

THE ORGANIZED RELIGION OF CHURCHES AND SOCIAL WORK: WHEREIN DO THEY DIFFER?

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THE religion of churches too often concerns itself with *one* phase *only* of human existence, to-wit: the spiritual, particularly in reference to the life hereafter. However important this may be, it is for organized religion to accept a broader philosophy if it shall continue its vitality amid the complexities of modern life. The social worker is deeply concerned also with spiritual or moral values but not alone with these. The social worker stresses the *complexity* of causes for motives and acts, the intricate interplay of heredity in contact with physical and moral environment. The social worker knows that nothing *just happens*. The social worker realizes, therefore, that if changes are to be brought about in life conscious changes must be made in the makeup of personalities, delicate adjustments made between personalities and environment, and definite changes in the social environment itself achieved through individual effort and mass action.

Religion should be the controlling element in *every activity* of human life. How earnestly has the religion of churches worked to decrease child labor, improve prison conditions, outlaw war, bring about law enforcement, or increase wages? The church has too long remained set apart, a thing of pulpits and prayers for an hour on Sunday instead of admitting active responsibility in every problem of mankind. It is reasonable perhaps that personal redemption should be the first concern of churches, why should they not, however, add a second and equally important concern; the redemption of man's entire life, political, industrial, and physical?

Is not the bringing about of a Kingdom of God on earth as essentially Christian as the delivering of orations on the Kingdom of God in Heaven?

The social worker accepts everything as possible of accomplishment, if not today by individual case methods, tomorrow by fundamental economic and social reforms, or by advancement in science. The social worker will not believe Christ intended to say that because certain of the poor of His time would outlive Him, that we too must inevitably have other poor with us always.

The social worker believes in intensive self-criticism of the methods of its social organization and a continual revaluation in its technical processes. The social worker does not believe that God has ceased to work for improvements in man, and that God regarded His work for man closed aeons ago on the seventh day. The church has not developed to meet the changed and changing social problems of today. It should weigh its accomplishments in the community today in the light of modern social conditions. It should frankly evaluate its own efforts day by day if it would live. There is a certain smugness about religion of the church, it rarely admits its own weakness and failure; it is suspicious of experiments, it will not seek out new methods.

The social worker does not believe in trusting the sense judgments only or in acting on surface conditions alone. The social worker wants to know all the pertinent facts before arriving at conclusions; the social worker regards all facts as pertinent. If the church would seek out all facts before attempting to act, its acts would be more fruitful. The social worker believes in a social case study or a social survey to determine needs. The church launches forth on drives to clean up this or drive out that without knowing its facts, without seeking trained leadership, without co-operating intimately with others who may also be interested.

The social worker believes constructive thinking is more helpful than abundant alms; it has learned that it is not enough to feed a tramp. It is quite as necessary to learn the causes of vagabondage and if possible remove the conditions which produce it.

The social worker believes that if a man is to deal successfully with the problems of another, that the one who attempts to help must not only be kind, but be *trained* in kindness. Good intentions—unsupported by knowledge of how to put desires into deeds effectively and graciously—do not solve questions. When life in the world was simple, good neighborliness was perhaps enough. Now in the day of complex individual problems, legal entanglements, frequent scientific discoveries, situations are increasingly difficult

to analyze and adjust. Only through trained and directed effort will success repay hopes.

The church too often is sporadic in its efforts, driven by emotional impulse only. The social worker must be prepared for a year-around program of helpfulness; a dinner on Thanksgiving or Christmas for the hungry is insufficient.

Social workers tap every source of co-operation and aid. They believe in working with every agency in the community, physical, moral, industrial, legal, social, religious. They see relatives and friends and teachers and lawyers and doctors and landlords and employers and committees and clubs and clearing houses. The church too often works alone, ignorant of other effective resources for human reconstruction.

Social workers are believers in specialization. They train special probation officers for delinquent children, special child placers and home finders for dependent children, legal aid workers for legal problems, welfare workers for industry, family case workers for general family rehabilitation, medical and psychiatric workers for health and mental cases. The church too frequently believes that any well intentioned person can deal successfully with any intricate human problem.

Social workers believe in finding out first what is needed and in giving just that. They do not believe in giving money or material aid only. They believe material help tends to degrade and should be given as sparingly as possible. While the church could profitably realize that men will be more interested in saving their souls if they have food in their stomachs, the church's first business of saving souls will gradually pass on if it tries to purchase interest in souls by giving food. By a system of dispensing material relief or by the opening of a church pool room, the church subordinates and weakens its own spirituality and drives elsewhere those who honestly seek soul satisfaction.

Social work emphasizes the scientific approach, which merely means that approach which is truly kind because it is seeking for the truth open-mindedly. Social work insists on regularity of effort and on trained understanding. Social work would bring about good will on earth by using every human and divine resource. Social work cannot work without religion. How can religion in the churches be Christian until it is socialized?