

Scriptural Principles with Respect to the Church's Mission and Christian Welfare Work

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Recently at the installation of an executive of Lutheran World Relief, the preacher said that social ministry is “part and parcel of our Christian ministry along with the preaching of the Gospel and the teaching of people” (*Lutheran Witness*, Feb. 13, 1972, p 10). Similarly it has been said that “the church has a mission not only to the whole world but also to the whole man, to each individual, and that not only spiritually but physically” (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, Sept 1969, p 545). Stated in the terms of the theme that was assigned for this convention, the thoughts expressed would read: The church's mission is to carry on Christian welfare work just as much as it is the church's mission to preach the gospel.

About the same time as the first quotation cited above appeared, a brief article in another periodical stressed that the work of the church is to preach Christ, and not social, although the individual Christian will do what he can in this area. The article stated that “the Church as such has neither the resources nor the obligation to feed the world.” It asked the question: “If they (Christians) expend their resources indiscriminately, who is to meet those needs that are exclusively the concern of the Church?” (*Christianity Today*, Feb. 18, 1972, p 30). These views could be expressed in terms of our theme by saying: The unique mission of the church is to preach the gospel. Christian welfare work, like feeding the poor, must not draw the church's resources from this unique mission nor interfere with it.

It is evident that the two views represented above are not identical. In some respects they are contradictory. Both, however, claim scriptural basis.

The theme assigned for this convention calls for an examination of Holy Scripture to determine what it says on the church's mission, Christian welfare work, and the relationship of the two to one another. What are the principles Scripture has established? So we shall have to study Scripture in this paper, not what some book or essay by a notable author contains on this point. In accordance with our theme, we shall limit ourselves to what Scripture presents and relate that to ourselves, our times, our circumstances. That, after all, is what is important to us. So we proceed to our theme: *Scriptural Principles with Respect to the Church's Mission and Christian Welfare Work*.

Our study will first examine in a general way what Scripture says about the mission of the church. Then we shall see what light Scripture throws on the church's role in teaching Christian welfare or charity. Finally, we shall examine what God's Word reveals about the church's role in administering welfare work.

I

The Mission of The Church

What is the mission of the church? Before we attempt to answer this question, we must ask: What do we mean when we speak of the church? The church is, of course, the sum total of all true believers, the saints of God of all time. The church consists of those who through faith in Jesus have been washed whiter than snow in the cleansing blood of Christ.

But these saints are known only to God. However, by means of the gospel God gathers Christians together here on earth into various groupings that we call church. The Lord Jesus brought the twelve disciples together, and the seventy. God brought the Christians of Jerusalem together, continuing to add to their number. He gathered a congregation of Christians in Antioch. He united the Christians in each of the cities where Paul preached into some kind of group or congregation to whom Paul wrote his letters. These were distinct, functioning groups to whom Paul addressed himself. But they were not something apart from the fellowship of all Christians, the communion of saints. They were rather groups in the various places where the gospel revealed that the one church of our Savior, the communion of saints, was present. When we in our presentation

speak of the mission of the church, we are asking: What is the mission for which the twelve were gathered together? What is the particular mission the Lord Jesus has assigned to a Christian congregation, to a synod of believers? We are concerned with the purpose for which the Lord Jesus gathers His Christians into functioning church groups in our present world. In examining this we cannot separate these groups from the one true church of all believers. What is said of one applies to the other.

When we inquire into the mission of the church, and of such church groups, we can do no better than first of all to inquire into the mission of Him who was made the Head of the church (Eph 1:22), who is the chief cornerstone upon which the church is built (Eph 2:20). If we know why He was sent, we shall know what He sends His church to do, for He said: “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (Jn 20:21).

The mission of the Messiah-to-come could be traced at great length through the pages of the Old Testament. We shall content ourselves here with a few pertinent references. Already the first gospel prophecy revealed the promised Seed’s mission as the crushing of the serpent’s head, that is, the freeing of man from the devil’s bondage. The sacrifice He would bring is already indicated by the “bruised heel” He would suffer. How the suffering Servant, the Son of God, would be wounded and bruised for the sin of man is vividly described in Isaiah 53.

We turn to the time of fulfillment. While Mary was awaiting the birth of her miraculously conceived child, Joseph, her espoused husband, was instructed to call this child Jesus, a name that gave expression to His mission, “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). John the Baptist pointed to Him as “the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Jesus Himself claimed that He came “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). This mission He had to carry out; there was no way that this cup could pass from Him (Lk 22:41–43). Christ Jesus came as the “one mediator between God and men, . . . who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tm 2:5, 6). Any failure to place that atoning death central in the Son of God’s presence here on earth completely fails to recognize why He was sent by the Father.

Another aspect of Jesus’ mission, also important and directly associated with what we have been speaking about, comes into view when Isaiah recorded words spoken in prophecy by the promised Messiah. The Promised One speaks of the Lord anointing Him “to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto those who mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (Is 61:1–3). Note the frequent use of words like “preach,” “proclaim.” When Jesus preached in the synagogue of Nazareth, He said of this word of prophecy: “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Lk 4:21). Later when He left Capernaum, He said: “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Lk 4:43). He called Himself the light of the world (Jn 8:12), to give those in darkness enlightenment through His Word of life. The greater part of His active ministry was spent in preaching and teaching. Indeed, His was a preaching mission, the proclaiming of a very special message. He was sent to proclaim the deliverance which He Himself would gain through His death.

“As my Father has sent me, even so send I you,” Jesus told His disciples. Not, indeed, on a mission that called again for shedding of blood in atonement for man’s sins, for this He did once, when He offered up Himself. But He breathed on His disciples, granting them the Holy Ghost, so that they might with power *proclaim* the forgiveness of sins through His blood. They, like He, were to preach, teach, instruct, enlighten, evangelize. They were to be the ones through whom “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (Lk 24:48). In this way they were to become “fishers of men” (Mt 4:19). Go, make disciples, baptize, teach, preach the gospel (Mt 28:19, 20; Mk 16:15)—that was the purpose for which He appointed and sent out apostles, as a continuation and extension of His own preaching mission. St. Paul recognized this. After describing Jesus’ work of reconciling the world unto the Father, he speaks of the mission he and the other apostles had, a mission flowing directly out of what Jesus had done: “Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:21). When Paul was converted on the way to Damascus, the Lord referred to him as “a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”

(Ac 9:15). And when he and Barnabas were sent out by the church of Antioch “for the work unto which I (the Lord) have called them” (Ac 13:2), they knew what that meant. They went, and they preached Christ wherever they went (cf.. Ac 13:5, 15, 44; 14:1, etc., etc.). Thus they fulfilled the role Jesus had assigned to them when He called them His witnesses (Ac 1:8).

So Jesus knew what His mission was. And He fulfilled it. As the Head of the church He knew what He wanted the church to do. And He has told us. Clearly, unmistakably. We too know what we, as Christians gathered in congregations and into a synod, must do. Preach the gospel to every creature. That is the church’s mission in a nutshell.

But where does this leave Christian welfare work? Is there a place for it in the church’s mission? The church’s teaching mission extends to “all that Christ commanded us.” The church must teach the whole counsel of God. It is not to add to nor to take anything away from Holy Scripture as it teaches.

This means that in its teaching function the church must first of all center on the doctrine of justification. To this end the law and the gospel must be put to use. The Lord Jesus wants repentance and remission of sins preached among all nations. This means that people must be brought to ask questions and given answers to questions such as these: Am I a sinner? How does God look upon sin? How can I escape the wrath of God? Is there forgiveness for sin? Is there a heaven and a hell? How can I get to heaven? All these are in some way involved in the one question asked by the jailer at Philippi: What must I do to be saved? The church that fails, first of all, to proclaim God’s answer to such questions is failing in its mission. To tell the sinner how he is justified before God is central in the church’s teaching mission. That is its mission.

But the “all things” of Matthew 28:20 includes the doctrine of sanctification. The law and gospel must be brought to bear on the Christian’s life. The church is interested in teaching, encouraging, inspiring Christian living. When Paul sees as the reasonable service for the Christians at Rome that they present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, when he tells them not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their mind, that they may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Ro 12:1,2), then he is preaching sanctification. He bases his appeal on “the mercies of God,” the mercies God has so richly extended to them through the gospel. And he gives instruction on what is expected by God of the Christian, living in the various circumstances in this world. Thus both law and gospel come into action in preaching sanctification, the latter to inspire and motivate, the former to correct and direct. Christians will ask: Lord, how do you want me to live? The church as part of its teaching function answers this question from God’s Word.

How am I to live as a Christian? Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give to the needy, visit the sick, cheer the downhearted, support the aged—this is a part, and a considerable part, of the answer. In other words, Christian welfare work is a significant part of Christian living. If the church has a teaching function in the area of Christian sanctification, it must teach what Scripture says about Christian welfare work.

II

The Church’s Role in Teaching Welfare Work

The Church must teach what Scripture has to say on Christian welfare work. It must instruct God’s people as to what God wants them as His children to do. What do we find in Scripture?

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Jn 13:35). Our Savior expects that love for one another will be an earmark of those who bear His name. This the Christians were taught as soon as they came to faith: “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 Jn 3:11). In fact, love to God is unthinkable unless it expresses itself at the same time in love to our Christian brothers. John writes: “If a man says, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?” (1 Jn 4:20).

Love is a thing of the heart. It must, however, find expression. To express love isn’t merely to say: I love you. Love finds more effective ways to demonstrate its presence. St. John reminds us: “But whosoever hath this

world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 Jn 3:17).

Welfare work will be used by our Savior on the day of judgment as an earmark of the Christian. "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Mt 25:35, 36).

Nevertheless, such acts of love are done by the Christian with no thought of pride, boasting, or display. It should be as natural for a Christian to love and to express it in works of love as it is for the body to breathe. We do not count and keep a record of each breath we take. The Christians perform these acts of love without consciously remembering and pointing to them for others to see. They ask on judgment day: When did we do all this?

So the church must from the beginning teach God's children that their love to God, constrained by God's love for them, will find expression in love to their brothers in Christ and will result in works of love—call it welfare work. This is not an option. It is what inevitably will follow where faith has been implanted by the Holy Spirit.

While Scripture bids the Christian to "love the brotherhood," it at the same time says: "Honor all men" (1 Pe 2:17). While brotherly love is to continue, Christians are admonished not to be forgetful to entertain strangers (He 13:1). The Good Samaritan did not first inquire who the man that lay half-dead alongside the road was. That did not matter. This man needed his help. Love moved him to extend whatever help was required, though he was a stranger and possibly even an enemy (Lk 10:30–37). Indeed, enemies too are included among the recipients of a Christian's works of love. "Love your enemies, do good to them who hate you, bless them that curse you," our Savior exhorts (Lk 6:27, 28). What the church must teach its people about who is to be the object of the Christian's works of love is summed up in the well-known words of St. Paul: "As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Ga 6:10). Christians have a priority on our works of love, but all men have a claim on them.

The church furthermore is to teach what the relationship between work and welfare is. Welfare is not to replace work as a means of livelihood. Welfare is not to produce laziness. The able-bodied person who is able to work—and "able" includes having both the health and the opportunity for productive work—should do so to supply his needs. St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians that they should "work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without and that ye may have lack of nothing" (1 Th 4:11, 12). In fact, he says: "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Th 3:10). The Christian is not to think that society owes him a living. Nor that God owes him a living. He knows that God expects man to eat his food in the sweat of his brow. Honest labor is to provide for man's needs.

At the same time, there will be the poor; there will be those who suffer need, who cannot work to provide for their needs. The Christian will recognize that his own productive labor will provide for their needs too. St. Paul writes: "Let him that stole steal no more, but rather, let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph 4:28). Not the worker's own needs are mentioned. That they will thus be supplied is taken for granted. But the Christian's labors are to produce a sufficiency that can be shared with the needy. Timothy is told what he should teach the wealthy: "Charge them that are rich in this world ... that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (1 Tm 6:17,18). The rich man did not do well to fare sumptuously every day while ignoring the needs of Lazarus, begging at his gate (Lk 16:19–20).

No, welfare is not to replace work, but work is to provide what is needed for welfare too. Such attitudes toward work and welfare the church will inculcate upon its people.

Finally, Christians are to realize that the first responsibility to provide for those in need rests upon the immediate family. That children provide for needy parents Jesus sees included in the honor enjoined in the fourth commandment. The scribes and Pharisees by their traditions set this aside when they said: "Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free." Jesus reproves them for this, saying: "Thus have ye made the

commandment of God of none effect by your tradition” (Mt 15:5, 6). St. Paul points out to Timothy how it is to be among Christians: “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tm 5:8). He comes back to this a few verses later: “If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged, that it may relieve them that are widows indeed” (1 Tm 5:16). These are strong, clear words. Christian welfare should begin in the home. Perhaps it would be better not even to call this Christian welfare. Within the context of the family, Christians will provide for those who are their direct responsibility so far as they are able, so that Christian welfare can help those who have no one to provide for them.

This may be something that needs reemphasis in the society in which we find ourselves. There appears to be a reversal of thinking today. Let society or government provide so that a family may not be burdened, is a popular approach. The prime role of the family needs continuing emphasis. Here, too, there is a loosening of family bonds; the family’s solidity is assailed. The church must teach what Scripture teaches about the family’s responsibilities.

Yes, the church has a role, a teaching responsibility when it comes to Christian welfare. It must teach; it must encourage; it must motivate its members also in this phase of Christian sanctification.

That the church is to preach the gospel is almost axiomatic. That it should teach its members sanctification including the area of Christian welfare is hardly subject to contradiction. There is, however, another question that must be examined in the light of Scripture. Does the church have a role in *administering* Christian welfare work? Has it been assigned *this* responsibility in Scripture? Must it provide the program by means of which a Christian can carry out his duties in this area of Christian sanctification?

III

The Church’s Role in Administering Christian Welfare Work

We begin again by looking into the life of Him who is the Head of the church. That He engaged in what we may call Christian welfare work is so evident that it requires no lengthy demonstration. “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people,” Matthew informs us (4:23). He concerned Himself with the needs of the hungering five thousand and the famished four thousand. There is no need to give a rundown of the many miracles of Jesus that come under the rubric of welfare work. Jesus does give His church an example of compassion for the unfortunate which resulted in acts of mercy.

We must, however, ask this question: Was healing the sick and feeding the poor his specifically assigned mission? Is that the purpose for which the Father sent Jesus into the world? Jesus is intent to say that He came to preach and to give His life as the sinner’s ransom. But nowhere, to my knowledge, does He say that He came for the express purpose of helping people over physical ailments or the afflictions of this earthly life. To that extent this might be considered something that was incidental to His ministry.

But Jesus did not do anything by mere chance. Nothing He did was only incidental to His ministry. What He did had a purpose, a purpose also in reference to the mission His Father had assigned to Him. We see this in the first of His miracles. Jesus’ interest was not merely to come to the aid of a bride and groom in their embarrassment over the lack of sufficient wine for the guests. He performed this first miracle in Cana of Galilee “and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (Jn 2:11), as John reports it. That His works of compassion were done with a view to His ministry of securing and proclaiming forgiveness of sins is most evident in the healing of the paralytic. Challenged concerning His right and authority to forgive the sins of the paralytic, Jesus responds: “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise ...” (Mk 2:10, 11). Jesus performed these works as a sign of who He was, to authenticate His ministry.

This, too, was the effect His works had on the people. When Jesus healed the man possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, “the people were amazed and said, Is not this the son of David?” (Mt 12:23). When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire: “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for

another?" Jesus pointed to His works of healing and preaching as an answer. In his sermon on Pentecost Peter reminded his hearers that Jesus of Nazareth was "a man approved of God among them by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know" (Ac 2:22). John recorded many of the works of Jesus in his Gospel recognizing them as signs "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Jn 20:31).

Thus the various works of Jesus, and they were often works that were performed out of compassion for men in human misery, were signs to certify Jesus' person and mission. We must, however, not forget that an important factor in their being signs was not only that they were welfare works, demonstrating Jesus' love and compassion, but that they were miracles, revealing His divine power. In that respect His welfare works differ from those we do.

In line with all of this is the high priority Jesus placed on satisfying spiritual needs over against man's earthly needs. When, after Jesus' forty-day fast, Satan attempted to make His need for bread appear paramount, Jesus' answer set the priorities straight: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). Indeed, the loss of an eye or of the right hand was not a loss at all if the result was that the whole body should not perish in hell (Mt 5:29–30). Calling upon His disciples not to be anxious for their life, for bodily needs like food and clothing, Jesus concludes with the well-known words: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt 6:33). When Jesus saw multitudes of people before Him, His heart was moved with compassion, for these were people who fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Mt 9:36). This does not speak of fainting for lack of food or from physical exhaustion or from a body weakened by disease. It was not bodily needs that caused the Lord's deep feeling of compassion. The people were shepherdless, a flock that did not have an overseer, placed over them by the Holy Ghost, to feed them with the bread of life. The problem was the lack of workers in the Lord's harvest. So Jesus sent His disciples out. What were they to do? They were to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt 10:7). But were they not also to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils? Indeed, but again to authenticate their message, as a sign of the truth of their preaching.

Our Savior did relieve human suffering. He did feed the poor. He did heal the sick. And He did much of this. But this was in the service of His mission as the Son of God, come to redeem men from their sins. Jesus did not permit the priority of His redeeming mission to be replaced by an equal or even greater emphasis on relieving physical, earthly ills.

But what about the church of which Jesus is the Head? That the church groups into which the Holy Ghost gathered the Christians became involved in Christian welfare work, in its administration, is beyond doubt. This happened very soon. The church at Jerusalem set up the organization through which these early Christians might practice their sanctification with works of love. People "sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Ac 2:45). These gifts for the needy were at first administered by the apostles. When this became too burdensome, requiring too much of their time, further organization was developed by the church so that the widows of all, both of the Grecians and of the Hebrews, might be properly provided for from the treasury. The fact that Paul advises Timothy that widows should first of all be provided for by their own families so that the church might not be charged with their support (1 Tm 5:16), shows that the church did set up the machinery for caring for those who had no other means of support. St. Paul became quite directly involved in the offering which the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia gathered for the poor saints at Jerusalem (Ro 15:25–27; 1 Cor 16; 2 Cor 8 and 9). He personally helped deliver these gifts to the poor for whom they were intended. This was Christian welfare work, administered by the church. The church was the agency that enabled the Christians of Macedonia and Achaia to practice their sanctification in this manner.

But here, too, we must ask the question: Was this an express responsibility given to the church? Were Christians gathered into church groups for the particular or prime purpose of providing for the poor, the sick, the aged? Christians are commanded to assemble so that they may hear the Word, edify one another, join in prayer and praise to God. But nowhere do we find them commanded to gather into a fellowship so that they might feed the poor and nurse the sick. In fact, the apostles were quite concerned that the preaching of the gospel might not suffer as a result of the "serving at tables" that was part of the congregational life at Jerusalem.

On the other hand, the church at Jerusalem was not told that they had done wrong in developing their welfare program. The apostles did not say: This is none of the church's business; the church must not allow itself to be used for such purposes. There were needs that required the attention of the Christians, needs that could not be taken care of within the families. The church in Christian liberty set up whatever organization was required under the circumstances lest these needs be ignored.

But here, too, the help that was given served a purpose in connection with the church's unique, specifically assigned task. Stephen, one of the men chosen to administer the welfare program in Jerusalem, a man "full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Ac 6:8). He testified to his faith in Christ in such a way that his opponents "were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke" (Ac 6:10). An example of that we have in his lengthy defense before the council. Similarly the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple provided an opportunity for Peter to preach Christ to the people who assembled in the porch that is called Solomon's (Ac 3:11ff). The offering gathered in Macedonia and Achaia was not only a compassionate act for the poor at Jerusalem, but Paul sees a deeper significance in it: "For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things" (Ro 15:27). It was a way of saying "thank you" for the gospel that had come to them from Palestine. When the church administered welfare work, this was brought into a close relationship with its assigned task of preaching the gospel.

What principles present themselves to us from our study of Scripture with respect to the church's mission and Christian welfare work? We sum them up with some pertinent applications.

A. *The church's specific mission is to preach the gospel of forgiveness in Christ.* That is its unique role, assigned to no one else, to no other institution on earth. To this it must devote its full energy. There is no parallel assignment given to the church with respect to welfare work. A church that cuts down on its mission program and directs its energy to solving the problems of poverty, sickness, the aging, a church that considers it more important to provide good housing for the poor on earth than to lead the poor in spirit to the eternal mansions in heaven is losing sight of its mission in the world. Those who say that what we need from the church is works, not words, more doing, less preaching, fail to see that the doing and working that was assigned to the church involves words, the Word, preaching.

We are happy to say that the first three stated objectives of our Synod reflect this unique mission of the church.

1. To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people.
2. To uphold the Truth of God as fully revealed in the inspired, inerrant, infallible Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Lutheran Confessions.
3. To provide a preaching and teaching ministry qualified to proclaim the Word of God faithfully, effectively, universally in accord with the Lutheran Confessions.

These objectives must be pursued with great vigor, for they aim at carrying out the church's unique mission.

B. *Preaching Christ includes preaching the fruits of faith in Christ, Christian sanctification, a significant part of which is Christian welfare work.* The church must teach its people not to pass by the unfortunate with the priest and Levite, but like the Good Samaritan to provide concerned, loving help. A heartless Christianity does not have Christ as its Head.

C. *The Christian will live a Christian life, will practice sanctification at all times, in all life's situations, through whatever institutions are a part of his life on earth.* The church has not been assigned the unique role in the world of providing opportunity for works of love. Christian welfare work begins for the Christian by not closing his heart to the needs of those within his circle of acquaintances, those with whom he comes into contact. Note how Jesus explains the word "neighbor." We also remember that the apostle saw the home as a prime

institution in which to provide for one's own. In our society, governmental programs have been developed to help the poor, to aid victims of catastrophe, to foster better health, to support the aging. Numerous societies and agencies, eg. the Red Cross, solicit contributions for aiding man in various ways. The need for the church as an institution to administer help for the poor, the sick, the widows and orphans appears less pressing than it was for the congregation at Jerusalem in the first century. The Christian has many opportunities through contributions, through paying of taxes, through active participation to come to the aid of those in need. Only this warning. He cannot unite in doing welfare work in an agency that operates under the confessional banner of a false religion. This is the problem in supporting the United Fund, where some of the monies are distributed to agencies under, for example, Roman Catholic supervision. Since opportunities to help are so numerous, we may choose those through which we practice our Christian love.

D. In Christian liberty the church may set up the machinery to administer welfare work and thus assist its members in carrying out this responsibility. Over the years agencies and associations have sprung up within the church to engage in welfare work. We will be thankful for agencies, like our Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, that enable us to practice this phase of our sanctification in association with those who fully share our Christian faith. Certainly such associations deserve our wholehearted support. While we could administer this work directly through our synodical organization, we have chosen generally to do this by means of separately administered associations. Even our synodically administered relief program under the direction of our Committee on Relief receives its support apart from our mission contributions. It is well in this way, too, to distinguish between what is the direct and unique assignment by the Lord to His church, the preaching of the gospel, and welfare work that is done in this manner as a matter of choice.

This distinction is being widely questioned. One of the quotations cited in our introduction expressed the thought that the church has a mission to the whole man. This statement, popular and catchy though it may be, is misleading, as is evident from conclusions that are drawn from it. The church must therefore, it is claimed, minister to people both spiritually and physically. Welfare work and preaching the gospel are then equally the church's mission. Redeeming men from social evils is placed on a par with bringing them redemption from sin and hell. I do not see how such views can claim the support of Scripture.

This is not to say that the church does not have the right to administer welfare work, or that this may not under certain circumstances be desirable, if not an obligation that faces the church because of pressing, unmet needs. As a synod we recognize this in our fifth objective: "To assist all members of the Synod in being active in deeds of love toward our fellow men in need." The manner in which we carry out this objective does, however, recognize that this cannot be made the church's obligation in the same sense as the preaching of the gospel is. The church's unique responsibility toward the gospel must be maintained.

E. When the church administers welfare work, it will, wherever possible, bring this into a close relationship with its prime responsibility of preaching the gospel. As in biblical times, these works of love frequently provide opportunities to speak of Christ to people otherwise difficult to reach. Such works of love may demonstrate to the world the gospel's power to change and motivate sinful man. Surely what we do through our W.L.C.F.S. is not intended simply to duplicate the services that are available through agencies not connected with any church. Our medical dispensaries in Africa have a broader purpose than physical health. In all these activities, the interest in the gospel remains prominent.

To keep these principles clearly before us as a church is important for two reasons. The one is to avoid being caught in the whirlpool of the social gospel. Without using the term, men today advance some of its ideas, perhaps in subtler ways than some decades ago. When it is said that we (and this is being said also of the church corporately) are not to think "that we do our Lord's will most profoundly when we verbalize the Gospel and conclude that it is less important to bring help and hope to the poor, the hungry, and the naked in their distress" (CTM, 1969, p 547), then the church's unique mission of preaching the gospel is being downgraded in the interest of social betterment. The "seek ye first" of our Savior is being lost sight of. When the church's role in social action is approvingly defined as "the corporate involvement of the church in shaping and reshaping

political and social structures” (Scharlemann, *The Church’s Social Responsibilities*, Concordia, 1971), then the church’s mission is being misrepresented from Scripture in the direction of social gospel. We must never forget the Lord’s great commission to His church: Preach the gospel to every creature. We will not let anything infringe on that soul-saving mission.

The second reason for keeping these principles ever before us is to guard against overreacting to the danger of making the church simply an agency for social ministry, of social action. The Lord’s call for works of love as the mark of the Christian must be taken seriously. We cannot say that we love God, and not love our neighbor and not demonstrate that love in action. We must use the opportunities the Lord places before us, and they are many and varied, to heed the exhortation of the apostle: “Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Our faith must work by love.