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## ARTICLE V.

## THE SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS.

BY THE REV. LOREN FOSTER BERRY, D.D.

IN discussing this theme, one is confronted at once by the abundance and richness of the material provided. The problem is not where to look for what is desired, but how to select from the whole the little that can be used. The principal truths of our Lord's social teachings fall readily into four groups,—Fellowship, Wealth, the Family, and the State. An examination of the Gospels will show that Jesus had more to say about fellowship than about wealth, more to say of wealth than of the family, and more of the family than of the state; and this, not because of the relative importance of these several themes, so much, as because, in the circumstances in which he lived and taught, he could accomplish most for his kingdom by proportioning his teachings as suggested. Perhaps also for the reason that these truths projected themselves upon him in this relative order.

Fellowship, having so large a place, illustrates both man's fellowship with God and his proper relation to his brother. Here come in such large aggregations of truth as are found in the Sermon on the Mount, the Last Discourse as given by John, and in the Judgment of the Nations as recorded by Matthew. These all teach fellowship. Specific illustrations from the Sermon are found in the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes. "Our Father,"—that is an expression of fellowship both with God and with man. If he is "our" Father, then we must be his children; and if we are the

children of God, then we must be in fellowship as brethren. So with "Thy kingdom come." It is to come through fellowship and for it. So in the Beatitudes; they that are accounted blessed are the merciful, and the peacemakers, and they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake. And surely there is fellowship both in the action implied and in the suffering. In like manner, in the Judgment of the Nations, they who are welcomed as "the blessed of my Father," are such as have been mindful of the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the sick and imprisoned. So too, in such parables as the Good Samaritan, Dives and Lazarus, the Children in the Market-place, the Unmerciful Servant; and in our Lord's many acts of mercy and healing. Here also we find the Golden Rule and the commandment to love one another even as he had loved his disciples. And elsewhere very frequently and *in extenso*. So familiar are these passages that they need little more than a passing allusion. It is enough perhaps to say that fellowship was a fundamental truth in our Lord's conception of his kingdom.

Possibly we do not always note how wide-reaching is this fellowship. We are apt to think of it as local, and only so. But in a great portion of his teachings Jesus was speaking of his kingdom as a world fact. His kingdom was the grain of mustard seed, which, when it is grown, is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree. It is the leaven which is to leaven the whole lump. And so there was good reason for the largeness and multiplicity of our Lord's teaching about fellowship. It was to have a large place in the historical processes that Jesus was inaugurating. Paul caught the idea when he went forth to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The missionaries of the church have had the idea ever since, and especially in the last century. The kingdom of God is to fill the earth; and the fellowship of the kingdom, the fraternity of the kingdom,

is to lift the individual and the home and the city and the state out of all that is unworthy and unbrotherly until there shall be a "new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." The thought is one of great fascination.

In approaching our Lord's teaching about money and wealth in general, we need to keep well in mind the fact that he did not teach an inch-by-inch philosophy, a piece here and a piece there; but a comprehensive philosophy, bringing every detail into proper subordination to the main purpose. While he says so much about wealth, he never isolates the subject from the fundamentals of his teaching. He treats it, as he does many another question, in its relations to the higher question of character. If he condemned wealth in any particular instance, as he seemed to do, it was because its influence in that instance was against the building up of a holy character, engrossing, as he saw it did, the attention, and drawing the affections away from God. He taught always that there is one great something without which all other things are not worth having, however beautiful and otherwise desirable they may seem to be. Everywhere he seemed to be saying, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Nevertheless things are good in their place; and, as Dr. Dale said, "If Jesus had not given us laws about property, he would have left a large part of our life free from his control."

And now let us seek for a few of the principles of our Lord's instructions concerning wealth and its uses.

The first of these principles is that of the relativity of values. This is plainly implied in the statement just alluded to. There is something better than material values. This is the teaching, also, of the passage which bids us cut off or pluck out the members of the body which cause us to stumble. It is better to save the life of the soul by getting rid of these than to lose it by retaining them. The

same truth comes out distinctly in the saying, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." The latter are better than the former, and are therefore to be chosen. Likewise in the parable of the Pearl, a man should sell all that he had in order to possess it, because of its larger value. So, too, it comes out in what Jesus said to the rich young man. There was one thing he lacked,—just one thing, though he had kept the commandments from his youth up; and that was a willingness to part with his possessions, and come, and follow Jesus. This, if he had only had it, would have been worth more to him a thousand times over than all his great possessions. And it was because Jesus saw this that he put this particular test upon him. With some one else it might have been pride of intellect or position, reliance on goodness, or unwillingness to trust and obey. But in it all and always, it is the great principle of the relativity of values that is determinative.

Another principle underlying all Jesus said about wealth, and especially so in the parables, is that wealth is not our own; it belongs to God. The whole thought of the parable of the Unjust Steward turns on the fact that the steward did not honestly handle, or rightly use, the goods of a "certain rich man." He was that man's agent. And when he was accused of wasting the goods, it was specified that they were his master's. So in the parable of the Talents and in that of the Pounds, and in that of the Wicked Husbandmen, and that of the Unfaithful Upper Servant. In all these cases of pictorial teaching, the money or the goods handled belonged to some one who was represented as owner, while the persons dealt with were simply stewards, or servants, using these things for the time. This is evidently our Lord's fundamental conception of wealth. It belongs to God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Nevertheless, as between man and man,

there may be ownership. Jesus does not repudiate that. He teaches stewardship as between man and God and in the right use of wealth, but ownership as between man and man. He who buys from his brother for a stipulated price secures the right to that which he buys so far as that brother is concerned, and when that brother parts with his property for an equivalent he surrenders his claim to it. The man in the parable who had bought a field, had paid a consideration for it, and as related to his neighbor it was now his field. So of the man who had bought a yoke of oxen. So of Mary's costly ointment; it was hers. It was "his own beast" on which the Samaritan set the wounded man. It was "at thy house" that Jesus sent word he would eat the passover. Along with stewardship as relating to God, Jesus taught clearly the doctrine of ownership as right in human relationships; but the latter in subordination always to the other.

But there is a still higher principle underlying all that Jesus said about the acquisition and use of wealth. And that is the principle of love. He who taught men to love one another, and to do unto others as they would that men should do to them, meant that men should carry this great determining factor of life into all matters of wealth. He meant that in every transaction there should be a mutual advantage for both parties, or all parties, involved. It was this principle of love that was wanting in the man who had but one talent given him. If he had loved his master and his fellow-servants as he should, he would have seen that he had no right not to use his lord's money so that all should be benefited. And so it was love that was wanting in the man who laid away his lord's pound in a napkin. He laid it away very carefully, no doubt, meaning to keep it very safe; but the master expected him to use it. He had no right to so hide it away and withhold it from use. In like manner it was a wrong use of money and power

that made trouble for the unjust steward, and the unmerciful servant, and all who were associated with them.

"Wealth," says Professor Shailer Mathews, "Jesus showed to be a good, but a good only when it is a social good, and when its pursuit does not weaken those impulses within a man that go out towards his fellows and God, and so render him unfit for the kingdom of heaven."<sup>1</sup>

As to our Lord's attitude toward men of wealth, it was the same that it was toward other men. He came to seek and to save the lost,—not to seek and to save the rich as distinguished from the poor, or the poor as distinguished from the rich,—not to seek and to save those in the humbler walks of life any more than those in places of influence and authority, but to save all men of all orders and all stations, for all these were among the "lost." So we see him meeting the wealthy Nicodemus, in that memorable night interview, with the same spirit of readiness and divine helpfulness which characterized his utterance and manner toward the most wretched sinner that called to him from the wayside. So we see him sitting at meat in the house of Simon the Pharisee and rebuking his inattention as calmly and kindly as he dealt with the woman at Jacob's well. So we see him at the home of wealthy Zaccheus, declaring with gladness that salvation had that day come to that house. So we see him a frequent visitor at the home of Lazarus and his sisters, where apparently there was, if not wealth, at least abundant material comfort. And when the end had come, still further proof that he made no distinctions against the rich, as such, is found in the fact that Joseph of Arimathea, "a rich man," came and asked the body of Jesus, and, assisted by Nicodemus, prepared it for burial with costly spices, and placed it in his own family tomb.

Such instances go far to show that Jesus in his personal

<sup>1</sup>The Social Teaching of Jesus, p. 148.

intercourse with men while on earth, made no distinctions against the rich, as such. In his mission to save the lost he regarded souls as of so much more importance than anything else, and all things else, that he sought these and ministered to these wherever, and in whatever conditions of life, he might find them. If a man was poor, this as a fact was nothing against him: unto the poor the gospel was preached. If a man was wealthy, this as a fact was nothing against him: he was just as much in need of the gospel as the other. If a wealthy military officer, able by himself to build for the Jews a synagogue, sent to him to come and heal his servant, the response was none the less ready because the officer had money. If a Jewish nobleman, dwelling at ease at Capernaum, came to him and besought him to come quickly to his home ere his child should die, he hesitated not because of the man's position or wealth, but spoke the word, and the child began to mend.

So much then is clear; Jesus had relations of helpfulness, and even of intimate friendship, with those who possessed wealth. To that degree their wealth was not against them. And if we go carefully through all the teachings of our Lord, and study in the same way his attitude toward men of wealth in his time, we shall find, that, whatever he said about the difficulty of a rich man's entering the kingdom of heaven, he did not teach that it was difficult because it was wrong for him to be rich; for he no more teaches this than that it is right for a man to be poor,—and to neither condition as such does he attach any moral quality,—but difficult because the environment of wealth, its absorbing cares, its temptations to a sense of security, its deceitfulness and its snares, all conspire to hinder him from recognizing and choosing as first of all things the kingdom of God and its righteousness. And it is in the light of this truth that we ought to interpret his teachings on this large theme.

Upon the general topic of the family, our Lord's example and teaching are as impressive as they are beautiful and suggestive. As a boy of twelve he went down with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth, and was subject to them there as a dutiful and obedient son. At Cana of Galilee his presence blessed, and his power made memorable, a marriage feast. At Bethany he rested often among friends in a family circle in which he greatly endeared himself. And on the cross he committed his mother to the care of John, in sacred witness to the love he bore her, and the respect he felt for the home life of his disciple.

And in his teaching he exalted in like manner the sacredness and blessedness of the family. To the woman at Jacob's well he said, as if searching her soul, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." And when she replied, "I have no husband," Jesus delicately and significantly taught her a truth which she had sinfully disregarded. In what he taught touching marriage and divorce, and chastity even of look and thought, he set his seal forever upon the binding and exalted nature of that relationship which God appointed between man and wife. Jesus taught, as Professor Mathews has well said, that "family life is the most sacred of all relations outside of the relation between God and man. . . . In the same proportion in which the natural sanctity of marriage is injured, in the same proportion is the nature of man outraged, and ideal fraternity broken. To dishonor this first of human relations is to loosen the bonds of society, to lower present social ideals, to do injury to the essential nature of both the man and the woman."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus plainly taught that the home is the source of innumerable blessings to society, or of innumerable evils to all life. It is like the waters of the well of Bethlehem for which David sighed, a source of refreshment, and ever to

<sup>1</sup> *The Social Teaching of Jesus*, p. 90.

be remembered with delight,—a spring of purification for society, or, on the other hand, like the bitter waters of Jericho, because of which there were death and miscarrying for the people. It is in the homes of the people that righteousness must begin and be perpetuated before reform in society can succeed permanently.

There were some things that Jesus evidently expected of the family that he did not feel called upon to specify. He expected fidelity between husband and wife, a wise and patient control of the household by parents, an affectionate and ready obedience on the part of children, and an effort on the part of every member to make all the other members happy and so far as possible burden-free in the home.

As to the perpetuity of the marriage relation, his teaching was direct and distinct. For one cause there was justification in his mind for legal separation. And the reasons he gave reach down to the foundations of the home as a sacred institution, and involve, in proportion as they are regarded, the perpetuity or the disintegration of the family. Dr. Woolsey clearly stated the case when he said, Jesus regarded the marriage relation as "the state of life in which two have become one flesh, a state founded by God at the first creation of man, and therefore a union made by divine authority which human authority may not sever."

Professor A. B. Bruce, commenting on the zeal of the rabbis in our Lord's time, "to have the bill of divorce in due form, that the woman might be able to show that she was free to marry again, and probably flattering themselves they were defending the rights of women," exclaims, "Brave men!" and then adds that "Jesus raised the previous question, and asserted a more radical right of woman,—*not to be put away*, except when she put herself away by unfaithfulness." Referring to various questions

that have puzzled the scholarship of the ages, and about which there has been much division of opinion, the same writer declares, "One thing is certain. Christ did not come to be a new legislator making laws for social life. He came to set up a high ethical ideal, and leave that to work on men's minds. The tendency of his teaching is to create deep aversion to rupture of married relations. That aversion might even go the length of shrinking from severance of the tie even in the case of one who had forfeited all claims."<sup>1</sup> And perhaps this is as near the truth as we can readily come, "The tendency of his teaching is to create a deep aversion to the rupture of married relations."

Concerning our Lord's teachings as to the state and the duty of citizenship, it may be affirmed, that nearly if not all that he said is crowded into the single statement, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." This may seem strange; for he was introducing a universal religion that was destined to come into contact with politics in every land in every succeeding age of the world. Why was it that he said so little on such a theme? Had he no message for a political world? Did he not care for the welfare of the state? Did he see no need of betterment of the condition of his people in their relations to the state? All these questions must be answered in the affirmative. He had such message; he was interested; he did see need of improvement. Why then did he say so little?

We must remember that the teachings of Jesus are always to be interpreted in the light of the conditions existing in his time. Had he lived at some other period in the history of the Jewish people, or had he come in contact with the Cæsar who was reigning at Rome in his time, it might have been different. The old prophets, as Isaiah and Amos, living at a time when Israel was politically in-

<sup>1</sup> Expositor's Greek New Testament.

dependent, were preachers of political righteousness. Their messages were addressed to the nation, and were essentially appeals for national righteousness, and showed the consequences for the nation as such, of the evils that were common at the time. But things were different with the Jewish nation in the time of our Lord. He would only have defeated the very ends for which he came, had he gone largely, or at all, into arraignments of the Roman government for the abuses his people were suffering. In fact it was for this very purpose that the Herodians and Pharisees had sought to entrap him when he bade them render to Cæsar his dues.

But let us not minify what our Lord did say of the state and the duty of citizens to the state. That single saying, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," covered every political duty of the people whom he addressed. They were not an independent people. They had no privilege of franchise. They had no part in the government. Their duty toward the government was very simple, namely, obedience and the payment of taxes. And what Jesus taught covered both these specifically. What need was there that he should say more?

Again, the principle involved in these few words is a very wide-reaching one. It extends to far more duties of citizenship than it at first seems to. In fact it would not be easy to name a duty of the common citizen toward a ruler that is not embraced in the simple mandate already quoted. The apostle Paul amplifies this a little when he says, "Render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor": but he really adds nothing to the principle which our Lord laid down. And that was our Lord's way of teaching. He crowded into a single sentence a principle broad enough to cover the duty of mankind along a certain line in all civilizations through all the

ages. And when he had done this he had said all for which there was any need.

In all the matters here discussed the teachings of Jesus are steadily making headway against all opposition. One of the most hopeful signs of the times is in the fact that men are so eagerly discussing these great themes. The final word has probably not been spoken on any of them. But in the discussion it is becoming increasingly plain, that Jesus did not separate any one great theme and treat it by itself as unrelated to others, but when he spoke of society, of the family, of wealth, of the state, he treated them, each and all, in their proper inter-relations, and, above all, in their bearings upon the in-bringing of that perfect kingdom which he came to establish.

Western civilization, broadly speaking, is immeasurably indebted to the Man of Nazareth. His message from the first was a proclamation of the universal brotherhood of man. It made men love one another. It broke down social distinctions, even those between master and slave. It created "an extraordinary sensitiveness" to wrong or suffering of any kind. Because of it there has occurred a remarkable change in the feeling and conduct of the power-holding classes as respects the weaker classes everywhere. Mr. Kidd affirms that here is the secret of the success of the French Revolution. It was not that the people were so mighty, for without leaders they were but a mob. It was not that the nobility of France was so enfeebled, for with them and at their command were the sinews of war. While the decay of principle and the disorganization of the ruling classes must be recognized as in a measure determinative of results, they do not tell the whole story. "The calm verdict of history must be, that it was in the hearts of the ruling classes, and not in the streets, that the cause of the people was won. The great body of humanitarian feeling which had been slowly accumulating so long

had done its work; it had sapped the foundations of the old system."<sup>1</sup> And the same forces, it may be added, are at work in all Christian lands, and are bringing to pass noticeable and significant changes. But whence comes this great fund of humanitarian and altruistic feeling? It did not exist in any such measure, and as a public sentiment scarcely at all, prior to the introduction of Christianity into the world. It does not exist as a public sentiment in unenlightened and heathen nations to-day. As a factor in the world's history it is altogether unique. How shall we account for it except through the influence of Jesus of Nazareth? The principles of his life and teaching are sinking down deeper and ever more deeply into the hearts of the great nations. Like leaven, they are permeating the mass. Like salt, they are purifying it. Like light, they are scattering the darkness. These characteristics are marking every advance toward the equalization of the conditions and burdens of life. They have marked every step of elevation and progress in English political and social life in the last century. They were behind the movement for the education of the people, behind the movement for the enfranchisement of the people, as they have been also the urging force on behalf of Ireland, and of labor reforms throughout the kingdom. They set in motion the forces that overthrew American slavery; they are beneath the increasing sentiment against the liquor traffic; they are the forces that are ultimately to guide and bring to a right issue the labor agitations of the time. In a word the principles of the life and teachings of Jesus, in a more or less clearly recognized form, are in and about every agitation and movement which looks to the uplifting and betterment of humanity.

<sup>1</sup> *Social Evolution*, p. 172.