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The upshot of all this is that problems of social ethics have moved into first place in many centres of theological discussion. This is strikingly evident to the visitor to Germany, whether in connection with the Evangelical Academic church synods, the great Kirchentage or the theological faculties. The problems most discussed today, and by jurists, philosophers and sociologists as well as theologians, are those that have to do with the problems of public life and their theological and Biblical foundations: the

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doctrine of the two realms, the nature of the 'orders', natural and positive law, the kingship of Christ.

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Heilsgeschichte n. Christly

Such an appeal to history and to Heilsgeschichte is condemned today by those who understand the kerygma in an existential sense. We are told that it is Christ who is preached and not the historia Christi. We are told that Luther rejected the heilsgeschichtlich pattern in favour of his christological interpretation of the Old Testament. 'God does not speak to us out of history but by Christ who is the end of history' (Bultmann), Professor Ernst Wolf warns against the danger of a re-Catholicizing of Protestantism in the emphasis of Cullmann. For

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where is the proper role of faith if history becomes God's revelation? Or if it is protested that it is only history as interpreted which concerns Cullmann, Professor Wolf insists that neither Heilsgeschichte nor Heilstatsachen must be allowed to take the place of the Christus praesens.

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(2) A second and related caution to be observed in connection with the proposal of a kerygmatic basis for social ethics concerns the question of a Christian causistry. The question is this: is it proper and is there New Testament precedent for Christians to formulate concrete ethical mandates, to develop a detailed ethical exposition of the will of God, and even to articulate rules of Christian conduct? Or is any such endeavour incompatible with the freedom of the Gospel as Protestants understand it? The issue

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is well presented by the Danish scholar N.H. S¹/_{pe},^{1/}
and in Karl Barth's Dogmatik III/4 2/

^{1/} Christliche Ethik (München, 1949), part I, par.18
^{2/} In the section 'Das Problem der speziellen Ethik,'
pp.1-33

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Karl Barth in his discussion expresses his general agreement with the position of S¹/_{pe}. He finds that there is a legitimate 'practical casuistry' as the expression of a 'prophetic ethos'. Christian ethics must not be reduced to a mere 'monotonous, colourless, formless imperative of obediende'. Thus he justifies a 'special ethic', a formulated counsel for the Christian conscience, resting on our knowledge of the criteria of God's judgment of human conduct. And such counsel, says Barth, has the same august authority as

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(Philadelphia, 1951); W.D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (Philadelphia, 1952, pp. 9/11)

God's immediate claim upon us in the moment of revelation since it derives from the Word of God. We conclude, then, that a kerygmatic ethic will not confine itself to the idea of confrontation and obedience, or that of 'love and do as you please', or to such summaries of obligation as the law of love. Such elements in the New Testament as its paraenetic sections, and above all the Gospel of Matthew in its aspect of incipient canon law (Christ in the role of the second Moses), 1/ offer us precedents for an articulated ethic.

1/ Cf. H. Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mt.*

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*Paul's conservatism
Imminent return of Ch*

The quest for a social ethic based on the New Testament is no doubt most problematic when we consider the letters of Paul. It is here that we find the classic passages and motifs which have been used to justify quietism, acquiescence in the status quo, political abstention, other-worldliness, and reaction. The fact is that in Paul's outlook we come face to face with all that distinguishes the world-view and view of history of the first century from that of the twentieth. The Church of his day looked for the imminent

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return of Christ. In point of numbers it represented only a microscopic group in the general life of the Empire. In its bearing on ethics Paul's Word of the Cross was very specially conditioned and focused.

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Eminent return; Paul; eschatology ethic

A crux for our understanding of the Pauline ethics is found in the well-known passage I Cor. VII, 29-31:

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not ~~rejoicing~~ rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.

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The theme of this part of the Epistle is: 'Every one should remain in the state in which he was called' (v. 20), and the application of this principle to the slave is particularly disturbing to the modern Christian. Does this passage define and exhaust the 'social ethic' that is implicit in the Pauline kerygma? We may anticipate our discussion by making two observations: (1) Paul is governed in this passage – in this level of the problem of church and world – by the special situation of the young and struggling ecclesia as it seeks to define itself in an alien and hostile and doomed culture, and he reads this situation

in the mythological terms of Jewish-Christian eschatology. It is not interim ethics in the strict sense, any more than in the case of Jesus, but rather an emergency ethic. The real situation of the Church makes this counsel wise as would be true in some ~~xxxxxxx~~ analogous critical situations in the history of ~~missions~~ missions. ^{1/} (11) There are other passages in Paul relating to other levels of the relation of Church and world where he envisages a change in social structures

^{1/} Cf. Bonhoeffer, op.cit. p.253



through the impact of the Gospel, though expressed in mythological terms.

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*Paul, im Ulla
Does not want to transform
world - Emergency*

A profounder view of the matter is taken in the existentialist understanding of the Gospel and is illustrated by an important article by Professor Erich Dinkler, 'Zum Problem der Ethik bey Paulus', ^{1/} The author is first of all concerned with I Cor. vi, I-II, where Paul reproves litigation by Christians before pagan tribunals.

~~.....~~
1/ Zeitschr. für Theologie und Kirche, vol. XLIX, 2 (1952), pp. 167-99.

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Dinkler then widens the discussion, alluding to the passage with which we are specially concerned. Paul's attitude throughout, he concludes, is determined by the idea of radical obedience. Neither Jesus nor Paul reflect upon the social consequences of their action. They do not concern themselves with 'the structure of the world'. In bidding us not to be conformed to this world but transformed (Rom.xii, 2), Paul does not say that we should transform the world. Dinkler rightly recognizes that the mythological eschatology of Paul

is not itself the basis for the other worldly ethics in question. This mythological view of the future is rather only an expression of the eschatologischen Existenzbewusstseins. Therefore, Paul's ethic of detachment is to be understood in terms of this prior existential consciousness. When the sinner dies to the flesh and to the world, he relinquishes all relation to having, using, enjoying, and places himself at the disposition of God. At this depth there is no occasion for any ethic except that of obedience.

.....

.....

(over)

We grant the negative implications of this passage as far as a social ethic is concerned, but we relate this to the emergency situation of the Church in this period.

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We must balance this passage in Paul with other passages in his letters, as Professor Dinkler recognizes to reach final conclusions. We find a good example of this procedure in a study of the Epistle of Philemon by Theo Preiss. ^{1/} This author well demonstrates that the systematic dualism which appears in I Cor. vii must be corrected by the kind of evidence we find with regard to slavery in the realistic short message to Philemon. This letter excludes the dualistic social which is too often read into the exhortations in the Epistles. If *Vie en Christ et éthique sociale dans l'épître à Philemon, ch III in La vie en Christ (Neuchâtel, 1951)*
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Paul had wished to reintegrate Onesimus into a social scheme that was not to be touched, if he had simply set the life in Christ over against an 'order of creation', and love over against civil justice, he would have ~~written~~ written somewhat as follows:

~~'My dear~~

'My dear Philemon: In the Lord you and Onesimus are one, and brothers; in life, in the flesh, you each abide in your station in the social order.....'

But Paul does not thus set one order over against another. Fraternity and unity in Christ, outweigh the master-slave relation, break it and

fulfil it on quite a different plane....Onesimus ~~is~~ becomes a brother in every sense. There is no vestige of paternalism (p.72). Thus Preiss very pertinently concludes that the well-known exhortations of I Cor. vii 'are far from giving us the whole thought and practice of the Apostle', and notes that the rich concreteness of the social ethic is 'masked for us by the necessity in which he found himself of checking abuses' (ibid)

Paul

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We shall not, in the circumstances expect to find an explicit and conscious social ethic in Paul's letters in the sense, that is, of a rationale for the transformation of social patterns outside the Church. We can canvass his Epistles for what he has to say about political authority, citizenship, property, marriage, and slavery with limited and ambiguous results at the best. We can fix upon his theme of the love of God for all men but this central feature of the

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Gospel is so general as to be inconclusive. Paul does, of course, testify to the power of God at work in the world through the Gospel. But this appears first of all to concern the believer and the Church. The righteousness of God, in the sense of his saving action, is revealed to faith. It is powerful. The operation of God among the Gentiles is compared to a Roman triumphal procession, conveying life and death. But the effect on the unbelieving world is not viewed in social-institutional terms. So far as the 'world' is concerned Paul appears to speak rather of the wrath of God as in operation.

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But if we stop here we overlook one of the most significant aspects of Paul's thought about the action of God and the Gospel. And this concerns precisely the world itself in the sense of pagan culture and its transformation. It is true that Paul here employs mythological conceptions. But in these we find a firm basis in the Epistles for a kerygmatic social and an aggressive social action.

We have in mind in this connection Paul's view of the conflict between God or Christ or the Church and the
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'principalities and powers', the 'rulers of the world'. We have here in Paul a mythological understanding of the victory of the Gospel over the tyrants of this world, its false authorities. This whole theologoumenon of the Apostle has only recently been fully explored and its significance illuminated. The terms have various and often obscure backgrounds. Paul uses them in different contexts. The conflict with or victory over the powers is always seen by him in an eschatological setting. But this mythological-eschatological victory over the cosmic tyrants proclaimed as Good News is a victory in which the believer himself is involved and

of which he is himself an instrument. And the hostile rulers and angelic powers in question include transparently what we would speak of in non-mythological terms as the structural elements of unregenerate society, the false authorities of culture. The dethroning of such authorities and the weakening of such power-principles constitute the central task of Christian social action.

Paul

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That the struggle in question was not concluded at the crucifixion is made clear in I Cor. xv. 24-8. The end comes only when Christ 'delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and every power'. Meantime in his Church Christ is seen as carrying on the victorious struggle until the day of his final victory.



Paul

As Paul portrays the matter, the cosmic drama 'is by no means concluded at this point. The struggle of Christ against the powers fills the period between his resurrection and the parousia; only then will the last enemy, Death, be destroyed'. 1/

1/ H. Bultmann, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, 3, Lieferung (1953), p.498.

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Paul

It is true that the New Testament speaks in ways that appear contradictory about the cosmic powers. Sometimes they are disarmed or subjected by Christ, sometimes destroyed, sometimes reconciled. They are commonly viewed as created and ~~not~~ assigned their functions by God (the political power, the Law, the social authorities generally, I Cor. vi. 3; 1/ xi. 10), but they have fallen away from him and need to be reconciled or combated. A victory over them was achieved by Christ; the struggle continues in the Church

1/ The angels here are thought of as standing behind the ~~A.N. Wilder~~ pagan tribunals of Reicke p. 27 of his note.
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and will be consummated at his coming again. All this is part of the eschatological drama. But what is to be emphasized is that Paul sees the life of the Church and the believer, and the role of the Holy Spirit, in terms of this dynamic and victorious struggle with social-metaphysical, that is, cultural tyrants. This offers us a real basis in his Epistles for the social action of the believer. The mythological language and perspective must be translated into contemporary terms without forfeiting the evangelical substance. And it is not enough to effect this translation in individualistic, pietistic or existentialist terms. What is represented in a naïve uncritical first-

century mythology must be carried over into ~~our~~ our thought-world in terms of a realistic Christian sociology.

Christianity → Social R am/ra ntion

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A recent article by H.D. Wendland of Kiel, entitled, 'The Relevance of Eschatology for Social Ethics', 1 supports our thesis at a number of points. First, on the negative side, he observes that Christian eschatology is incompatible with apocalyptic pessimism and with any kind of irresponsibility towards the world. But more than this, 'eschatology has a productive significance for social ethics'. The petition, 'Thy Kingdom come', in effect 'dethrones the

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false political and social gods of the world', and carries with it the 'rejection of social conservatism' as well as of all false Utopianism.

1/- The Ecumenical Review, vol. v, 4 (July 1953), pp.364-369. See the fuller statement in a memorandum, 'Christian Hope and the Christian Ethos', published by the Study Department of the World Council.

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Christianity has a social transformation

We conclude, then, that the New Testament in general and Paul in particular, offer at the very centre of their message a theological basis for social-cultural action. The primitive Church was undoubtedly engaged in such action, in the transformation of pagan civilization and culture, and was conscious of this action as inherent in the Gospel. We only fail to recognize this because ~~it~~ its way of describing such this-worldly action took a mythological expression. The eschatological and dualistic symbolism of the early Christians has misled us into thinking that the

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Gospel in its classic period had no concern with what we call social change. This misunderstanding has encouraged the Church in quietism and has furnished its enemies with many of their best weapons against the faith.

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Paul - social transformation

If the thesis proposed is valid, especially as concerns Paul, the question is naturally raised as to how far it is compatible with certain aspects of Paul's teaching, especially those which enjoin social ~~passivity~~ passivity and submission to authorities. The answer lies in a recognition of the different aspects of the 'world' with which the Apostle deals in different passages. One may distinguish three aspects:

(1) When Paul has in mind those features of the world associated with its idolatry, blasphemy, fraud, A.N. Wilder, Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics



sexual depravity, in short with all that is suggested by his lists of vices, he counsels separation from the world. 'What partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ... Therefore come out from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean' (IICor. vi, 14, 17).

(2) When Paul has in mind those features of the world represented by its basic social patterns: social hierarchy, marriage, economic activity and due political authority, he counsels acquiescence and detachment, because the time is short and the fashion of this world is passing away. (Yet his attitude here is more

complex as we have seen in connection with slavery; and his motivation is basically determined not by the shortness of the time but by the constellation of factors in which the Church stood.) These social patterns characterize the life of all men, believers or unbelievers, and are not looked on as evil at least in their formal aspect.

(3) When Paul has in mind those features of the world which we may call the structural elements of unregenerate society, including both pagan error and the institutions in which it embodies itself - all



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constituting the world-rulers which hold men in bondage perverted authorities which dwarf and debase the spirits of men, of which Satan avails himself to resist the Gospel - then Paul envisages aggressive impact, dramatic struggle and world-transformation in this age as at its end. But this is expressed by him in mythological imagery and deceives us into thinking that the conflict in question is purely spiritual or other-worldly, and that any significant victory must be deferred until the final consummation.