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Theology of Rural Life: A Protestant Perspective

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IT IS NO SMALL THING to be asked to represent the Protestant Christian theological community in an inter-disciplinary exploration of goals and values in American agriculture. Beyond the sense of responsibility lies an even more profound feeling of perplexity, for who can speak authoritatively in the field of Protestant Christian theology?

The situation is not quite as bad as it has been made to appear in the little anecdote of the three theologians confronted by a knotty ethical problem. According to the story, the Jewish theologian replied: "The Torah tells us —." The Roman Catholic began: "The Holy Father has stated —." The Protestant replied: "It seems to me —." Even if Protestant theology is not quite that individualized, it is probably true, to steal a trite formula from the economists, that if all Protestant theologians in the world were laid end to end, they would not reach a conclusion.

In such a situation I can do no more than seek to reflect the central tradition of Protestant theology with emphasis on the most recent tendencies within that tradition. In all honesty, I should begin by saying that my rendition of the tradition is inevitably colored by my own prejudices and predispositions in the area of theological interpretation.

RE-STATEMENT OF THEME

The topic assigned to me was *Theology of Rural Life: A Protestant Perspective*. I have witnessed several attempts over

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the years to formulate and state a "Rural Theology" or a "Theology of Rural Life." These attempts have always failed, just as I would fail if I allowed myself to engage in that effort. The simple fact is there is no "rural theology" or "urban theology" or "American theology" or "midwestern theology" or "theology for the middle class" or for the working class or for any other sociological, economic or geographical sector of society. The Christian Faith is unitary. While there are many schools of theological thought in Christendom and many variations of interpretation, Christian theology does not separate men into groups, classes or categories and offer a different gospel for different states of mankind.

Having demolished the topic assigned, I have obviously a responsibility to replace it with an acceptable substitute. My best offering in this regard is, I fear, much more pedantic and uninspiring than the original, but at least it is in my judgment more accurate and more discussable. The topic I have chosen is *Implications in Christian Theology for Human Goals and Values Affecting Rural Life*.

METHODOLOGY

The form of my presentation will be deductive. I shall first attempt to state briefly and all too simply the central thesis of the Protestant Christian faith. Against that theological background I shall undertake to identify some of the ethical implications of the Protestant thesis. In relation to each of these general areas of ethical concern, I will try to present some insights as to the bearing of the Protestant ethic on the goals and values most pertinent to agricultural and rural life.

THE PROTESTANT THESIS

The Christian religion may be aptly described as a religion of ethical monotheism. In common with its Hebrew antecedent and in contra-distinction to the numerous polytheistic faiths of mankind, Christianity affirms the existence of one God. Christianity ascribes to the will and the activity of that one God the origin, the meaning and the destiny of all reality. God is seen as the source and creator of the universe and of all things in it. Its continued existence is an expression of His will; its meaning is found in His purposes; its destiny is in His keeping.

The use of the adjective "ethical" to define Christian

monotheism points to the conviction of Christians that the fundamental relationship between God and man is a contractual one. Man is the crown of creation, a being of special endowments. With him God has established a "covenant" relationship. This contract or covenant defines both rights and obligations on the part of the contracting parties. God promises, for example, not to destroy mankind, but on condition that man shall observe and keep "his commandments and his ordinances and his statutes." (Deut. 8:11) In obedience to the "commandments" of God, Christian man finds the ethical dimension of his being.

Although regarded as a valid contract, the divine-human covenant, it must be pointed out, is not an agreement between equals. It is an agreement between Creator and creature; between Father and child; between Absolute Power and limited power; between Supreme Will and limited freedom; between Perfect Holiness and corruptible humanity. In this curious covenant relationship, man's powers and abilities to understand, accept and fulfill his part of the contract are wholly derived from God, who established the terms of the contract.

Man, having been created by God "in His image," finds himself a creature with limited but important areas of freedom, dwelling in a world of perpetual ethical tension. Symbolically that tension is reflected in the Creation myth, in which it is said: "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." (Gen. 2:7) In the "dust of the ground" and in the "breath of life" we see man as composed of a lower or worldly element and a higher or spiritual element. The resulting tension is not to be interpreted as a conflict between the "physical" and the "spiritual" as some classical Christian heresies have assumed. As the story of the temptation of Adam and Eve makes clear, the tension is between violation of the covenant through self-will and adherence to the covenant, which means obedience to God's will.

And what is God's will for man? In terms of the specifics of human conduct, this has been and continues to be the perennial search of conscientious adherents to the Judeo-Christian tradition. In general terms, the answer has been made crystal clear in and through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the central figure of the Christian faith. No more succinct summary of God's will for man can be found than in Christ's answer to the question: What is the first and greatest commandment?

His reply: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:37-39) Love,

in short, is the essence of God's will and purpose for man. Love toward God and love toward fellow man are man's primary obligations under the covenant. Love is the basic norm for ethical conduct in the Christian faith.

By this norm, however, man stands forever condemned. The heart of the human predicament, in the Christian view, is that man does not possess the power within himself to fulfill his part of the contract as established by God. His essential nature is forever a battleground. On the one hand, he is pulled by the secular lures of selfishness, greed, conflict, hatred and all the other forms which denial of love to God and to man may take; on the other hand, he is subject to the persistent demand of God for obedience to the Law of Love and its fruits in gracious, generous, self-denying conduct.

In this struggle, love is forever losing, the covenant is forever being violated, and man stands forever a condemned sinner. But this is not the final word, or Christianity would be a religion of ultimate hopelessness and pessimism.

In the complex covenant relationship between God and man, God himself provides the solution to the dilemma into which His demand for loving obedience has placed his creatures. As in all other things, God himself is the original source of love and in His great love for His creation, He has provided the means of redemption for sinful man. Although God judges the world by the standards of the covenant, His love is even more basic than His judgment. To put it in the classical simplicity of the New Testament: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

In Christ, then, we see not only the revelation of God's ultimate will for His children — that they shall live out the Law of Love — but also the means of grace by which faltering, sinful man may find forgiveness, cleansing and restoration to divine favor.

In Christ also, and in His abiding presence in human history in the form of the Holy Spirit, the Christian finds the source of continuing strength for the struggle against evil and for righteousness, both within himself and in the social order. Thus is undergirded the ethical dimension of the covenant. Man is not saved by his works, but by his faith. Because of his faith, he is motivated and empowered to do the works of righteousness, which means above all the works of love.

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

From the theological thesis just stated, the Christian derives many secondary insights: his interpretation of the meaning of history; his understanding of the nature of human destiny; his concept of the nature of the church; his evaluation of all sorts of social institutions, secular movements and human loyalties.

Sinful Nature of Man

I move now to a definition of some of the ethical implications of the Christian thesis which seem to have relevance for agriculture and rural life.

First, the Christian thesis asserts that man is a sinner who stands forever under God's judgment. This applies to all men at all times. This means that all of us, in all our activities, in all our attitudes, in all our relationships are guilty of some admixture of self-will and self-seeking. Because this is so, we may never absolutize our own insights, our own institutional arrangements, or our own patterns of life. This is one of the most humbling and devastating of all the insights derived from the Christian faith.

What would this do, for example, if taken seriously by the agrarian fundamentalists? It would certainly force a re-examination of all the pleasant assumptions some of us have lived with so long about the superiority of the "rural way of life," the purity of "rural values" and the specially sacred nature of the "farmer's calling."

I am not suggesting here that we lean so far away from the nostalgic glorification of rural life as to fall into the equal but opposite fallacy. In recent years I have heard some speeches in glorification of the metropolis and the urban way of life which have been quite as oblivious of the Christian doctrine of judgment as anything in the romantic literature of rural life. The "holy earth" boys have, if anything, been topped by the "holy city" boys.

In my attempts to appraise the rural way of life, I have discovered that for every virtue attributable to country living and to the agricultural vocation there is to be found a countervailing vice. For example, to mention but a few: strong family structure — patriarchalism; neighborliness — nosiness; religious sensitivity conditioned by natural environment — deep-seated pagan naturalism; self-reliance — stubborn individualism; absence of class stratification — family clannishness; community loyalty — narrow provincialism; respect for tradition — blind conservatism. And this list could be indefinitely prolonged.

I can and will defend the thesis that there are those aspects in rural life, especially as we have known it in the economically well-adjusted sectors of the American scene, which are conducive to the development of strong character, wholesome family life, stable and fine communities and democratic qualities of life. Rural life at its best provides a favorable environment for these values; it does not guarantee them. It has all too often produced their opposites.

In this connection, one is reminded of some words of Arthur E. Morgan in his book, "The Community of the Future" (1957). Conceding that in former times he had been among the voices of agrarian or at least "small community" fundamentalism, Dr. Morgan says in this later book:

During most of human existence such population groups, usually in the form of villages, have been the nearly universal settings of human life. Probably more than 99% of all men who have lived have been villagers. Men have been so deeply identified with this way of living that few societies have long survived its disintegration and disappearance. Man is a small community animal.

While these small population units have not been the sole possessors of community qualities, yet some living conditions and circumstances are more favorable than others for keeping alive that spirit. The many urban associations, while of great value, usually are poor substitutes for full community life, especially as to opportunity for children to learn the normal processes of living by sharing life and experience with their elders.

Such a modest evaluation is in line with the Christian appraisal which recognizes the admixture of good and evil in all communities and all societies.

Let's apply this doctrine of the sinful nature of man and his institutions in one other direction. What does it have to say to the ardent advocates of one or another particular form of economic organization for agriculture? I'm sure all of us know people who feel strongly that God's will for land tenure, at least in America if not throughout the world, is the family farm. All of us have heard allusions to the "divinely-inspired" law of supply and demand. A generation ago the great Japanese Christian, Kagawa, toured the United States and won a great deal of support among church groups for the cooperative movement by his proclamation that "Cooperatives are applied Christianity." I have not actually heard it, but I am sure a strong case could be made for God's support of the Communist collective pattern of agriculture, based on that verse in the second chapter of Acts which describes the early Christian community as one in which they "had all things in common."

Just as in war, so in economic ideological conflict we all tend to glorify our own side and deify our own favorite patterns of economic organization and our own kit of nostrums for all sorts of economic ills, including those of agriculture. The doctrine of man's sin and God's judgment cuts the ground from under all such absolutist positions.

This point can be summarized by a quotation from a 1954 statement of the General Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. entitled "Christian Principles and Assumptions for Economic Life":

God as we know him through Christ is the God of history, of nations and peoples, as well as of individual souls. It is His will that His Kingdom be realized among men and that His lordship be acknowledged over all principalities and powers, over every department of life including economic institutions and practices. The Church is under divine imperative to call all men — and especially its own members — to recognize the meaning of God's lordship over their economic activities, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth. . . ."

All men are created in the image of God; and, though they are in history sinful and rebellious as the slaves of their own self-will, God seeks to redeem them from their self-centeredness. Men experience freedom in the measure in which they are willing to become God's servants, and to allow God as revealed in Christ to become the center of their lives and the pattern of their living.

Redemption and Responsibility

The second implication to be drawn from the Christian thesis relates to the first as the obverse side of the coin. Man is by nature sinful; but he is also, by the grace of God, susceptible to rebirth and redemption. Regenerated by God's gracious act through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, man possesses a great capacity for good and responds in loving obedience to God's Law of Love. The role of the redeemed man was effectively stated in the section report of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Evanston, Ill., 1954) dealing with "The Responsible Society in a World Perspective" as follows:

He (God) has established with men a living relationship of promise and commandment in which they are called to live in faithful obedience to His purpose. The promise is the gift of abundant life as children of God for those who hear and follow the divine call. The commandment is that men

should love God and their neighbors. In the call to responsible social action, the promise and the commandment of the righteous and loving God require us to recognize that in every human being Christ, Himself, comes to claim our service. Responding to God's love in Christ and being aware of His final judgment, Christians will act responsibly. The call to social righteousness is sustained by the sure hope that the victory is with God, who in Christ has vanquished the powers of evil and in His own day will make this victory fully manifest in Christ.

This statement clearly defines the role and the motivation of the obedient Christian in the realm of social policy and social action. He seeks to act responsibly and to overcome, with God's help, his own inherent tendencies toward selfish irresponsibility, not because he thereby earns the love of God and his own salvation; he acts in this manner rather because he has already experienced the redemptive love of God in Jesus Christ.

This experience, let it be quickly said, does not provide the Christian with any ultimate insights into the specific solutions to human problems. If Christian faith could provide such definite and specific answers, all Christians would inevitably belong to the same political party, the same farm organization and the same school of economic thought. That such is not the case is testimony to the wide margins of freedom and the vast areas of responsible decision making which God has left in the hands of His children.

What the Christian faith contributes to agricultural policy, to make this aspect of the discussion specific, is not a set of neat answers to the farm problem which has eluded the agricultural economists and the politicians. The Christian contributions are rather a plumb line, which is the Law of Love, and a motivation to seek the implications and the applications of the Law of Love issue by issue, case by case, election by election, proposal by proposal as they come along.

The Law of Love

This brings us squarely to the third ethical implication of the Christian thesis for goals and values in agriculture and rural life. It is this: Love is the highest value in human relations. All other goals and values in human experience are tested and judged by their contribution to this central value. The ramifications of this doctrine are extremely far-reaching — far beyond possible treatment in any single paper. One must choose among the infinite number of fascinating avenues which open before us. I have chosen four for exploration.

1. Stewardship. Stewardship is one derived Christian doctrine which has special significance for persons related to the agricultural economy. Generally speaking, Protestant town and country leadership has stressed stewardship as an extrapolation of the doctrine of creation. We have buttressed it with such Old Testament citations as "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1); and "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over. . .all the earth" (Gen. 1:26). In its application, we have related this doctrine most commonly to the obligations of resource conservation — the conservation of soil and water resources, forests and wildlife.

While all this is valid, I would like to suggest that both the source and the application of the principle of stewardship are too limited when seen only in these dimensions. Man's obligation as a steward of God's creation flows not solely from the special status accorded him in creation; it derives also from his response to the Law of Love. Treating other men as we ourselves would be treated (which is the instrumental statement of the Law of Love) includes dealing with the natural bases of human existence, the earth and its resources, in such a manner that earth will sustain an abundant life for contemporary and successor generations even as it has dealt bountifully with us. This is the ultimate Christian motivation for soil, water, forest, fish and wildlife conservation. It applies also to resource conservation in respect to minerals, energy and all other forms of natural phenomena which contribute to human existence and well-being.

I suggest further that our traditional applications of the stewardship principle to such matters as those just mentioned have been too limited. If stewardship is truly motivated by the Law of Love, must it not also concern itself with such matters as these:

Effective and equitable distribution, without regard to national frontiers or political ideologies, of both the fruits of the earth and the technological skills and economic developments which can expand the productivity of the planet?

Rational programs of population planning and control which will look toward limiting the earth's human population to a size its resources can carry in suitable nutrition, health, welfare and comfort?

Serious concern for revision of public policy and practice in respect to the wholesale and irresponsible use of chemical pesticides, insecticides, detergents and other earth, air and water pollutants which threaten both human and nonhuman life over wide areas?

Aggressive devotion to programs of international peace and order designed to avoid the dangers of nuclear or germ warfare which could well exterminate the earth's human population or render the world unfit for human habitation?

There are unquestionably many other applications of the principle of stewardship. Some of these run far beyond the range of agricultural policy and rural life. Yet all of them are of vital concern to rural people in search of normative goals and values for modern living.

2. Freedom. Freedom is one of the most highly regarded goals and values in both the American political tradition and in the Christian theological framework. Unfortunately, it has too often been defined and pursued as if it were somehow antithetical to the value of loving community. Especially in the American scene freedom as a value has been highly conditioned by the frontier psychology of individualism, which has been variously translated as "laissez faire," "caveat emptor," "the public be damned," and "mind your own business and I'll mind mine."

The Christian definition of freedom never sets this value over against the Law of Love but rather regards it as a function of the supreme value which is love. By what must seem an irreconcilable paradox to the mentality of the rugged individualist, Christian teaching always manages to relate freedom to obedience in a creative synthesis, the acme of which is the doctrine of "slavery to Christ." My only meaningful freedom as a Christian is that which comes when I have truly subordinated my will to the will of God. In this experience comes freedom from fear, from lostness, from meaninglessness, from death—freedom to self-giving, to love, to creativity, to immortality.

The subordination of freedom to the Law of Love is classically expressed in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians:

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. (Gal. 5:13-15.)

How does the doctrine of freedom thus construed bear upon goals and values in rural life? Let me venture a few hypotheses in this highly controversial field:

(a). Freedom, in its limited meaning of "absence of restraint," can never be a sole or major goal of public policy.

(b). The exercise of human freedom must always be conditioned by a sense of responsibility to the neighbor and to God.

(c). While governmental action may under certain conditions be an unwarranted invasion of human freedom, it may under other circumstances be the only effective means in a democratic society to preserve and promote the freedoms of certain groups or individuals.

(d). Traditional economic structures and practices, or newly emerging ones, may pose threats to human freedom as great or greater than any of the programs of government — and all should be scrutinized from this point of view.

The World Council of Churches, in its 1954 report previously cited, stated a definition of "responsible society" which is helpful in clarifying the status of freedom in the mosaic of human goals and values:

A responsible society is a society where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and to the people whose welfare is affected by it.

Here is a guideline to the shapers of public policy generally and agricultural policy in particular which would move us far down the road toward reconciliation of the ideological warfare between the supporters of a "free marketplace" and the contenders for a "firm government program."

3. Justice. The preceding quotation from the World Council leads to justice as another important American and Christian value. Despite its popularity as a slogan, justice has long been a poor relation in the family of human values. It got off to a bad start in the Old Testament legalism of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." In this guise it has seemed with some justification to be almost the antithesis of the Law of Love, which certainly has strong overtones of mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In more modern times justice has been the victim of popular distortions of the democratic credo that "all men are created equal." While it is profoundly true in the theological sense that all men are of equal value in the eyes of God, their creator, it is demonstrably false in terms of native physical, mental and emotional endowments. Thus this credo proved a poor vehicle for the value of justice in contemporary society.

What I should like to suggest is that before justice can become a useful goal of agricultural policy it must be seen in Christian perspective as a function of the Law of Love. The Old

Testament highlights two approaches to human relation: The Law, which was man's attempt to codify God's will in terms of specific legal prescriptions of universal applicability; and the prophetic tradition, which can be exemplified in the farmer-preacher Amos of Tekoa, who railed against the institutionalized legalism and ceremonialism of his day and proclaimed God's will that justice should "roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream."

In Christ's teaching both of these were superseded and placed in proper perspective. He said: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). And what was their fulfillment? "A new commandment I give unto you; that you love one another" (John 13:34).

This suggests that love is the fulfillment of justice. Looked at the other way around, it can be said that justice is one of the effective expressions of love. I hope the discussion up to this point has made clear that love in the Christian vocabulary has little or nothing in common with the various emotional and sentimental meanings given to that vastly overworked word in modern speech. Love in the Christian meaning is "agape"; it is a function primarily of the will, with support from the mind and the heart. Love means willing the good for the neighbor even as one desires the good for oneself.

Applied to the doctrine of justice, this means that I will desire and strive for justice, equity, equal opportunity, fair play — dare I say "parity" — for others in society with the same diligence that I seek these basic goals for myself. To put it a little differently, while justice by no means exhausts the demands of love upon Christian obedience, the toleration of injustice is a clear denial of the Law of Love.

One of the tragic facts of human history is that justice has rarely been freely given by man to man, by group to group, by nation to nation. Nearly always it has had to be won in hard-fought struggle, and almost without exception yesterday's victim of injustice turns out to be tomorrow's oppressor. This fact is sad and cogent evidence of the sinful character of man and of the remoteness of human society from the loving community of Christian faith.

Rural people have ever been involved in the struggle for justice. The world's first quarrel, according to Biblical tradition, was between Cain and Abel over the acceptability of their respective offerings of agricultural produce. Amos' complaint *as a shepherd and "dresser of sycamore trees"* (whatever that was) was of the inequities of income and level of living between

the farmers of Tekoa and the residents of the city of Bethel. From then (eight centuries before Christ) until now, history is studded with instances of peasant uprisings and farmer revolts against the disparities between levels of living on the farm and those enjoyed by at least the more conspicuously favored of the dwellers in cities.

This is precisely the focus of the great agricultural debate in our own generation, which has been symbolized by the term "parity." I realize that the word "parity" has lost its popularity among most agricultural economists and many in agricultural politics. Despite this fact, or perhaps I should say because it is being threatened with oblivion in its economic and political contexts, I should like to make the attempt, for purposes of this discussion at least, to rescue the word in what I believe to be its true and proper dimension — the ethical.

Parity is an ethical concept. It comes from the same root which appears in the phrase "on a par with." It speaks of equity, of justice. Stripped of its technical clothing, as in "parity ratio," "parity price," "parity index," etc., parity is an ethical principle. As used in the agricultural policy debate since 1930, the parity principle says: Diligent farm families operating efficient family farms are entitled, as a matter of right, to a level of living on a par with that enjoyed by other American families who invest comparable labor, skill and capital in other economic pursuits.

As an ethical principle this is a hard statement to controvert; nor have I heard it seriously challenged by the spokesmen of any political party or any farm organization. The only defensible opposition to it might be to criticize the parochial Americanism implied in it; but that issue runs throughout the whole sweep of our economic nationalism and can hardly be debated in terms of agricultural policy alone.

The great agricultural debate, as I hear it, deals not with the rightness or wrongness of the principle of parity; but with its implementation. Shall the farmer have his "full parity" in the marketplace, through loan-and-storage types of governmental action, or by direct compensatory payments? There are, of course, ethical issues involved in the choice between these alternative means, but to go into them in detail at this point would take us too far afield.

One aspect of the debate over means designed to achieve the goal of reasonable parity of income and living for farmers is worthy of brief comment. I refer to the endless controversy between those who defend strong programs of government in the name of justice and those who resist such programs in the name of freedom.

Although I think there has been a vast amount of phony argument advanced on this issue, the issue itself is quite real and important. This clash between the values of freedom and justice in the agricultural debate illustrates as well as any the important fact that human goals and values are forever in conflict with one another. Conceivably if the ultimate Christian goal of a perfect loving community could be achieved, the conflict among the lesser and supporting values might be finally resolved. Then, for example, we might as human beings so perfectly define our own goal of freedom that it would in no way threaten injustice to any other person. The fact that such a suggestion sounds fantastic may simply illustrate how far we are both in fact and in imagination, from the fulfillment of the Law of Love in human relations.

It is this kind of situation that I had in mind earlier in this chapter when I made reference to the "mosaic of human values." One role of the Law of Love is to reduce the element of conflict among various subordinate values and tend toward their arrangement in a mosaic pattern of beauty, harmony and peace.

Before leaving the subject of justice, I must put one more element into focus. Earlier I referred to the ease with which erstwhile victims of injustice become its perpetrators whenever and wherever they acquire the power to do so. Consider, for example, the ethical inconsistency of industrialized agricultural operators who seek the public's sympathy because of the high risk and uncertain incomes which characterize their industry but at the same time reject even with violence the efforts of their employees to organize and enter into collective bargaining relations with them. Even worse, some of them, or at least their spokesmen in Congressional hearings, have piously declared, "We would rather starve than accept price supports." But when it actually gets down to the practice of the thing, it turns out that they really meant: we would rather starve our help than take the steps necessary to stabilize our industry.

Justice is an important value in the Christian mosaic. It is worthy to struggle for justice for one's self and one's own group provided the means used are worthy. It is much more laudable to grant justice before it is wrested from us because this is a more genuine expression of the Law of Love. As with all other significant human goals and values, the theologian and the ethicist should work in partnership with the social scientists — economists, sociologists, political scientists. The latter can make an enormous contribution by clarifying the means and methods most suitable and efficient for implementation of the goal of justice. Creatively bringing together the insights of Christian faith and

the technical knowledge of the scientist gives great significance to the dialogue sought in this and similar conferences.

4. Community. The final value I would hold up briefly for our scrutiny is the value of community. I realize that sociologists may feel that it is an invasion of their domain to refer to community as a value. However, they have had so much trouble defining it satisfactorily in sociological terms, that perhaps the fog will not be greatly intensified if I make a theological assertion or two about community as a human value. The two highest avenues for the expression of the Law of Love in the common life are the family and the community. Although communities as the sociologist finds and describes them are a far cry from the perfectly loving community of Christian faith, community is nevertheless the proper context for the practice of the Law of Love.

It seems quite evident that God intended his children to dwell in communities. He so arranged his creation that there is virtually nothing a man can do in complete isolation, except die. You can't be born by yourself, you can't get married by yourself. You can't think, or speak without the use of culturally created and conditioned tools. Personality itself is a culturally conditioned product; so are economic activity, scientific pursuit and religious worship. The self-made man who worships his creator is as deluded as every other sort of idolater. There is even the strong implication in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that God Himself is a community.

It may well be that the most important of all assertions to be made about "rural values" is that rural life is, by classical definition, composed of small communities of intimately and sensitively interacting human beings and families. As we have repeatedly said, this does not guarantee the practice of love in human relations in the rural community. It does provide the opportunity, as possibly no other structure of society does, for the expression of the Law of Love over a maximum range of the varieties of human need, experience and interaction. If and when the tide of urbanization has finally engulfed us all and achieved the totally homogenized culture which it seems to threaten, we may find that the most grievous of the casualties of that assault on the human spirit has been the death of the opportunity and the incentive to human community.

On the other hand, one is sustained by the Christian hope that "love will find a way" and that new vehicles for the expression of the Law of Love, possibly superior ones, may emerge to bless and redeem the barren wastes of depersonalization which seem all too typical of urbanized society. At least, if I may turn

homiletical for a moment, I believe the major challenge before the supporters of rural values is to seek ways of preserving the essential experience of loving community and to find structures to express it in the society of tomorrow.

Of the numerous implications of the doctrine of community, I will develop only one which has specific relationship to agricultural policy. I refer to the much mooted roles of competition and cooperation in agricultural purchasing and marketing. My comment is a very simple one: As a principle, cooperation has more to contribute to the achievement of loving community than competition.

Having made that statement, I should probably protect it by a few further observations. This observation is not intended as a blanket endorsement of farmers cooperatives and their practices. We have already pointed out the sinful nature of all human institutions, and this includes farmer cooperatives. Nor is the principle intended to deny a useful and practical role for competition. That is a matter for the economists to discuss.

Among the positive implications I would derive from the principle as stated are these: Farmers are in line with the Christian goal of community when they undertake and pursue in good faith cooperative methods of organizing their economic life. In this pursuit, however, they are subject to the same kinds of temptation to violation of the Law of Love as they and all men are in other forms of business. The technique is a good one; it should be used in ways and with motives which are amenable to the expression of the Law of Love.

On the other hand, in a world where competition plays so prominent a role in economic motivation and organization, the community principle can have a modifying role. It calls upon the competitor to recognize the human dignity of the person on the other side of the bargaining counter, to be responsible in all his dealings in a competitive economy, to accept the goal of true and loving community as a superior value exercising discipline over his pursuit of competitive advantage.

MODEL FOR SOCIAL ACTION

I have tried to expose some of the ethical implications of the central Christian thesis. It has become obvious how quickly, as one moves down the ladder of abstraction, the issues become controversial. I have tried to stay principally in the areas of general consensus.

Aside from the validity of any of my own personal conclusions

as to agricultural policy, I have tried to illustrate an intellectual process which I believe to be incumbent upon all men who would conscientiously address themselves to issues of public policy. The process, in general, is this:

1. Identify the ultimate loyalty of your life. For the Protestant Christian it is the God revealed and made real in human experience by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
2. Define the supreme value which flows from this loyalty — the Law of Love.
3. Explore the ethical ramifications of that supreme value. Those mentioned here were the doctrines of stewardship, freedom, justice and community.
4. Apply these ethical doctrines to the issues of policy as they arise in the life of society. At this critical point, the Christian will seek and weigh the best insights of the social scientists as to methodologies, but he must make his own decisions as a free citizen of Christian concern. He can claim no absolute wisdom for his judgments at this level; indeed he must retain a flexibility of judgment which will admit former error, new light, changing circumstances and other factors which keep the arena of public policy ever fluid and ever controversial.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' STATEMENT

As a final contribution to this discussion and a further illustration of this methodology in the area of goals and values, I call attention to an official statement of the General Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., adopted in 1958 on the subject of "Ethical Goals for Agricultural Policy." This statement covers some of the ground dealt with in this chapter but includes other topics. It cites a total of seven "Goals" which it "affirms" and "commends to the churches and to the consciences of Christian men and women."

This statement touches on the three levels of abstraction which have characterized this chapter. It makes a general theological affirmation. It cites seven ethical goals. Under each of the seven stated goals is a paragraph of commentary which includes both a tie-back to a Biblical basis and some specific implications for agricultural policy and program. As a conclusion I quote the introduction and the seven goals from the official statement:

A Christian ethical approach to agriculture begins with the acknowledgment that "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. . . ."

God, the Creator, has given man a special position in the world, with a specific responsibility for the fruits of the earth and towards all living things. This is the stewardship of the earth's resources for the nourishment and the enrichment of human life. Thus the production of food and fibre — the primary task of farmers — becomes a service to God and man.

The goals:

Opportunity for the full and wholesome development of persons.

Preservation of the integrity of the farm family and the enrichment of rural family life.

The encouragement of voluntary association, cooperation, and mutual aid among farm people.

Conservation of nature's resources and their development for the legitimate uses of mankind.

Adequate and healthful diets for the world's growing populations.

Fair and reasonably stable levels of income for farm producers.

Recognition of human interdependence on a national and world scale.