

NUMBER

**2**

MAILING

# **The Social Gospel Malady**

by  
**FREDERICK NYMEYER**

A Subtle Evil Threatening  
Every Church and Which Has  
Already Penetrated Into  
Many Unawares



"How Love I Thy Law"

Obedience	100
Alms	10
Proclamation	9+
PSALM	119

NUMBER

2  
MAILING

## **Social Action, Hundred Nineteen**

**Post Office Box 218**  
**South Holland, Illinois 60473, USA**

*"Indifferent toward the consequences, but holding invariably to the Commandments."  
(Blind voor de uitkomst, maar ziende op't gebod.)*

SOCIAL ACTION, HUNDRED NINETEEN condemns and execrates the pious sanctimony and hypocrisy inherent in all Altruist ethics, including the Social Gospel, Socialism and Communism, and the "fraternity" and "equality" ideas of the French Revolution.



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Mailing number 1 had the title, "A Diagnosis".

## The Social Gospel Malady

The Social Gospel continues to make inroads into Christian churches, whether into Catholic or Protestant; into developed countries or undeveloped; among conservative denominations or liberal.

This document is addressed to the public at large -- to those who profess the Christian religion; but equally to those who do not.

The material herein is descriptive. When an individual denomination is mentioned, then that is done for purposes of illustration -- to make awareness of the problems and potential dangers, if any -- real and meaningful. The "accident" regarding where the writer has had opportunity for personal observation has determined the selection of the illustrations.

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### I What Is The Social Gospel?

An official publication of the Christian Reformed Church, The Banner, published an article in the issues of November 20 and 27, 1970 with the title, "Two Poles or One Goal?"

That was a convocation address by Dr. Anthony A. Hoekema, professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Dr. Hoekema wrote (quoted in part only and not exactly in the original sequence):

All these passages—and many more could be cited—teach that social concern is not an option for the Christian, but a *must*. Christ does not send us a questionnaire, asking, Would you like to be the light of the world? (Answer Yes or No). He tells us: You *are* the light of the world. This is an integral part of what it means to be a Christian.

The need for social concern today is heightened by the

pile-up of problems which continue to press upon us in the contemporary world. There are economic problems: poverty, unemployment, the inadequate pay of migrant workers, and the like. There are problems of community relationships like racial discrimination, juvenile delinquency, and the rising crime rate. There are the problems involved in our environment: air pollution, water pollution, erosion, deforestation, and the like. There are conflicts within our society: racism, old versus young, progressive versus conservative, those who favor change versus those who favor the *status quo*. There are problems involving sex and the family: the sexual revolution, the rising divorce rate, abortion, and illegitimacy. There are the problems involved in the growing use of drugs, and all that goes with drug addiction. And there are the problems involved in national and international affairs: civil rights, gun control, political corruption, war, the draft, conscientious objectors, disarmament, overpopulation, and famine. In the midst of this multiplicity of problems, it is urgent that a Christian approach be articulated, that a Christian witness be heard, and that Christian love be shown.

*reasons for this neglect*

What lends further urgency to the church's social task in our time is the fact that evangelical Protestantism in America has largely neglected its social responsibilities.

The list by Dr. Hoekema is representative of the problems commonly selected for Social Gospel attention, namely:

Economic problems: poverty, unemployment, inadequate pay for migrant workers; etc.

Community relations: racial discrimination, juvenile delinquency, rising crime rate.

Physical environment: air pollution, water pollution, erosion, deforestation; etc.

Social conflicts: racism, old versus young, progressive versus conservative, those who favor change versus those who favor the status quo.

Sex and family: sexual revolution, rising divorce rate, abortion, illegitimacy.

Drugs: drug addition; etc.

National and International affairs: civil rights, gun control, political corruption, war, draft, conscientious objectors, disarmament, overpopulation, famine.

Then Dr. Hoekema adds: "In the midst of this multiplicity of problems, it is urgent that a Christian approach be articulated, that a Christian witness be heard, and that Christian love be shown."

Earlier Dr. Hoekema gives data on the origin of the Social Gospel movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. He writes:

There is a growing polarity in the church today between two competing conceptions of the main purpose for the church's existence—conceptions which I shall name, for want of better terms, "soul-winning" and "social action," or perhaps better, "personal evangelism" and "Christian service," or "missions" and "Christian action." One recent writer has gone so far as to say that the division between these two types of people is one of the most tragic polarities within evangelical Protestantism today.

What is the difference? The "soul-winning" people, if I may use that term, believe that the church exists primarily for the purpose of bringing men to salvation in Christ through personal repentance and faith. The "social action" people, on the other hand, believe that the church exists primarily for the purpose of discerning God's will with regard to the social needs of mankind, and of working for a better world—a world in which Christian principles will increasingly be applied toward the solution of social problems.

#### ***the rise of the social gospel***

How did this polarity come about? The early decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of what has become known as the "social gospel" in America. Led by such men as Samuel Z. Batten, Washington Gladden, and Walter Rauschenbusch, this movement began to insist that the sins against which the church must inveigh should not be limited to such matters as swearing or Sunday desecration, but should include such things as sweat shops, child labor, inadequate wages, poor schools, and slums. To give further impetus to this movement, Walter Rauschenbusch in 1917 wrote a book entitled *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. The theology embodied in this book, however, turned out to be a very liberal one: among other things, Rauschenbusch taught that God was to be conceived of as immanent in humanity, living and striving with man; and that the only sense in which Christ bore our sins was that salvation is the "voluntary socializing of the soul;" that He bore the "weight of the public sins of organized society."

After the publication of this book many conservative evangelical leaders began to feel that the emergence of the social gospel meant the triumph of theological liberalism in America. By way of reaction, there emerged in this country what has become known as "fundamentalism." "Fundamentalism," named after a series of articles entitled *The Fundamentals*, insisted on the literal inspiration of the Bible, stressed loyalty to orthodox doctrines, affirmed the literal Second Coming of Christ, and characterized the social gospel as a perversion of biblical Christianity.

The result of all this was that many religious leaders began to move toward one or the other of two extremes. Some leaders, feeling that the key to social problems was always to be found with the individual, began to lay all the stress on personal conversion and personal piety, assuming that when the sins of individuals had been corrected, the problems of society would be eliminated. Other leaders stressed the crying need for social reform, since there were many evils in society which simply could not be corrected by individual repentance.

Unfortunately instead of supplementing each other, these two approaches were pitted against each other. Each side supported its view with Scripture passages. Each group tended to see the other's teachings only as errors, fearing to endorse even their wholesome doctrines, lest they suffer "guilt by association." Social gospel leaders often failed to preach individual repentance and conversion, and fundamentalists often failed to see that, even though a man is personally honest and responsible, the organization of which he is a part can be undermining Christian virtues and promoting cruel injustice. It seemed that one was either a "social gospeler" or a "fundamentalist," with no room for an intermediate position.

What follows is the last paragraph in the Hoekema article:

In summary then, the two main tasks of the church are *evangelism* and *social concern*. Both are essential; they are not antithetical but complementary. Instead of seeing polarity between these two, we should see the one as supplementing the other. Instead of dividing fellow-Christians into categories like soul-winning sheep and social-action goats, let us realize that all of us who are Christ's have an obligation both to win men for Christ and to express our love for Christ in social concern.

The foregoing will suffice to designate some of the aspects of the Social Gospel. It means to teach certain ethics, and to urge and require action in various well-intentioned ways, in specified matters of "social concern," as listed representatively in the foregoing quotations.

The excellent description of the Social Gospel and its origin by Dr. Hoekema reveals that:

1. Advocates of the Social Gospel have generally abandoned the old-fashioned historic Gospel; the two do not seem to have mixed well.
2. Advocates of the historic Gospel have been rather blind or at least inadequate in regard to the need for the

Social Gospel. They have hitherto neglected to supplement the historic Gospel with the Social Gospel.

3. Nevertheless both the historic Gospel and the Social Gospel are a "must" now and hereafter.

The situation appears simple. The "Christians" holding to the historic Gospel of the Christian religion have not done enough for their "neighbors"; and the non-Christian social gospelers are showing the historic Christians hitherto unrealized obligations for "social concern." This is the idea that there should not be "two poles," but instead "one goal" in common.

Fundamentalists say we "must be born again." Christ made that famous statement to Nicodemus. But to be "born again" will alone not arouse enough social concern nor get that job done which is known as the Social Gospel. To have been "born again" -- to have experienced that event -- does not necessarily produce adequate social concern nor adequately promise to accomplish the Social Gospel.

The new synthesis, the new pairing together, of the historic Gospel and the Social Gospel at Calvin Theological Seminary is to be viewed as a great movement forward; it is to be accepted as an improvement and should not be questioned as a heresy.

The Convocation Address has in it a very noteworthy statement:

"...even though a man is personally honest and responsible, the organization of which he is a part can be undermining Christian virtues and promoting cruel injustice."

Thereby Dr. Hoekema has clearly formulated a basic, fundamental proposition of the Social Gospel, to wit, that obedience to the Ten Commandments ["to be personally honest and responsible"] is inadequate as a sole basis for "organizing" society.

The proposition is that "even though a man is personally honest and responsible," that is, even when he obeys the Decalogue, nevertheless "the organization of which he is a part can be undermining Christian virtues and promoting cruel injustice" [underscoring added].

That statement in the Convocation Address commits Dr. Hoekema, and other members of the faculty who may also be teaching the Social Gospel, to a basic proposition

underlying the Social Gospel, namely, the inadequacy of the Decalogue, as well as the inadequacy of being "born again" for attaining social justice. Although God wrote the Decalogue on stone tablets on Mt. Sinai, something more than the Decalogue is necessary in order to have a virtuous and just society.

Several years ago this writer wanted a letterhead which would immediately reveal one of his basic premises, to wit, that the Decalogue is unqualifiedly and singularly adequate as a "foundation" for all social organization. Psalm 119 extols the Decalogue. In every verse there is reference to the marvelous merits of the premises and the marvelous consequences of the Decalogue. Various words are used to indicate the Decalogue: law, statutes, ordinances, word, commandments, testimonies, precepts, judgments. And so, the decision for a name was Social Action, Hundred Nineteen.

The church of which this writer is a member is a Calvinist denomination of Dutch origin. There is current in The Netherlands a powerful expression not translatable with equal force into the English language. The expression is: Blind op de uitkomst, maar ziende op't gebod. It is equivalent to saying: "When you must make policy decisions, then close your eyes to consequences, but keep them fixed steadily on the Decalogue." In other words, the Decalogue is considered basic, adequate, irreplaceable, both as a rule of individual conduct and for the organization of society.

Among the ancient Hebrews, among the ancient Greeks and Romans, and in the whole Western tradition there is a controlling idea called "Natural Law" out of which springs Roman, Civil, Common, Canon, and Statutory law. This writer is in that tradition; he believes in it. What is known as natural law is finally the same as the Decalogue.

But new thinkers, advocates of the Social Gospel, motivated by what is called social concern, consider Scripture, the Greeks, the Romans, and the leading thinkers in the Western world for 1900 years, to have been inadequate in relying on a "higher law," which hitherto has been identified by Christians as the Decalogue, and by nonChristians as Natural Law.

There are two traditions which are irreconcilable, and which have enormous consequences for weel or for woe. The one is the Hebrew, Classical and Christian tradition. Western civilization is based on that -- from Moses, Solon, Aristotle, Justinian, Cicero, Seneca, Aquinas, Grotius, Coke, Blackstone. Call them all for short: the Classical tradition.



Opposed to that are two modern traditions irreconcilable with the Classical. One of these modern traditions is the catastrophic Romanticist, of which Jean-Jacques Rousseau is a fountainhead. The other is the Positivist (including Marxian).

The Convocation Address referred to departs from the Classical, and espouses premises which are Romanticist and Positivist. The move to add the Social Gospel to the Gospel is therefore revolutionary. And it proposes to do what has never yet been accomplished by philosophers, namely, putting together two antithetical ideas -- as irreconcilable as fire and water.

## II Has The Social Gospel Merit?

The merit of the Social Gospel can be tested in two different ways:

1. By observing its consequences, and reasoning back from those to causes. If the consequences of the Social Gospel eventually prove to be the opposite of those intended, then the Social Gospel and its underlying principles (causes) are bad; and being bad should be rejected and replaced by better principles.

2. By thoroughgoing probing for its underlying principles concerning their worth, and by deducing what the consequences will be, whether good or bad, from the application of those principles. This becomes a study of cause and effect.

### What Are The Consequences Of The Social Gospel?

The history of mankind, and common observations on what is going on in the world, should bring a man to the conclusion that men do not really learn by reasoning, but only by experience (empirically -- relating to or based on experience). Men do not become wise except after they have suffered unexpected, unwanted and painful consequences. Men learn, it seems, only empirically -- from consequences.

The Social Gospel sounds so good in theory, so elevated in moral principles, so brotherly in Christian love, that it is not easily resisted even by careful reasoning. The Social Gospel, appearing to be in the process of triumphing in many Christian churches, will probably be correctly

appraised, therefore, only after disappointing experimentation with it. It is as in the case of a bank robber; he planned the robbery well; he obtained, say, \$100,000 in a half-day of time; and so he continues robbing banks. But bank robbery is not a safe way to make a living, not even on a one-time basis, and it becomes a horrendous risk as a steady policy; consequently it is never a sound policy.

The mere fact that there is a high wave of thinking among clergymen and theological professors in favor of the Social Gospel does not establish that the ultimate consequences of the Social Gospel will be good, and that men will long hold to it as a policy, as an ethic, or as an alleged Biblical revelation.

There is an important fact which should not be ignored. The Social Gospel has NEVER yet been successful anywhere or in any age. It is exactly as Walter Lippmann, an ardent Social Gospeler in his ethics, wrote decades ago in his book, The Good Society, that all Social Gospel societies are poor, tyrannical and bellicose (quarrelsome, warring). In other words, Social Gospeler Walter Lippmann has said that ALL Social Gospel societies are BAD.

The faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary therefore has changed its foundation for its hopes of a good society to a different foundation from the historic one, and the new foundations on which the faculty is building may not prove to be a rock -- but may be sinking sand.

What is important is that the Social Gospel has not yet produced a society that is good -- one which is (1) free, (2) prosperous, and (3) peaceful; but only societies that are (1) tyrannical, (2) poor and (3) bellicose (warlike). Such statements need substantiation. However, any allegation that a Social Gospel society will be free, prosperous and peaceful equally requires cogent historical and logical substantiation by any faculty which has already introduced the Social Gospel.

A man does not need to be a learned man in order to appraise the Social Gospel as good or as bad. He needs neither great principles, nor any religion, to be able to reason practically -- from bad consequences to the conviction that the causes that brought on the bad consequences must also be bad. The history of the world appears conclusive that where the Social Gospel is put into effect, the common man with his down-to-earth judgment eventually does not accept it voluntarily. The Social Gospel has hitherto always disappointed and disillusioned the common man.

So much for a "common sense" approach to the Social Gospel.

### What Is The Reasoning Behind The Social Gospel

But let us make a different approach; let us forget about what is practical; or what anybody can learn from experience; let us turn instead to theoretical reasoning, to logic; let us shift from the Common Man to the Intellectual. What can the Intellectuals tell us about the Social Gospel?

The eventual answer in this case will be that the logic in favor of the Social Gospel is not logic, but a system of fallacies. This is not the place to refute in detail the intellectual fallacies of the Social Gospel; too much space will be required. That task is deferred.

The sequence should be that those who are proposing something new should openly declare what their premises for the Social Gospel are, and they should be able logically to justify experimenting with the Social Gospel. Those who do not favor the Social Gospel should listen with an open mind to formulation of the new premises and of their justification. But if the premises are not candidly stated, accurately formulated and adequately defended, the time will be at hand when the Social Gospel should be subjected to questioning, distrust, critique, contempt and resistance.

Social, political and economic thinkers -- whether Solon, Lycurgus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Aquinas, Occam, Calvin, Descartes, Grotius, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Coke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Kant, Hegel, Smith, Burke, Madison, Marx, Adams, Calhoun and many others -- have published enough so that a correct "setting" can be given to the "theory" of the Social Gospel. It should, then, be possible to appraise the Social Gospel with objective, intellectual processes.

This is certainly a valid question to ask: Is the "theory" for the validity of the Social Gospel, as a way for organizing and ordering society, intellectually respectable? Or might the theory of the Social Gospel be genuinely irrational? illogical? absurd? and/or vicious?

This question is therefore asked: Will someone in Calvin Theological Seminary, which has introduced the Social Gospel, make a respectable theoretical defense for it?

### Has The Social Gospel Respectable Biblical Foundation?

This question is not an integral part of the reasoning for the Social Gospel. But in Christian circles the Bible has standing as an authoritative source for basic ethical principles. When a theological faculty espouses

the Social Gospel, the members should be expected to have definite ideas whether the Social Gospel is compatible with Scriptural ethics, with its interpretation of history, and with its ideas on the social, economic and political structure for society.

The Social Gospel either has a Biblical foundation; or it does not. If the foundation is Biblical, what is it, and where in Scripture and how is it expounded, and commanded and made mandatory?

The Social Gospel in Calvin Theological Seminary cannot stem from the dogma expounded in the denomination's Three Standards of Unity -- The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, and The Canons of Dort. Dr. Hoekema does not cover that point. He indicates that the origin of the Social Gospel theory comes late -- long after any of the Three Standards of Unity were formulated. The theory, the thesis, of the Social Gospel is not even a century old, having originated in the early decades of the present century (according to Dr. Hoekema). Is the Social Gospel a better social and ethical interpretation of Scripture than that in the Three Standards of Unity?

Or, in sharp contrast to that optimism about the Social Gospel, is it a grave misinterpretation of Scripture, with damaging social and ethical consequences?

The phenomena of "faith" in the reliability of Scripture may generally be declining in theological seminaries. The words of "faith" may still be uttered, but there may be -- sometimes there seem to be -- nullifying mental reservations. The old words may be used to keep quiet the minds and hearts of ignorant laymen and pious women, but the speaker may give evidence -- here and there in his words and conduct -- that he does not accept the old words in their old meaning any more.

A person should not be confused by such development of unbelief, if and when it occurs. It would in fact be a marvel if general unbelief did not arise. There are so many irrational and nonsensical ideas present in the Social Gospel that it is not possible that there be much general "faith" left. Neither rational thinking nor vigorous faith can survive in a Social Gospel environment.

This section may be concluded by three questions:

1. Is the Social Gospel practical? Can people "live" with it? Is it contrary-to-purpose? Will it hurt rather than help individuals, and their society as a whole? If happiness and welfare are legitimate aims of a society, will the Social Gospel hinder such results?
2. Is the Social Gospel rational, or is it irrational?

What is its "theory" of man, and of man's environment? Does it make sense, or does it not?

3. Is the Social Gospel founded on statements in Scripture (as an alleged special revelation)? Is the Social Gospel a genuinely new and valuable discovery of "Biblical truth," or is it nothing of the sort, but instead merely a late heresy?

Until cogent information comes from advocates of the Social Gospel, concerning what is "truth" in this matter, this inquirer holds to the following:

1. That the Social Gospel is contrary-to-purpose, and that it will hurt all men, but especially the poor, weak, handicapped and disadvantaged.

2. That the Social Gospel has irrational foundations, is worthy of no respect, and should be rejected, especially by intellectuals.

3. That the Social Gospel mis-states what Scripture teaches about ethics and the social structure, that is, the Social Gospel is unBiblical and a heresy that should be rejected by orthodox Christians.

Do men lose "faith" and then, therefore, turn to the Social Gospel? Or is it the other way around -- do men first turn to absurdities and heresies in the Social Gospel, and therefore and thereafter lose faith? Here the answer to the first question is, No; and to the second question, Yes.

The basic, original, primary unidentified disease causing malaise (ill health) generally in the Christian churches is the Social Gospel.

In this connection it is interesting to turn to Augustine. He noted that Cicero discovered that to have an attitude of faith in regard to the unknowable things of life, it was necessary to fall back on and to have a strong hold of "moral certitudes." Cicero, a pagan, were he alive today, would quickly sense that what passes for moral certitudes in the Social Gospel really undermines religion -- the transcendental as well as the ethical.

The Social Gospel may be the most crucial of all problems besetting Christian churches at this time, for when a Christian's ethical certitudes are revealed to be defective, as it always turns out to be in the Social Gospel, then he ends up abandoning confidence in valid, Biblical faith. In practice what happens is that when Social Gospel action fails to produce valid results, the person promoting such

programs does not abandon the Social Gospel and return to the true Gospel, but plunges deeper into further Social Gospel actions with progressively more frustrating results.

### III Clandestine Introduction Of The Social Gospel

The Social Gospel is being introduced clandestinely into Christian churches.

By clandestine is meant that the Social Gospel is being introduced (1) piecemeal, (2) unobtrusively, (3) without labeling, and especially (4) without "authorization."

The Roman Catholic church uses the word "clandestine" to designate a marriage which has not been solemnized by a priest of the Roman Catholic church, according to the rules of that church. In such connection "clandestine" does not mean secret, as a clandestine love affair, but a marriage not properly authorized and performed. The Social Gospel is, in just such a sense, being introduced into churches; that is, its introduction is "clandestine."

Something as radical, unBiblical, impractical and irrational as the Social Gospel should not be introduced clandestinely. The top policy-making body in a denomination should first be consulted, should thoroughly study the problem, and then should reach a decision, binding on the denomination's seminary -- pro or con.

In big business, an executive must have a certain quality of judgment, or he cannot survive. That quality consists of perceptive awareness of what is important and of what is not important. A problem, say, arises. He must immediately, more or less consciously, consider whether the decision to be made is within his authority or is not. Must he consult a superior? Or instead, must he refuse to decide because he should leave the decision (on so minor a matter) to a subordinate? Let an executive blunder a few times on such matters and he will not survive. He will be considered dangerous; and he is.

An illustration may make the problem clearer. Suppose a family has had for a hundred years a cosmetic business -- face powders, wigs, nail polish, etc.; and in that century the expansion has been great; the family is rich; it employs professional managers; the members of the family travel much and live abroad for extensive periods.

Suppose after being away for two or more years the head of the family returns, and visits the main plant. But as he approaches it, he is astounded by the changed appearance. The artistic setting, the beautiful approach -- things

natural to a cosmetic business -- have changed. It is obvious that something revolutionary has happened. In front of the old building, a steel mill has been built, and the chimneys belch smoke, and there is the thundering noise of hammers and other big equipment.

And when the principal owner picks his way through the mess and the noise, and reaches the office, and talks to the General Manager, he learns that the General Manager has decided to go into heavy steel fabrication; he has on his own authority added that to the cosmetic business.

Has the Social Gospel in the same way been added at Calvin Theological Seminary to the historic Gospel without authority, that is, clandestinely?

#### IV Reaction To Unrest About The Social Gospel

Those who promote the Social Gospel -- which is believed to be a program contrary-to-purpose, irrational, unBiblical, and heretofore invariably damaging to the churches -- knowing that they are promoting something new and different, should expect questioning and alarm by others, who may not clearly understand exactly what is wrong, but who sense that the historic Christian faith to which they have been holding is being undermined. But reactions of surprise, alarm and dissent on the part of fellow church members may be resented by promoters of the Social Gospel; they may attack the ideas, motives and methods of whoever dissents from the introduction of the Social Gospel. To dissent against the Social Gospel may expose a conscientious churchman to the charges of being a rumor-monger, an insinuator, and as probably not "observing the demands of truth, love and justice according to the Word of God."

See the attached photostatic copy of An Open Letter to the Christian Reformed Church, which appeared in The Banner, official publication of the Christian Reformed Church under date of December 4, 1970.

This Open Letter is signed by John H. Kromminga, President; Andrew J. Bandstra, Dean of Students; Harold Dekker; R. Recker; Anthony A. Hoekema; John H. Stek; Melvin D. Hugen; Henry Stob; Fred H. Klooster; Bastiaan Van Elderen; Carl G. Kromminga; Marten H. Woudstra.

## An Open Letter to the Christian Reformed Church -

**A.** As members of the Calvin Seminary Faculty we address this statement to all our fellow church-members.

**B.** For some time now writings and rumors circulating in the church have called into question our united commitment to the Scriptures and our common loyalty to the confessional standards of our church. We have until now not thought it wise or necessary to respond. But we have watched with increasing concern and sadness the distrust, suspicion, and anxiety these writings and rumors have created, and we have decided to speak out.

**C.** We begin by acknowledging freely that our work is done in human frailty and that it is marred by sin. For this reason we need, and do continually seek, both the forgiveness and the correction of God. For the same reason we are open to, and do at all times welcome, the instruction and brotherly admonition of the church. But we are distressed and sorrowful when we are misrepresented, and when our cherished solidarity in faith and life with the church we love and serve is groundlessly called into question.

**D.** We take this occasion, therefore, to declare anew that we are committed in heart and mind to the service of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; that we accept the inspired Scriptures as the infallible rule of faith and practice; that we endorse the Confessions to which we have in all honesty affixed our signatures; and that we are heartily resolved to be faithful to Christ, to his Word, and to our common faith, as we seek to interpret the Gospel to and for our troubled modern world. In accord with this we are always willing to submit ourselves to any responsible inquiry by any authorized ecclesiastical body.

**E.** Meanwhile we deny and repudiate those charges and insinuations which call into question our dedication to the Lord and our commitment to Scripture and the Confessions--charges which undermine the confidence of our people in the Seminary

**F.** It is with brotherly concern that we urge all who write and speak, as well as those who read and hear, to observe the demands of truth, love, and justice according to the Word of God. What in these times we covet and indeed expect from all the members of our church is neither uncritical indifference nor petty censoriousness, but such confidence, support and prayer as will enable us to fulfill in faithfulness and unity the weighty calling in the Lord to which the church has summoned us.

Yours in the Lord,  
The Faculty of Calvin Theological  
Seminary,

Andrew J. Bandstra  
Harold Dekker  
Anthony G. Hoekema  
Melvin J. Hugen  
Fred H. Klooster  
Carl D. Krommerja

J. H. Krommerja  
R. Kieker  
John H. Mied  
Henry Stob  
Bastiaan Van Elderen  
Markus H. Woudstra



This Open Letter reveals the excellent abilities of the drafter, and the acute awareness of "problems" by all the signers.

(On the original, paragraphs were not lettered; nor were there underscorings. These additions have been made by the present writer in order to facilitate making cross references.)

A pre-examination of the rhetorical power of this Open Letter is desirable in order to do justice to its force. It is illuminating to consider the right choice of words (of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs), the structure of sentences, the careful use of inclusive and exclusive terms, etc.

Notations which follow may individually appear to be about minor matters in the Open Letter, as an ordinary brick in a house, but the collective effect accomplished is so noteworthy that such details should not be neglected.

The following are noteworthy technical features of this Open Letter:

1. Paragraph "B": The paragraph refers to "writings" and "rumors" being "circulated." These words are nonspecific, and do not specify what writings, and what rumors, nor who is doing the circulating. When it becomes further apparent in later paragraphs that an evil ("misrepresentations") has been unleashed, the disappointment is sharpened. This reader wishes that, instead of shooting with pellets out of a 12-gauge shotgun, the faculty of the seminary had gone hunting with a high-powered rifle, and been explicit about what and how and where and when and why and who.

2. Paragraph "B" (continued): The Open Letter has many adjectives and adverbs. The use of adjectives and adverbs introduces more assertions than are candidly made. Adjectives are generally realized to be "question-begging" terms (they assume or assert without proof what needs to be substantiated). In this paragraph "B", two adjectives are key words, "united" and "common," in the phrases "united commitment to the Scriptures" and "common loyalty to the confessional standards." Do these twelve signers have exactly "united" or "common" ideas on the "confessional standards"? For example, Professor Harold Dekker might look at some things differently from one or more of his colleagues. But those differences, if any, are here apparently excluded; maybe only on whatever they are unanimously agreed is there reference made here. On whatever they might not be "united" or hold in "common" -- those matters appear to be excluded in this Open Letter.

3. Paragraph "C" has a grave charge, to wit, "misrepresented." Somebody apparently has been lying about the faculty of the seminary, and faculty members have probably

already processed their defamers at least to the stage of Silent Censure.

4. Paragraph "C" again: The combination of paragraphs "B" and "C" brings about a result which is somewhat deplorable. Anybody who, even in his thoughts (let alone the "writings" and "rumors" that he has spread), has ever differed from the views of the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary must now feel endangered. Paragraphs "B" and "C" establish for the faculty a universal suspicion of everybody else in the church except children, the ignorant and the senile. This writer has written Dr. John H. Kromminga on this matter; Dr. Kromminga replied that this writer was not referred to by them. But why should anyone have been exposed to a universal suspicion?

5. Paragraph "C" again: But to feel relieved of suspicion is in part hallucinatory. Nobody can now or in the future -- since this letter of the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary -- ever disagree with the faculty and not be suspected. The faculty could not have silenced future criticism better than by its method of leaving the past criticism they have received anonymous.

6. Paragraph "C" again: Note the insertion of the adverb "groundlessly." The "groundlessly" may be correct, but if so it can as of now only be accepted on confidence; there is no evidence submitted; the adverb is "question-begging" -- it pushes forward as fact what needs to be substantiated before it is asserted. Groundlessly? And they have published that they have already introduced the Social Gospel!

7. Paragraph "C" again: The twelve signers seem to claim a preferred position. They are willing to accept "instruction" and "admonition"; but they omit reference to criticism. There is the adverb "brotherly" (before admonition) which implies that worthy admonition might be rejected because not brotherly enough. The Biblical advice to critics to be brotherly is here converted into a demand for gentle treatment for what has been clandestinely introduced.

8. Paragraph "C" finally: "Instruction and brotherly admonition" [only] of the church. The "only" is not said, but it is implied. In other words, "free speech" by individuals, on their own, is really not proper in this situation. The proposition is: You may not react to what a seminary professor says except through the cumbersome machinery of the "church." What this means becomes clear from an analogy, to wit, would the President of the United States be reasonable if he declared all criticism of himself improper -- there is to be no criticism -- except by formal impeachment by the House of Representatives and trial before the Senate?

9. Paragraph "D": It is here conceded that the world is modern, that is, different from formerly; that it is troubled; and that the Gospel needs a new "interpretation" which they are "seeking" to provide. And so there is more than old reiteration. Therefore, although some teachings may be new and different, nevertheless nobody should frustrate them except that there be two requisites complied with -- (1) only an "authorized ecclesiastical body" (a Synod presumably) and (2) such a body making a "responsible inquiry" (presumably an investigation without charges; inquiry being a weak word).

In other words, freedom of speech and of the press are not to be available to critics of the brethren who signed the Open Letter! These salutary institutions (free speech and free press) are seemingly outlawed; critiques of new faculty programs cannot be countered except by the equivalent of impeachment and notorious trial!

10. Paragraph "E": After the ambiguous, and qualified claims in paragraphs "B", "C", and "D", we come to the strong and positive disclaimer; it reads: "Meanwhile we deny and repudiate those charges and insinuations." But what charges and insinuations? Can any man in the denomination know exactly what the denial and repudiation mean, when he has not heard the explicit charges and insinuations in the words of the unnamed and therefore unknown critics?

11. Paragraph "F": Finally in the last paragraph there is the admonition "to observe the demands of truth, love and justice." In the framework of the preceding paragraphs in the Open Letter the twelve professors are making three charges against their unnamed critics -- the critics have not spoken truth, nor manifested love, nor promoted justice.

How could anyone have more skillfully deflected past critiques? But not that alone: how could anyone more successfully discredit any future critiques? Consider the present writer. He has published no critiques of the twelve brethren in the seminary. He has been assured that he is not referred to in the Open Letter. But if, in the future, after the Open Letter has been published in The Banner, he publishes something critical concerning the seminary staff, then the people in the denomination have already been prejudiced against him as somebody who is no lover of "truth, love and justice according to the Word of God"; and/or who "misrepresents"; and/or engages in "petty censoriousness," etc.

In summary, six questions should be asked:

1. To whom does the faculty refer; what are their names? Why not publish them?

2. What specifically did the critics say or write?
3. Where did they do that?
4. When did they do that?
5. How was this mistake perpetrated?
6. Why, for what purposes, might these misrepresentations have been formulated?

By answering those questions, the faculty can relieve nonguilty members of the denomination of their grand anonymous accusation.

## V Inquiries

1. What indeed is the Social Gospel?
2. Is the Social Gospel taught in the Three Standards of Unity (Belgic Confession; Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort)? If so, where?
3. Has any church yet prospered spiritually and materially from the Social Gospel? The Methodist? The Presbyterian? The Episcopalian?
4. Is the present principal agency for the promotion of the Social Gospel the World Council of Churches?
5. Are the ultimate ethical premises of the Social Gospel and Marxian Communism identical, or at least non-distinguishable?
6. Is the Social Gospel contrary-to-purpose -- does it eventually hurt the weakest members of society? and also society as a whole? And is it therefore evil from a practical standpoint?
7. Is the reasoning behind the Social Gospel illogical and irrational?
8. Is the Social Gospel unBiblical?
9. Should the Social Gospel be introduced in a seminary clandestinely (as defined)?
10. Are free speech and a free press to be abandoned to protect the introduction of Social Gospel dogma, heretofore considered to be heretical?

If the members of a faculty of a theological seminary have already plunged into the promotion of the Social Gospel, what are their answers to such relevant questions?

## VI The Social Gospel Problem Cannot Be Evaded

1. The Social Gospel can be "accepted" on any of three bases, namely, (a) its skeptical theology, (b) its new ethics, and (c) both. The Social Gospel can be "rejected" on any of three bases, (a) its skeptical theology, (b) its new ethics, and (c) both.

In preceding pages the theology of the Social Gospel has been "neglected," as not immediately relevant. Sole attention has been given to the ethics of the Social Gospel. Traditional Christians have often rejected the Social Gospel because of its theology; but they have not always been equally positive in rejecting the ethics of the Social Gospel. If rejection was adequately justified on the basis of the theology of the Social Gospel, then it was tacitly considered to be unnecessary to work out in detail the reasons for rejection also of the ethics of the Social Gospel.

But here the issue is limited (restricted) solely to the ethics of the Social Gospel; that is the issue. (It may become necessary to show in a separate analysis that the ethics of the Social Gospel necessarily constitute a seed bed for its skeptical theology; it is not bad theology that brings on bad ethics; instead the bad ethics make the bad theology of the Social Gospel an inescapable consequence.) The essence of the Social Gospel is its ethics. It is here unqualifiedly challenged that the really bad ethics of the Social Gospel are a good consequence of the bad theology of the Social Gospel. In this analysis, both the ethics and theology of the Social Gospel are rejected.

2. The problem of the ethics of the Social Gospel will undoubtedly be alleged by many to be a subtle one. But wherein may that subtlety be? How convert the problem from subtlety (and consequent confusion) to simplicity (and consequent clarity and renewed faith)? Where almost certainly must the solution be found? The answer to that, it is believed, will be discovered to be inadequacy of the definition of terms, something which almost always explains frustrating confusion. What are the requisite definitions?

3. It will be found futile, working as a historian of religious, philosophic and ethical thought, to appeal to great and ancient authorities, for example, to appeal to John Calvin. Calvin has given no evidence that he anticipated those modern ethical definitions which constitute the cause of our present ethical confusion and bedevilment. To pose as a great authority on Calvin will be no help whatever, but only pedanticism.

4. The several reactions to the difficulties created by the new ethics of the Social Gospel may well bemuse those who sit in the pews.
- a. Is it an answer, or is it a beguiling evasion, to react to the ethics of the Social Gospel by becoming more vehemently "evangelical"; salvation is by grace?
  - b. Is it an answer, or is it a beguiling evasion, to react to the ethics of the Social Gospel by becoming more vehemently dogmatic about the Five Points of Calvinism?
  - c. Is it an answer, or is it self-deceiving, to react to the enormous denominational and public significance of the Social Gospel problem by retreating from real dialogue on that subject into parochial congregational and pastoral activities, in a sense weeding one's own little flower garden, while the Battle of Waterloo is raging nearby?
  - d. Or is the ethics of the Social Gospel the kind of a problem that needs to be met "head on," in forthright contradiction?
  - e. And should a real "dialogue" be undertaken? Should that dialogue bring forward every relevant dialectic and argument? And should such endeavors be limited to any living individual's petty mind, or should they draw on the whole "bank of knowledge" created by the predecessors of the men of this age? Should we become or remain detached from the past; or should we be heirs of all our predecessors who have worked thoroughly; so that we can pass on a better heritage to our descendants?

As the course of events in the Christian churches is unfolding, the question becomes inescapable whether what is aimed at is only to improve or reform the church, or whether it is something far more serious, namely, to alter the whole inherited structure so radically that it is subverted. People doing this may not understand fully what they are doing.

*"Things Are Not  
What They Seem"*

# NO CIVIL WAR IN THE CAVE

An Analysis Of Romanticist Ethics Among Calvinists or  
The Unconscious Combining Of The Ultimate Ethical Premises of Communism  
With The Appearance And Label Of Calvinism.

This book is an analysis of how that philosophy known as "Romanticism," stemming from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, has beguiled Christian churches. Romanticism here is a philosophic term, and has nothing to do with a legitimate ardent emotion toward somebody of the opposite sex.

Romanticism is the most destructive philosophy in the history of mankind, far more harmful, for example, than Humanism.

Advertising for this book, NO CIVIL WAR IN THE CAVE (Libertarian Press, \$1.00; free to ordained clergymen), has been censored -- refused by the official weekly of the denomination. Any advertising on this book should therefore read the equivalent of "For Adults Only."

We quote the Foreword of this book, and the last anecdote in it:

"Nations that have not the self-governing force of religion within them are unprepared for freedom," according to Alexis De Tocqueville (1815-1859).

The "self-governing force of religion" to which De Tocqueville referred is what Denis Diderot (1713-1784), French encyclopedist, rejected as unwanted and undesirable Civil War in the Cave, that is, the struggle within each man to attain personal morality and to curb his unbrotherly propensities toward his fellows.

The Civil Rights Movement, seemingly progressing, faces the prospect of delay if not eventual failure because its leaders and allies are not building on the universal principle of a Civil War in the Cave, but instead rely on Compassion.

The prospect that clergymen will contribute effectively to elevating a minority group is nullified by their espousal of cardinal socialist-communist doctrines, both erroneous, (1) that LOVE is COMPASSION and (2) that SELFISHNESS is SIN.

Paraphrasing De Tocqueville: Members of any minority for whom a Civil Rights Movement may be initiated are unprepared for genuine equality until they individually espouse the principle of Civil War in the Cave and make progress until their self-discipline approximates that of the majority.

There is one universal and inescapable standard by which all men without any exception must be judged, namely, their Civil War in the Cave, or their self-disciplining morality. No minority can elevate itself, or be helped by anyone, by ignoring or rejecting that standard.

(Continued - Over)

And the last anecdote:

A Charming Illustration of Compassion

Irving Babbitt in ROUSSEAU AND ROMANTICISM, page 119, Meridian paperback, gives the following example of the emphasis of Victor Hugo, French Romanticist, on COMPASSION:

...[Victor] Hugo indeed has perhaps carried the new Evangel of sympathy as a substitute for all the other virtues farther than anyone else and with fewer weak concessions to common sense.

Sultan Murad, Hugo narrates, was "sublime." (1) He had his eight brothers strangled, (2) caused his uncle to be sawn in two between two planks, (3) opened one after the other twelve children to find a stolen apple, (4) shed an ocean of blood and (5) "sabred the world."

One day while passing in front of a butcher shop he saw a pig bleeding to death, tormented by flies and with the sun beating upon its wound. Touched by pity, the Sultan pushes the pig into the shade with his foot and with an "enormous and superhuman gesture" drives away the flies.

When Murad dies the pig appears before the Almighty, and, pleading for him against the accusing host of his victims, wins his pardon. Moral: "a succored pig outweighs a world oppressed."

There are people in this age who preach a similar over-evaluation of compassion, without its having any connection with a Civil War in the Cave.

**Social Action, Hundred Nineteen**

**Post Office Box 218**

**South Holland, Illinois 60473, USA**

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