

Kingdom Balance

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During the many years I was active in the Synod there was a good deal of reference to "kingdom balance." The interpretation of "kingdom balance" depended to a large extent upon whose ox was being gored. And yet, there were repeated honest attempts to define in quantifiable terms of what "kingdom balance" actually consists, but it was an elusive task. Furthermore, the concept was always wrestled with in the narrowest of senses: Missions versus Worker-training. The debate could become quite vociferous, vigorous, and even heated but no satisfactory or long-lasting definitive ratio ever resulted. For all practical purposes the matter was left to resolve itself by the old tried and true equation of supply and demand with all of its practical implications. It is likewise interesting to observe that in all the debates I heard or was personally involved in regarding "kingdom balance," there were never included aspects of Christian and church responsibilities other than missions and worker-training. Occasionally in my earlier years I tried to broaden the scope to include these other responsibilities but it was quickly brushed aside as an unwarranted intrusion by a person who, perhaps, had a little too much exposure to the social gospel while not yet truly dry behind the ears. Be that as it may, no matter how much you wrestle with the question, there is no pat answer to the problem of "kingdom balance," although in my customary intrepid manner I'll probably try to conclude with one.

As a church we are and should be vitally and even primarily concerned with bringing people to Christ. Since this is a generally accepted basic principle or basic priority, we tend to use it as a salve to our conscience because of our limited attention to other Scripturally mandated activities. The fact of the matter is that we tend to neglect certain parts of Scripture, particularly in areas in which God sets forth what He requires of us in our relation to our neighbors. There sometimes seems to be a proclivity among us for an unrealistic selectivity in the preaching, teaching, reading, and application of the Word of God as a result of which justification is stressed almost to the exclusion of sanctification and the fulfilling of the Second Table of the Law, defending ourselves by intoning that we have to guard against moralizing. Permit me to illustrate. We are all familiar with the King James translation of Matthew 28, 19-20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ... " How often haven't you heard the "to observe *all* things" restricted or applied solely to the major and minor points of formal doctrine and doctrinal practice? On the other hand, how infrequently, if at all, have you heard the "to observe all things" applied as well to the instructions Christ gave concerning our relationship to those having needs other than the purely spiritual? The fact that we tend to restrict or apply the observing of all things pretty much to doctrine and doctrinal practice indicates at least that we may have more of affinity for the strong meat of the Word than we do for the milk of the Word. Some years ago this led us as part of the Synodical Conference to make an issue out of polygamy in Africa before we taught them much about the Word. Permit one more example. I have never heard at a circuit meeting or at a conference or at a district or synodical convention a responsible treatment of the prophet Amos's strong words about the injustices done through the misuse of wealth or an exposition of the great passages in Isaiah and the other prophets which stress God's concern for the poor and the oppressed.

Furthermore, we tend to place an inordinate amount of stress on formal Christian education, expending a high percentage of the religious dollar for this purpose, not infrequently at the expense of the basic responsibility of our churches to be witnesses of Him to the uttermost parts of the earth and also at the expense of what Christ requires of Christians individually and collectively in their relation to those having other basic wants and needs. In the process the Church, instead of functioning merely as the assisting agency to the parents in the bringing up of their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is looked upon more and more as

a surrogate parent, so much so that there is an increasing number of parents who feel that if they send their children to a parochial school, they have fully discharged their God-given responsibility. I have heard many a sermon on the responsibility of the Church to provide Christian training in the form of formal education, but I have heard few, if any, which categorically places the basic responsibility of child training with the parent where it properly belongs. Furthermore, it seems that at least some of our young pastors begin their ministry with some kind of feeling that their ministry will be evaluated largely on the basis of how quickly they can get an elementary school started, whether or not a congregation is ready for it, or whether or not the congregation at that time possesses the necessary resources and has the wholehearted support such a project requires. Compounding the situation is the fact that a congregation in its planning to open a Christian day school seldom, if ever, addresses the propriety of upgrading its synodical support in the same proportion to the drain it will make on the resources of the Synod which is expected to train the workers at considerable financial loss. This militates against "kingdom balance."

Also militating against "kingdom balance" is the willy-nilly opening of area Lutheran high schools without adequate planning and without adequate resources. Here again there is no consideration of increasing synodical support in proportion to the resource drain on the Synod expected to train and provide the workers. The fact of the matter is, in some instances at least, that funds that would ordinarily flow into the mission programs are no longer available and are even diverted to high school operation. I don't think the congregation to which I belong is an isolated example. Over two-thirds of its operating budget is devoted to local educational support, elementary and secondary. Its prevailing large deficit is almost exactly its commitment to the local area Lutheran high school. It has not in the past several years met its synodical commitment, much less increased it. In fact, the 1985 operating budget of the congregation calls for cutting back on its synodical commitment by \$15,000 in order to try to balance its budget. Nation-wide it is said that we spend more than ninety cents of every church dollar on personal religious concerns while less than ten cents reaches foreign fields. We do well to ponder this, for that is scarcely "kingdom balance."

What has been said does not even get into the subject of what we generally call "benevolences." Again using as an example the congregation to which I currently belong, and it was not much different in other congregations to which I belonged, the budget not long ago allocated only three hundred dollars for those in need or hit by disasters. There were no envelopes in the packet for this purpose. Neither were door collections permitted to enable members to respond spontaneously to disasters and other needs, a situation that has now been corrected to some extent. Even as a Synod we tend to salve our conscience with the relatively small amounts collected and expended by the Committee on Relief to meet some pretty clear Biblical directives. After the second World War some significant amounts were raised and used for the relief of war-sufferers, German war-sufferers, that is, largely because of our German heritage. I served on the committee and I can't recall a nickel going to Italy, France, England, Belgium, Russia, or other war-torn countries except for some used clothing which may have gotten to such areas because we distributed some of it through Church World Service. What does this say for "kingdom balance" in the area of benevolences?

I am well aware of the fact that I am laying myself open to the charge of advocating the social gospel and of being an enemy of Christian education or of just being a viper in the bosom of the Synod. Before an attempt is made to burn me at the stake as a heretic, let me quickly scurry back to what I think will be a little safer ground.

The primary function of the Church is to preach and witness to the saving Gospel. The more fully and the more effectively this mission is carried on, the greater will be the fruits resulting and the greater will be the activity in addressing people's other needs and hurts. Is there, then, a dichotomy between the witness of the Word and Sacraments, on the one hand, and the witness of the deed on the other? The answer is, "Yes." Holy Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions do dichotomize what we can call for our purposes today the "Saving" ministry and the "Social" ministry.

From the Scripture side the last verse of Matthew 13 is a case in point. In this find Jesus in His own home country. The people were in need of feeding and healing, and yet Matthew tells us: "And He did not many

mighty works because of their unbelief." Furthermore, it is clearly evident from His whole public ministry that His primary concern was to seek and to save that which was lost, culminating, as it did, in His atoning sacrifice on Calvary's cross. Yet, it is also abundantly clear that Jesus had compassion upon the poor, the suffering, the blind, the lame, the mentally deranged, and the like; but He made no special effort to seek them out. They came to Him, and usually when He helped them in their physical or mental or emotional needs, He made sure they also had the Gospel preached to them. It is well to call to mind too that one of the main signs Christ gave to the disciples of John concerning His Messiahship is contained in these words: "The poor have the Gospel preached unto them."

From the side of the Confessions we can point first to Article XII of the Apology: "For the chief works of God in men are these, to terrify, and to justify and quicken those who have been terrified. Into these two works all Scripture has been distributed. The one part is the Law, which shows, reproveth, and condemns sins. The other part is the Gospel, i.e., the promise of grace bestowed in Christ, and this promise is constantly repeated in the whole of Scripture, first having been delivered to Adam (I will put enmity, etc., Gen. 3:15) afterwards to the patriarchs; then, still more clearly proclaimed by the prophets; lastly, preached and set forth among the Jews by Christ, and disseminated over the entire world by the apostles." The Lutheran Confessions, however, are balanced. They emphasize often the necessity for a practicing Christian faith. Luther states in his explanation of the Fifth Commandment in the Large Catechism: "... In the second place, this commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect, and save him from suffering bodily harm or injury. If you send a person away naked when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed him, you have let him starve. Likewise, if you see anyone condemned to death or in similar peril and do not save him although you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him. It will do you no good to plead that you did not contribute to his death by word or deed, for you will have withheld your love from him and robbed him of the service by which his life might have been saved."

In Scripture and in the Confessions a dichotomy is made. And yet, in practice this dichotomy really does not exist, for in practice you really can't dichotomize proclamation and all facets of love in action. We keep the Gospel proclamation as the primary task while the meeting of social needs flows out of Christ's love for us and the corresponding love we ought to have for others. This means that neither the Christian nor his church will have any misgivings about showing love and thus actively meeting the needs of the poor, the helpless, the old, the sick, and the hungry. This kind of ministry obviously has a place, a distinguished place, in the Church's mission as long as we remember that it is the fruit of the main mission, the primary task Christ gave the Church, that of bringing souls that know not the Gospel into contact with the Gospel.

That this is the proper position is very evident from the closing chapters of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in chapters 17 and 20 of John, and in the opening chapters of the Book of Acts. These contain specific words which our Lord obviously meant for our guidance, especially as we look at "kingdom balance" or rather balance in kingdom work with its inevitable inclusion of priorities. In this whole body of instructions there is one word so central, so vital, so emphatic that it is the only word made especially prominent by repetition. The word is **witness**: "Ye are witnesses of these things...Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." The only other word rivaling it for prominence is the word **preach** which conveys essentially the same meaning since the soul of preaching is witnessing, witnessing to the truth of God's Word. We can maintain an acceptable balance if it can be said of us as it was of the church in Thyatira (Rev. 2,19): "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first."

We've referred to love a number of times in this presentation. Sometimes when that word is raised in connection with kingdom work and kingdom balance, the one who raises it leaves himself open to the criticism, at least in our circles, of letting his emotions run away with him, of being wishy-washy, and hence incapable of balanced spiritual judgments. It's high time that we meet this type of accusation head-on. It is absolutely Scriptural to insist that love manifests itself also in Christ-like compassion which endeavors to

meet the needs, other than spiritual, which people also have. If I am loving, if I am compassionate, I'll be a Good Samaritan as I have faith, understanding, opportunity, and ability. When we really understand the love that has God's benediction, we realize that his kind of love does not ask: Whom shall I love? To whom should I show compassion? Who is my neighbor? Instead, godly love tests itself by asking: Am I loving? Am I compassionate? Am I neighborly? (Galatians 6,10; 1 John 3,17-18) When we as individuals and as a Church have the love that has God's benediction, we do not even ask whether the exercise of that love is a component part of kingdom work and a factor in "kingdom balance." We know that it is. The Christian - that is, the true, active Christian - and this is true also of the Church, heeds without reservation the admonitions like that of Galatians 6, 10: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Let's reinforce this with the following. It is quite evident in the Epistle to the Ephesians that Paul had heard in Rome of the faith of those Christians, many of whom were in areas around Ephesus and whom he had never met. He had heard that they had confessed Christ and had turned from their pagan idols. They had acknowledged that Jesus is Lord and had taken open positions as Christians. In the first chapter, verses 15-16, Paul writes: "For this reason, I, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, have never stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." In commenting on this, Ray C. Stedman makes the following observation:

"What convinced Paul their faith was true was the evidence of their love - faith that works by love. Because love was beginning to be shown among them, love for all the saints, he knew that the faith they exercised was genuine. That is very helpful to know, because if your faith has not resulted in your becoming a more loving person, at least in growth in this direction, then it is not genuine faith. It is merely an intellectual acceptance, which means nothing. Remember how James stresses this very fact. He says that faith is revealed by the concern it awakens for the hungry, the homeless, the needy, and the heartbroken, and our willingness to reach out to heal the hurts of those in society around us. He says, in effect, 'Show me your love, and I'll see your faith; but don't talk to me about faith unless love is present.' And Paul agrees. He has heard of their love, and so he is aware that their faith is genuine."

In commenting on the verses immediately preceding this one, Dr. Stedman points out that two things are emphasized which are always found together in Scripture - the Word and the Spirit. Both, he says, are absolutely essential. There is no salvation without both of these, for these are the instruments by which God performs His work. Then Dr. Stedman goes on to make some observations which are apropos to the subject at hand. Remember he is talking about the togetherness of the Word and the Spirit. I quote him:

"It is always a mistake to emphasize one of these to the exclusion of the other, as some groups today are doing. Some say, 'We don't need the Word. All we need is the Spirit's guidance within. All we need is simply to trust the feelings we have. God the Spirit is dwelling in us and He will lead us.' But whenever a group does that, they follow the path of similar groups in the past which invariably results in impractical ideas, mysticism, fanaticism, rigid determinism, and individualism - everybody going his own way and doing his own thing. Utter confusion results if you set aside the Word and try to follow only the Spirit. On the other hand, there are those who try to follow the Word alone. There are many churches today which have lost the freshness and vitality of the Spirit and have been reduced to mechanical, perfunctory performance of the Word. They may be orthodox to the core, but there is no life; they are sterile and dull and lifeless. In dry, mechanical services, they go through a certain form, a ritual observance, and the people go home deadened and dried up. Such people develop a kind of clenched-teeth piety in which they resolve to do their duty as Christians, but there is no motivation, no hunger, no satisfaction, no love, no warmth, no joy, no life."

Preaching the Gospel to every creature is inseparable from, though by no means identical with, what we call benevolences or what most people would call social concerns or what Scripture describes as acts of love demonstrating faith. In this connection it is well to refer to Luke 4, 18-19. Quoting from the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus defined His mission in this way: "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* All of these things were a part of Christ's total mission. Each has its place.

In both Matthew 4, 23 and 9, 25 the evangelist summarizes Jesus, ministry as follows: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." It is pretty clear from this that there are three distinct types of tasks: teaching, preaching the Gospel, and healing sick people. Certainly they are not identical tasks. Neither should they be confused. And none should be omitted. All are crucial parts of Christ's mission. It is our mission as well. He has commanded us both to feed the hungry and to preach the Gospel. Nowhere has He said that the latter is required while the former is an option that can be considered if spare time, manpower, and money are available.

Witnessing, preaching, teaching, benevolences or social concerns, fellowship, and worship all are fundamental parts of the mission of the Church. They must not be confused with one another although they certainly are interrelated. To glorify God we must proclaim the Gospel and care for the needy. Faithfulness to Christ means obedience in both areas. In both areas we must act as if Christ were coming today and plan as if He were not coming for a thousand years. As Douglas Webster wrote: "Wherever the church of Jesus Christ is vital, an abiding concern will be manifested for the eternal destiny *and* temporal care of men, women, and children."

When we talk about "kingdom balance" or about which tasks in the Church's mission should take priority, I have considerable empathy, with the person who said that there are too many drummers with too many diversionary drumbeats. This has resulted in too much unhealthy competition for money and manpower, overemphasis in one area, and little or no concern for the total God-given work program of the Church. The Scriptures must be ransacked, for only there can be found the ultimate answers regarding the mission of the Church and "kingdom balance." "Kingdom balance," as it reflects the mission of the Church, does not permit the doing of the one thing and leaving the other undone. The fact of the matter is that the subject of "kingdom balance" so often raises its ugly head and becomes a matter for concern only because of the lack of love, resulting in the lack of stewardship in the lives of so many professing Christians. If the resources were there, and they could be, "kingdom balance" would likely become a dead issue. Therefore, I am inclined to agree with what Arthur T. Pierson once wrote: "And so it comes to pass that, while thousands go to church, come to the Lord's Table, say their prayers, and bear the name of Christ, they live a life essentially worldly, are engaged in no soul-saving work, and have no relish for it; they have no experience of the sweetness of voluntary self-denial for His sake, and spend a thousand times as much on self-indulgence as they give to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or even give the living bread to dying souls!" We may have minor variances in what we consider to be "kingdom balance," but we must be united in our commitment to a truly evangelical Gospel witness and in renewed and sacrificial efforts to serve Christ and our fellowmen as He teaches us in His Word. This kind of commitment automatically results in "kingdom balance" and under such circumstances "kingdom balance" can no longer exist as an issue or concern. It exists today only because we are not sufficiently immersed in the Holy Scriptures and hence do not bear in sufficient quantity the fruits of a living, joyous, and unrestrained faith and because we seem to be scared to death of any emotion associated with faith, lest we be accused of *Schwaermerei*. God grant that His Truth somehow move from the head down to the heart, stirring our emotions so that our whole man gets involved. Only then will concern for "kingdom balance" become a thing of the past where it ought to be.

* This is usually applied only to the spiritual. I think that is unduly restrictive.

