

# Sacrilege and Cupidity

## A PLEA FOR PERSPECTIVE

M. E. BRADFORD

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL is old hat. Its shiny newness has long since worn away; and even in theological circles it has experienced an embarrassing interrogation. But it is by no means dead. After apologizing for the doctrinal excesses of some of its early champions, and after developing a new and conciliatory idiom for use on the theological and political conservative, it now sits comfortably in the councils of Christendom, its essentially political and utopian character effectively masked. Television programs and books have been recently devoted to its resurgent influence. And, in fact, that influence has never been diminished. All we can say is that, for a time, it was checked. The heterodox order of priorities it represents has long been a pulpit commonplace. And it is with reference to that order of priorities that I here propose to examine

and define the origin of social gospel as a political force. For it is this politics *cum* faith that presents American conservatism with its most serious challenge.

It is by no means easy to debate with men who insist they speak for God. American liberalism (whose theological voice the social gospel is) has always had a plentiful supply of adherents who speak for God; and they have, I am sorry to admit, had no monopoly in this business of sacrilege; American politicians of various persuasions have claimed a pipeline to the deity. By now American conservatives should have learned that this is a degrading strategy — and that the very nature of their position makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to “play the game” this way. And what is more important, they should have learned how to answer the latter-day bogus “thus saith the Lord,” on its own theological ground.

Mr. Bradford is assistant professor of English at Northwestern State College of Louisiana at Natchitoches.

### ***The Rhetoric of Love***

The backbone of the popular brand of the social gospel is what I call "the rhetoric of love." Its argument goes something like this: "God is love; God has given us (we, the liberals) a clear definition of what he means by love; those who oppose what we urge are the enemies of love." No normal American will admit that he is against love (or deficient in it); and the American conservative, when charged with such an enormity will "crawfish," "hedge," or perhaps try to "outlove" his opponent. In brief, he will do anything but insist that there is such a thing as an excess or misplacement of love. He knows in his bones that man is indeed prone to excess in all things (including love); and a reluctance to indulge excessive impulses is part of what we mean by conservative. But he is unwilling to examine political and philosophical sentimentalism (by definition, expression of emotion out of proportion to its occasion) in its theological dimension. And he must do so if he is not to fall victim to the rhetoric of love.

The good old theological name for this excessive or misdirected love is cupidity; it was the original sin and has, since Adam put the love of Eve before the love of God, been among the most frequently repeated. And it is the

error into which good men and true fall most readily. Assuredly, it is the sin into which the social gospel should lead us through the rhetoric of love. For this rhetoric makes no distinction among the objects of love. It sees all objects as equally worthy and thus abolishes all order of priorities in our obligations.

For example: American grants of aid to free nations may at times prove wise, necessary, or even successful. But the conservative maintains that the virtue of any foreign aid program is conditioned by its effect on our economic and military posture. The rhetoric of love may call for greater and greater largess in the name of humanity; but the theologically-grounded answer to its insistence is that our obligations to preserve our own economy, and with it our capacity to assist and protect those nations which depend upon our strength, is greater than our obligation to relieve completely any single nation in its distress. When compassion outreaches judgment, cupidity is the result. And the political voice of the social gospel is short on judgment.

It is with reference to a form of the doctrine of cupidity that we may define excessive liberty as license, excessive tolerance as indifference, excessive or forced equality as anarchy. In its name

we may, in the face of the rhetoric of love, reject sociological, sentimental juggling of the letter and intent of the law done in the name of "civil rights"; impious "non-violence" in the streets done in the name of brotherhood; and surrender of national sovereignty called for in the name of world unity. For it is cupidity to put even the honest demands of minority groups for redress of grievances they "suffer" before the maintenance of the integrity of a constitutional system or a hard-won and slowly evolved social order. And it is even more of an inversion to surrender national sovereignty in the name of world peace when only our sovereign strength preserves that peace.

**Love Some Persons or Things  
More than Others**

None of the answer to the social gospel is very difficult. Most of it may be had out of Aristotle, John Adams, Calhoun, or Burke. But the best reply to the rhetoric of love is a general theological reply. We must love some things, some men, more than others. The love of God and of the general well-being of a number of men often precludes the perfect love of individual men. Our obligation to our own family or "clan" is greater than our obligation to the faceless multitude. As Burke said, "No

cold relation is a zealous citizen. We begin our public affections in our families." Our obligations move outward in a circle from the near to the remote. For if we undermine the ground of our own being, our integrity and capacity to act responsibly in our own proper affairs, we are of no use to any man.

Thus replied to, the social gospel — which I suspect grew out of the clergyman's deep-seated distrust of providence and the "other-worldly" promise of his own faith — returns to its place; and then the pulpit ceases to be a political tool of a "this-worldly" eschatology based on a denial of the transcendental character of the faith it should draw upon for support. Thus answered, the sacrilegious mask of the rhetoric of love can be torn from the face of the quasi-totalitarian liberal will-to-power, and the conservative can return the dialogue of American politics to a ground where the odds are in his favor. For without the advantage of his mask, the politico *cum* prophet is merely the aggressor in a power struggle, not the "agent of the Lord." And even though they may differ about the merit of various programs for achieving the common good, Americans and other civilized Westerners do not like a bully — especially a sanctimonious bully! ♦



# The Fallacy of FOREIGN AID

HENRY HAZLITT

THE ADVOCATES of foreign aid believe that it helps not only the country that gets it but the country that gives it. They believe, therefore, that it promotes worldwide "economic growth." They are mistaken in all these assumptions.

I should make clear at the beginning that when I refer here to foreign aid I mean government-to-government aid. Still more specifically, I mean government-to-government "economic" aid. I am not considering here intergovernmental military aid extended either in wartime or peacetime. The justification of the latter will depend, in each case, only partly on economic considerations, and mainly on a complex set of political and military factors.

It ought to be clear, to begin with, that foreign aid retards the economic growth and the capital development of the country that grants it. If it is fully paid for out of taxes at the time it is granted, it puts an additional tax burden on industry and reduces incentives at the same time as it takes funds that would otherwise have gone into new domestic investment. If it is not fully paid for, but financed out of budget deficits, it brings all the evils of inflation. It leads to rising prices and costs. It leads to deficits in the balance of payments, to a loss of gold, and to loss of confidence in the soundness of the currency unit. In either case foreign aid must put back the donor country's capital development.

All the consequences just described have occurred in the

---

Mr. Hazlitt is the well-known economic and financial analyst, columnist, lecturer, and author of numerous books.