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Evaluation on an Ethical Basis

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IN ORDER TO give an ethical critique of the programs presented in the preceding papers, I must make judgments according to some theological standard unless I limit ethics to analysis of ethical language only. And it is obvious that I do not want to do this, or I would not have agreed to an assignment involving "evaluation."

I do not want to be misunderstood in asserting that ethics must have a theological basis. I am not asserting that one must "believe in God" in order to make an ethical judgment. If this were true, no Communist, secular humanist or classical Buddhist could make an ethical judgment — an absurdity. All that is asserted is that every ethical judgment reflects a conviction concerning man's real situation, i.e., a theological or ideological conviction.

Not all such convictions held by the same person are necessarily consistent. And this is why ethical judgments made by the same person are often found to be inconsistent. Furthermore, people are often unwilling or unable to enunciate their deepest convictions. Indeed, their formal professions may not correspond closely to their real convictions concerning the things that matter most to them. In this situation it usually proves true that ethical judgments are better clues to real convictions than theological professions. We think of the former as one step closer to action, and we have a strong intuition (shared, incidentally, by Jesus) that "actions speak louder than words"!

These considerations have a bearing both upon my operations in evaluating and upon the operations of those I am to criticize. If my own critical judgments imply theological criteria, I can

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hardly do less than make them as explicit as possible. On the other hand, critical judgments about the ethical decisions of the other authors' papers in relation both to their own standards and mine are the meat of my assignment.

From one point of view, my work of ethical criticism may seem quite redundant in the light of what has gone before. Of the 11 preceding papers, four have been quite unabashedly ethical and theological.

If this paper is to be justified functionally, it must be in terms of bringing all of the other papers into correlated ethical judgment within one unified framework. In order to attempt this, I shall take three major steps. First, I shall define a theological standpoint in relation to the explicit theologies set forth in the earlier papers. Second, I shall endeavor to construct a hierarchy among the "clusters of values" suggested. If all goes well, this should emerge coherently from the theological standpoint already promised. Third, I shall subject particular proposals in the papers to criticism in the light of the established hierarchy. In doing this, of course, care will be taken to have due regard for the differing responsibilities of governmental agencies, voluntary farm organizations and churches.

THEOLOGICAL STANDPOINT

All four of the overtly theological papers take an explicitly Christian stance, as befits their ecclesiastical sponsorship. They represent the two organized religious communities most extensively represented in the American farm population. I think it could be shown, however, that the same problems could be dealt with on somewhat parallel lines from a Jewish theological standpoint. This is not surprising, in view of the historic connections between the communities, but it is a point which will be alluded to later.

The four voluntary farm organizations are formally non-sectarian. Membership involves no credal test. Whatever sociological affinities some of them may have to the church, they are not formally identified with it. It would be quite improper for them (according to their own standards) to put forward an explicit theological basis for their programs when they are in point of fact theological united front organizations. People with differing ultimate convictions have found a large enough area of common convictions to make collaboration worth while. Discussion of fundamental theological issues does not come within the scope of their common life. Nevertheless, analysis and evaluation of the

convictional presuppositions of their programs is very much in order. (In relation to the point of this paragraph, the Grange is a special case. Nevertheless, according to my understanding, it still falls within the foregoing description of farm organizations, which would fit the great majority of voluntary membership organizations of all kinds in our society.)

Governmental agencies which deal with agriculture are yet another case. They are prohibited by our basic law from being sectarian. I do not mean, of course, that the law can prevent a government servant from being theologically motivated! But in his influence upon policy he is responsible not only to his own theological convictions but also to the convictions of all those whose servant he is. Often this is not easy! But if his own conviction will not permit him to undertake it in principle, then he cannot conscientiously become a government servant. It seems to me that this understanding of the relation between governmental agencies and community values is quite clearly shown in the papers presented by government servants.

My situation as the critic is different from any of these inasmuch as it is without any formal organizational context. I may take account of the historic beliefs of Judaism, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The demands of competent criticism would require this even if I were not in one way or another committed to some of these beliefs by personal faith. There is no reason why I should not go even further and take into account the classical beliefs of other historic religions in which I am much interested and concerning which I have the privilege of teaching from time to time. But no institutional connection does, or can, determine the final criteria by which the judgments of this paper are made. It must be a matter of my own faithful apprehension.

In turning to Dr. Shirley E. Greene's paper there is so much with which I agree, stated with emphases for which I am so grateful, that I hesitate to move on to points where I must take issue. His very restatement of the assigned topic shows sensitivity to the nature of the theological enterprise and accurate insight into the intentions of those who planned this program. His use of the notion of a covenant relation as a means of understanding man's relation to God is good, not only because of its historic importance in the Christian community, but also because it roots Christian teaching in its Jewish context as nothing else can. My only reservation, as will be seen, is that this notion is not stressed enough. Its fundamental priority needs to be made clear.

Another excellent emphasis is that placed upon man's condition as a sinner. Contemplation of this unwelcome news has potential usefulness as a nostrum for the rural sentimentality

described in several of the papers. Here, again, an even more emphatic and pervasive use of this insight would be in order.

Identification of man as a sinner sets up and complements the central thrust of the paper: redemption is an expression of God's love, which can be fulfilled only as man responds in love. I am especially pleased with the hint that stewardship, so readily and pervasively applicable to agriculture, is not simply a derivative of the doctrine of creation, but even more profoundly rests on the doctrine of redemption.

This leads me directly to my concern about the paper. It nowhere makes as explicit as it should be made the fundamental priority of redemption in the Christian religion. For example, the first thing of which it speaks in setting forth "The Protestant Thesis" is creation. There is a well established logic in this, if one is seeking to be systematic. But there is also a subtle danger. Creation is the first teaching of Christianity neither in time nor in importance. The matter might be put in this way: the Christian community has from the beginning taken for granted that God is Creator; it has affirmed that he is Redeemer.

The situation is somewhat different in Judaism, but only enough to help make clear the right order of priorities in Christianity. The central creative notion of Judaism is the Covenant. It was this which gave meaning to the proclamations of the prophets. Yahweh had called his people into Covenant relation with himself through his act of deliverance from bondage. Although the later arrangement of Biblical materials somewhat obscures the fact, it seems clear that this was familiar teaching among the Hebrews long before it occurred to them to suggest that he was also the creator of the world. The latter came as a reflective aftermath; the other gave meaning to their existence as a people.

This act of national redemption holds a place in Judaism precisely comparable to the deliverance in Christ, which is the subject of the Gospel. To be sure, the Christian community believed from the first that God was the creator of the world, but that was not what the Christian message was about.

I am not trying to downgrade the creation. It has its importance, as the early church found out. Those who rejected it were the gnostics. They thought of this as an evil world created by a lesser evil deity. God, the Father, sent the Son into the world to save us out of it. Orthodox Christianity has been clear: He who redeems is also he who has created. But it is in redemption that God's character is made known: God so loved the world that he sent his Son. Not because of our worth. Not even because of our potential usefulness. But because he loved us! Only if the

centrality of this point is maintained can an adequate rationale be provided for unlimited concern on behalf of every other human being.

This should make clear the limits of my stricture against Dr. Greene. We are exactly together in the emphasis which we want to make. I have merely suggested some ways in which, as it seems to me, this emphasis can be more effectively communicated. I express admiration for the ways in which he relates his theological insights concretely to the ethical side of agriculture. Brilliantly illustrative of this is his insistence that justice must be seen within the context of love from the standpoint of the Gospel. It might be put this way: unless one understands first that God loves, it cannot even be asserted that he is just. Otherwise, to forgive would be an injustice. Dr. Greene says that the key to all judgment must be the "plumb line which is the law of Love." I don't like either figure of speech (although some Biblical warrant could be claimed for both). But I agree completely with his intention as I apprehend it through its concrete expression.

This brings us to the statement of Bishop George H. Speltz. He relates his paper to that of Dr. Greene by saying that the latter's exposition of God's love (agape) provides the motive for his own recommendations. He then goes on to say, however, that his paper has more to do with philosophy than theology, as that distinction is understood in the Roman Catholic tradition. In this latter judgment he is correct, for he relates all that he has to say for himself to "natural law" rather than "supernatural revelation." The only exceptions to this generalization are his occasional passing references to grace and his extensive use of the great modern social encyclicals of the Popes. These latter (for which I would like, parenthetically, to express my very great personal gratitude) recognize both perspectives. Thus they introduce Gospel teaching concerning redemption into the paper. But its main thrust is an expression of natural law, which in any identifiably Christian form is built upon the notion of creation. Thus a distinctively Christian theological framework does not emerge. Instead, the way is prepared for a moving expression of what Mr. Rohde in his paper calls agricultural fundamentalism. The matter comes to a head in the following passages:

In the mind of the good farmer . . . reverence for mother earth is one with his reverence for God and his parents. Moreover, this feeling quite naturally embraces a reverence for his native country. . . . I think it doubtful whether any other agency can be substituted for agriculture in laying a foundation for true piety. . . . The rural values stressed in this paper [are] reverence for the soil, love of God, love of fatherland, willing acceptance of honest toil.

On this basis must not China and Japan (before industrialization) be the most truly pious nations on earth, and the United States of America the most impious? The question is not asked to find fault. I have a Japanese friend, son of a Shinto priest, who was educated in a Christian mission school. He was called to the Christian ministry and trained in this country to the doctoral level in Old Testament interpretation. One of Japan's leading Hebrew scholars, in the end he became converted to orthodox Judaism. One of the considerations which moved him to his last step was that Judaism seemed closer to the natural piety of his fathers.

Do not misunderstand me. I am neither ridiculing Bishop Speltz's suggestion that work can be a therapy for original sin nor remaining unmoved by the wholesome "rationality and creativeness" of farm life. But this natural setting leads to Christian piety only if it is guided by the revelation in Christ. If we have seen God in Christ, then we can see him on the farm. And if we have seen him on the farm, then we can see him in the factory. Maybe it is a little harder, but the work of redemption is done there too.

PUTTING THE GOALS AND VALUES IN ORDER

Having identified God's self-giving, limitless concern for the welfare of every man as the ultimate source of all value, and the right response to his love as the touchstone of all human goals, we turn to an appraisal of the clusters of values suggested by Dr. Burchinal for the Planning Committee. Let us consider them in the order in which he gave them.

Freedom related to agricultural production and distribution. Freedom cannot, from our perspective, be regarded as an intrinsic value in itself. And yet it is a condition essentially instrumental to the achievement of any value at all. It participates crucially in most of the other clusters of values and must therefore be concretely involved in their discussion. The actual structure it takes in agricultural policy depends upon the value placed upon order, stability, justice, efficiency, et al. Freedom from is never a value; at best it is avoidance of disvalue. Freedom as a positive instrumental value is always freedom for some venture of worth. Opportunities will arise later for discussion of government as an agency and/or enemy of freedom.

Justice. The necessary context for a Christian understanding of this value has been suggested. And this understanding has in some measure penetrated American constitutional, juridical and

political thinking. In any consideration of farm policy it must be reckoned a value of high priority, even if surrounded by some ambiguity of meaning.

Efficiency. This value will be reckoned so importantly instrumental to the general welfare that it cannot be denied. However, it has been, is, and will be in tension with concern for the welfare of those caught at the margin of a rapidly changing industry.

Security. This value can never be made absolute, but it does slow the relentless march of efficiency — and it should.

General welfare. Among all the suggested clusters of value, this comes closest to the heart of the matter. When understood in particular and concrete terms it bears important relation to Christian love. Its concrete interpretation, however, encompasses not only the controversies over farm policy, but most of the political disputes of our time.

Order and stability. These values again are merely instrumental. The particular form of order and degree of stability chosen represent the limitation placed upon freedom in accommodating efficiency to the demands of justice and security in the pursuit of the general welfare!

THE PROGRAM PAPERS

Dr. Cochrane's paper speaks so well for itself that there is little need to speak for it. Philosophical competence, ethical sensitivity and dialectical skill characterize its developing argument. He quite properly refrains from adopting a formal Christian stance (for reasons already suggested); yet at one point he gives a brilliantly succinct and explicitly Christian rationale for a liberal society: "none is good or wise enough to have arbitrary power over any other." The argument as a whole shows quite conclusively, it seemed to me, that under present (and future) conditions we cannot hope to achieve values we demand without some form of supply management.

Mr. W. E. Hamilton employs pronouncements of the American Farm Bureau Federation to come to what appears to be a different conclusion. His paper is a carefully worked out display of the value affirmations of the Federation, with something like pre-eminence placed upon the value of the market system. There is a commendable emphasis upon freedom, but without its proper context of responsibility being made clear. "Active participation in public affairs" is urged, but the possibility that the federal government might be made the instrument of the people in authentic

value achievement seems never to be contemplated. What kind of limitations should be placed upon it? The following passage is extraordinarily stimulating to the imagination:

Programs which make people dependent upon the federal government certainly impair their freedom to decide how they will use their right to vote. Economic freedom and political freedom are interrelated. Neither can be impaired without impairing the other. The man whose economic position depends on a particular program is under great pressure to vote for candidates who promise to continue the program, even though he may differ with them on numerous other issues.

After reflection on the resolutions which Mr. Hamilton reports, and his comments upon them, I have come to the conclusion that one unspoken assumption is necessary in order to make them hang together: government on the national level is inherently demonic in character.

Just one more minor comment. Any churchman who is also a member of the Farm Bureau should be offended by the suggestion that he "make certain that actions taken by his church are within the basic concepts of our American system."

Mr. Gilbert C. Rohde's paper is disarmingly candid. The Farmers Union is dedicated to the family farm ideal — as a heritage from "agrarian fundamentalism." This attachment has led to the repudiation of what Mr. Rohde would regard as the economic fundamentalism of the Farm Bureau. Government at various levels is regarded as a potential instrument for "the economic betterment of farm families on the land." I readily admit that the Union's program for direct subsidies on a graduated basis with maximums seems to me ethically superior and altogether more rational than the price-support system. But I see little sign that it is likely to come within the art of the possible.

I find much that is warm and compelling about Mr. Rohde's presentation. But one wistful passage seems to symbolize the jeopardy in which the family farm crusade stands: "A young farmer's entry into agriculture is becoming more and more restricted. There is a serious question of whether or not a family will ever be able to accumulate enough capital in a lifetime to own the farm and all the machinery and equipment necessary to operate it efficiently."

Mr. Herschel Newsom's thesis is clear: there is an imbalance in the American economy through long established help to segments other than agriculture. What is needed now is parity of income for farmers. This seems ethically unexceptionable. What isn't clear to me is Mr. Newsom's program for accomplishing this end.

The latter part of Dr. Robert J. Lampman's competent paper is commentary upon Mr. Rohde's wistful remark. In 12 years, the farm population has declined by almost half — with every indication that the trend will continue.

The main part of his paper, however, deals with major goals of American economic life. Three of these can be directly related to our established standard: full employment, fair sharing of output and of opportunities and meeting the economic responsibilities of world leadership. All of them can be direct expressions of concern for the welfare of all men. The other goals — satisfactory growth of capacity to produce, efficient use and allocation of that capacity and reasonable stability in the general level of prices are instrumentally related to the same standard.

Mr. Oren Lee Staley's evangelical fervor was both impressive in itself and an aid to understanding the nature and prospects of the National Farmers Organization. He presented the plight of the family farm in a way which heavily underlined what had been said by Mr. Rohde and Dr. Lampman. This darkness heightened the bright prospect of salvation through farmer organization for collective bargaining on lines tightly drawn and carefully worked out. The basic right to engage in this procedure seems undeniable on the theological basis already adduced. Indeed, if he chose to, Mr. Staley might take some encouragement from the papal plan for industry organization, as expounded by Bishop Speltz.

The ethical problems are substantially the same as with labor unions. If the movement succeeds as Mr. Staley hopes, there will be need for widespread reflection upon the ethical issues surrounding whatever instruments analogous to the picket line and union shop may be developed. My suspicion is that there is little clarity or consensus in the farm population on these issues as yet.

There is little need for me to comment on Dr. Henry A. McCanna's kaleidoscopic compendium of Protestant programs. I was instructed by it. Three points will suffice.

First, its theological perspective is not made as explicit nor as clear as I could wish. The doctrine of Creation only is adduced at the beginning. "Basic Christian concepts" are referred to in the second paragraph, but the first paragraph gives no real hint as to what they are. Much later on Dr. McCanna moves to supply this deficiency by reference to the concepts of the Lordship of Christ, grace and judgment.

Second, Dr. McCanna makes responsibility to future generations the subject of one of his explicit ethical goals. He thus refers to the matter raised so sharply for us by Dr. Boulding's comment. However, no elaboration or program is presented.

Third, the Migrant Ministry of the National Council of

Churches appears a wonderfully appropriate response to God's love. However, I am made uneasy by the establishment of "elimination of foreign farm labor importation programs" as one of the stated goals of the program.

I am grateful for Father Edward W. O'Rourke's earnest exposition of the program of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. A series of particular comments may be in order:

1. We are indebted to him for his candid statement and forthright acceptance of the principle of subsidiarity. This principle quite clearly animates the addresses of both Mr. Rohde and Mr. Staley. More serious contemplation of it by Mr. Hamilton and his colleagues in the Farm Bureau would, I think, go rather directly to the heart of the most serious issue I raised with him.

2. Whatever the difficulties involved in the maintenance of the family farm, Father O'Rourke shows quite conclusively why a Christian cannot leave the issue alone.

3. I am fascinated by his discussion of liturgy and rural life. Difficult, at best, to make effective in the present situation of rapid change, the Roman Catholic Church is somewhat better organized to try than are the protestant churches. He convinces me, nevertheless, that protestants should be doing more in this direction than they are.

4. I have a few theological issues to raise with Father O'Rourke, which I shall not discuss at length. I think we can never properly speak of ourselves as establishing the Kingdom of Christ. I think that man's radical sinfulness needs to be more directly taken into account. And Aristotle's teaching on happiness needs to be more radically transformed in the light of the Christian doctrine of redemption.

Dr. J. B. Claar succeeded in communicating to me with vividness his delicate situation as a public educator. There is no ambiguity in his mind, as an administrator of the Cooperative Extension Service, that he is involved in molding ethical attitudes. He is helping people perceive the difference between "what is" and "what ought to be," according to their own convictions. "Extension is a change agent with regard to both the goals of people as well as means by which they pursue them." It is helping people "to take steps to attempt to manage change." And yet Dr. Claar is at great pains to indicate how carefully indoctrination is shunned — or, indeed, anything but a reflection of "the values of Americans." To reconcile these considerations is no light task. The patience and ethical sensitivity with which Dr. Claar confronts it inspire my admiration.

CONCLUSION

God's love, man's sin, God's reconciling power which never can be fulfilled short of our outgoing concern for every man: these provide a framework which can bring all of the goals and values for agriculture to judgment — whether propounded by individuals, voluntary organizations, governmental agencies or churches.