

4-1-1957

## Labor, Industry, and the Church

David S. Schuller

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Schuller, David S. (1957) "Labor, Industry, and the Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly*: Vol. 28, Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol28/iss1/18>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# Concordia Theological Monthly

VOL. XXVIII

APRIL 1957

No. 4

## Labor, Industry, and the Church

By DAVID S. SCHULLER

**T**HE church stood amazed before the rising form of the industrial giant. Its size was frightening enough, but its two heads of unionism and management struck terror into her heart. The church felt she should say something to the monster. But then what could she say? It certainly didn't look like a membership prospect. And so the church pretended she didn't see it. But the church's heart continued to pound. And way down deep she felt guilty. She had a message—even for such two-headed giants. And she should be speaking.

When she finally drew near and took a big breath to speak, she discovered what she should have known all along: Giants don't exist as such. They are multiple. They are made up of people. In this case "American Industry" turned out to be sixty-five million people. Now she could speak, for people are her concern.

Perhaps we in the Missouri Synod approached the problem in reverse. We were willing to talk about individuals. We failed to see the giant. Now the first book has been published in our circles which focuses simultaneously on the collective "industry" and the particular "man." The subtitle of the book, *Labor, Industry, and the Church*, finds a key when it suggests it will be a "study of the interrelationships" of the three.

The man inviting us to inspect the monster, the Rev. John Daniel, clearly understands it. As a matter of fact, he loves it. He reveals the love of a pastor who devotes years of doctoral study questioning the relationship of the church to industry in order to better serve his people. One senses that the ideas presented have been hammered out on the lecture platform and classroom, but mostly in the homes and sanctuary of those who wear blue shirts.

## I

## LUTHERAN ETHICAL APPROACH

In his concept of the "natural orders" Luther suggested that the Christian works in five basic relationships: the church, family, state, school, and socio-economic groups. The author's main thesis is that in its proclamation and practice, the Lutheran Church has done a valiant job in the first four areas. But in the last, the socio-economic, she has been embarrassingly quiet. "We Lutherans have faltered and floundered about because of apathy and lack of practical knowledge; also because of obscurantist, quietistic, or mystical approaches" (p. 7). Even in charity one must admit our approach has frequently been inadequate and at times unrealistic.

Yet because of the genius of her theology the Lutheran Church has a unique message to speak. Her ethics stand apart from the classical Greek pronouncement of self-knowledge or idealism. Her very foundations differ from the dualistic answer of the Roman Catholic Church. She fears bringing the ethical and moral under the sphere of the state as found in historic Calvinism. The distinction of the Lutheran ethic, the author asserts, is "the centrality of faith and love as means and motivation for the Christian life" (p. 27).

The concern, however, is not that we simply defend the theological foundations of this ethic, but that it be lived. The words spoken at the Second Assembly of The World Council of Churches at Evanston still haunt us: "The real battles of the faith today are being fought in factories, shops, offices, and farms, in political parties and agencies." The church often has a propensity for fighting on battlefields long after they have been vacated by the enemy. Indeed the need is for a virile faith. But the indispensable corollary of any new life is that it be lived. Looking nervously to the wings where stand utopian socialists on the left and individualistic capitalists on the right, the author urges that the concept of the Christian man replace the theory of the economic man.

The Lutheran ethic is built upon the Scriptures. Dr. Daniel therefore examines several salient Scriptural concepts on which to build the practice he advocates. Significant is his handling of the idea of "work," "calling," and "love."

*Work.* — It is a faulty exegesis which sees work as a consequence

of sin. Even in paradise man was to worship God and cultivate the earth. It was part of God's plan that man should "fill the earth and subdue it." Thus in its essence work is not a curse. Only the burden of work — "the sweat of thy face" — comes as the result of sin. But in its very nature work, under God, is creative — a service to God and man. It is a distinctively Christian perspective which sees a basic dignity in all work.

*Calling.* — One is always happy to see the Lutheran concept of the calling not only politely dusted on theological shelves but also coming into use by the church. In recent years this reviewer frequently has been distressed to find the Roman Catholic Church far ahead of us in relating the calling to the life of people. While we have been talking as if we still faced the economic and industrial world of the sixteenth century, they have been creatively updating the idea for an industrial, urbanized culture. Once again we are back to our theme: These throbbing parts of a living heritage must not be put into alcohol and preserved as specimens in theological museums. They must be part of life.

*Love and Labor.* — A characteristic of our industrial culture is that the worker rarely is able to sense a creative purpose behind his toil. Work becomes routine, a "putting in time," in order to earn enough money to do what he really wants to do. Theologically speaking, a major cause has been the eclipse of the Christian concept of love (*agape*). This introduces a basic question of methodology. In what way can we use the Bible to speak to our problems? How can writings from the simple agrarian economy of the first century or before speak to the intricate complexities of mill, foundry, and corporation today? The answer lies capsuled in the major concepts descriptive of the life of faith. As one grasps the fundamental depths of "Christian love," for example, the ongoing implementation and expression follows within the fellowship of the church.

## II

### LABOR AND MANAGEMENT

Of our population of 170,000,000 people, more than 65,000,000 work for salaries or wages. More striking, however, than raw totals is the trend it indicates. In 1870, 53 per cent of all workers were farmers; in 1950 only 12 per cent were so engaged. Conversely,

while only six million were employed in business or manual or white-collar work in 1870, over fifty-seven million workers have taken their places today. Translating this into precise figures for our Lutheran constituency is difficult. Two facts seem clear: We are still working with people who represent the middle-income groups in the United States. While we have fewer people making larger incomes, we also have fewer in the lower-income groups. Secondly, using the 1952 figures of the United Lutheran Church Board of Social Missions, we discover 42 per cent of their church members engaged in urban industrial and manual work; 21 per cent in white-collar jobs; 14 per cent owners of business, managers, and professional people; and 20 per cent farmers. In one sense labor represents a minority interest in the United States. Equally true is the fact that it is the majority of the country's adult population.

Judging by the history of literature, it is rare to find a pioneer in any area who doesn't make it the center of the universe. Dr. Daniel avoids the exaggeration and dire warnings one might expect from one championing a cause. He reflects the changed approach of students of industry. Compare, for example, the volumes which were published just ten years ago. In his *Labor Relations and Human Relations*, Dr. Selecman of Harvard described conditions then: ". . . smoldering hostilities, suspicions, and fears; high turnover, absenteeism, and strikes; discontent with wages that are the highest in the world; restrictions on output by men who are the most mechanically minded in the world—seemingly an incessant, seething ferment of dissatisfaction and discord" (p. 3). Refreshing was the very title of the National Planning Association's study in 1952: *The Causes of Industrial Peace*.

In this vein the author warns against thinking of all management-labor relations as "problems." Of the hundreds of thousands of collective bargaining agreements signed in any year, 97 per cent are concluded without strikes or walkouts. But the more dramatic clashes in a struggle for power remain in our minds. "Thus, when we read extensive accounts about labor troubles, we should keep our sense of proportion, balancing and assessing present problems against the total picture and historical facts" (p. 170).

One cannot say much about labor without discussing the "New

Leviathan" of unions. Because of their enormous power today and their sheer numbers — over sixteen million members — we are apt to lose sight of their rather recent rise to prominence. The modern labor union does not find its source in the medieval guilds or in Colonial America. The movement had a flickering beginning in the early nineteenth century. Naturally the first large labor organization, the National Labor Union, dates from the post-Civil War period. Much of the early history was refreshed for us last year when the merger took place between the AFL and the CIO.

Perhaps historians will see the mid-fifties as the period in which the whole picture of unionism changed in the United States. In the decade prior to this date unions seemed to lose some of their youthful militancy. In addition the Taft-Hartley and Smith-Connolly Acts restricted their growth. Thus during the current period the major unions in the United States have been holding their own rather than growing to any degree. The present extent of their power is indicated in part by their annual income. A survey of the major unions in the United States revealed dues totaling \$433 million a year. Of this figure \$239 million stays with the locals; \$194 million goes to the national treasuries.

While our church has scrupulously avoided identification with either side of the labor-management tension, most of our leadership, lay and clerical, appears to feel instinctively more sympathetic to the conservatism of management. "Our natural and inherited Lutheran conservatism has often been aligned with conservative and propertied interests in the business and industrial world, in preference to the radical, revolutionary, or anarchistic elements" (p. 137).

Although he points out the community-spirited accomplishments of big business and, in particular, the National Association of Manufacturers, the author reveals his basic distrust of these self-interest groups. He cites, for example, Alfred S. Cleveland's conclusions regarding the major objectives of the NAM in the twentieth century: 1. Reduction of the bargaining position of organized labor; 2. Minimization of taxes on industrial profits and managerial compensation; 3. Opposition to all public regulation or government participation in industry; 4. Encouragement of direct and indirect public aid to industry. (A. S. Cleveland, "NAM: Spokesman for Industry," *Harvard Business Review* XXVI [May 1948], 353 to 371)

But a change for the better is apparent. The old emphasis on free enterprise, open shops, an unrestricted economy, and the use of lockouts, monopoly control, and violence in strike-breaking is passing. A new concern for the welfare of workers, both physically and socially, is abroad. Industry now favors social security; it has its own health insurance and retirement plans, it has even learned to live profitably with excess profit taxes. A few plants have even provided for industrial chaplains.

### III

#### PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

The church is set in the midst of "materialism, arrogance, hypocrisy, incompetence, weariness, and shallow professionalism." She in turn has become cold and concerned more with herself as an institution than with the people she has been commissioned to serve. To answer the challenge of our contemporary industrial culture, Dr. Daniel suggests ten principles descriptive of both a virile theology and an active faith:

1. Labor is a gift of God, done for God and our fellow man.
2. Before God all people, regardless of their economic status, are equal.
3. The material world is to be subordinated to man, who was created in God's image.
4. Men are but stewards of all the wealth and resources which come from God.
5. Sin, which is the cause of friction between management and labor, must be confessed by the individual.
6. The Law of God can curb excesses but cannot bring about reconciliation.
7. Only Gospel grace will motivate the final correction of evil by conversion.
8. The church as a communion recognizes faults on both sides and in herself; she cannot formulate economic programs.
9. The church must lead and not be led by prevalent mores.
10. The rule of love should be fostered at all times.

At this point a reader of both this review and the book must be ready to cry out, "Yes, but exactly what do we do about it?" In

the perceptively phrased editorial of a German Roman Catholic review *Wort und Wahrheit*, the same difficulty is sensed: "Catholics have a most disastrous tendency to cleave to the abstract and the generalized and to fight shy of the concrete and particular. We are everlastingly developing and repeating 'principles' but can never make up our minds to apply them to reality . . . we forget that these 'principles' are literally 'beginnings' and that they should not only guide our conduct but are powers of truth which issue a perpetual challenge."

The last two chapters of the work — some forty pages — suggest "Some Practical Applications." A number of concrete ideas are sketched. This section of the work is not a handbook on procedural steps, but at least points the direction. The pastor, for example, is encouraged to bring prophetic criticism to both capital and labor. His task remains pastoral, to "preach the Gospel, and lead those who accept it to godly activity by Gospel admonition" (p. 188). The congregation can work with discussion materials on the subject in forums, seminars, and Bible classes. Above all, people need to interpret their very work as an offering unto God — in the strictest sense of the word — a "worship." On the intercongregational level the church might well bring leaders of labor and management together for open discussion.

Recently some more imaginative steps have been taken. Particularly since World War II, the idea of the industrial chaplaincy has been spreading. An industrial chaplain is a pastor who ministers to men right on the job. At present some twenty-five men are actively engaged in this work of speaking the Gospel to the moral and spiritual problems arising from mass industrialization. The idea, first suggested by R. G. Le Tourneau, received an impetus from the military chaplaincies during the war. It seemed logical that if the church desired Christian pastors to accompany men into battle, she might also have them accompany men into the factories and shops of our land. Some forty companies had appointed industrial chaplains by 1952. Although the results have not been totally positive, the movement has carried the banner of Christian concern for all members of industry both before an indifferent world and before a smug, middle-class church.

Other attempts by the Protestant Church to do more than talk



about the problem would include the "ministers-in-industry" project of Marshall Scott at Chicago Seminary. Both seminarians and clergymen study industry by spending weeks with laborers on the job. Significant also have been the growing groups of Christian pastors and laymen who serve as arbitrators in labor disputes. Dr. Daniel cites a dozen Lutherans who have served in this capacity. A beginning has been made.

When one closes the book, he muses on its probable result. The book itself is a beginning. It is cautious. It is conservative in its theology. It is not startling in any of its suggestions. It works within the traditional framework of the Christian ministry and congregation. One wonders if the Publisher's Foreword, which states that not all of the author's points of view are necessarily endorsed, may be a symbol of fear and unwarranted conservatism.

One looks beyond the walls of the church to a mass of workers. The majority of them are unchurched. Many of them are hostile toward the church as a bulwark of the *status quo*. Others are impatient with a church which forever speaks in glowing terms of ideals, but somehow never works out her words in action. The rest are apathetic to an institution which has as little to do with their life as has sterling silver dinnerware and candlelight.

In any church situation it is relatively easy to work if one is satisfied with skimming off the "cream" of the population—the particular segment of the group which is drawn to the church. What is haunting in any block or mill or factory is the great core which will never hear the Gospel because they never will respond to the wholesale invitation of the neighborhood church. Church work is not "attractive" in some sections of town. And as any church survey will show, official boards are reluctant to start mission work in an area where there is not the prospect of a self-supporting church within ten years. Thus the anomaly of rival denominations racing one another for a new suburb while whole sections of industrial areas remain underchurched.

Strangely enough, one finds himself thrown back into theology. Questions are disturbing. How does one move from basic Bible passages to such problems as guaranteed annual wages? Does the church as church speak out against social injustice and inequity? Is there any point in even asking how the church should approach

the self-interest motive of the masses of workers? Can the Lutheran concept of the "calling" have significance in the midst of increasing automation? Looking at the church as an institution — specifically "our" church — we ask: is it inseparably bound with the interests and aspirations of a particular segment of a capitalistic culture? Each question sets off a new chain reaction. Yet all of these questions are fundamental, dealing only with basic attitudes and outlook. The whole scope of questions dealing with action remains ahead.

It seems significant, as one man has expressed it, that while modern man has been impressed by bigness, he is not yet "domesticated" to it. He lives in a world of big business, big unions, big government. He is liable to be overwhelmed in the midst of the great metropolis, using mass-distributed products, working on mass-production, waiting for possible mass-annihilation. But in the midst of it he is most influenced by the personal association. He is most molded by the primary groups. It is in the intimate, face-to-face contact that he absorbs his values, fashions his dreams, and acts out his life.

The church is not surprised by this. It is part of her very outlook. It has long been part of her theology. It reflects the concern of her Lord. Perhaps this is the key the church will use to unlock the present tension. For the monster of industry doesn't exist as such — it is made up of people.

St. Louis, Mo.

#### SUGGESTED READING

- Caemmerer, R. R. *The Church in the World*. St. Louis, 1949.
- Childs, M. W., and D. Cater. *Ethics in a Business Society*. New York, 1954.
- Cook, Rev. Clair M. "The Industrial Chaplains," *The Christian Century*, August 31, 1955.
- . "A New Industrial Chaplaincy," *The Christian Century*, September 1, 1954.
- Dankert, C. E. *An Introduction to Labor*. New York, 1954.
- Forell, G. W. *Faith Active in Love*. New York, 1954.
- Hemmeter, H. B. "The Ethics of Christ in Industry," *The Cresset*, X (Feb. 1947).
- Jennings, W. W. *Twenty Giants of American Business*. New York, 1953.
- Kornhauser, A. *Industrial Conflict*. New York, 1954.
- Laetsch, T. "The Prophets and Political and Social Problems," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XI (April 1940).
- Oursler, Fulton. "Circuit Rider of the Mills," *Reader's Digest*, May, 1949.
- Pope, L. *Labor's Relation to Church and Community*. New York, 1947.
- Tawney, R. H. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York, 1926.