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The challenge of the social problem in the country church

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The Challenge of the Social Problem
to the Country Church.

Thesis

by

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CONTENTS.

Chapter I.

The Rural Social Problem.

I. The Origin of the problem.

1. Material change.

2. Intellectual awakening.

II. Some conditions responsible for the social
status of the country people.

1. The farmer an individualist.

2. The aloofness of the Agriculturalist as
as class.

3. The social standing of the farmer in the
popular sense.

4. The new type of agriculture is causing
a stratification of rural social life.

a. The labor and hired man problem.

b. The tenant and housing problem.

c. The increase in prosperity and the
problem of absentee landlord-ism.

III. The character of the problem.

1. A problem involving the young life of

the community, and its future
development.

2

2. The making of farm life interesting enough to hold the youth on the land.
3. Supply the human values which civilization has matured.
4. A threefold division of responsibility.
5. The practical aspect of the problem.

Chapter II. Social Agencies and Institutions.

I. Agencies and institutions of the past, which fostered the social spirit.

II. Modern socializing agencies.

1. The home with its strength and weakness.
2. The school and its failure to take a place of universal leadership.
3. The church.
4. Other socializing influences.
 - a) County Farm Bureau.
 - b) The lodge.
 - c) County fairs etc.

Chapter III.

The opportunity and obligation of the Church.

I. The opportunity.

1. Functions naturally attributed to the church.
 - a. The teaching of fundamental religion.
 - b. The short comings and promise of the church as a socializing institution.
2. The church is not to usurp position of other institutions.

II. The churches obligation.

1. To herself.
 - a. Prophet of idealism not of individualism.
 - b. Not a movement to secularize.
2. To her message.
 - a. Distinctly religious and tending to develop character.
 - b. To arouse a class consciousness
 - c. To instill a passion for brotherhood and human sympathy.
3. To the activities of the community.
 - a. Recognize the social problem as a unit.
 - b. Specialize in social functions specifically its own.

c. Be the servant of the entire community.

d. Compelled to outline a working program.

Chapter IV. The Social Program of the Church.

I. The Church the center.

II. Leadership.

III. The Survey

IV. Development of a Community consciousness.

V. Specific Points of contact.

1. Religious worship

2. Religious Education.

3. The expressional life of the church.

4. The equipment.

Chapter I.
The Rural Social Problem.

When we think of a problem, the propensity of the mind is to think of something new, something only recently having come into existence. In a sense this is true when we speak of the rural social problem. But there is another aspect of the situation. The rural problem as it is known and spoken of today is not the result of any radical change in the living conditions. At least it has not been due to any change for the worse. Indeed there may be isolated communities where retrogression in social conditions has been the rule, and progress the exception to the rule. This, however, is exceptional. A comparison of the living conditions and environment of farming people of a century ago with the conditions that appertain to rural inhabitants today reveals at once the fact ^{that} physical and economic conditions have not grown less desirable. One hundred years ago men and women on the farms lived in poverty. They suffered hardship and privation. They reared

children to a life of toil and ignorance. All this the rural people did, without having the slightest hint that there might be a rural social problem. The problem did not exist for them. They simply accepted things as they came without so much as a question of their rightness. Life was regarded as satisfactory when it brought an adequate provision for the physical needs.

The origin of the rural social problem is found not in a changed physical environment. Its deepest source is intellectual. The rural mind has turned to a new emphasis. The conditions in the country, once regarded as satisfactory, no longer function for contentment and happiness. Men from the soil, especially the youth of the land, have realized, that conditions could be improved; that they are not as good as people living there deserve; that country people could afford better things. This change in mental attitude has brought a decided emphasis to the sociability phases of rural life.

"The sociability phases of rural life are even more important than the material phases. They are related to the later somewhat as end to the means.

Without social intercourse the life of the average person will be considered empty not withstanding the possible largeness of the farm, the great yield of produce, the beauty and fatness of the stock, and the extensiveness of the bank account. If the country is deficient in sociability matters we shall have to regard it as an evil."¹

Man is endowed with certain constitutional desires for relationship with his fellows. Any mental stimulus tending to define and emphasize this fundamental need is certain to raise a problem. Such an intellectual emphasis has come to the rural population today. The present rural social problem is the result.

Some conditions responsible for the social status of the Rural people.

The farmer as an individual has been an intense individualist. Living for the most part in isolated communities he has been the monarch of his own little throne. His farm, be it but a cleared spot of five acres, has been his kingdom. His home consisting of one room or

1. Gillette, page 109.

more, has been his castle. His family served the dual purpose of attendants and companions. His needs were largely supplied from the productive acres which he tilled. If Nature in any given season was niggardly or extravagant he restrained his wants or lived in abundance as the occasion demanded. He thought in terms of self for himself. It is not surprising that the farmer of the past developed for himself an individualistic philosophy of life. " His crops and his stock, his income and his prosperity have seemed to come by the application of his own individual effort to the conditions which the physical environment afforded. "² He had his own way of doing things and any attempt to inaugurate a change aroused the most insistent opposition and prejudice.

Our interest extends also to the agriculturalist as a class. We find that he has held himself aloof from other social and economic organizations, representing as he does, according to the census of 1910, 44.9% of the inhabitants of our country he has a right and an obligation to hold a large place in the life of our nation. A near sighted policy, or more strictly speak-

ing, the lack of any definite program of concerted action on the part of the rural people, has resulted in a scattered and ineffective influence in civil and political affairs. His extreme individualism has kept the agriculturalist as a class from co-operating even in community matters for his own benefit.

Socially, in the popular sense of the word, the farmer has held a unique and not altogether enviable position. His city brother has dubbed him "hayseed", "clodhopper", and "reube". The city has set the standard in style and in living. There was a day, and that day is not entirely past, when the country had no social consciousness of its own. Any country bumpkin with social aspirations was compelled to seek recognition from the residents of near-by towns. Country folks in general catered to those of recognized social superiority who dwelt in the city.

Thus far we have been speaking of conditions that appertain largely to the past but which form a background for the present situation. A more complex form of agriculture is taking the place of the older type. The country, especially of the great Middle West,

is becoming more and more thickly settled. And where this is true a more complex form of social life is being introduced. The change has brought the hired man to the community. This man may be married and live in a house on the farm, or he may be single and board with the land owner or operator. In either instance he adds a very important factor to the rural social problem. The relationship may be friendly but inevitably there will be some class distinction. This may not be felt among the men, but the difference in economic freedom will certainly reveal itself in the social relationship of their wives. Another phase of the same hired man problem is that of housing. Ordinarily the housing problem is thought of as being distinctly a city problem. But the farmer who provides a better shelter for his registered cattle than for his own wife and family is not given to over scrupulous care for the physical needs of the man who labors for him for hire.

In further consideration, of the conditioning background of rural social life, we need to call attention to the effect of the new type of agriculture upon the population of the country. Particularly in

the corn-belt, the introduction of improved methods and modern machinery has had a marked influence. Among the results two are outstanding. The land owner has become comfortably prosperous. And he has been given a desire to retire. Consequently he establishes his home in the near-by village and rents his farm. In this manner he adds to the stratification of rural social life. For, the owner, being no longer the operator, we have created a sort of absentee landlordism. Thus we have three distinct classes, 1) the owner living away. 2) The operator or renter, who is interested in the farm only because of what he make^s it yield in the form of economic returns. 3) The hired man, who has no personal interest in the farm nor its production. And no one of the three classes, as a rule, is vitally concerned with the permanent improvement of the social conditions of the community.

There are many other conditioning factors, but this, we believe, gives us a sufficient background for a discussion of the real nature of the rural social problem.

The Character of the Problem.

While we have been recounting the state of economic and social conditions in the rural community, we find ourselves forced to the realization that not on any of these circumstances; no not on a combination of the whole group, are we able to place our hand and say, - this constitutes the rural social problem. The problem before us is not one to be defined in terms of physical environment or of material things. Neither may we say it is an ideal existing only for the fanciful dreamer. The character of the problem is such that it can be described only in terms of life. It is objectified and made real and living in the person of the youth of the open country. As they enter upon life they are a very storehouse of potential power. No group of young people from any other district have greater possibilities.

But it is in the unfolding of the future that the tragedy lies, unless some force can be found to direct this latent energy into proper channels. Look at the boy born into the country home, to receive a minimum amount of care from a mother already overburdened with household tasks, and to receive less than

a minimum amount of attention from a father whose chief pride is in being able to labor indefatigable from the dawn until the set of sun. Shall we usher this youth at the age of ten, or younger, into this path of incessant toil, which his father has trod under the lash of a rural individualism? Shall we force him to be content with the few years of school life provided him at the district school under a city minded teacher? Shall we starve the soul that craves the touch of art that will reveal the beauties amid which it walks day by day and fails to comprehend?

These questions may be answered in two ways.

First the youth, of fifteen to twenty, one day pulls up his team at the farther end of the long corn row under cultivation. He looks back along the row, which seems not to end but to merge into other rows equally endless and monotonous. He looks forward into the future and sees there a similar type of dull uniformity. Then the neighbor lad, a year his senior, calls to him from across the fence. When they part the lure of the city is upon them. The questions have been answered by them. No "back to the farm movement" will be given serious considera-

tion by such as they. But in place of a solution to the rural social problem we find it but becoming the more complicated. There is danger that this exodus of the best blood from the country districts will seriously impair the quality and stamina of those individuals left to man the farms. Some even go so far as to declare that only a race of degenerates will remain upon the soil. Such an assumption, it seems, goes farther than the facts warrant us in proceeding. For there are no reliable statistics available giving comparative amount of degeneracy in country and city.

This takes us outside the range of the immediate problem which faces us. We are interested in bettering the social condition of the country districts for the benefit of those who are to remain there-in. This then is the second answer to our questions, .We will supply the country community with the human values which civilization has matured for us. Outstanding among these is the provision for the social need of the last individual in the country.

"There are some indications that the country life is more nearly stagnant and impoverished in social

intercourse than in any other direction. Stagnation means that, relatively speaking, rural life does not keep pace with the corresponding grades of life in the city. Social poverty involves the thought that the country is really backward in view of the demands and ideals of modern life. Deficiencies in intellectual stimulus and outlook, amusement, and recreation, associational and institutional agencies, and in education deserve ~~ext~~ended consideration." 8

In the main we agree with this statement of the deficiencies of the social life of the country. And we might add that the statement practically defines the character of the rural social problem. However, it seems that the phases of the present social exigency may best be included under the following three groups, -1) moral and religious, 2) educational, 3) recreational and associational. This includes and emphasizes a fundamental factor not directly mentioned and scarcely suggested above, namely, the moral and religious instruction of the people. Even business men, which hitherto have had little to say concerning religion, are today declaring this to be the groundwork upon which all the

superstructure of all our modern social and economic life is built. If community life is to be placed upon a high level, even approaching the ideal, it must be developed and maintained under the guidance of some institution having a religious emphasis.

Further word concerning the value and importance of an educational program for the rural community is scarcely needed. The intellectual stimulus and outlook of the country districts is so manifestly beneath the average of American life that we are justified in assuming, that any definition of the character of our problem will include the educational factor.

Perhaps the most neglected of the three phases suggested is the recreational, or as we choose to call it the associational life of the rural community. The rush of seasonal labor leaves little time for play on the part of the farming people during the larger part of the year. From the close of February until the beginning of December the average farmer drives to the limit almost without intermission. And yet it is not that he has no time for recreation and association.

Instead he has no organized associational life to draw his attention and to afford him an opportunity for the expression of his constitutional desires. We see that this phase of community need also requires the impetus and direction of an effective institution.

Then, our problem, by reason of its very character, resolves itself into the finding of some institution, which shall through its ministry so function as to co-ordinate the efforts of all institutions of a social nature, to the end that a practical application of the ideal principles of social relationship may be made.

Chapter II.
Social Agencies and Institutions.

There has been, through-out the years, a gradual and certain movement towards a socialization of the country life. By socialization we mean the development of a habitual desire and ability on the part of country folks that enables them to carry on intelligent and refined associational life with their fellows, to the mutual benefit and inspiration of all concerned. In recent years, with the introduction of the telephone, automobile, and rural free delivery; and with the building of hard roads and the extension of rail and trolley communications, this tendency has been very marked.

A retrospective glance will help us to understand what social agencies and institutions have been fostering this spirit and to see whether they have been and are now adequate to meet the need. And further such a consideration will enable us to test the various institutions in the light of the demands made by the

" character of our rural social problem.

The singing school, the spelling bee, the apple peel and the husking bee were among the forms of social life commonly practiced in an earlier day. Of these not one is indulged in today except as a novelty. In their day they had an important place. Indeed we might well wish that the old fashioned singing school had continued until the present age. For no other institution has ever succeeded in directing such universal and effective attention to the study of vocal music. The public school has made a feeble attempt. But the instructors there, for the most part, presuppose the rudimentary type of work formerly done by the singing school. The home has, it is true, contributed in a measure to the musical training by providing individual instruction. But there will always be some children whose parents either can not afford or will not spend the money that their children may be given this opportunity.

" The other agencies mentioned were never more than fitfully indulged in and are scarcely worthy to be called socializing agencies. They do, however, give us a cue to the institutions which have been fostering the social

Life of the country. Practically, ^{all} of these activities were conducted under the influence of either the home or the school. We will consider first the home and its influence as a socializing institution. We have already seen that it fails in a measure to give the musical culture stimulus. The intellectual training it frankly turns over to the public school. The home as an institution has done little to organize and maintain other institutional life valuable for the community. But the home has been regarded, perhaps rightly, as the ideal institution to provide and care for the associational, amusement and recreational activities of the community. The early forms of social life already mentioned were held, for the most part, under the supervision of the interested fathers and mothers. Without doubt the home had a claim to priority as the institution to govern and control the play life of the country. But in as much as it has fallen far short of the possibilities in that field it seems time that right were either exercised or forfeited to some other institution prepared to meet the task. The socializing influence of the home is not to be discounted in

the least. It is intimately related to school and church and for that matter is vitally connected with the whole of community life. But the home is a smaller unit in itself. We can not think of one home controlling the social life of any considerable number of family organizations. And no inclusive organization of family circles has yet come to the front with a program of community control. It is true that mothers clubs have been active and effective in securing improved conditions for specific districts, but theirs is in no sense a universal leadership. Such an organization at its best remains a club with the limitations imposed upon any group which includes only a portion of the community.

The school;- We refer here to the district school upon which the rural districts are so largely dependent,. That this institution is a large contributor to the social life of the country community there is not the slightest doubt. And yet it is scarcely eligible to receive title to the entire task of social reconstruction. All possibility of such a movement is eliminated by the fact that practically every country

school is conducted and controlled with the idea of dollars and cents in mind. The directors plan, not in terms of the largest usefulness, but in figures of the smallest possible denomination. Social and humanitarian values are left out of consideration. Play-grounds and recreational facilities are given a minimum amount of attention. Moral instruction is scarcely contemplated. As to the teachers of these rural schools, they are for the most part beginners in the profession; which may also mean that their education is only begun. One of three assumptions may be made concerning a large per- cent of these instructors; ^{they are} 1) teaching for the money to complete their education; 2) teaching for a few years until such time as they shall marry; 3) holding the present position as a stepping stone to the city school. Teachers of such transient interest will never arouse the patrons of the rural school to any concerted social action.

There are other socializing influences at work in the country. Many of them have been and are making valuable contributions towards the socialization of the country life. We will next give brief mention to

a number of these, not one of which makes a universal appeal or is in any sense an institution purposing to co-ordinate and direct the social activities of the entire community.

The County Farm Bureau, lately come into prominence in the Middle West, has been gaining favor with the farmers. And it is making remarkable progress in the organization of the economic interests of the farmers. Co-operation is being widely and effectively encouraged. Some phases of this work have a distinct social function, although the primary emphasis is, almost without exception, economic. The County Fair and Farmer's Institute, promoted by this organization, lend themselves naturally to the sociability phases of the larger community life, but make no attempt to direct this work in the life of the smaller community.

The lodge has done some valuable social and relief work among the men and to a less extent among the women, but it is of a hit or miss sort of character and in no sense meets the need of the country as a whole.

Commercial organizations of villages have extended their influence to the surrounding country.

But this influence has been neither constitutive nor regulative of the sociability phases of life in the open country.

One outstanding social institution we have purposely left for our final consideration. Many harsh things have been said about the decadent country church. It has been too much concerned with formal piety and technical religion. In the past it has failed to keep in vital touch with the life of the community. But in the face of all this criticism we wish to place ourselves on record as believing in the potential force and possibilities of the rural church. Extended consideration will be given in the succeeding chapter to the socializing influence of the church. It is not necessary to further anticipate that discussion here.

Chapter III.

The Church's Recognized Duty and Her Obligation.

Just as we have seen that the school and the home have certain functions which they are pre-eminently fitted to perform, so the church is given precedence in the realm of religion. There are certain functions in this field which are naturally attributed to the church. Its chief task is the teaching of fundamental religion. Like the other institutions mentioned the church has been falling far short of the ideal. Only a very small percent of the rural population is receiving any religious instruction. And the Biblical interpretation received by the few is entirely inadequate and often confusing and contradictory. It would seem therefore that the church is no more worthy of a place of leadership in this new social program than other institutions having recognized social functions. Yet there must be some institution, with potential or developed possibilities, to which we may look for

" inspiration and guidance in the socialization of the
rural community. The church we believe has more to
offer, and more to promise with a reasonable hope of
" attainment, than any of the other existing or proposed
" institutions. Furthermore we believe it makes the most
" universal appeal to the open country community. And
" finally we believe the church is obligated, by its very
" aim and purpose of existence, to assume such a position
of leadership.

" We will attempt in the discussion which is to
" follow to define what is meant by this obligation. But
first let us make clear the fact that the church is in
" no sense to usurp the position of other institutions.
" There was a time when the church had dictatorial powers
" in political circles of the world. But one of the
" fundamental principles of our American government has,
" wisely we believe, separated church and state and defined
" the activities legitimately undertaken by each.

" Elementary secular education for example is placed in
" the hands of the government. It would be worse than
" folly for us to assume that this was a legitimate
" field for church activities. The educational work of the

church must be confined to the moral and religious instruction, not of its recognized adherents alone but of the entire community. There is a sense in which the church shall lead the school and other social institutions. Let us express it as, the inspiration, co-operation and co-ordination of the social activities. It is this phase of the church's task and obligation that we wish to take up and discuss at some length.

What we have in mind by the obligation of the country church is finely expressed by Butterfield in his definition of, "the special work of the country church."

"The country church (and its allies) is to maintain and enlarge both the individual and community ideals, under the inspiration and guidance of the religious motive, and to help rural people to incarnate these ideals in personal and family life, in industrial effort and political development, and in all social relationships."⁴ The groundwork of all social development in the rural field is to be found in some phase of idealism. The criterion of progress will depend upon the emphasis or point of view; the economist stresses the economic; the socialist, brother-hood and justice.

4. Butterfield, - The Country Church and Rural Prob.

The church, however, in its combination of the emphasis upon the quickened moral and religious sense and the extension of the idea of obligation does most to foster and inculcate the fundamental idealism necessary for social advancement.

The church has in a special sense been the prophet of idealism. But the tragedy is that the institution has been victimized by all sorts of religious fanatics with a variety of religious messages. None of which were more insidious than an over emphasized type of individualism. We would not for one moment minimize the need and value of personal religion. There must be not only an avalanche of experience to inspire hope and direct the will towards the attainment of the highest life, but there must issue from this experience a constant flow that will afford inspiration for the life of the people of the land. Our contention is that the church shall minister to the highest both in personal and in community life. This is the age of a social emphasis. And the church can, therefore, no longer confine its efforts to the saving of the individual, else it will soon be engaged in a struggle of self-preservation.

We have no desire to secularize the church. But the fact remains that the church must under-go much the same change through which the farmer has been passing; a change from individualistic stress to social emphasis. It is part of the church's obligation to bring about this change without, "excluding the opportunity for the weary soul to fold its wings beneath the altar and hear words of peace and solace." 5

Thus far we have confined ourselves largely to a consideration of the church's obligation to herself as an institution. What then shall be the message of the church of the new day? This chapter begins with the assumption that the chief function of the church is to teach religion. The message of the church, then, must have as its first requirement a religious motive. This, however, by no means limits the message of the church to the preaching service and the teaching of the Bible in the Sunday school and Bible classes. The motive may often lie under the surface or reveal itself in unusual places. For instance it is distinctly a part of the religious message of the church to teach the young people of the country the value of development of

personal character. Perhaps the best way to present this lesson to some youth would be to convince him of the value of a college education. Every ideal that is placed before the people with the purpose of social or economic improvement may rightly be considered a challenge to a religious duty.

The message of the church should in the second place arouse a class consciousness. Agricultural labor is difficult, often disagreeable toil. The hours are long. And the farm work must be carried on in the face of constant buffeting from the elements. Wind rain and sun seem to conspire to make the task uninviting. The inexperienced are inclined to make over-much of the joy of working on the soil, and of the inspiration of being near Nature. Country folks do not as a rule become enthusiastic over such expression. There is, however, a certain fascination about the farm and a proper emphasis on the part of the church will bring an increased appreciation of the value and joy of their task on the part of the rural people. Any message will be essentially religious that brings to the farmer a deeper consciousness that he has an essential ~~end~~

and important part in the work of the kingdom of God.

In the third place the message of the church should be of such nature as to instill in the hearts and lives of the country people a passion for brotherhood and human sympathy. There are two outstanding reasons why this is important. First the present stratification of society in the rural communities, already noted, is creating conditions which need the leavening influence of such a message. Unless this message is sounded with unmistakable clearness and effectiveness, there is the strongest possibility that the rural communities will become involved in capital and labor difficulties peculiarly their own. This leads us to our second consideration. Labor leaders have already made various attempts to enlist the farmer in strike and other social unrest movements. The response has not been general in any sense. Yet the tendency is marked enough to warn us that the spirit of brotherhood and justice which Jesus taught should be planted in the hearts of the rural classes before a less ideal interpretation of social justice enters there. Rauschenbusch says, "In our thought today the social problems

irresistibly take the lead. If the church has no live and bold thought on this dominant question of modern life, its teaching authority on all other questions will dwindle and be despised." ⁶ Let our teaching then be clear in that it brings a closer fellowship between the different strata of the rural community and between the farmer as a class and society at large.

We have yet to consider that phase of the church's obligation which has to do with her activities in the community. In the very beginning we are obliged to recognize the solidarity of the rural social problem. The church shares the task with other institutions of progress. And it is only by proper co-operation that they may arrive at any satisfactory solution to the problem. The task before the community is one, not many. The school shall not say to the home, -I am not the home and thus be freed from all obligation to the children who come from the home. The home needs the school; the school depends upon the home; and the church is vitally related to both. The social life of the community is developed and finds expression through these and other social agencies. The church is not only obliged, but if

6. Rauschenbusch, - Christianity and Social Crisis.

she is wise will gladly recognize this situation and co-operate with these her allies in a great cause, the social reconstruction of the open country.

The position of the church is never-the-less unique, in that the activities of these other institutions are dependent for their ideal development upon the influence of the religious motive. Education is not complete unless the work of the school is preceded, supplemented, and crowned by an adequate religious instruction. The influence of the home is most perfect and lasting when it is vitalized and spiritualized by the religious motive. The church, if it is to have this ideal influence in the social relationships of the open country, will essentially be busying itself as a specialist in the development of those functions which are specifically its own. Public worship, though unavoidably social in character, is never-the-less primarily a religious act. And it should be encouraged because it is religious not because it is social. One of the most scathing criticisms ever passed against the church is contained in the statement frequently heard, -the people will respond whenever a social event is proposed in the

church but they do not seem to be interested in the
Sunday morning worship. Minister and people must make a
special effort to take from these services the stigma
that has been placed upon them. It is a lamentable fact
that the rural minister has not always, indeed seldom
been in the past the type of man who could make these
services of worship attractive and beneficial in the
largest sense.

The church at large has an obligation on this
score. For all too often it has failed to supply the
country church with intelligent consecrated leadership.
The minister of the country church today is to be more
than the preacher of the Gospel. He is to be a leader
in the truest, most literal sense of the word. The church
must have a change of attitude in regard to the qualifi-
cations for rural leadership. Hither-to, city ministers
have taken a rural charge as a course of training to
fit them for, what has generally been considered to be,
the larger more desirable task of a city pastorate. In
the future the rural ministry must be regarded by the
church as a life work. Only when the church has taken
this sort of an attitude can she hope to train a type .

of leadership necessary for the solution of the social problem of the open country. Some very formidable difficulties are to be overcome if these leaders are to be provided. In the first place there is the question of preparation. Comparatively few men are taking courses in college and seminary with the rural ministry in view as a life work. And this is not surprising when we consider the outlook. It is most too much even for the faith of a minister to spend four to eight years, often running in debt, in preparation for a task that does not offer a respectable livelihood. A second difficulty in the provision, or rather in the maintaining of efficient leaders in the rural districts is the isolation to which the minister is subjected. Without access to libraries which contain the books he needs; without the stimulus of association with other men in his profession; and with only limited means of keeping in touch with the new methods, it is difficult indeed for the rural minister to be an aggressive leader in his community. And it is an equally arduous task for him to keep from spending his energies, and those of the church, upon unimportant matters. Butterfield says, "The

final difficulty that I see with respect to the country
 clergyman is that if he becomes a community leader, as
 he ought, he may scatter his energies. His task is to
 understand the work of the church in the light of the
 total rural problem. He must be a student of large
 affairs. He must know his community - the people, the
 industries, the social life as expressed in school, lodge
 and family. He can not neglect his professional study.
 all this means hard untiring work. One may easily
 become superficial." 7

The church if it is to meet this problem of leadership should encourage the present tendency to establish rural departments in our church colleges and seminaries. This necessitates the provision of instructors qualified to present the rural social problem in a manner that shall attract men to the rural field as a desirable place to spend their lives. And having attracted men to that field the church should place them at the task; give them some encouragement; and allow them time to develop a constructive piece of work.

The church must further specialize in religious education. The average rural Sunday school conducted,

Butterfield, - The Country Church and Rural Problem.

" as it is, in the one room church is entirely inadequate
to meet the need of the present day. The work is much
in need of organization and extension, and the applicat-
ion of modern methods of instruction. And more time
should be provided for such instruction.

There is a type of associational life growing
out of a properly developed educational program, which
specifically belongs to the church. Organizations will
spring up within the religious school that will be
effective only as they find expression by coming into
organic connection with the life of the community. Thus
the way is opened for the church to become through its
activities the servant of the entire community. The
minister of the country church has, in a more or less
definite sense, always been regarded as the servant of
the community. He has been called upon for every type
of leadership. No occasion of a social character is
ever regarded as complete until the pastor of the
church has been called upon to make some remark. Every
movement seeking public approval sought first the
support of the minister and the church. This is as it
should be, only the idea of the church being the servant

of all should be extended until a broader policy of service than the one under which it now operates has been established. All too often the church has been regarded as an institution forever asking for something. The very fact that many public appeals have been made through the church has been responsible for the present attitude towards the church on the part of the rank and file of the country people. The church if it is to claim a place of leadership in the social program of the open country must break down this barrier and make the farmer and his family feel that it truly has something that will make his life more liveable and worthwhile.

Then, the final obligation of the church is met when it has outlined and developed a practical program fitted for the specific need of the community in which the church is located. In view of the task, as it has been outlined and as it actually exists, this obligation is one that will not soon be discharged in an ideal manner. Changing conditions will require constant improvement in the program which has been outlined. Any progress in the ideals of the community will bring a renewed challenge to the church to minister to this

higher type of life which it has helped to create. The hope of the rural church in the future lies in its ability to keep pace with the progressive movement of such a community, by keeping ever before it a definite program to challenge and inspire yet greater development.

Chapter IV.

The Social Program of the Church.

The program of the rural church will vary to meet the need of each separate community. There can be no universal solution to the rural social problem of the church because of the wide difference in conditions that exist under the influence of the local environment. Manifestly then the program we present will need to be expressed in general principles, except in so far as we have in mind a specific community. The last consideration we believe to be the more practical. Therefore, we have chosen a specific open country community and shall try to outline what we believe to be an ideal program for that community as the challenge now comes to the church located there. We might say in passing that the community chosen is in all essential phases a typical Mid-western community.

The church the center.

The church shall be recognized as the center of

all community life. This does not mean that all community activities will be carried on within the church walls, but that this is the principle upon which our program is established. There has been a tendency on the part of some writers to make the village the center. Where there is an open country church surrounded by a more or less definitely defined community the plan is impracticable for the following reason; -1). Close the country church and the people will not travel the additional three to ten miles necessary for them to attend religious services in the village. 2). By enlarging the bounds of the community you destroy all possibility of developing the finest type of community spirit. 3). In most instances a fairly definite recognition of the community limits has been thrown about the church and come to be generally recognized. 4). The community has been known through a long period of years by the name of the church located within its borders. 5). The village cannot possibly be regarded as the center when it does not occupy that position topographically. 6). By carrying the nominal center to the village the probability of denominational differences is multiplied and the

possibility of usefulness thereby diminished.

Leadership.

We are assuming that the church has met her obligation in regard to the provision of a trained leader who may concentrate sufficient time and energy for the solution of this community's problems. This leader will necessarily need first to become familiar with the conditions that exist in this community. That this may be accomplished with the most expediency a systematic study of the community will be made.

The survey.

This survey should accomplish the following definite objects.:-1) The extent of the community will be defined and a map made showing the boundary, also including roads streams and other natural divisions of the community. The resulting map will not necessarily be regular in shape. In fact it will usually be decidedly irregular. The church and each farm residence and school should be definitely located. Community improvements such as hard roads should be indicated on the map. 2). The history of the industrial life should be recorded, including a detailed account of crops, soil

conditions, number of people employed, with their specific tasks if there is any specialization of labor. Farm owners, tenants, and hired men should be enumerated and their residences carefully located.

3). The survey will include a religious history, which gives an individual and family record of all the people of the community.

4). The social and moral life should be surveyed with a view to discover the social leaders and the organizations in which they are most active. The nature and number of social gatherings during a given period will be noted. This study will further reveal the number of people taking part in the social life. The moral character of the social life will be considered and any centers of moral infection pointed out.

5). An inventory will be made of the church property. The finances will be thoroughly inspected, and a statement made of the financial condition of the church together with an outline of the system used to carry on the money matters of the church. Church attendance will be reviewed and compared with the possible average attendance of the community.

A statement should be made of the religious service needed by the community which is and is not provided.

Development of Community Consciousness.

Now that the leader knows the need of the community he should proceed to bring a consciousness of this need to the community itself. This may be brought about only by a thorough educational program. Community spirit is not of a mushroom variety but rather it is the product of careful culture and slow growth. The following items will help in the development of this spirit.

1. Place books, bulletins, and magazines in the homes and church library which treat of rural themes and country life.
2. Preach sermons that will educate the people in the needs of their own community.
3. Hold district conferences to study the rural problem.
4. Call in agricultural experts from the state university to lecture and advise.
5. Co-operate with civic improvement societies to call attention to specific problems.

Specific Points of Contact.

I. Religious worship private and public.

A distinctly spiritual and at the same time practical message brought to the people ; not each Sunday but Sunday by Sunday, is of vital importance in establishing a point of contact between the church and the community which it serves. The preaching services should bear some relation to one another and to the total need of the community. It is well for the minister to have in his own mind certain truths that he desires to place before the people during the church year. This will give direction and unity to the services of worship that otherwise might be lacking.

Special features,

A vital interesting message to which the people will gladly listen.

Themes and texts having a rural setting.

Special seasons fittingly observed with special services.

Evening service,

Primarily for the young people.

Preeminently evangelistic.

The lantern, freely used for educational
and inspirational purposes.

Emphasis on congregational singing.

II. Religious Education.

The Sunday school should by all means be made the center of the religious educational program and for that matter of the entire church life. There is no phase of the church's work about which the interest of the community so naturally centers. If properly organized and controlled the Sunday school makes a strong appeal to childhood, youth and adult life.

Program.

1. A graded Sunday School adapted to the rural community.
2. Teachers training and monthly teachers conferences.
3. Special community study classes.
4. Class organization.

III. The expressional Life of the Church.

A well organized Sunday school will almost certainly lead to a demand for some specific task through which the teaching of the church may find

an organic connection with the community life. The suggestions which follow are given without attempt at logical order. The aim being simply to give some of the ways in which the church may function to meet the problem that is before the rural community.

1. Furnish leaders for special community tasks.

A. concerning health and sanitation.

B. Concerning road and bridge construction and improvement.

C. Concerning beautification of country-side.

2. Encourage co-operation with other institutions.

Invite educational leaders to speak in church,
Aid the agricultural specialist of the county
or the farm adviser .

3. Lead in the play life of the Community.

a. Encourage the Saturday half-holiday.

b. Organize the boys and the girls in to clubs.

c. Encourage athletic contests, field days, etc.

d. Make church socials community affairs,
which are really social in character and at
which every one in the community is welcome.

e. Establish a definite social center at the

church.

4. Stimulate and inspire the aesthetic life.
 - a. Literary clubs and debating societies.
 - b. Regular community singing.
 - c. Supply a community reading room

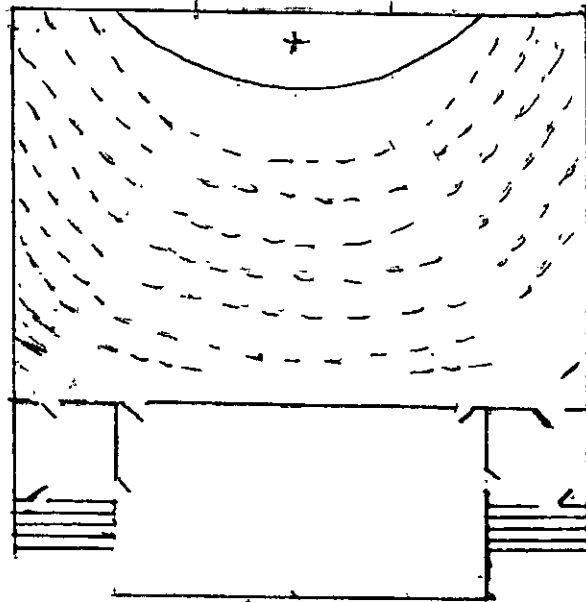
IV. Equipment.

Any program of this sort will require a larger equipment than is to be found in the average country community. The one-room church of the country side will need to be enlarged or replaced by a plant adequate to meet the community need. There are many forms of church architecture which would be suitable. But in as much as the community we have in mind has a good brick structure suitable for the community worship, our proposition will be one of remodeling. We give below the present plan of the church and a remodeled plan.

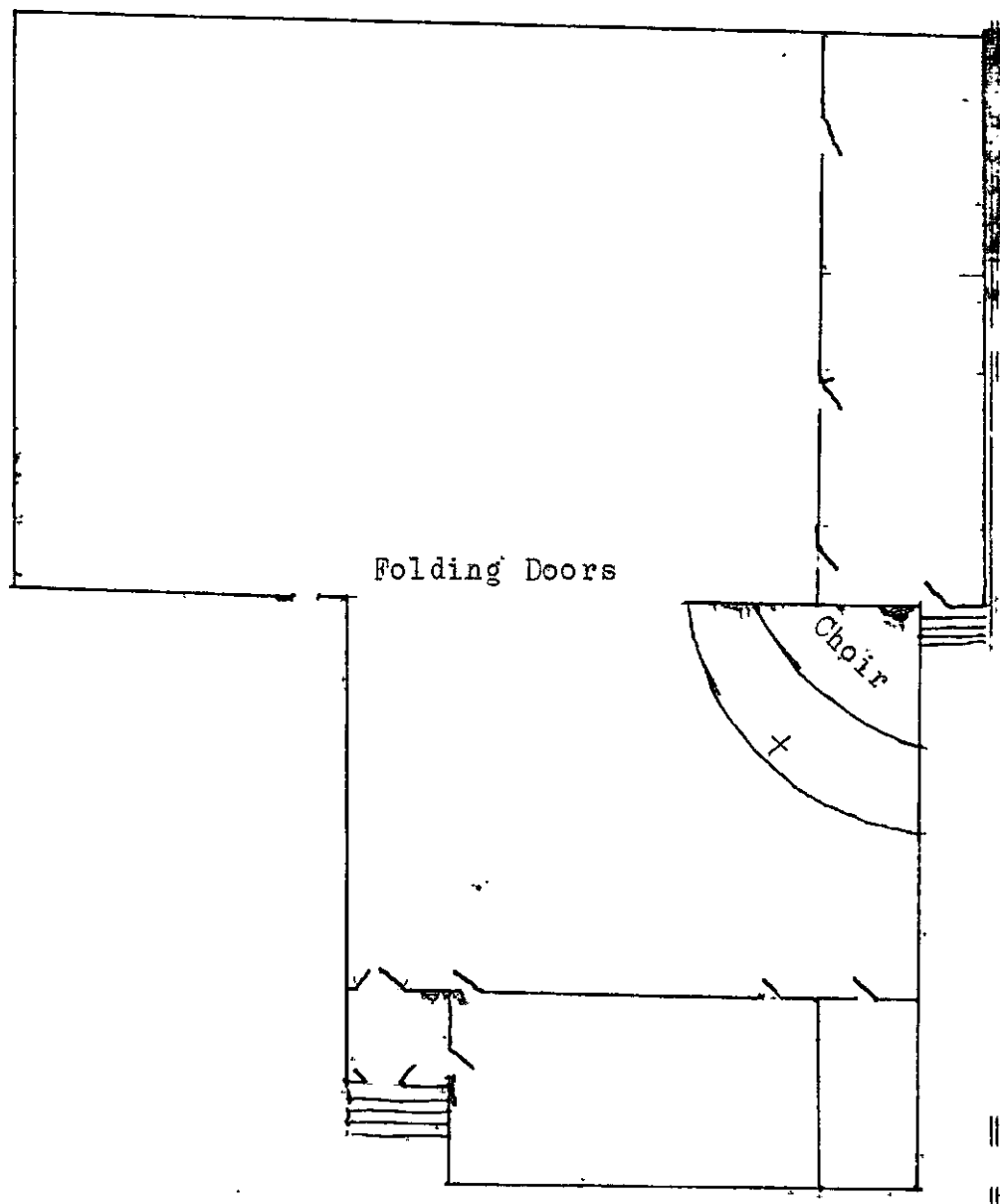
*Note.

For the suggestions in this chapter the author is largely indebted to the pamphlet, "Report of the Committee on, Country Church Function, Policy and Program."

Church as it now stands.





Improved Plan.



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