

F.W. Herzberger Part Four – Herzberger's Theological Legacy Robin J. Morgan

The one man who wrote for the Associated Lutheran Charities and most clearly carried Herzberger's theological legacy beyond Herzberger's lifetime was Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr. Caemmerer was pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in St. Louis when he wrote "Lutheran Social Action" for the ALC in 1938. This article was the first of many that he wrote about the church's relationship with the world even after he became a professor in the Department of Practical Theology of Concordia Seminary. Caemmerer "provided the most penetrating and sustained formal theological contributions to the Charities conference both before and after World War II." [1] In this first article, he talks about the different circumstances in which present day Lutherans found themselves compared to the time of the Reformation:

The Reformation arose in a day when the Church was the dominant institution of the world not only religiously, but also politically and economically. From a fourth to a half of the real estate holdings of Europe were in the hands of the Church. Its endowments controlled many educational, commercial, charitable enterprises. Only in exceptional instances, chiefly in the law faculties, were instructors in the higher and middle schools of Europe other than ordained clergymen. [2]

Caemmerer discusses the fact that Missouri Synod Lutheranism was still focused on its own development and "for the most part [had] a narrowly horizoned social consciousness, with little

participation in the affairs of a democratic commonwealth.”[3]
He highlighted three points that Lutherans did well in supporting the social good:

1. Fine standard of decency
2. Substantial home life
3. Courtesy and kindness, at least inside the group

However, “pitiable progress is to be registered in the last twenty-five years in organized charity even toward our own needs. There has been a standstill of Lutheran participation in community and national affairs.”[4]

To begin remedying this state, Caemmerer suggests two avenues for education: first, the clergy and second, the laity. They must be taught that the purpose of the congregation (the working unit of Lutheranism) is twofold: To maintain Word and Sacrament for itself and spread it among new believers; and to provoke unto the good works which are the end and aim of the spiritual power engendered by the means of grace. Every use of the means of grace is to result, in home and congregational situations, in the development of spiritual power. This power is to be used; and the administration of the congregation is to direct these powers into valid channels. Permitted to be dissipated and unused, these powers become a blight on the Church’s program.[5]

According to Caemmerer, the most powerful bloc within the milieu of the Missouri Synod was the clergy. It is imperative to educate the clergy about the significance of being involved with this kind of work. “Without some sweeping renovation of outlook in the ministry, doctrinally and practically, with regard to the social impact of the Christian congregation, any momentary, propagandistic program in the Church of social action will remain utterly idle.”[6]

He discussed the importance of educating the laity in the "life of love" and arousing "the individual Christian to his social awareness. Through the manifold educational activities of the Church, directed by its ministry trained to that end, this realization must be created in a new, direct, startlingly abrupt and fresh fashion: we live to love." [7] Until such time as these measures are put into place and begin to bear fruit "Observation of the social worker [such as the members of ALC] in general may elicit the joy that also in our Church the specialized technique of direct services to humanity is being linked with the dynamic of Christian love; and the warning that the professional worker in the Church may never forget that, while we are saved by a vicarious sacrifice of the Redeemer, we must serve by a sacrifice that is very much our own." [8]

In 1942 Caemmerer wrote and delivered an essay for the Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Atlantic District of the Missouri Synod at Concordia Collegiate Institute entitled "The Lutheran Church Faces the World." By this time he was a professor at Concordia in St. Louis. He wove together his concern for social issues with an anticipation of post-war realities for the church. He made it clear that the church had been through times when it did not hold to its tasks and was consumed by the changes of the world. Sometimes it fled in fear of persecution; sometimes it became the preserve of special privileges of one class. Caemmerer's opening comments addressed the need for the church to adapt without losing itself. "All history has one lesson, which current world disorder is bringing into sharp focus: only useful institutions survive." [9] Caemmerer believed that part of the church's challenge at this time is the confusion over its business in the world. He goes on to clarify what the Gospel and the primary task of the church really is. "In bringing men into His Kingdom, the Savior is not aiming merely at improvement of conduct and outward conformity with

helpful custom. But He is concerned with the total change of man.”[10]

To accomplish these tasks the church must be clear about its objectives: “to make disciples of men, to plead with them to be reconciled with God for Christ’s sake, and to teach them to observe the things Christ has commanded and to maintain good works.”[11] The church’s responsibility and field of action is to bring this message to the world in ways and with methods that will be heard and received by the people in their own context. Every human being does not respond in identical ways and so it is the church’s responsibility to find the most suitable ways to offer the Gospel message.

Caemmerer says that there are four basic ways that human beings respond to the Gospel. The first is the intellectualist. This person wants to understand. “He is normally the product of a leisure culture, one that has afforded time for study and reflection, one that succeeds generations of learning and investigation.”[12] Caemmerer says that this person is from the start against the Gospel because it critiques the human mind and is supernatural, beyond experimental proofs.

The second type is the religionist. This person believes in worshiping God as part of an obligation to do what’s right. “He flourishes especially where religion has become an institution, has developed customs and cults, has impressed its community with the rightness of its codes of conduct.”[13] Such a person often isn’t concerned with the truth of the Word and relationship with God, but is concerned with the external rituals of the religion. He is not looking to be changed, but to maintain the status quo.

The third type is the emotionalist. This person “is aware of a nagging deficit in life... [He] “is the product of a

civilization in decay, damming up the accumulated fears and prejudices of generations.”[14] This person is looking for some kind of release from his internal strife and a way to find inner peace.

The last type, according to Caemmerer, is the animalist. This person is primarily concerned with staying alive. “He is at the level of society demanding that he spend his best energies simply earning a living for himself and his dependents. Living means food, clothing, shelter; hence his interests tend to simmer down to them.”[15]

How will the Lutheran church address these various types of people with the intention of offering them the Gospel? Caemmerer says that the Lutheran Church- Missouri Synod has one great asset – doctrine. In the middle of this doctrine is the teaching of salvation by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith. It is not a matter of changing one’s behavior patterns, but a matter of trust in Christ for the true change of heart and life which is the foundation of Christianity:

Associated with this doctrine has been an unusually clear interpretation of the place of suffering in the life of man, Christian or non-Christian. Suffering is God’s way of speaking to man of his shortcomings, calling him to repentance: suffering for the Christian is God’s school to make him more surely and more completely God’s own man. These are the clarion notes in the call of the church to a battered, forlorn, sodden world.[16]

The liabilities of the Lutheran church, according to Caemmerer, are its emphasis on money, property and clericalism. Lutheran preaching tends to be argumentative which detracts from the joy of the Gospel that should be expressed and lived in the Christian community:

We rightly define justification as the center of our faith. But justification in the scheme of the Christian religion is not an end: it is a dynamic; it thrusts in the direction of the Christian life; it has a design and purpose in view, that the saved Christian should serve God and man with love. This service is not to be by compulsion; but is to be joyful, thrilling, wholehearted.[17]

He goes on to say that there is a group within the church which is living out both the Gospel preaching and the social issue emphases in its work: "The Associated Lutheran Charities, a worthy professional group, has done much to lend emphasis to the church's obligations toward a world in need in body and soul. But more remains to be done in the routine of the parish and pulpit." [18]

How can the Lutheran church address these issues? Caemmerer says that the Lutherans have been good at reaching people who are willing to listen, but "what will it do for a world that will not look or listen?" [19] He says that the church cannot wait for those who appreciate churchly culture. It is the church's responsibility to develop a strategy and go into the world.

However, for the church to remain the church and not become side-tracked by theologically wrong agendas, "the one true strategy must be built around the means of grace." [20] He says that modern man, especially in the post-war era will be animalistic in nature. To reach such a person:

The people of the church must simply appear different... The one thing that will penetrate the consciousness of animalist man will be a spectacle... the Christian at work, with him. To find in a sea of selfishness and callousness a mooring of kindness; to find one citizen of many who is eager in

helpfulness, efficient; one employer who can be kindly, considerate; one friend out of many who will be faithful, forgiving, persistent in giving rather than receiving...that is an experience more than a thought or judgment of theory; that comes like a flash of light in darkness.[21]

It is this moment of light that gives the Christian the opportunity to direct his non-Christian neighbor to the means of grace. It is here that the Christian can interpret for the neighbor how God is working in his life to bring him into relation with God through Christ. To be ready for such connections with the world, the Christian must be trained so that he can live this way from one day to the next. "Each must be so charged with power that he can witness to his world independently and with courage. That takes equipment." [22]

The equipment Caemmerer says each Christian needs is the ability to ask the questions to which most Lutherans memorized the answers long ago in school. "He himself has to know the plan of salvation as a way; he must be able to put it in words." [23] Secondly, the individual must have faith that isn't associated simply with "the classroom or chancel step. It must be life. Life situations must be multiplied, the individual's participation in them fostered, as he is trained for impact." [24]

The third piece of necessary equipment for the Christian is growth in love. "Love is the parallel of the Christian faith. He is equipped with love through the work of the means of grace in his own life. Love is not a tender flower automatically blooming on the Christian stock. Love is action." [25] Caemmerer allows that many people may not know what areas of need lie right outside their doors or that they may be put off by the old, weak and sick in their midst. However, the New Testament

is clear about the areas of need: Our whole Christian faith moreover, our Gospel of the Cross, is the means by which the Spirit charges the Christian for tasks of love. The individual's life must become the life of love, of love in action, seizing upon every opportunity, entering every area.[26]

He concludes by emphasizing that carrying out this strategy of the church in the world "is not only suggested, but insisted upon by the Scripture. There has been no time in history when the church had the right to neglect this strategy...Each one of us is God's man, commissioned with the high charge to show sodden, broken people the glory of God." [27]

Caemmerer's thought continued to develop as he ministered at the seminary and in various synodical capacities. Years later he characterized his development this way:

Slowly it began to dawn on me that in my preaching and care of the spiritual life of my people I had more to do than bolster their faith in God. I had to face the fact that God was interested not just in their faith, but in their capacity to love, love one another and love all people. The accent on justification had been useful, and love was not a way for gaining peace with God. But love was a fruit of the righteousness with which God assured them of His favor.[28]

*He again addressed the ALC in 1946 with a series of lectures entitled "The Application of Christian Ethics to Current Social Problems." These essays sought to offer Christian solutions to post-war issues. However, it was in 1949 that much of his thought along these lines culminated in his book *The Church in the World*. This slim volume crystallized the strategy he sees in the New Testament for living as the church in the world:*

Caemmerer is not trying to say everything which the church catholic has said or even ought to say on the church-world topic. He is consciously and unconsciously a Lutheran confessor looking through Pauline eyes at the reality of the church. Therefore he does not make extended comment on any independent doctrine of God or doctrine of creation as a means of understanding the world. Indeed, as a Lutheran it is not likely that he could conceive of an "independent" doctrine or want to develop a doctrine of creation. He sees the creation sub specie Christi.[29]

Caemmerer's focus throughout the book is on teaching the Church how to carry the good news of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake into the world – the world, not as challenge or menace, but the world as people "subjects and objects of the cosmic drama of salvation." [30] He says that there are two points which are essential in this task. The first is agape, love, "by which the man of the world becomes alert to the fact that he needs help and that the Church has help to give." [31] The second is the kerygma, the gospel message. This "second factor is the help itself, the answer of God Himself through the Church to the need of the world." [32] He says that it is not enough for the message to be received by the senses of the hearer. It must "register on the mind of the hearer." [33] How can this be accomplished?

Caemmerer reminds the reader that Christ asked his disciples to be witnesses. This witness, though often including the words of the kerygma, is primarily "showing the presence of Jesus Christ at work in the life of the witness. This witness will be set forth sometimes in words giving the information about the source and origin of this life; but primarily and ordinarily by means of the attitudes and actions which betoken this life at work." [34] Here is agape in action:

It is the will of the Christian man bent and directed toward the good of the other, the other regardless of claim or chance of return. This love is always a personal thing. It is the response of the heart to the Kingdom or indwelling of God. It is in itself the reaching out of the individual heart to the next individual in need; it is simultaneously being sensitive to need, assuming responsibility for need, devising means of helping in need, sacrificing self for need, all without hope or intention of return.[35]

Caemmerer goes on to enumerate the areas of life that respond to this "Christian conditioning." He first addresses the family from which all people come and through which human beings learn of life together. He talks of the problems families struggle with today. Business and occupation are the next category which he says is "a field so fertile because love is so unusual there...Where Christian love can operate, and where it seeks particularly under the strains of current economic life to meet the need of people, there witness comes into its own." [36] Beyond business Caemmerer talks about citizenship and how the "democratic process...has broken down at the point of individual responsibility." [37]

All of these areas of life stem from the personal, inward man, who is wracked by fears about them all. Though people address these problems in a myriad of ways, it is this underlying fear that drives much of the world's activity. "The man without God is a man without security. Hence, the most significant aspect of the inner nature of the man of the world is fear." [38] Caemmerer says that Christians can reach this man of the world when he sees Christians as "individuals who have resources not only to meet and face their own problems but also to share good cheer and sacrifice with others..." He makes it clear that "...those individuals have an influence much more vital than the

formal invitation of the outward institution of the Church.”[39]

All of this effort on the part of the Christian to reach the man of the world has, up to this point, not gotten him to the message which is the actual help each human being needs. However, “the Gospel and the Word of reconciliation works only in those who listen. They listen, we have said, because they have discovered that the people who have the Gospel are people worth listening to, that they have resources for life which they, too, need; they have seen their good works and have found them good for themselves and now are ready for the visitation of God.”[40]

Now is the time when the man of the world will ask “What do you have that I need?” and the Christian can answer:

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not merely a figure in history past, but He is God now. He not merely died on a cross, but He died that men might be alive with the very life of God now. He died for me, but He also died for you. His dying had that power because He faced a problem that is bigger than any human being can solve, He faced the problem of sin and separation from God; and His death was God’s way of again replacing Himself in our lives and giving us what we need. Our needs are not simply the needs of the body, but of the heart; not simply needs for the gifts of God to our bodies, but for God Himself alive in our inner self. That is what Christ Jesus did, to make possible this gift.[41]

Caemmerer goes on to say that this message needs to be spoken concretely, in language that can reach the person to whom it is addressed. It is critical that it be made available in a way that the person can receive it and claim it as his own. “Finally, the kerygma of the Christian has to be the reflection

of his actual self. It has to be a witness.”[42]

Caemmerer’s position on the church in the world includes pre-evangelical, evangelical and post-evangelical actions. The Christian is compelled by the Gospel to act on behalf of the neighbor: first through love, “Christian conditioning,” and then as deliverer of the message itself. Both of these actions move from or toward one central focus – the furtherance of the Good News of Jesus Christ among Christians that leads to furtherance of the Gospel among those outside the church. Caemmerer explicated the theological foundations of Herzberger and other earlier writers and ministers involved with care and redemption work in clear and precise language of his time.

[1] Lueking, 56.

[2] Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., “Lutheran Social Action,” Thirty-seventh Annual Convention of Associated Lutheran Charities, 48.

[3] Ibid., 50.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 51.

[6] Ibid., 52.

[7] Ibid., 53.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., “The Lutheran Church Faces the World,” Twenty-Fourth Convention of the Atlantic District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 3.

[10] Ibid., 5.

[11] Ibid., 7.

[12] Ibid., 11.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 12.

[16] Ibid., 19.

[17] Ibid., 22.

- [18] Ibid.
- [19] Ibid., 23.
- [20] Ibid.
- [21] Ibid.
- [22] Ibid., 24.
- [23] Ibid., 24.
- [24] Ibid.
- [25] Ibid.
- [26] Ibid., 25.
- [27] Ibid., 30.
- [28] Richard R. Caemmerer, "No Continuing City," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 5, no. 5, October 1978.
- [29] Martin Marty, "The Church in the World" in *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, edited by Robert W. Bertram, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1966, 138.
- [30] Marty, 139.
- [31] Richard R. Caemmerer, Sr., *The Church in the World*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1949, 40.
- [32] Ibid., 41.
- [33] Ibid.
- [34] Ibid., 42.
- [35] Ibid., 44.
- [36] Ibid., 46.
- [37] Ibid., 47.
- [38] Ibid., 48.
- [39] Ibid., 49.
- [40] Ibid.
- [41] Ibid., 50.
- [42] Ibid., 52.