sardis (Rev. 3:1) or the lukewarm church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:15-17).

As desperate as the needs of the world are, a church which is not sure of its origin or authority, which differs so widely in its message, that works from diametrically different philosophies, that differs fundamentally in the objectives to be sought—such a church finds it difficult to offer to the world anything but an organizational unity which, because of its inner confusions, will lack the spiritual dynamic to accomplish the objects sought. The attempt to achieve a moralistic unity, either by inter-church cooperation or by minimizing the importance of doctrine, or by organic unity such as a world church cannot be endorsed by a New Testament church. This is because the present leadership in Christendom, by denying the authority of the Scriptures and the

fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, have destroyed the pre-suppositions on which the moralism of Christianity rests. Inevitably, if doctrines are to be held only tentatively, the same principle of relativity will undermine the authoritative character of the moral position of the church. A united front on social problems by a conglomerate church composed of saints and worldlings, believers, and unbelievers, Unitarians and Trinitarians, Christians and humanists, is to erect another tower of Babel which will end in confusion of speech.

2. *The modern church has within itself contradictory principles and objectives.*

(a) *The modern church accepts contradictory authorities in religion.* If the New Testament church accepts the Scriptures as the final authority in religion, and the liberal church insists that reason (or any other criterion) is the final test of all that claims to be revelation, then the modern church not only has two contradictory authorities but two contradictory philosophies and perhaps more.

(b) *The modern church accepts contradictory conceptions of God.* The orthodox conception based upon the final authority of the Old and New Testaments characterizes a New Testament church. With reason or religious experience as the final test of all that is called God, modernism has drifted into intellectual polytheism, with gods as many as the heathen. Gods may be made of ideas as well as stones. With much nominal theism actually atheism, the modern church has both idolatrous and atheistic elements. The modern church does not agree as to the character or the identity of its God.

(c) *The modern church holds contradictory views concerning the nature and possibilities of man.* A New Testament church holds to Biblical teachings concerning human nature, teachings which are continually verified by human

events. It therefore insists that man in his natural state is inclined to evil as well as good, but that even his good impulses are not free from the taint of evil, consequently the works of men are mixed. This continually prevents social idealism from reaching its objectives. The New Testament church, consequently, insists that man (not even religious man), cannot build the Kingdom of God; that he is not only attempting to usurp the prerogatives of God, but that he also lacks the moral and spiritual resources for such an achievement. The redemption of society, impossible without the regeneration of the individual, is hopeless since Christianity is a minority and always has been. Neither Scripture nor current history indicate any possibilities of a change of status. Today there are more non-Christians in the world than when Jesus died; and more unbelief in the modern church than any time in the history of the Church. The liberal doctrine of man upon which the social gospel rests, is derived from Rousseau and Bushnell rather than Christ and Paul. It is more Greek than Christian, and more idealistic than practical. Modernism has forsaken the prophets for Plato, and forsaken Christ for Rousseau and Bushnell.

(d) *The modern church holds contradictory views as to the primacy of its task.*

A New Testament church holds to the Scriptural position (Matt. 28:19-20) that the primary task of a church is to preach the gospel of salvation to all men everywhere, to offer them salvation from sin and eternal life in Jesus Christ, to gather together a remnant of true believers prepared to meet the Lord at His coming. A New Testament church is primarily an evangelistic church, and by evangelism is meant that evangelism which is based upon the doctrines of grace as set forth in the Scriptures. In the larger sense it holds

to the conviction that it is more important to keep a pure witness to the Christian faith in the world, than to pour its energies into the secondary task of social reform which is palliative rather than regenerative. It believes that more lasting social good is accomplished by the bringing of individuals to Jesus Christ, than the effort to get sinful men to adopt more ethical forms of behaviour. It has observed that when the faith of the church has been corrupted that the morality of the social order suffers in consequence. Since Christians and those who are in rebellion against God do not have the same philosophy or the same social objectives, it is difficult for them to cooperate. The New Testament church is primarily evangelistic and secondarily social in its emphasis; the churches devoted to the social gospel have reversed this priority, making cooperation impossible between the two groups. The prophets observed that religious syncretism did not have any conspicuous success in the social field, so they never advocated a united religious front against the evils of society, for false religion is socially harmful and never produces the spiritual values which result from a consistent Christian testimony. The social gospel must be rejected by those who are the most concerned about the welfare of society, for it lacks both the realism and the spiritual dynamic to be effective.

***What is the Social Responsibility
of a New Testament Church?***

1. *A New Testament church has a fundamental responsibility to the world: it must set forth and exemplify the righteous will of God for all men.* It must not accept as its standard the ethical relativities of the modernists, the endless compromises of democracy, the party cries of the nationalists, the partisan lies of the politicians, the plausible trap-

pings of economic greed, the mouthy ravings of shallow patriotism, the prejudices and fanaticisms of racism, or the polyanna deliverances of its own pink-tea prophets. It must continually check and correct its basic positions by the eternal principles laid down in the Word of God. A church which echoes the party cries of a sinful society, which becomes the mouthpiece of the illusions of its times, which abandons its primary authority for lesser authorities, whose ministry deals principally in secondary truths, has abandoned its New Testament charter, whether its professed theology be orthodox or liberal. The church must be in the world but not of it.

2. *A New Testament church must not only be separate from the secular state in name, but it must refuse to be used by the secular state for secular ends.* The church which permits itself to be the spiritual propaganda arm of a sinful state, hypocritically paying lip service to idealism in time of war, or the recruiting agent for the military forces in time of peace, or the supporter of a selfish and sinful international policy in the name of patriotism, or becomes a bulwark of class privilege or an apologist for class abuse, is in spirit a state church, having renounced its primary task, to bring all men and institutions under the criticism of the Word of God.

A New Testament church recognizes the legitimate function of the state as set forth in the Scriptures, respects its authority, prays for its rulers and urges its people to be good citizens, within the will of God (Rom. 13). The fundamental objective of a sinful state is self-preservation; the fundamental objective of a true church is to do the will of God. These fundamental distinctions must be remembered in determining the position to be occupied. The true church must refuse to pronounce benedictions upon the sinful policies of the secu-

lar state, but on the other hand it should not give aid and comfort to others equally sinful who would overthrow the state. The church should endeavor under God, under the guidance of Word of God, to give to Caesar all that belongs to Caesar,

3. *A New Testament church must not devote its energies to changing basic economic and political systems, which is not within its mission, but to bring under Christian criticism all systems.* Here again the prophets point the way. They had nothing to say about the value of the political, economic and cultural forms taken by their times, but they had much to say about those who, expressing themselves through these activities, violated the will of God and were guilty of selfish and unjust practices. They judged all things in their times by the will of God for men, and the effect of certain forms of sinful behaviour upon persons. Neither did they, like many modern liberals, conceive of a model state as a place where everyone has sufficient bread. The prophets would never have consented to exchanging spiritual and moral freedom for a totalitarian state with plenty of bread. On the other hand, they would have unsparingly condemned poverty in the midst of plenty.

A New Testament church will note that private property, the right to engage freely in trade for profit, the relationship of employer and employee, are all recognized in the Scriptures and without objection as such. The Scriptures do not invest these practices with peculiar sanctity, but the testimony of history is that it is difficult to abolish these economic fundamentals and enjoy that liberty in which the Christian life thrives. The members of a New Testament church, as citizens of the state, will express themselves and vote their convictions on all these matters, keeping in mind the fundamental principles of the Word of God. A New Testament

church must not devote itself to changing human systems, but its membership should function as individuals in the state in such a way as to produce the greatest measure of justice to all men.

4. *A New Testament church will keep constantly in mind that the hope of the church is not the building of the Kingdom of God by a world church with a confused message, but the return of the King to set up His Kingdom* (Rev. 11:15). There is no evidence in history or revelation that it is God's intention to preserve our civilization. Other civilizations have come and gone, and only the egotism of man supports the conviction that our particular civilization will last. The trend of present day events indicate that its internal contradictions and tensions, may with explosive power, destroy the achievements of the centuries.

A New Testament church, keeping in mind the apocalyptic nature of the Kingdom, remembering the remnant character of the true church, noting that sinful man is continually involved in contradiction and frustration, will be kept from deviating from its God-given task of evangelism. It will not be lured by the utopian schemes of unbelieving humanists, the socialistic plans of those who follow Marx instead of Christ, or the neo-catholicism which subscribes to the new illusion of the social gospel that the hope of society lies in a united church—regardless of confusion of doctrine and lack of authority. The true church, keeping its eyes fixed on the eternal, remembering continually its evangelistic and moral responsibility to the world of men, will remain the salt of society and the light in a sin-darkened world. On the other hand, religious apostasy has no spiritual dynamic in its idealism, no certainty in its message, and consequently no solution for the problems of a world in the grip of demonic forces and persistent in rebellion against God.