

# PAUL LEROY VOGT

CHURCH COOPERATION  
IN COMMUNITY LIFE

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# **Paul L. Vogt**

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### **PREFACE**

Many books have been written during the past few years on the rural church. Some of these have given excellent concrete illustrations of methods that are proving successful in solving local problems. Others have discussed the general rural church situation. The rural life movement, however, has been so rapid that it is believed that a brief restatement of the place of the church in the rural life movement is desirable at the present time.

It has been the task and privilege of the writer for the past four years to be almost constantly in the field traveling from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Canadian border to the limits of Florida and getting so far as possible first-hand impressions of rural church and community conditions. It is the purpose of the present essay to discuss some of the general problems in rural life presenting themselves to the religious forces of America, and to note some conclusions as to the next steps to be taken if these forces are to render the service in rural advance that it is believed is theirs to render. Suggestions as to local programs will be made only as evidence that when the church undertakes in an adequate manner the solution of problems whose solution is demanded of it, it receives both the moral and the financial support of the people served. The chapters on phases of the local program are intended only to help in preparing the way for the larger service contemplated.

As with individuals, so it is with institutions. It is difficult to discuss the place of different organizations in the rural life movement without arousing the antagonism of leaders in the respective organizations. It is hoped that the point of view held will be accepted as one of sympathy for the efforts of all organizations concerned and that the purpose of the discussion is to point the way toward a larger cooperation resulting from a better understanding of the work that may be expected of each.

*Paul L. Vogt.*

## CHAPTER I

### SOME PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

When one begins to discuss a subject it helps very much if his readers know what he has in mind in the terms used. In the title selected for this text there are at least three words that need definition. Probably no reader will agree fully with any of the definitions given, but an attempt to define should at least help the reader to understand better in what sense the terms are used by the writer.

The term "community" has come into such common use that it might be assumed that definition is unnecessary. And yet when learned bodies get together to discuss community problems a large part of the time is usually taken up in attempting to define what the different speakers are talking about.

When the writer lived in the open country several years ago he went to Mifflin Center school and attended Wesley Chapel church. The schoolhouse and the church were located at the same crossroads, and these two institutions drew for their constituency from an area of about four square miles for the school and a somewhat larger area for the church. Brownstown school, to the south, Hendrickson's to the east, and Whetstone to the west made up other school communities. Pleasant Grove church, Salem, and Brownstown, with a different territory covered by each, made up church areas that did not coincide with the school areas bounding Mifflin Center school territory. In like manner, when trading was to be done, Upper Sandusky and Kirby, five and six miles away, were the centers to which everybody went, generally on Saturday afternoon, when friends from other sections of the county might be found on the streets. The boundaries of the trade center were thus much larger than those of either the school or the church. In politics, the center of interest of the particular township with which the writer was concerned was the old schoolhouse turned into a township house at Mifflin Center, the location of the church and school. The local political interests of the other communities mentioned were at the appointed places in the respective townships. The seat of justice was for some time in the parlor of the writer's father's residence, or in the front yard, to which court was occasionally adjourned when weather conditions permitted. In a larger way county courts were held at the county seat, as were other of the larger political activities.

One could go on indefinitely illustrating the boundaries of interests of various kinds. Some of them centered in the State House; others in the national Capitol; and many a wordy political battle was fought in the little country section over the question as to whether the protective tariff or the Democratic party was responsible for the hard times the farmers and others were suffering. There were even world interests involved, as during the Spanish-American War or the Venezuelan difficulty during Cleveland's administration.

This concrete illustration both raises the question, Which of these is the "community?" and also points the way to the answer. None of the groupings mentioned can be considered "*the* community." Yet each is "*a* community." A "community" is a psychical and not a physical thing. It can only approximately be bounded by physical lines. In the last analysis the true "community" is nothing more nor less than that group of two or more individuals who are bound together by a single interest. Thus two people living within sight of one another may be members of the same religious community and at the same time be absolutely separated from one another in their political affiliations. Also one person can at the same time belong to many "communities."

But this definition, if adhered to strictly, would lead to confusion of thought perhaps more serious than a less accurate use of the term. Careful investigation of the relation of the different psychic communities to one another reveals the fact that geographically the areas of individual community interest overlap one another; and that in the better organized regions the centers of interests coincide and it is only the boundaries of the several interests that are not coterminous. The Mifflin Center illustration given above is good in that it had the religious, educational and political

interests centered at one physical spot. The social and recreational life of a large part of this local area also was centered here. In the other local groups mentioned there was a division of interest much more marked. A more practical definition, then, of a "community" would be "That aggregation of population which is bound together by a predominating proportion of its local interests."

If this definition is accepted, then an inspection of almost any local aggregation, in the open country at least, will lead to the conclusion that there are few groups of people who have any large number of local interests in common. Perhaps the most powerful force to be considered in determining what is an open country community is that of the social life. People in a given section habitually seek those with whom they are best acquainted when they get together for social affairs of interest outside the family circle; and it is only occasionally that the mass will go out of these habitual associations in seeking social relaxation. This social life may be sought at one time in the school, at another in the church, again at a picnic, or in the home of some one in the "neighborhood." But the dominating factor is acquaintanceship rather than religion or education or business.

Villages are more easily defined as to the number of interests holding the group together.

One principal objective in the modern local community organization movement seems to be to bring together at some central point the focal points of as many local interests as possible, thus strengthening the community bonds and increasing the community consciousness. As this end is achieved the necessity for the strict definition given above disappears and the "community" becomes *that aggregation of people the majority of whose local interests have a common center*. This is the sense in which the term will be used in this discussion.

The term "rural" likewise conveys a different thought to different people. Indeed, so likely has the term been to mislead that in a recent national survey of religious conditions, the term was abandoned and "town and country" substituted. The simpler plan is to arrive at a definition of the word "rural" which will include what the latter term connotes. To confuse "rural" with "agricultural" is to ignore both the past and the present in movements of population and in organization of interests. To an increasing degree the interests of the open country are centering in the village, or even larger centers. So that in discussing the problems of the agricultural population it is often necessary to make the center of discussion the organization of the village with an agricultural environment. The better plan is to definitely discuss the problems of the open country under the term "agricultural" and retain the other term for all interests of groups of population in smaller communities, whether in the open country or in the villages. In general, the division of the United States Census will be observed and the term "rural" regularly applied to all groups of under two thousand five hundred population.

At a recent meeting of country ministers an attempt was made to define what is the problem of the rural church. The definition as framed is herewith presented: "The rural task of the church is the nurture and development of all phases of human welfare in those communities where the general life and thinking of the people are related to matters which pertain to material natural resources."

This definition is inadequate from the administrative point of view in that it would exclude the small manufacturing community, the educational center, the summer and winter resort communities, and similar specialized groups where population is small. The problems of these small communities not directly related to material natural resources have many characteristics in common with those included in the above definition. Size of community has much to do with the type of problem presented; and the one who understands the problems of the agricultural village is probably better able to deal with the problems of the villages of the type mentioned than is the one trained for service in a metropolitan center.

The term "church" is here used in the sense of including all religious forces in rural life. The Sunday School Association, the Christian Associations, Church Federations, and other groups allied to the church are included in the general term.

## THE MANIFOLD FUNCTIONS OF THE CHURCH

The church is the only agency in existence that is concerned with man in all his relationships. It is concerned with keeping alive in human consciousness the existence of a Divine Being and of man's relationship to that Being. It is the only agency that proceeds on the theory of the immortality of the human soul and that has a program of preparing the soul for a life after death. In common with other agencies the church is concerned with the individual life of man on this earth and endeavors to lead human beings to that course of life which will result in the maximum of personal spiritual welfare. And in common with other agencies it is concerned with man in his relations to others and to his material environment because these relationships have a vital effect on his spiritual life.

A full analysis of the functions of the church would include a discussion of those features of church work which have to do with man's relation to God and to an immortal existence. But in a discussion of the church in relation to the community it is not necessary to consider man's relation to God nor to a future life except in so far as beliefs in such relationships influence his personal welfare on this earth or his relationships to his fellow man. Thus this discussion falls in the field of sociology rather than in the field of theology or psychology. A casual observation of the forces at work in human relationships, especially in the smaller communities, leads quickly to the conclusion that beliefs both with reference to God and to a future life have a vital effect on social conduct. But it is the effect instead of the truth of beliefs that is the subject matter to be considered.

Having thus defined the field of our discussion both as to subject matter and as to the phase of the interests of the church to be considered, it is next in order to note the size of the task.

According to the census of 1920, 50,866,899 people in the United States lived in rural territory, that is, in communities of less than 2,500 population. This was 48.1 per cent of the total. For the first time in the history of the country the records showed a larger proportion of the total population living in urban centers than in villages or in the open country. The population in incorporated villages of less than 2,500 population was 9,864,196, or 9.3 per cent of the total, while that in unincorporated or open country communities was 41,002,703 or 38.8 per cent, as compared with 8.8 per cent and 44.8 per cent respectively in 1910.

The total rural population increase was but 1,518,986, or 3.1 per cent. Incorporated village increase was 1,745,371, or 21.5 per cent, while the unincorporated community population actually decreased 227,355, or .6 per cent.

These figures indicate two conclusions of importance to our discussion. The first is that the villages of less than 2,500 inhabitants are sharing with the large centers in the general increase in population. Their increase proportionately is not so marked as is that of the extremely large centers, but it is sufficiently marked to indicate that they offer opportunities that attract more than does the open country. This village growth must be reckoned with in determining policies of location of church buildings and the type of local church program for community service.

The second conclusion is that the open country is still at a disadvantage so far as its possibilities of supporting a large population are concerned. Actual depopulation of the open country, the enlargement of the size of farms, the abandonment of acreage once under cultivation, which preliminary figures issued by the Census Bureau indicate, show that not yet is the demand for agricultural products such as to make a much larger open country population possible. This fact also points the direction for readjustment of rural community life.

The data from the religious census of the United States, taken in 1916, while not classified as rural and urban, give hopeful figures as to the progress of religious institutions in this country. While the total population of the United States increased during the decade 1910-20, 14.9 per cent, the church membership from 1906-1916 increased 19.6 per cent. The total church membership increase, 6,858,796, was 50.2 per cent of 13,710,842, the increase in total population. These figures

of church membership increase, covering a period before the European war began to affect this country seriously, indicate that the general rising ethical standards of American life have had their reflection in the larger personal as well as financial support of the religious forces.

While data are not available as to the proportion of rural and urban population belonging to church, the census gives figures as to the church membership in communities of over 25,000 population. According to census estimates, 32.7 per cent of the population lived in cities of over that population in 1916. The religious census shows that 36.5 per cent of the church membership lived in communities of that size. Contrary to popular impression, the larger centers actually have a larger proportionate church membership than do the smaller communities. The facts show that the problem of advance of the Christian Church is more of a small-community problem than it is of the larger centers.

While the proportion of the total population belonging to church increased from 38.1 per cent in 1906 as compared with the 1910 population to 39.6 per cent in 1916 as compared with the 1920 population, the magnitude of the unfinished task is still almost staggering. If the proportion for rural America were the same as for the country as a whole, there would be 20,143,292 people not belonging to church. Church membership, of course, is not the only criterion of the influence of the church; nor would all denominations admit that all the people should belong to church, since some would not accept children not yet having reached the age of accountability. But in any case Christian America is not Christian even in church membership. This does not take into account matters of social and economic relationships which the spirit of Christianity has not yet penetrated and by which church members as well as nonmembers are bound.

More than 50,000,000 rural folk rising to a consciousness of their inherent solidarity and community of interest, and more than 20,000,000 of these not affiliated with any religious organization, present a challenge for trained leadership unequalled in the history of the world. Urban interests have grown powerful. Urban life has rapidly advanced for at least the more favored groups until it has far outstripped conditions in rural communities that go to make up the best in modern civilization and culture. Germs have been found in the "Old Oaken Bucket" in the country, while the scourge of typhoid has been banished from the city, and the "Church in the Dell" has crumbled in decay, while the metropolitan pulpit has taken the best leadership for its own. The country has been unable to compete with the urban centers for educational, religious, or social leadership because wealth has accumulated in the cities. Rural population has declined because the prizes in wealth accumulation were in the cities and because it was easier to secure those things there that people have learned to value as most worth while, in good housing, medical attendance, education, and recreation. While city poets have sung the praises of country life, many people who have lived in the country and endured the long hours and little pay from husbandry have, like the Arab, folded their tents and slipped away; and when once they have tasted the advantages of urban life, have not returned.

No civilization can be wholesome or permanent so long as any one great group is permanently handicapped in its struggle for economic or social welfare. So long as any group is evidently at a disadvantage the shift of population from the less-favored to the better-favored groups will continue; that is, unless castes are formed which compel people to remain permanently in one group or the other. And this does not happen in modern democratic society. And so long as there is a continuous shift of population in one direction or another we have evidence that conditions are such as to induce the shift.

It is the existence of conditions such as these that makes the challenge for a trained loyal service on the part of those selected to attend to matters concerned with rural public welfare.

It is the purpose of the following pages to outline briefly some of the conditions to which the church must give attention if it is to meet the demand now made upon it by modern rural life. It is not intended to be a treatise on practical theology in the sense ordinarily accepted in courses on that subject. Very little attention will be given to matters of organization or administration of the local

church. It is believed that if only ministers of the gospel can once attain an adequate grasp of the purposes of religious service, the matter of method of accomplishing results may be left largely to the pastors themselves. On the other hand, emphasis upon method, which seems to be demanded by many ministers instead of knowledge of ends to be attained, is more than likely to lead to overorganization, or organization not adapted to objectives. One of the essentials in all leadership is that of having definite objectives toward which to work, and it is the purpose of this text to call the attention to objectives and to organization, both local and general, adapted to the attainment of objectives rather than the methods of attaining them.

## CHAPTER II

# THE BASIS FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

The past few years have witnessed a marked widening of the concept of the functioning of the church. But there is still considerable question concerning the basis for the program of church work that now bids fair to become conventional. Not long ago the writer attended a convention of a state social welfare association. Over three hundred and fifty persons were in attendance representing the leading agencies for the advance of social welfare in the entire commonwealth, both urban and rural. Careful inquiry revealed the fact that but one minister had registered, and he was on the program. On the other hand, it is the rare occurrence for those professionally interested in social service to be present at a convention of representatives of religious orders. In practice there is still a clean-cut dividing line between those interested in social progress and those engaged in so-called religious work. The social workers are not irreligious; many of them believe their service to be of the highest type of religious expression. The representatives of the church are welcomed by social workers into their councils, but it is feared that often these representatives are not taken seriously because for so long they have had a program that affected social welfare in but an indirect way. The time has come when representatives of the church should accept their rightful position as leaders in all movements that tend to make human existence more Christ-like and to make the kingdom of heaven on earth more of a reality.

The reason for the attitude of both ministers and people toward the church has been the emphasis placed upon individual regeneration as the sole and all-important method of advancing the Kingdom. The "conversion" of the individual would lead him into right conduct. When all individuals were converted then the kingdom of heaven would indeed be at hand.

But the advance of social science has made clear the fact that the individual is very largely the expression of the group in which he lives. Custom, convention, fashion, public opinion, and other group influences go far to determine what individual thought and action will be in any given group. The Tennessee mountaineer has a different standard of what constitutes true religion from that of the New England Unitarian. The code of race relationships in Mississippi is not the same as that in Wisconsin. The standards of the boy's "gang" determine largely the dress, the ideals, and habits not only of youth but of the coming man. Even in the life of the individual different standards exist suitable to the several groups in which he carries on his habitual activities. The capitalist who corrupts Legislatures with impunity in business or who prevents child-labor legislation may be a model Christian gentleman in his home and church life.

It is admitted that in the last analysis the group mind can have its existence only in the individual minds that compose it. But it is also true that when we consider the minds of individuals working in groups with the consciousness of what the reactions of others are, the results are different from what they are when the individual acts alone. Moreover, individuals as a class react in much the same way to stimuli that affect all of the members of the group at a given time. If the price of milk is raised so that there is suspicion of profiteering, common resentment appears. If the leadership of a political party is threatened, the politician, even though he loses leadership, rarely bolts his group. Instead he finds some excuse for standing by the party organization. It is not necessary to alter the minds of all individuals by "conversion" in the conventional manner either to change public opinion, alter physical conditions, or change the form of social organization. When these changes are effected in the minds of the controlling elements of the group, then the entire public mind and social organization are altered and the social process goes on stimulated in newer and, it is hoped, better directions.

One or two illustrations should make this point clearer. Several years ago it was the custom to use common drinking cups on railways. When first legislation was passed to prevent such use,

considerable public opinion opposed it as foolish. Now, it is difficult to get any one to touch a common drinking cup even in the home. Before the elimination of the saloon powerful and sometimes very respectable forces were lined up in favor of its continuance. But as soon as the fight against the saloon had been carried to the point of its legal elimination many of those who once supported the barroom because of the profit to them became its opponents. Formerly the saloon was a center for the corruption of many if not most of the youth in the community. Now, most communities are bringing up a far higher grade of young people morally than they once were because it is no longer necessary to fight against this center of immoral infection.

The lesson these illustrations should teach is this: that the conventional method used by the churches during the past half century of depending almost entirely upon individual regeneration through personal appeal as a means of salvation of the race has handicapped the church and limited its effectiveness. When it is once understood that the mind and the character of the individual can be influenced in as many ways as there are social contacts, and when the means of approach through all these contacts is understood, then the effectiveness of the church will be immeasurably increased. Social life must be saved not only through individual regeneration but also through the establishment of a right attitude on the part of the individual and as many individuals as possible. On the other hand, individual attitudes can be established in large part by bringing about, through means now fairly well understood, good economic conditions and social organization.

The sad part about the traditional limited method of approach to improvement of group life has been that in probably the majority of cases impulses were aroused by personal appeal to do good and then through ignorance of objectives in group advance those impulses were allowed to die. The "backslider" is an excellent illustration of the results of periodic renewal of impulse to right living. In most other cases the impulses thus aroused have found their expression in a hypersensitiveness in regard to certain phases of personal conduct. Emphasis upon personal moral conduct to the exclusion of effective interest in social progress characterized much of the product of the personal evangelistic campaigns carried on periodically during the past two or three generations, while the real work of making the world better has been directed by men and women not particularly subject to these periodical waves of religious impulses but imbued with a steady abiding faith in the worth of social action. They have had the good impulses, but these impulses have been steadied and rendered permanently valuable because faith based on knowledge of objectives was available.

If the serious errors of the past are to be avoided it will be necessary for those intrusted with responsibilities of church leadership to vastly increase their knowledge of problems of group life and of methods of control of group life. The following pages are designed to aid the prospective religious leader, either professional or lay, as far as possible in understanding some of the problems that must be dealt with in making human life what Christianity hopes for. Results already have been achieved sufficient to place beyond question the principle that the church must approach life from every possible angle. The effort to produce right attitudes in the individual must be continued, but the methods used must be varied and multiplied.

Furthermore, before the sound point of view with reference to the method of approach to the problems of the church can be obtained it will be necessary to have a clear understanding as to the place of the child in the moral order. Those who derive their theology by reading and interpreting isolated passages of the Scriptures sometimes arrive at unexpected, and, from the point of view of rational living, eccentric and positively harmful conclusions. Some devoted readers find in the writings of Paul something about "Whereas in Adam all die, in Christ all are made alive"; and in Christ's words the utterance to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again he shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." They have drawn from these doctrines that all men are born with sin inherent in their natures and that there is no good in the soul until "conversion" has taken place. So long as these doctrines find a place in the preaching and practice of churches the method of world salvation will be radically different from that for which the writer is contending.

In brief, if the words of Christ are taken at their face value when he said "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," we have an entirely different basis of approach to our problem than if we assume that all are lost except those upon whom the mystical influence of "conversion" in the traditional sense has operated. If the assumption that children are born good is accepted, then we are brought to the question, "How may these innocents be kept so?" The answer is, By training them to control their natural impulses, good in themselves but likely to lead into wrong if not properly directed; and by cultivating the natural tendencies to good that find expression in every normal child. They must also be brought to an understanding of what Christ means to them as their Saviour and Guide. Then this must be supplemented as rapidly as possible by the organization of group life, in such a way that evil influences will be eliminated.

The saloon was not many years ago the center of corruption of thousands—yes, millions—of the growing youth of this country. The elimination of the saloon has made possible the development of millions of young people free from the particular type of sinfulness for which the saloon was responsible. In like manner, the elimination of commercialized vice has rendered our cities incomparably safer for our young men and women than they once were. The substitution of wholesome amusement for young folks in good environment for the unregulated commercialized amusements once the sole source of recreation has exerted a moral influence too far-reaching to be estimated. The introduction of cooperation in industry has eliminated the sin accompanying the fights between capital and labor in those industries where it has been introduced. These illustrations show how it is possible, by continuing the improvement of social and economic conditions to create such an environment as will destroy the sources of individual corruption and degeneration and will make the growth of the child a continuous succession of stages of spiritual improvement and growth. "Conversion" can thus conceivably become a conscious personal acceptance of Christ and of the principles of Christianity as the normal basis for right living without a noticeable break in the course or direction of life rather than the intense emotional cataclysm that so often characterized the change in hardened sinners.

When children good by nature are brought up in an environment physical and spiritual that has been brought into harmony with the laws of God, then the problems of evil will be reduced to those arising out of natural causes over which man has not achieved control; and children will be looked upon as the natural and rightful members of the church instead of being kept out of the church until they reach the age of accountability. The burden of getting out of the church should be put on the child instead of the usual responsibility of deciding to come into it.

It is customary for leaders of the church to assume credit for practically all the good things going on in the direction of human improvement by assuming that, though the church does not have a large membership, comparatively speaking, its influence has inspired the good work being done in social progress. It is well to face frankly the fact that, whatever may have been the situation in the past, at the present it is questionable whether the church has been the source of even the larger portion of this inspiration. The public schools, including the higher institutions of learning, have been socializing the future leaders in social progress so that their inspiration has been drawn from a concrete knowledge of social problems and from the belief that humanity can, by proper effort, control conditions of living. Then pragmatic results have furthered this belief until inspiration has come from the achievement of results themselves rather than from any recognition of Christian influence in social life. The Christian religion is doubtless responsible for those things most worth while in modern life, but other sources of inspiration have developed for which Christianity does not get the credit.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that in the past two or three generations two marked divisions have grown up, the one a section or wing inside the church which has placed sole emphasis upon individual regeneration as the method of social progress; the other largely outside the church, with emphasis upon social reform as the method of advance. What is needed is a widening of the field so that the methods of social improvement proved to be of value by social workers will be adopted

as valid methods of bringing about the kingdom of God. On the other hand, social workers must give more attention to the regeneration of the individual. When each of these groups recognizes the value of the program of the other, then it will be difficult to distinguish longer between churchmen and social workers. The two groups will, in fact, join hands, and by unifying and coordinating efforts will work more effectively in attaining a common aim. The basis, then, for the program for the church which will touch all phases of human interest in a vital way is that every human interest has its effect on the welfare of the soul. And a program that fails to take into account every approach to the individual can at least be but partial.

Again, it will be necessary to revise popular impression as to just what is spiritual. The farmer who after having a most unusual "spiritual experience" at a revival service angrily opposed a local movement for consolidation of schools because such a move would increase taxes had an idea of religion that was strictly personal—and anti-social. The church leader who feared that the encouragement of social-center activities by the church would ultimately result in a condition in which the social activities of the church would overshadow the "spiritual," had in mind a distinction that must be met and understood if the church is to broaden its program without losing its identity as a religious institution. The minister who, while praising a community-club movement which had brought to the community many improvements and a better moral condition, stated that it was injuring the "church," either saw a real conflict between "spiritual" and "social" welfare or had a misconception as to what is spiritual.

The problem seems to arise out of a tendency which has crept into theological thought to limit "spiritual" things to mystical personal experiences. With this definition of spiritual things there seems to have come a tendency to look upon any type of activity that was of a practical nature, such as providing for the recreational needs of the community, organizing a campaign for better reading facilities for country people, or for better farming, as not spiritual, and consequently be sedulously avoided by the church. Perhaps there is no thought in American rural life to-day that causes more trouble to the aggressive rural minister of the modern type than this. His young men and women want to broaden the scope of the church, but the trustees, and those whose word counts toward the selection of pastors and their removal, often oppose anything being done by the church which is not customary and accordingly, as they think, not spiritual.

Christ said "I am come that ye might have life, and have it more abundantly." If this statement is accepted at its face value, then we have the foundation for judging every activity in which the church may partake. Does the activity tend to increase the material and spiritual welfare of the community, so that the influences that tend to the extermination of the group are less? If so, then it conforms to the purposes of the coming of the Christ. On the other hand, if the activity does positively lessen the resistance of the community, reducing it ultimately to a lower scale of living characterized by those things that are recognized as harmful, then it is not a legitimate part of church work. It also follows that if such harmful conditions exist in the community without a protest on the part of the church or without some definite effort to eliminate them, then the church is not living up to the high calling expected of it by the Master. The term "spiritual" is, accordingly, much more inclusive than has been popularly supposed, and one of the great contributions of social science during the past few decades has been to bring to the public mind the knowledge that man and his spirituality cannot be dealt with individually but must be included in all those relationships that affect the soul of the individual.

While the succeeding pages have to do with the social aspects of the spiritual life of man, it must never be forgotten that the regeneration or the quickening of the individual is at least half of the task in community progress. The life of the honest, upright man, whose soul has been set on fire by contact with the flame of divine love, whose heart has been brought into harmony with the divine will of God, becomes in itself a point for the radiation of impulses for right living. And when these impulses are directed into useful channels through a broadened understanding of sound objectives in social progress, then real advance is possible.

There are many other phases of thought that act as a hindrance to the advance of the spiritual kingdom in rural America, but these illustrations will be sufficient to show what must be cleared away before the broad program of the modern rural church can be whole-heartedly accepted. In fairness to the writer it should be kept in mind, as stated in the definitions given at the opening, that this text has nothing to do with those vital elements of religious organization and service which are intended to keep alive man's belief in a divinity and in immortality except in so far as these beliefs affect community relationships. The discussion of these subjects falls, rather, into the realm of theology. It is hoped that at least the principles underlying the movement toward broadening the program of the rural church have been clearly, if briefly, stated, and that the movement toward a larger concept of the religious forces as a factor in rural progress will continue to spread at an accelerating speed.

## **CHAPTER III**

# **THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH**

As one travels through the rural districts of America and observes differences in the standards of living he is convinced that human welfare depends very largely on economic conditions. The broad, well-tilled fields of Iowa, surrounding large, well-built houses, big red barns and other outbuildings, form a marked contrast with the patches of corn in irregular fields cleared from the brush and scrub trees on hillsides in Tennessee or Kentucky, and the hovels and rundown farm buildings which go under the name of homes for the hill people. Healthy, well-dressed, happy children attending good schools of the most modern type in the corn belt undoubtedly have the advantage of the boys and girls in the hills who often do not learn to read and write before they are ten years old, if at all, and when they do go to school must be taught by poorly trained teachers for short terms, ending before the holidays, and in one-room schools often attended by nearly a hundred children. Religious service and leadership in the one section under the direction of college and theological seminary men can hardly be put in the same class with the highly emotional expression of religious impulses of the mountain section led by once-a-month absentee pastors with no education, or, worse still, by wandering so-called evangelists of doubtful morality. One could go through the whole list of contrasts between the economically well-favored sections of the country and the less favored agricultural sections and in no way would the advantage be on the side of the latter.

Efficient social and religious institutions cannot be built on poor economic foundations. So long as a section of the country cannot afford to pay more than five hundred dollars per year for teachers or preachers, it cannot hope to have the leadership possible to another section where ministers to rural people can easily secure eighteen hundred to three thousand dollars per year. Good buildings cannot be erected, nor can any of the material comforts which go to make up the foundation of civilized life be enjoyed.

For the sake of the church, as well as the people, the church must attend to the economic foundations of rural life. It is unfortunate for many parts of the United States that the ministry has become so separated from real life by the mystical trend in religion that it has rendered practically no service in laying the foundations for the continuance of the communities themselves.

The shift of population from rural to urban centers which the census records show has continued, if anything, at an accelerated speed, indicates the seriousness of the problem. A part of the shift is doubtless due to improvements made in methods of production. So far as this is the cause there is no reason to be disturbed over the tendency, as it is useless to try to keep young men and women in an occupation that does not offer opportunity for earning a living. Part of the shift may be due to the living conditions in the country. This is but an indication of the task of the church on the social side and can be changed as economic welfare permits. But the fact that rural population has been leaving the farms and that agricultural lands have been abandoned by thousands of acres, indicates that urban opportunities have far outbid the rural in financial returns, variety of openings, and in working conditions. The farmer's income must be increased as compared with other groups before there can be a well-balanced relatively stable American life. Until this is achieved those who are trying to build up rural institutions as strong as those in urban centers will be engaged in a hopeless task.

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