

Christ and the Needy (1895)*

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I

On several occasions during the last election campaign the relationship between the rich and the poor was referred to, also by us apparently, without proper care. We have to accept that this is so, now that one of our warmest friends, who is also from a prominent family, has told us that our words had offended him on more than one occasion. There is, of course, always the possibility that the offense was in part taken rather than given, but when a loyal brother tells us that he was “irritated and aggrieved,” then we are inclined for our part to seek the responsibility for this in the thoughtlessness of our words, and to entreat the aggrieved and irritated brother not to hold this terminological bumbling against us.

Happily, forgiveness is always easy among us Christians, and when issues arise there is always one authority to which we are prepared to surrender unconditionally from the outset: *the authority of our Lord and Savior*.

That being so, it seems to us desirable to examine the case in point somewhat more closely and to respond more thoroughly to the question concerning the position that Christ took regarding the contrast between the rich and the poor.

* Abraham Kuyper, *De Christus en de Sociale nooden en Democratische Klippen* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1895), 11–56, trans. Herbert Donald Morton, ed. and annot. Harry Van Dyke. Scriptural citations are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted. In order to conform the translation to modern conventions, some changes in formatting have been made, primarily with respect to changes to paragraph breaks and italicizing.

Even if some ill-considered words may have escaped my pen, in the main we endeavored to follow in the footsteps of him whose words and example are decisive in life and in death for all who love the Savior. Naturally, here, we too can go astray; we are obliged and prepared, also in this matter, to pay heed to the brotherly criticism of those who confess Christ with us. Yet even those brothers who declared themselves to be the most deeply aggrieved and terribly irritated will readily concede that we may not speak otherwise than according to the light that is given us by the spirit of Christ.

We value this reference to what Holy Scripture teaches us concerning the contrast between the poor and the rich all the more because from our first participation in public life and not just now for the first time, we have always expressed ourselves in the same spirit respecting the needy in society. Such is also the case in connection with the Franchise Bill.

Yet we shall leave aside, for the moment at least, the question of electoral reform. What motives of the heart have moved many of our socially high-ranking Christians to adopt a different position in this matter from our own is not for us to judge. Only the Knower of hearts may be the judge here. Therefore, we will scrupulously avoid saying that any one of these brothers acted contrary to conscience in this matter.

The only thing that saddened us—and, if we may speak frankly, that aggrieved and irritated us in our turn—was that the attractiveness of this political logic drew many of our noble brothers, probably against their will, into a company in which to our mind, given their credentials of *spiritual* nobility, they did *not* belong. In this way, their influence at the time became a support for Conservatism, and even though we gladly assume that they neither intended nor willed this, they did not, as we see it, take sufficiently into account the virtually undeniable fact that their influence had perforce to tip the balance in favor of the status quo. Yet for the moment this can all rest.

What we need above all as Christians is that we go to *God's Word*; that we kneel at the cross of Christ with quiet reverence; and that we endeavor to arrive at complete agreement regarding how—from what standpoint and in what light—Christ would have us consider the vexing problem of the fearful contrast between the rich and the poor.

Even if we could not allow ourselves to hope that this exposition would bear fruit in bringing people to judge our position in a more sympathetic and brotherly spirit, it can never be without benefit to the readers of our paper that also with

regard to this grave problem we counter the slogan of the *revolution* with the voice of the *gospel*.¹

That being so, allow me, by way of introduction, to call attention to the crushing condemnation by Anatole Leroy Beaulieu in the March issue of *Revue des deux mondes* regarding the position adopted by Christians, contrary to the spirit of Christ, with respect to money and thus with respect to Mammon.²

We may invoke this witness all the more because Leroy Beaulieu harbors *no* democratic sympathies but, to the contrary, warns against them. He at least cannot be suspected, as people suspect us, of harboring democratic leanings and invoking the gospel more strongly than is proper and permissible as we oppose the sinful and heaven-defying inequality in our earthly lots. Beaulieu writes,

No one, so said Christ, can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and Mammon. Now, Mammon is wealth. Yet this splendid word from the Sermon on the Mount is out of date today. Christians of our day have arranged everything quite differently. There are 400 million persons who have been baptized in the name of Jesus, but how many of them show the slightest hesitation about serving Mammon? After eighteen hundred years, Mammon has again become king of the world. Those who are the most pious divide their time between serving God and serving Mammon; it is not concern about their eternal treasures that weighs most heavily upon them and oppresses them. In truth, one might even imagine that it was said not of the rich but of the poor that a camel might more easily pass through the eye of a needle than that they should enter into the Kingdom of heaven. For if Christians had truly understood and absorbed the ideas of their Savior, they would not be out to make money but would much rather be fearful of possessing too much of it. (245)

Thus, to counter anti-Semitism, he adds that Jews may have become slaves of money, but this was only possible because they noticed that one could get furthest ahead in Christian society with *money*, always *money*.

Now our fellow confessors of Christ among the upper classes will want to keep in mind that Leroy Beaulieu discerns and denounces this unholy desire for money not only among the wealthy. On the contrary, he observes quite correctly that the wild slogans voiced by the lower classes of society arise from precisely

¹ This is an allusion to G. Groen van Prinsterer's slogan: "Against the Revolution, the Gospel!" That is, oppose secularism with Christian principles.

² Kuyper is referring to the first part of a multipart work by Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, "Le Règne de l'argent," *Revue des deux mondes* 122, 15 March 1894, 241–60, subtitled "Autrefois et Aujourd'hui." There were ultimately ten parts in the series appearing through 15 January 1898.

the same passion. It is not that they disapprove of the possession of too much money and property in itself as such, from idealistic motives. No, what stirs them mainly is that others *do* and they do *not* have this power at their disposal. Thus if the opportunity should arise for them to become a favorite of Mammon, they would quickly burn incense at his altar. Sad experience teaches that but for a few favorable exceptions, men who rose from poverty to wealth quickly forgot their earlier democratic sympathies and acted, if anything, even more harshly than others against the socially disadvantaged.

The Revolutionary principles of 1789 in the most shameful way caused the hope of a better fatherland to fade and stimulated peoples and nations to find within this brief earthly existence the ultimate purpose of man's efforts. That is why the regime of Louis Philippe in particular gave such an impulse to the revolutionary development of the service of Mammon.³ He desired before everything else to be the *money* king, believing that only *money* can bestow power and influence.

This sinful revolutionary motive appeared in those days in two streams. On the one side, wealthy owners drove free capital up in various ways, even by fiction, to unprecedented, all-crushing heights. On the other side, have-nots endeavored to become wealthy, or at least well off, by taking the money away from its owners, either by violence or by legal measures.

Thus, however idealistic social democracy may present itself, its striving remains focused, at bottom, on nothing other than acquiring more *financial* power. It calls for more material well-being but to the neglect of every other element. Additionally, the passion with which thousands upon thousands follow its banner is not the passion for a higher ideal but well-nigh exclusively the passion for greater material well-being.

Against this revolution on the terrain of Mammon, in either form, we Christians must place the gospel of our Lord and Savior—his principle, his spirit, something of his divine love. To this end, we must enlist among the upper classes the support of the handful of well-to-do, pious Christians who, God be praised, are not so few in number and who curse Mammon and bless their Savior, not only with the lips but from the heart. Therefore, we must likewise seek the support of the truly pious among the lower classes, relatively more numerous in our population than in other countries, who value their heavenly country far above all the pleasures of this world.

³ Louis Philippe, king of the French (1830–48), during whose reign French policy favored economic expansion and severely limited the franchise to the highest taxpayers only.

These elements, from above and below, must work together in our generation to proclaim gratitude, in the spirit of the gospel, amidst the turbulent forces in society. Yet let it not be forgotten, as Leroy Beaulieu emphatically states (p. 260), that while the poor were content and lived peaceably, it was the classes that were better off that aroused in them the thirst for sensual pleasure and thus for money. "It is the rich," he says, "who preached the love of money to the poor and who gave them lessons in corrupting the nation and coveting material things."

II

If you want to understand correctly the *weight* and *significance* to be attached to what our Lord and Savior said about social relationships, then you ought to know, at least to some extent, what these social relationships were. Otherwise, you will not know to what circumstances Jesus' words apply and what the circumstances were that he either *commended* or *denounced*.

This is all the more needful now that there are Christians who try to escape the urgency of Jesus' words by objecting "that these hard, cutting words were appropriate at that time but they have neither *meaning* nor *significance* for our time." At that time, they argue, pagan and *Jewish* conditions were ruled by inhuman cruelty, which is why Jesus had to perform such radical surgery. However, today everything is different. We now live in a Christian society over which the gospel sheds its softer luster. It is therefore the height of absurdity to want to apply these statements of Jesus to our circumstances today without softening or tempering them.

This argument is so dangerous because there is indeed *something* to it, and this grain of truth can easily serve to cover up the incorrectness and exaggeration of the popular image—dangerous not so much because it leads to deceiving oneself and others but still more because it captures our hearts and gives us the delusion that we are indeed letting ourselves be led by the spirit of Christ when in fact we are still constantly acting contrary to his spirit.

We shall not neglect therefore to take the trouble to give a brief description of the social conditions that Jesus addressed.

Naturally, a broad sketch of these conditions would fill a small volume. A daily newspaper cannot think of providing that. Yet in a few short strokes we can still give our readers a clear answer to the question whether the circumstances of those times were so *inferior* to those of our times that Jesus' critique relates to the circumstances of his contemporaries but has nothing to say to us today. Therefore, we take first a quick look at the circumstances in the world of that day, and then a word in particular about the circumstances in the land of Palestine.

Now, insofar as general social circumstances are concerned (thus writes an authoritative source), the first century of the Roman Empire belongs to the happiest period not only of Roman history but indeed of world history.⁴ The storms of the civil wars had abated, and peace reigned throughout the conquered provinces. Far away, along the fringes, at the frontiers of this mighty empire, wars were still being waged, but these did not touch the lands washed by the Mediterranean Sea. Granted, the Julian emperors were guilty of many unbearably arbitrary acts, but this arbitrariness subsided and did not reach much further than Rome and its immediate surroundings.

Many inscriptions that have been found show that in the provinces, even under emperors like Nero, people led quiet and peaceful lives and felt happy. The administration of government was outstanding; the administration of justice, particularly in civil matters, was equally outstanding; and exploitation of the provinces, as in the days of the Republic, no longer occurred, at least not with impunity. Taxes were moderate and distributed fairly. Imperial collectors levied direct taxes, and indirect taxes were sometimes leased. Yet the successors to the good emperors did what they could to oppose misuse, and trade and industry flourished. Roads were splendidly maintained; in general, security reigned on land and sea; and harbors were built, canals dug, and river traffic regulated. The coinage system was regularized. The commercial cities around the Mediterranean Sea flourished. Incredible treasures were funneled from the provinces into the lone city of Rome—but also from Rome back to the provinces to pay with money like water for all manner of objects of oriental provenance. The arts and crafts thrived as never before or since. Agriculture was practiced in a rational way. Market gardens, orchards, and vineyards flourished then as they do today in our most civilized countries. Pliny's letters inform us of social conditions in the Po Valley of northern Italy in which there was no poverty worthy of mention. Throughout the Eastern Empire, where the trades and industry flourished, the social situation was no less favorable. Food for the population was provided in abundance, and if a great catastrophe occurred such as the inundation of Pompeii by rivers of lava from Vesuvius, government and private initiative vied with each other in coming to the aid of the victims.

The ratio between wages and the price of bread was also favorable. According to one inscription, in an inn a traveler paid 5 cents for bread and 10 cents for other food. Only meat, which even today in northern Italy is still eaten only by the

⁴ Kuyper's note refers to Gerhard Uhlhorn, *Der Kampf des Christenthums mit dem Heidenthum: Bilder aus der Vergangenheit als Spiegelbilder für die Gegenwart*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Meyer & Zeller, 1874), 94.

higher classes, cost 75 cents per kilogram of mutton, 1.75 guilder per kilogram of pork, and 75 cents for a chicken. However, a worker who earned an ordinary wage was in a position at the time to earn enough in five days that he could buy food for a month, so that the head of a household of five, the young children included in proportion, could earn enough in twenty days to feed his family.

The gap between rich and poor was great at that time as well, yet the distinction in social position was far from what it is today. The richest and greatest fortune that we read about among the voters was 54 million guilders. Such a capital was possessed only by the Lentuluses and the Narcissuses, and they were the Rothschilds of their day.

What does this mean, then, compared with the Rothschilds now? In 1875, the latter's fortune already totaled 2,400 million guilders; since then, it has risen to 5,000 million, and it doubles again every fifteen years. Credit, the curse of our time, was unknown. People were paid in cash. Virtually all capital was invested in land and could therefore not, as today, foster so much poverty. Therefore, poverty in the sense of our pauperism did not exist. Individual cases of impoverishment were easily alleviated. After the Antonines,⁵ outright pauperism did break out in the Roman Empire, and it hastened its decline; but in the days in which Jesus appeared and spoke there was simply no question of poverty as a general phenomenon in the sense in which we know it. Thus explains our authority, whom we have followed virtually word for word in order to avoid any appearance of depicting things more favorably than they actually were.

That social conditions under the first emperors are often portrayed in an entirely different light is due to the fact that people paid attention almost exclusively to social conditions in Rome itself. But the city of Rome occupied an entirely exceptional position. This one city ruled the world and imagined that the entire world must work for her so that she could enjoy the sweet life of *dolce far niente*, of doing nothing. That is why its population of over one and a half million inhabitants had become practically unaccustomed to doing any work at all. People rested on their laurels. Furthermore, the municipal government sometimes spent more than *seven* million in a single year just to feed the people. On festival occasions, meals set out on 20,000 tables were served to the people. On 135 of the 365 days of the year, the people had to be able to attend all manner of free theater and sporting events. On important government occasions, civil servants were not showered with ribbons and knighthoods, but gold was given to the people, such that on one occasion Septimius Severus distributed 420 guilders in cash to every family.

⁵ That is, after AD 192.

In addition, Rome looked after its poor in various ways. There were training institutes for the helpless and for orphans. To ease the pressure on Rome, colonies were planted abroad. A patron generally paid his clients seventy cents per day. The so-called *collegia* levied a monthly contribution for poor members. In the case of a disaster or setback, the wealthy competed for the spotlight by contributing lavish gifts.

Jesus' activities, however, had nothing to do with local conditions in Rome. He acted and spoke in an eastern Roman province. In this province, generally speaking, social conditions were not inferior to today's but remarkably better. In any case, in those lands pauperism, at least as we see it on the rise again today, was unknown at that time.

III

Our readers will appreciate our framing this series of articles somewhat more broadly. The importance of the matter demands that we do so. This is necessary because for so many years the preaching in our churches has neglected to proclaim Jesus' direct teaching about social relationships. It often seemed as if Jesus' direct teaching about social relationships had no significance for us today. To our embarrassment it must be said that it was unbelievers and not the redeemed of the Lord who first called attention to the fact that Holy Scripture, too, and particularly the actions of our Savior, say something authoritative and important about these pressing social needs. However, people in our circles, both high and low, are so estranged from Jesus' word and spirit on this point that a brief reminder is insufficient, and there is an urgent need to place this entire subject in a clear and, if possible, convincing light, so that in this matter, too, there may again be a Christian consensus.

Now, our previous article sketched the general social relationships as they were found in Jesus' day in the Roman provinces, of which the Holy Land was one. We did not describe these relationships ourselves but laid before our readers Uhlhorn's description, partly to avoid any semblance of bias and partly because Uhlhorn supports every detail in his sketch with documentary evidence. His sketch showed us that social relationships in Jesus' day were not at all less favorable, and, in many respects, were more favorable than they are in our day.

Yet with that not enough has been said. Our Savior appeared in a Roman province that from a moral and social standpoint distinguished itself extremely *favorably* from the others. To Israel had been committed the oracles of God; its national history was launched by God himself with a social framework that excluded poverty in the form of pauperism as we know it; impoverishment, to the extent that it occurred also in this nation through one's own fault or as a

result of falling on hard times, was both restricted in duration and eased by the spirit of mercy.

Do not misunderstand this. We are by no means claiming that the sublime spirit of love that must be the hallmark of every Christian community already obtained in ancient Israel. Yet while Uhlhorn calls the pagan world, despite its bearable social conditions, *Eine Welt ohne Liebe*, “a world without love,” he grants that this cannot be said of social conditions in ancient Israel.

Accordingly, nothing is more incorrect than the notion that the commandment that we should “love our neighbor as ourselves” came first from Jesus’ lips. The same statement appears literally in the Old Testament, and even love for one’s enemies is prescribed already in Proverbs 25 and elsewhere.

The compassion or mercy that flows from pity and love and that was fundamentally different from pagan charity (*caritas*) and largesse (*liberalitas*) was enjoined upon God’s people in his name not first in the New Testament but just as firmly in the Old Testament. Look at Psalm 37:26; 41:1; 112:5, again, in Job 29:16, and again in Proverbs 12:10. In Isaiah 58:7, we read about the kind of fast that God preferred: “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” All this is so that the commandment given to Israel in Leviticus 19:18 might be fulfilled: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

The only difference between the ministry of mercy under Israel and the mercy of Jesus’ word was that under Israel the *commandment* was the mainspring, while according to Jesus’ demand it is the *impulse* of the heart out of thankfulness that must induce love; further that under Israel the demonstration of love was regulated by set rules while among us it is spiritually *free*. In Israel’s days, a tithe was required; Christians, however, must each decide for themselves whether they can afford a tithe, or, indeed, whether a tithe is enough in their particular case.

Yet under Israel, precisely because of the legal provisions that governed conditions in the name of God, conditions were in many respects *healthier* than they are among us Christians, to whom it is left freely to define the limits of our charity.

The very laws God gave for land tenure were of such a nature that the gap between rich and poor was tempered to a substantial degree. From the outset every Israelite was steward of a piece of land from his God, and no one was helpless. Moreover—and herein lies the glory of Israel’s agrarian legislation—even if someone through his own fault or as a result of setbacks had lost his land and belongings, this did not rest as a curse *on his heirs*, but this impoverishment was always only *temporary*. God had set a fixed term after which every piece of land, no matter how it had been lost, reverted to its original owner.

The concept of property was accordingly an entirely different one under Israel than it was under Roman law. The idea that someone could dispose absolutely over his property was unknown to Israel. All property gave only relative rights. One who owned a field or a vineyard, a fig or olive grove, was not allowed to harvest it clean: something had to be left in the field and on the tree for the poor (Deut. 24:19–21). One who passed through a cornfield might pluck some ears with his hand, though not cut into it with his sickle (Deut. 23:25). In the Sabbath year, the *entire* yield of the soil was for the poor (Ex. 23:11). Lending at exorbitant rates was forbidden. What was loaned had to be forgiven in the Sabbath year (Deut. 15:2). Wages were to be paid before sunset (Deut. 24:15). In short, the entire management of property stood under a higher law and higher control.

In addition to this, there was also the second tenth, which was for the benefit not of the Levites but especially of widows and orphans. There were the sacrificial repasts, to which the poor too had to be invited; the charitable alms had to be given openhandedly and generously. Above all, there was the brotherly understanding that people had to adopt toward those who were poor and lowly. Accordingly, the social gap between the rich and poor as we know it was *entirely* unknown in Israel. You can tell that from Jesus' parables. From the hedges and from the highways people were gathered to come and sit at the banquets of the rich.

It must be kept in mind, of course, that reality, for all that, by no means matched the spirit of the law, and that Israel too sinned against the compassion of the law.

If, however, one consults the Apocryphal books of the Old Testament, which inform us of the situation as it had evolved between Malachi and John the Baptist, then we see that after social conditions had become less favorable, care for the poor appears more prominently in these writings. Already even then the false notion insinuated itself that the giving of alms possessed sin-discharging power. Thus Tobit 12:8–9 states, "It is better to give alms than to treasure up gold. For almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin." In Ecclesiasticus [Sirach] 3:30 we read, "Water extinguishes a blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin." Even when the Pharisees set the tone, no one rebuked them for giving no alms or too few alms but only for doing so from the wrong principle.

Accordingly, what the New Testament teaches us about the social relationships of the time nowhere betrays the existence of pauperism as such. People's duty to share with the poor was not challenged from any quarter. Of large fortunes not a hint is to be found, and what primarily characterized the situation is that the poor and the rich interacted with each other on the basis of *personal intercourse*: the poor visited in the homes of those who were better off, and in oriental fashion, sanctified by the spirit of Israel's laws, they were admitted even to the tables of the rich. Dives and Lazarus may paint a shocking picture, but the fact that

poor Lazarus had entree to the house of the rich man and might have eaten the crumbs that fell from his table betrays a level of intimacy between classes that is foreign to our Christian society.⁶

Pulling all this together, first with respect to the general condition of the Eastern provinces that were under imperial administration at the time, and also with respect to the salutary influence exerted particularly in Palestine by the impact of Israel's law, we cannot escape the conclusion that social conditions of the time, as Jesus observed them around him, were not *unfavorable* but much rather favorable when compared with present-day conditions.

IV

Not new, but then also uncontested, is the observation from which we must proceed here, namely, that our Lord and Savior himself did not choose his place among the *upper* but among the *lower* classes of society.

In this respect, too, the words of Isaiah apply:

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isa. 53:2–3)

These are harsh words, which for a long time were construed to mean that our Savior had a hideous face but that are now rather generally understood as referring to Jesus' social position and to public opinion of the Rabbi from Nazareth.

Now those of us who with the Christian church believe in the eternal pre-existence of the Mediator know and confess that this appearance of Jesus in the lower classes of society was not accidental, nor that it was imposed upon him by *force*, but that he opted for this himself: "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Christ was thus perfectly aware of his social position, as is clear from his incisively beautiful statement: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

The fact that Jesus chose or adopted this position (if we may put it that way) among the *lower* classes of society even formed part of the gospel proclaimed by the apostles. This is evident not only from what we just cited from the [Second]

⁶ The rich man was sometimes referred to by the Latin word for "rich" (*dives*) as a personal name. See Luke 16:19–31.

Epistle to the Corinthians, but likewise from Philippians 2:6–7, where the wording has it that Christ, being in the form of God, “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.” That is why the Gospels, and in particular the Gospel according to Luke, make a point of highlighting this social position of Jesus while he was on earth and to focus attention on it in every possible way.

It is true that God sent a herald to prepare the way for Jesus—a herald of priestly blood. Yet, the son of Zacharias does not keep company with the upper crust of Jerusalem: he breaks with them and, content with the simplest of clothing, lives on locusts and wild honey in the wilderness.

When the sacred story comes to the conception and birth of Christ himself, it does not shift to Jerusalem, Jericho, or Caesarea but to the little country towns of Nazareth and Bethlehem—the one so despised that Nathanael asks, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” and the other so insignificant that there was only one inn, too small to house all who sought to stay at it.

Mary was undoubtedly of high lineage, even of royal blood, but her social situation did not place her with the rich and prominent but with the disesteemed. The man to whom she was betrothed was a carpenter in a hamlet called Nazareth. Together the two possessed so little that the wise men from the East had to bring gold to make their flight to Egypt possible. As a result, especially of her lofty descent, Mary was so deeply under the impression of her low social status that in her song of praise she sang, “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. . . . He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty” (Luke 1:47–48, 53).

However scanty the reports of Jesus’ early years may be, it is clear nevertheless that our Savior spent all but three years of his life in forgotten Nazareth, and that even there he did not belong to the more prominent families or to those invested with authority but to the class of small craftsmen. Tradition would suggest that it is not improbable that Jesus worked in the trades himself.

What was true of Jesus’ own social position was also true of his surroundings. The first to whom his coming was proclaimed were not the members of the Sanhedrin or the members of the royal house of Herod but poor shepherds who watched their flocks by night in the fields of Ephratah. It cannot even be said of these men that the sheep they watched were their own property; they appear much rather only to have been hired to watch the flocks during the night. At the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Joseph and Mary, despite the friendship of these shepherds, were still so impoverished that they could not afford a *lamb of the first year*, hence lacked *three guilders*, and therefore fulfilled the requirements of the sacrifice with a *pair of turtledoves* as was permitted *the poor* in

Leviticus 12:8. A lamb was required, but someone *not able to bring a lamb* was permitted to bring instead a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, birds that were very common in Israel and therefore cost very little. If the shepherds had been the *owners* of their flock, Mary would surely have been able to secure a lamb. That she offered the sacrifice of the poor proves not only that she lacked the means herself but also that the shepherds in the fields of Ephratah belonged to the poor class of keepers of sheep.

That all this was no sad necessity but God's ordinance, and therefore *willed by Jesus himself*, is shown by nothing so clearly as his choice of disciples. Later, Jesus also had a few friends among the prominent men of Jerusalem; but Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and Joseph of Arimathea remained out of sight. The circle from which Jesus chose his disciples is thus not the circle of high officials, nor the circle of the prominent, nor the circle of the learned, but the circle of the "simple in the land"—people of the lower middle class, as are found today in Scheveningen and Katwijk, in Noordwijk and Egmond, on Marken and Urk, fishermen who personally carry out their vocation together with their families.⁷ John and James worked on their father's little boat and had to mend their nets themselves. They were thus not even fishermen that you could compare to the shipowners of Scheveningen, for these do not sail themselves. Besides, the little boats on Gennesaret were far from comparable to our *pinken*, our modern fishing one-masters.

Later, to be sure—first in the case of Matthew who was "sitting at the receipt of custom," and still later in the case of Paul—Jesus also called men of a somewhat higher social position, but this does not detract from the fact that Jesus chose men almost exclusively of *nonprominent* rank and that during the three years of his sojourn on earth he associated mainly with people of this lower rank.

Naturally, this is not in the least to say that Jesus never spoke with men of a higher position. It is clear from the wedding in Cana, from his visit to Zacchaeus' house, from his sitting down to eat in the house of Simon, and ever so much more, that our Savior certainly did have relationships in other classes. Nevertheless, all this cannot undo the telling fact that Jesus deliberately and voluntarily chose his place among the lower classes; that he kept company mainly with the lesser folk in the land; and that it was preferably from the less prominent that he chose his faithful followers and the men upon whom he vested hope for the future of his sacred mission.

⁷ The first four are fishing villages on the North Sea coast; the last two were islands in the former Zuyder Zee.

Moreover, the multitudes that followed him when he sailed on the Sea of Galilee do not give the impression of being what we today would call a “distinguished public.” Carelessly, without a knapsack or provisions, they follow Jesus; and when he feeds the thousands, art and tradition still portray a scene of the least of the land sitting in groups around Jesus in quiet simplicity.

This eloquent fact—that our Savior adopted and assumed his social position not among the great of the earth but among the least—is so striking from every angle and in every way that no one has ever tried to contest the certainty of this detail. Rather, in hymns and homilies, the fact of Jesus’ humble birth, his sober position in life, and his less impressive surroundings has been acknowledged from age to age, crowned with a sacred halo, and glorified, not without fervor, in the ideal sense. It is just that the importance of this fact *for our social relationships* has not been sufficiently felt. People called attention to it in order to honor Jesus’ humility. They spiritualized his earthly smallness and used it to exhort to heavenly mindedness.

However laudable that may be, there is more to it. Jesus was able to choose. He could have taken up his position wherever he wished—in a palace, among the mighty of the earth, or among the little people—the lowly in the land. And *he chose the latter*.

This must, of course, have been for *a reason*. There must have been something that moved him to avoid the palaces and houses of the mighty in order to seek the quiet dwellings of the little folk in the land—something that spoke strongly to him because he was of David’s lineage, of royal blood, even king in the kingdom of God. We shall not guess at this, for who can penetrate the secret thoughts of the Lord? Yet it is clear that also in Jesus’ days there was a certain contrast between a *higher* and a *lower* position in society and that in Jesus’ birth, living circumstances, and surroundings, the connection with the little people in the land was much closer than it was with the prominent and great of the earth. It is also clear that Jesus expected much more for the kingdom of heaven from the small than from the great, as can be seen from his choice of disciples.

V

To establish the correct chronological order of Jesus’ various meetings and the different addresses he gave is far from easy. The Gospels do not present a chronicle or journal but draw a single powerful portrait from many angles. Yet, it is at least certain that Jesus’ appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth and the *Sermon on the Mount*, as it is called, followed shortly after the *temptation in the wilderness* and thus stand at the beginning of Jesus’ “revelation to Israel.”

Now in this connection one's attention is immediately drawn to the fact that *hunger* is the first factor in the temptation; that afterwards, in the synagogue at Nazareth, the text is opened at Isaiah 61:1, which says that Christ is anointed to preach the gospel to the *poor*; and that soon, in the *Sermon on the Mount*, the first beatitude likewise applies to the *poor*.

Add to this that Jesus referred the disciples of John the Baptist for evidence of his divine mission not only to his words but to the fact that "the gospel was preached to the *poor*"; and it is further put beyond all doubt that in Jesus' appearances and in his addressing the crowds, the *main* feature that stands out is that he purposely, by preference and by virtue of his anointment and calling, turns in the first place to the poor and seeks the subjects for his kingdom mainly among them.

However, with respect to both Isaiah 61:1 and the beatitude regarding the poor, a brief explanation is called for. An explanation is indispensable in the case of Isaiah 61:1 because in our [authorized] translation⁸ there is no mention of *armen* [the poor] but of preaching good tidings to the *zachtmoedigen* [the meek]. Similarly, some explanation is required in the case of the beatitude because the text of Luke 6:20 differs from that of Matthew 5:3. We must, therefore, request the attention of our readers for a moment for what is in itself a question of exegesis.

Respecting Isaiah 61:1, the matter is simple, and we can be content with a brief reference to Luke 4:16–21, where we read the following:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Evidently, Jesus himself interpreted the words of Isaiah 61:1 to mean preaching the gospel to the *poor*, and this, of course, decides the matter for us.

Not so easily answered is the question whether in the case of the beatitude one is to think in the first place of the *poor in spirit* or the poor in the *social* sense. As everyone knows, Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for

⁸ The reference is to the authorized Dutch Bible, the *Statenvertaling* of 1637. In English, this translation is comparable to the Authorized Version or King James Version.

theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” while in Luke 6:20 we read, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” The question therefore arises: Should Luke 6:20 be regarded as an abbreviated manner of writing, and should his message thus be spiritualized? Or should Luke and Matthew be brought into harmony such that *both* social poverty and spiritual poverty, the latter as connected with the former, are done equal justice?

Once again, we shall not present our own explanation, because our testimony in this matter would in all probability be considered suspect. We appeal instead to two expositors, the one from earlier and the other from more recent times, whose names have authority even in high society—Calvin and Godet.

Calvin states,

While the words of Luke and Matthew must mean the same thing, there can be no doubt that Jesus speaks of the blessed as those who are oppressed by adversity and who suffer affliction, with this difference only, that Matthew, by his addition, restricts the blessedness for the oppressed to those who have learned to be humble under the discipline of the cross.⁹

Thus Calvin understands the beatitude as a beatitude not of the spiritually vulnerable but definitely of the *socially poor or repressed*, but he restricts this pronouncement of blessedness, with a view to Matthew 5:3, quite correctly to the poor and oppressed who are quiet before God.

If we consult Godet in his well-known commentary on the Gospel of Luke, we find entirely the same explanation.¹⁰ Godet does not hesitate for a moment to declare that Luke provides us with the more original reading, which he infers particularly from this that in Luke the words are directed to the multitude themselves: “Blessed are you who are poor,” “you who are hungry,” and so forth; and he explains quite accurately how Matthew had to alter this when he transferred the beatitude from the second person (you) to the third person.

Transferred to the third person, the saying “blessed are *the poor*” would have become baseless. Or how could all of the poor, including the most mischievous among them, be blessed? This saying was only correct and true when Jesus spoke personally to his disciples and the circle of believing poor who stood around him: “Blessed are you who are poor,” “you who are hungry,” and so forth. When

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentarii in Quatuor Euangelistas*, vol. 6, *Opera omnia* (Amsterdam: Joannem Jacobi Schipper, 1667), 64.

¹⁰ F. L. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, vol. 1, trans. E. W. Shalders (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1875), 312–15.

Matthew proceeded to turn this into the third person, “Blessed are *the* poor, blessed are *the* hungry, and so forth,” so says Godet, then a spiritual element had to be added, and therefore Matthew wrote, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Godet elaborated Calvin’s thinking still further and arrived with him at the conclusion that Jesus did truly bless the *poor in the social sense* though with the reservation, of course, that social oppression should not lead to spiritual demoralization but to the fear of God.

That being so, one can hardly approve of the constant *spiritualization* of all these statements in today’s preaching such that every connection with life is eliminated from them by ignoring the social meaning implicit in them. Even our marginalia fall far short on this score and in exegetical precision lag far behind Calvin on this point.¹¹

Yet it all comes down to one’s point of departure. Once one imagines that all such statements by Jesus apply only to the condition of the soul, one breaks the connection between *soul* and *body*, between our inner and outer life situation—a connection to which both Scripture and Jesus hold fast; and so one slides unnoticed onto the wrong track.

Now by universal consensus it is certain that Jesus in his reply to John’s disciples pointed to the fact, as a mark of his Messiah-worthiness, that he preached the gospel to *the poor*. Here the texts of Luke and Matthew agree, and Mark leaves out any added allusions to *spiritual*. The meaning of these words cannot be that Jesus, as if he were engaged in some sort of “inner-city mission,” proclaims the gospel not only to the rich but also to the poor and that he thus does *not forget* the poor. Such a dull, tepid reading would simply be absurd. Or, how would the fact that he brought the Word of God not only to the rich but also to the poor ever have been a sign of his Messiahship? Thus, this entire thoughtless and superficial exposition simply destroys itself.

No, the lofty and striking sense of this declaration of Jesus lies precisely in his claim, as the One sent by the Father, that he had taken the gospel *not* to the upper classes but in the first place to the *lower* classes of society. That is the hallmark of the Messiah. Virtually all other founders of religions began by approaching *the great of the earth*. Not so Jesus. To the contrary, he approaches instead what is small and despised. Therefore he now lets John know that he will proclaim salvation not in the first place to the powerful of Jerusalem but to the poor people of Galilee.

¹¹ The reference is to the “Kanttekeningen,” marginal glosses in the *Statenvertaling*.

People sometimes say that Calvin entertained tendencies that were more aristocratic, appealing to a poor interpretation of a statement in the *Institutes*. If you really want to know how Calvin explained the gospel, then open his *Commentaries* to Matthew 11:5 and Luke 7:22 and listen to what you then hear. Calvin writes,

Jesus adds this purposely in order to remove all suspicion that the flesh might have derived from the socially oppressed situation of the men who followed him. Because we are proud by nature, something has almost no value in our eyes if it does not visibly shine. In contrast, the church of Christ, which is gathered principally from the poorer people (*ex pauperculis hominibus collecta sit*) is robbed of all external splendor. For that reason the gospel goes against the grain of many, because it is not accepted by the mighty and prominent of the earth. And now Jesus points out how wrong it is to judge the value of the gospel by that measure, since according to his Word it is *meant in the very first place for the poor and oppressed*. Something from which it follows that we must not think it strange when we see how the great of the earth, puffed up by their wealth, oppose the gospel and have no eye for God's sovereign grace.¹²

Thus we have established that Jesus cited his approaching *the little people of this world* as a principal sign of his status as the Messiah. We have likewise established that at his first appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth he again stressed the fact that he went to *the poor* with his message of salvation. We have also established that he was introduced to the office of Messiah by first being personally exposed to the temptation of *hunger*. Having established all this, the Sermon on the Mount would not be the Sermon on the Mount if we did not find in it this same touch.

If we now read in Luke that Jesus addressed the multitude in the second person and said, "Blessed are *you* who are poor," and at the same time, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation," then there can be no doubt that Jesus had a very keen eye for the *social* contrast between the poor and the rich; that he felt drawn much more to the former than to the latter; and that for the future of his kingdom he vested hope not in the mighty and great of the earth but much more in the little, silent folk in the land.

Furthermore, if people should ask, finally, whether *humbleness* and *humility*, which is to say, social and spiritual poverty, are not causally related, then with Calvin we reply in the affirmative. Power, prominence, wealth, honor, prosperity, and well-being seduce people much sooner to turning to themselves and putting their faith in the creature and thus to becoming proud and puffed up. That is why it is so difficult for the great of the earth to be genuinely "poor in spirit."

¹² Calvin, *Commentarii in Quatuor Euangelistas*, 122.

O, how different things would be in Christendom if Jesus' preaching on this point were also our preaching and if the basic principles of his Kingdom were not cut off and alienated from our society by over-spiritualization.

VI

We needed to dwell somewhat longer on the opening of the Sermon on the Mount because prolonged lopsided, spiritualizing preaching had made the meaning of Jesus' words unrecognizable.

Having done so, we are now in a position to go on to examine the other basic ideas in the Sermon on the Mount that pertain to differences in society. These basic ideas are *four* in number.

The first is this, that *money* on earth has become an unholy power opposed to God and that a curse therefore adheres to capital as such. Mammon was the name of an *idol* worshiped in Syria, on the borders of Palestine, an idol that was also known in Palestine. Mammon was the name of what we often call *Fortune*. This idol was served, incensed, and worshiped as a means to make a fortune, to become rich and, even if by less than honest means, to make one's purse overflow.

Furthermore, Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money [Mammon]." Thus, Jesus means that the aims and efforts of the children of men can be gathered under two heads, the service of *Jehovah* and the service of *Mammon*; a service that makes one pledge his soul and strength to either Jehovah or Mammon.

Jesus observed that there were more than a few who wanted to serve neither the one nor the other exclusively but who attempted to unite the service of both: on the Sabbath *Jehovah* and during the days of the week *Mammon*; Jehovah on Zion and at the great feasts, but Mammon in their vocation and life in society. Against this, Jesus protested. That is not possible, says your Savior; you cannot serve two masters. You must choose between Jehovah and Mammon. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

Jesus thereby took a stand. He branded the service of money and of capital, the pursuit of the favor of Fortune and dedication to the service of Money, as *sinful*, as not of God but of the Devil and as directly contrary to the service of our God—a crass and cutting statement that opposes both the priests of Fortune and the choir boys of Socialism, spokesmen who are driven by virtually no other motive than to improve their own social position. However, no matter how it may be taken, Jesus' statement about Mammon sets the tone and governs all his

preaching. Jesus turns against Money the moment it tries to act as a power that does not stand in the service of the Lord.

The second basic idea, which goes together with the first and follows from it, is this:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.¹³

This saying touches *the goal* toward which our lives should always be directed, and, as such, it pertinently and squarely opposes the pursuits of the world, especially in this century.

Financial power, climbing higher, collecting treasures in stocks and precious metals, purchasing houses and landed properties, becoming the master of earthly goods—this, it may safely be said, is the main thought that exercises the heads and hearts and senses nowadays at the stock exchange and in the world of our young people.

Everything stalks money. Everything thirsts for money. Virtually all senses and thoughts are set on acquiring money. To gain control over money people will use cunning and guile; they will cheat and deceive each other; they will risk the goods of their wives and children, and sometimes even the goods of strangers that have been entrusted to them. Everything is measured by money. Whoever is rich is a celebrated and honored man.

This is just what Jesus does *not* want. He sets himself diametrically *against* it. He proclaims that a world or a people who aim at it and pursue it corrupt themselves spiritually in the process. Storing up all kinds of treasures in order to heap fortune upon fortune, and imitating the financial barons on a small scale he regards as cursed.

He does not want and will not tolerate the laying up of such treasures. The soul's longing and the heart's desire must be focused on something entirely different—on spiritual goods, on heavenly goods, on the treasures that neither moth nor rust corrupt and where no thief can break through and steal.

Jesus says that gold makes your human heart materialistic, for, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The thirst for money results in money's assimilating and annexing your heart; in making you lose all that is human, lofty, noble; and in debasing yourself as a human being and creature of God.

¹³ Matthew 6:19–21.

Closely connected with this is the third basic idea about social relationships in the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that you should desire no other treasures than what you need for your *daily sustenance*. Jesus expresses this in two ways. First, there is the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, where all prayer for earthly needs is confined to the sober entreaty: "Give us this day our daily bread." Then there are those beautiful words—oft repeated yet seldom practiced and understood—about the birds of the air:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.¹⁴

This is the weapon against all the temptation inherent in money and goods. Your *desire* dominates you. Money and goods are a temptation because physically and socially we have all sorts of needs and all sorts of wants. We must eat and drink; we must cover our nakedness; we need a place to live; and ever so much more. The desire to acquire provisions for our everyday needs is legitimate in itself, but it is precisely at this point that temptation slips in, for the moment we make our needs *too great* we are in the enemy's power.

Against that Jesus puts a threefold *weapon* in our hands: first, that we moderate our desires; second, that we vest our hopes not in the creature but in our God; and third, that we place the needs of our soul higher than our bodily needs.

If your heart yearns for luxuries and delicacies, then the prayer, "Give me my daily bread," has no meaning for you. Then it is a lie upon your lips. You pray the Lord's Prayer truthfully, that is, from the heart, only when your desire

¹⁴ Matthew 6:25–34.

is for nothing other than the *morsel of bread*, only when you receive and value everything else as a free additional gift from your God.

This is Jesus' appeal for simplicity, moderation, and soberness of life. Free yourselves by limiting your desires. Become spiritually strong by hardening yourself in material respects. This is a basic idea of Jesus, which is thus diametrically opposed to our century's propensity constantly to increase our income and surround ourselves with luxuries and so intensify the power and influence of gold on our hearts.

A certain Reverend Barnett reports that he recently traveled through Japan and found, to our shame as Christians, that social relationships in that country are today much better than they are in ours.¹⁵ This is what he writes,

Rural life is well loved in Japan, and the majority of the people have absolutely no desire for the titillation of sensations that the great cities offer. In Japan one also finds little outward display of luxury. The morals and habits of the different social classes bear a remarkable resemblance to each other, and the rich do not make the poor jealous with their fine carriages, proud dwellings and precious jewels. The wealthy do love to acquire beautiful and remarkable works of art, yet they act with a certain moderation in doing so. The population accordingly cannot reconcile itself to the great European houses that ministers and other high-ranking civil servants order to be built for themselves. Thus, wealth is not invested in matters of no general public use, but is more available than elsewhere for productive labor.

Remarkable [Rev. Barnett goes on to say] is the similarity of manners between the different classes of society. Rich and poor are polite and urbane. The employer and the employee cannot be told apart by their external behavior. Both are tidy and neat in their appearance, easy in their movements, moderate, and restrained. The child of the high civil servant attends the same school as that of the workman, and they sit beside each other. The upper classes know that their children will not pick up bad manners from their playmates. As a result of this relative equality, a friendly relationship obtains between the rich and the poor that disposes the former to bestow largesse when needed and the latter to accept it with equanimity.

Remarkable too is what he adds: namely, that the people of Japan, so much more than we, love the beauty of nature, pay attention to the birds of the air, and

¹⁵ Samuel A. Barnett, "The Poor of the World: India, Japan, and the United States," *Fortnightly Review* 54, no. 320, 1 August 1893, 207–22. This essay was reprinted in Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, *Practicable Socialism: Essays on Social Reform* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), 30–51. Kuyper refers in particular to the account appearing on pages 46–47.

consider the lilies of the field. Yet Japan is not saturated with the spirit of Christ; it lives only off remnants of common grace.

O, how things could be different among us if only the confession of Christ raised social relations, like those that already exist in Japan, to a still higher level—if indeed, by restraining and limiting our needs and placing our trust more in God than in the creature, we freed ourselves from the anxious temptation that is inherent in Money for both the rich and the poor.

Alas, people read the Sermon on the Mount and find it beautiful, but they do not believe Jesus really meant it that way. They find it to be delightful poetry but spiritually too high for the prose of our lives. Even the best Christian always retains a small chapel for Mammon.

VII

Of the four basic ideas that Christ expressed in his Sermon on the Mount concerning social relationships, our previous article looked at *three*. That leaves one still to be examined.

This last one is certainly not the least weighty, and it concerns *our possessions*. The first basic idea was that *greed*, as such, is unholy; it is a service of *Mammon* that stands opposed to the service of God. The second was, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth”; the treasure that really enriches lies in the spiritual domain. The third was to remain free in the face of Mammon, limit your needs and do not put your trust in the creature but in your Creator. “Father, Give us *this day* our daily bread.”

These three, as you can see, are tightly knit together, and all three serve to confirm the beatitude “blessed are the poor.” In the eyes of Jesus—in the Sermon on the Mount, and really throughout the Gospels—it is *not* the poor man who is pitiable. The one to be pitied is *the rich* man.

Of course, one additional basic idea now comes into play. Greed is an idol. The soul’s treasure is not *gold* but *grace*. A morsel of bread should be enough for you. Yet, and here we have the last question, what in that case is one to do, how is one to act with *property*, with what you call *yours*, with the *goods* and *gold* of which you are the master?

In the Sermon on the Mount we find three pertinent statements. First, do not insist too strictly on your property rights. Second, lend to one who appeals to you for help. Third, give alms.

Jesus does not preach community of goods. He assumes rather that for all manner of reasons the unequal distribution of property will persist. Least of all may it be argued that Jesus accepted only provisionally and temporarily the

existing unequal distribution of property as he found it while he in fact aimed at equality of possessions. This latter position is impossible because Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is describing the basis of the kingdom of heaven in its earthly order; he is telling us in this way how things will be until his coming again. This is definitely confirmed when he declares in Matthew 25 that in the day of judgment precisely those who clothed the naked and fed the hungry will enter eternal life—something that would have made no sense at all if indeed Jesus had intended that his disciples should set out directly to implement equality of possessions.

A great deal more could be said about this weighty point, for it is sad in the extreme that Christians understand and put into practice so little of Jesus' basic idea for social life. For now, however, we will not let ourselves be diverted too far but instead be content to have shown that our Savior never desired, let alone demanded, a theoretical equalization of possessions. Everywhere Christ assumes that the inequality of possessions will persist until his coming again.

Yet, we hasten to add, what Jesus does want, also in the matter of possessions, is that not *envy* but *love* should reign, and that this love should level the inequality as much as possible. Jesus does not say that all the money the rich spend on the enjoyment of life or on prestigious projects is wasted and that everything you do not need for your daily morsel of bread must be given away.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus does not stand up to say that people should drink water instead of wine and give the money thus saved to the poor. The Lord also did not condemn as wasteful Mary's pouring out upon his head a pound of very costly ointment that was worth three hundred *denarii*. Judas did that, while Jesus replied that her deed did her honor.

Jesus does censure and rebuke the possession of money and goods if people behave with them like a dog that finds a pile of juicy bones and, although it cannot possibly devour them all itself, still growls and snarls if other dogs approach because they are hungry.

That is why Jesus' first rule is: "If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well."¹⁶ An ordinary Jew wore two garments: on his bare body a woolen shirt, here called a *tunic*, and over it a square piece of cloth that he wrapped around himself as a travel blanket, here the *cloak*. Thus Jesus' statement is as trenchant as possible. It is not about a dispute before a judge about a parcel of land or a lamb from the flock, much less about pearls or jewels; it is a lawsuit about an absolute necessity: the clothes a person wears on his back.

¹⁶ See Matt. 5:40 and Luke 6:29.

The ordinary tendency of our heart is to be offended and annoyed and to rise to the defense of our right to our property. However, this is so wrong and reprehensible in Jesus' eyes that he sooner sets as the rule from his side: "If someone wishes to dispute your rights, even to the clothes you wear, then do not growl like a dog over its bone, but yield, and grant him even more than he demands, so that through your entire deportment you may shame him and in this way arrest the injustice in his heart." It is not greed that must overcome greed, but forbearance and quiet sufferance that must triumph over injustice.

Jesus' second pertinent statement has to do with *lending*. *Lending* is different from giving *alms*. It is a *temporary* leveling of an excessive inequality in possessions. John the Baptist had already established the rule: "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food [i.e., whoever has a *double* portion of food] is to do likewise."¹⁷

In actual fact, the situation in the world is always such that two people stand side by side, one of whom has two beds to sleep on, two garments to wear, and two portions of food for his hunger, while the other has no bed to lie on, no raiment to cover his nakedness, and no food to ease his hunger. This cries out to heaven.

Jesus is not speaking of luxury goods, nor is John. There is mention only of the three things that people cannot do without. Now the gospel demands, by the mouth of Jesus' herald and by the mouth of Jesus himself, that a feeling of humanity and love square this imbalance. Such situations must not be tolerated. All such inequality among Christians, if it persists, is sinful in the sight of the Lord.

It is in this sense that *lending* is to be understood. It is not that someone who has a thousand guilders must give three hundred guilders to just anybody who comes along with a request. That refutes itself. For then the man who gave the guilders could ask to have them back immediately, as a loan, and the other, given the same rule, would have to give them back right away.

No, the intention is that where need exists, but need caused by *temporary* inconvenience such that alms would be out of place and yet help is needed, you should not withdraw your hand but instead help your brother in such a way that he is both helped and later, by paying back what he has received, is left free of debt.

Lending is therefore never in order unless there is ground for expecting repayment. When this prospect is missing, one does not lend, one gives alms.

This brings us naturally to the third weapon that we shall wield against the inequality of property. *Alms* is a word derived from a Greek word that means *mercifulness* or *compassion*. It is therefore not *alms* if you give something in order to be rid of an annoying supplicant. It is not *alms* if you give something

¹⁷ Luke 3:11.

in order to gain honor. Even less is it *alms* if you provide assistance in order to earn your salvation. The giving of alms should be the fruit of a stirring of compassion in your heart. You see a need, a want, a pain, and the very sight should stir you as a human being. The inner stirring of your heart should arouse your compassion. If you are so moved in your soul that you are *ready* to give and feel you *must* give in order to relieve this need, this pain, this want, then, but only then, are you giving *alms*.

The fact that alms are regarded nowadays as a humiliation is our fault, because we Christians have helped to degrade alms to a sign of inferiority, thus insulting the poor. To receive alms is no more degrading than it is degrading to be rescued by someone when you fall into the water or to need someone to watch over you when you lie sick and helpless in bed.

That is precisely why Jesus insists so strongly that all outward show should be avoided—for everything that smacks of show is fatal to mercy, and thus to alms. The basic rule for alms is found in Matthew 9:13, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” It is a rule that holds for all Christians, hence first of all for the Church, and it is not least of all the Diaconate that has violated (and continues to violate) this lofty rule through their callous, chilly, often humiliating “distributions.”

If we now pull all this together, then no doubt can remain that to some extent Christ definitely did desire a certain sort of equivalency, a *para-equality* of possessions.

This is not communism, which did not exist in the first Jerusalem congregation either, as is clear from Peter’s saying to Ananias, “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?”¹⁸

Nevertheless, it is a certain *para-equality*, that is, a certain equalization insofar as the ordinary requirements of life are concerned. *Shelter, bed, clothing* and the *daily morsel* must not be scanty and insufficient but such that these needs are met for all alike, and then for all alike not through coercion but through the power of charity and mercy.

This is the right that the poor have, for Christ’s sake, with respect to those possessing more. Those who possess more but fall short in this matter are not only unmerciful but commit an injustice, and for that injustice they will suffer the punishment of eternal judgment in eternal pain.

Such, and not otherwise, are the four foundations that Christ has laid down in the Sermon on the Mount for the social relationships among his own people. No one should regard this as if it were a peripheral matter and as if it is merely men-

¹⁸ Acts 5:4.

tioned in passing in the Sermon on the Mount and does not really touch the root of the matter, for as we already observed, Matthew 25 proves *exactly the opposite*.

If it is true that Christ in the Last Judgment will judge first and foremost whether we have clothed the naked and fed the hungry, then it follows directly from this that these *basic* ideas of Jesus about social relationships are at the same time the *main* ideas in his teaching about the kingdom. Precisely for this reason, there is no deeper mark of disgrace on Christendom than the curse of pauperism, which has broken out so dreadfully precisely among the baptized nations.

If there are any “practicing Christians” who live off their wealth year in, year out, constantly laying up treasures on earth while hunger and poverty continue to inflict suffering—let them see to it how they may still escape, upon reading and rereading Matthew 25, the terrible word of the Lord: “For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink.... Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these,” so ends the word of Christ, “these will go away into eternal punishment.”

VIII

The four basic characteristics connected with social relationships that we found presented in the Sermon on the Mount were confirmed by Christ again and again in his ongoing ministry. Yet, one thing must never be forgotten; it is mainly with respect to this point that the Social Democrats have got Christ wrong, namely, that almost all Jesus’ statements in the social area have to do with the *kingdom of heaven*.

This point is crucial because it sharply distinguishes our own efforts in the social area from comparable efforts by the men of the Revolution. Among them, social need is regarded as something in itself, and discussion of it extends *exclusively* to relieving the *material* needs of the poor and giving them “a decent living.” Of course they will add that such an improvement in their lot will at the same time have the effect of once again elevating the oppressed *morally* and *intellectually*. For the time being these are just so many words and meanwhile they restrict people’s horizon to existence in this life. No account is taken of people as transcending earthly life and called to eternal glory, with the result that man’s true *higher* “decent living” is left out of consideration.

Of such striving one finds *nothing* at all in Christ. There is no doubt that Christ opposes the social dominance of money, that he seeks to temper sinful inequality, and that he aligns himself not with the great but with the little folk on earth—yet never otherwise than *in connection with the kingdom of heaven*.

The misery already suffered on earth certainly broke his heart at times and aroused in Jesus' bosom feelings of the most profound pity. Yet Jesus shrank back even more from the "eternal pain," from "hell," where "the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." However much earthly suffering may bear down upon us, Jesus still regarded this as a blessing if it breaks the pride of our hearts and drives us to flee eternal perdition. His entire social thrust (if we may put it that way) lies in the incisive word: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"¹⁹

Social reformers of every stripe who appeal to Jesus and yet aim at nothing but relieving worldly burdens wholly misunderstand Jesus' intentions and are quite wrong to invoke his name; and as long as they do not turn personally to the Savior of the world, they will never be able to bridge the deep, broad chasm that separates them from the Redeemer of the world. The gospel is and remains that *God so loved the world that whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life.*

For us too, as Calvinists, there will always be a gulf separating us from the Socialists (as they are called today). We both commiserate with the suffering of the oppressed, we both endeavor to improve this situation, and in doing so we both oppose Mammon. Nevertheless, what separates us inexorably is that they will never lift a finger to save people from eternal perdition, whereas we Calvinists, as confessors of Christ, do not for a moment wage even the struggle against social injustice otherwise than in connection with the kingdom of heaven. This is the wide gulf that separates Calvinists and Socialists and that Patrimonium has never forgotten.²⁰ That is why the spiritual element stands in the foreground even in Patrimonium's social program. If men should be found in our ranks who have lost sight of this unbreakable connection with the kingdom of heaven and who when reminded of this sin have not repented, then they do not belong in our midst but are evidently Socialists, *not* Calvinists.

In these articles, we strongly emphasize not only the four basic ideas in the Sermon on the Mount but also this connection of *Jesus' social program* (if we may put it that way) with the kingdom of heaven.

On this point we may not give in. When papers such as the *Dagblad van 's Gravenhage*²¹ and circles of prominent people attack us as if we were Socialists because we hold firmly to the social program of Christ, they show only that they

¹⁹ Mark 8:36.

²⁰ Patrimonium is the name of the League of Christian Workingmen, founded in 1876.

²¹ Kuyper is referring to a conservative daily newspaper published in The Hague.

have shrugged off any respect for Jesus' word and grasp nothing of the meaning of the kingdom of heaven.

It is only from this standpoint that the proper light falls on Jesus' reply to the *rich young man*. This young man was from the wealthier class and already possessed many goods. Yet he was not a loafer or a layabout but a young man with a kind of legalistic religion and a certain fear of God in his heart. He was even personally pious in the sense that he felt attracted to Jesus, provided only that he could remain as he was and in a certain sense be an ornament for the cause of Christ precisely through his high social position.

"Good Teacher," he inquired, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This question is all too seldom heard among our own rich young men nowadays. Then came Jesus' answer:

You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.

However, at this he succumbed. For the story continues:

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus ... said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" Jesus said to them again, "... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

That this was no exaggeration but was meant seriously may be inferred from what the disciples asked in response to this perplexing saying, and from what Jesus said in reply. "And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.'"²²

Do not pass over this too lightly. Jesus states very clearly here that the possession of money and goods, as soon as it acquires the character of wealth and luxury, is a hindrance, an obstacle, a stumbling block on the road that leads to the kingdom of heaven. The link between that kingdom and *the poor*, drawn so clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, is here not only denied and disputed when it concerns the rich of this world but even pronounced impossible without special, *very special* grace.

In this meeting with the rich young man the contrast between *capitalism* and the *kingdom of heaven* is *absolute*. Even a man of *capital* can be saved, but not

²² See Matt. 19:16–26; Mark 10:17–27; and Luke 18:18–27.

unless God the Lord bestows miraculous grace upon him and conveys the camel through the eye of the needle.

Entirely in the same vein, Christ accordingly depicts the disastrous end of the self-serving capitalist in this striking parable:

And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’”²³

After painting this true-to-life portrait, Jesus adds ever so earnestly, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God”; while he prefaced the parable with these cutting words: “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

It is therefore noteworthy that Jesus himself possessed nothing but the garments he wore around his body. As he hung on the cross and died for the sins of the world, his cloak and his coat were the only things he possessed, which under the prevailing law of executions could fall as booty to his tormentors.

Jesus owned nothing more and nothing else. Even less than the foxes or the birds, he had no place to lay his head. During all those years with his companions, he lived on gifts of love, on charity.

Indeed, lest money should break the power of his kingdom, he expressly instructed his apostles that they should carry out their mission without possessions. When he first sent them out he said, “Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey,” “nor sandals nor a staff.”²⁴

Thus one should certainly never say that social relationships were a side issue for Jesus. In the Gospels the issue comes up again and again. It is explained both theoretically and practically in every possible manner. It forms one of the *salient* points in the whole of Jesus’ preaching. Anyone who denies or disputes this is lacking in respect for the Word of the Lord. Anyone who bows before this Word must stand on our side in this matter.

²³ Luke 12:16–21.

²⁴ Matthew 10:9–10.

IX

In keeping with the principles explicated in the previous articles, our Savior chose the side of the little, silent folk in the land—so conspicuously, in fact, that he was reproached for having flattered and seduced the people and having incited them to riot. Some said openly, “No, he is leading the people astray” (John 7:12).

This explains why the prominent in society, even when they believed in him, kept themselves more or less at a distance, while the multitude followed him warmly and endorsed him publicly. We have already called attention to the furtive deportment of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea; yet it is eminently worth noting what John 12:42–43 says in this regard that “many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it . . . for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

Compare that now to the bold, spirited love that the little folk bore our Savior as they thronged around him without hesitation, followed him along the way and when he entered Jerusalem even strewed palm branches in his path and sang *Hosanna* to him.

To be sure, some have noted, in opposition to this, that shortly afterward the people chose for Barabbas and called for a cross for Jesus. This objection, however, has no weight and in no way proves the fickleness of the multitude, as if they acclaimed him one day and demanded his crucifixion the next. Some interpret it that way; and so it has been brayed forth a hundred times in oratorical style, but it is not correct. For the multitude who strewed palm branches in Jesus’ path were the little people from the *countryside*, probably from Galilee, who were making their way to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, while the screamers for Barabbas belonged to the lower classes of the more cultured and highly developed *capital city*.

And yet even viewed in this way, the angry cry of *Crucify him! Crucify him!* may not be charged to the account of the Jerusalem plebeians, for the Evangelist states expressly that it was the priests—we would say the preachers—who went about among the crowd advising them to choose Barabbas.

There is only one well-to-do citizen of Jerusalem of whom it is known that he honored and supported Jesus. We are referring to the man in whose upper room Jesus celebrated the Passover. Yet take note, this man too preferred anonymity. His name is not mentioned once, and Jesus does not refer to him by his name but by the ass standing tethered before his door.

To the simple in the land, by contrast, Jesus felt so strongly attracted personally that once, when the crowd pressed in upon him, his mother and brothers advised him to be careful. He did not fail to stretch his hands openly toward the

multitude and to proclaim loudly that those people were “his mother, his brothers, and his sisters” if they followed him in truth.

He thanked his Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, that he had hidden the mysteries of his kingdom “from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.”

Those little folk toiled and served and worked in the sweat of their brow; and Jesus observes *how the great of the earth exercise lordship over them*, yet also how the rules of his kingdom derive more from these little folk. *It shall not be among you as with the great of the earth.* For Jesus came to serve, not to rule; and whoever would be great among you must be a *servant*.²⁵

Among “employers” (as we would call them nowadays) there was one featured by Jesus who even as late as the ninth hour hired the “unemployed” who were standing idle in the marketplace and still paid them a full day’s wages. Whoever had given to one of these little ones who believed in him even a cup of cold water, he or she would receive eternal recompense in Jesus’ future.

Furthermore, what Jesus stresses above all else is that intimacy with our socially lower brothers should not get lost. Notice how often Jesus speaks of the well-off man who brings in people from “the streets and lanes,” from “the highways and hedges,” until his house is filled and allows them to sit at his table.²⁶ Even if we concede that Jesus’ parables owed this picture to oriental hospitality, still it is clear that he purposely took the good element in this hospitality and raised it to a principle. For in Luke 14:12–14, we read these most remarkable words:

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Here Jesus speaks in a manner indicating that the feasts that do the rounds among the well-to-do, such that one invites the other and is invited back in return, do not have his sympathy. He admonishes us, rather, to invite the poor and needy to our table, so that they can enjoy the taste not only of a good meal but also of our fellowship and brotherly love. In Jesus’ estimation, this is so far from being a side issue that he links it to a wage, an eternal wage, when the time comes for the resurrection of the dead.

²⁵ See Matt. 20:25–27 and 23:11–12; and Luke 22:24–27.

²⁶ Luke 14:21, 23.

Jesus, therefore, had nothing against the more well-to-do. They too receive his saving love. He also visited the home of the wealthy Zacchaeus. However—and this is telling—Zacchaeus was a man who gave not a tenth but *five* tenths to the poor—*half* of his wealth. *Half* of what he received annually Zacchaeus gave to the poor, and yet no special word of praise escapes Jesus' lips to commend him for that act. Jesus is flat-out silent about it.

Yet if you would like to know when Jesus' lips do praise alms, it is when he sees the poor widow cast her mites into the temple treasury, as told in Luke 21:1–4:

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

"They all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty." If Jesus now sees from his heaven how our little folk in the land give for their church and school and the like, even beyond their capacity, while so many who live in abundance are stingy and cold, would his approval not rest, even today, on the generous among the little folk?

And so, we come to the closing scene in which our Savior immortalized and sealed his relationship to rich and poor for all times: his moving parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."

This is moving; this is breathtaking. It makes an end of all disputes about Jesus' view of the needy. The *sinful* inequality in people's lot in life offends Jesus, and his wrath is ignited at the hardness of those who have. Here everything is

dreadfully *serious*. Lazarus is pronounced blessed, and the rich man, through his own fault, is the spoil and prey of eternal perdition.

X

No one can say anything against the preceding nine articles. They were simply taken from the gospel, and they pitted this *gospel* against the *revolution* that sin has brought about in the world of property and social relations. In fact, all we did was assemble the various passages in the Gospels that bear on social relationships, link them together, and let them speak for themselves.

That this *seemed* new can only be ascribed to the astounding way in which the preaching of the Word has failed to bring this part of the gospel before the church to explain it and to apply it. Preachers remain caught up in the *spiritual*. Stuck in the same circle of thought, they neglect to preach the *full* Christ, whose gospel shows so clearly that he also wanted to impact social life—that he judged it as it was and desired it to be more sanctified.

We do not want to reproach our current preachers too harshly for this, for they have only continued onward in the one-sided track of their predecessors. They were accustomed to it—so much so, in fact, that “the rich man and Lazarus” seemed to be treated properly only when the social element was eliminated from it and everything was applied *spiritually*. Had they not treated the Good Samaritan in the same way? Was that parable not really concerned with the saving of our souls, and was the inn not the church and the innkeeper the minister of the Word?

Still, a *gentle* reproach is not altogether out of place. Cries of distress were heard loudly on every side and social abuses were growing more unbearable all the time. People are asking constantly what the Church can do to calm the social unrest. Is it then not sad to see how seldom the preachers have felt what an incisive force the power of the Christian gospel is to draw the wealthy away from their capitalistic tendencies and the poor from their socialistic inclinations?

“Take heed, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity,” proclaims God’s Word, testifying in this way that in this world the poor and the little man, too, remains sinful and can be tempted to sin by the provocation of luxury.²⁷

²⁷ Psalm 125:3 (*Statenvertaling*); compare the ESV: “For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.”

Therefore, our appeal goes out once again to the ministers of the gospel, not only among the *Gereformeerden* but also among the *Hervormden*,²⁸ that they should muster the courage to remain silent no longer about the Word of their Lord concerning the needy but to put the trumpet to their lips and proclaim his holy gospel also with a view to our earthly circumstances.

Actually, it is shocking and outrageous the way that prevailing conditions and personal relationships in our Christian society *blaspheme* the person and word of our blessed Savior. After all, also on the paths of social life he has left us an example, so that we can walk in his footsteps. Of how many Christians among us can it be truly said that also in *social respects* they are followers of their Savior?

We have not disguised the fact that in all probability our words during the elections were too strident, too thoughtless, too little in tune with the sacred melody that we had heard from Jesus' lips. However, where were the affluent and the prominent among our Christians who upon hearing our words called out to us:

You are speaking too stridently; you should let your words be more loving; but we do thank you for reminding us once again of the basic idea of our Savior in the social field. It is indeed so true that whoever lets himself be led by the gospel, and whoever imitates Jesus, must stand on the side of the little people and the oppressed of the earth.

Alas, it was not to be. A rare Zacchaeus cheered us on, but the Nicodemuses and Josephs went into hiding. Others protested vociferously against us. This was a cause of profound grief to us. Can it be that the salt has lost its savor among us? Do people no longer bow and submit to the Word? Is the Christ of God no longer the sacred ideal that beckons to us all? Even the Rothschilds with their titanic capital have found defenders among us. This makes our heart weep, for it harms the honor of our confession and deadens the appeal of the gospel.

Against the *Revolution*, the *Gospel!* To be sure; but woe unto you if you take just half the gospel of our Savior and admonish submission, while concealing the divine mercy of the Christ of God for the socially oppressed and for those who must bear a cross.

²⁸ *Gereformeerden*: members of the free Reformed Churches in the Netherlands; *Hervormden*: members of the semi-established Dutch Reformed Church. Kuyper, but also Lohman, belonged to the former, after seceding from the latter in 1886. In Lohman's soon-to-be-organized breakaway party (the *Free Antirevolutionaries*), the *Hervormden* were in the majority, as were the more affluent of the middle and upper classes.

Let everyone personally face the Lord. We judge no one. Only this we pray, that people will permit us and leave us free to hold high the banner of the gospel also in the social field, so that the rich man see the danger and guard his soul, and the poor man renounce murmuring and greed.

We have testified, for a quarter century, that our social relationships are *un-Christian* and that a *sinful* inequality has supplanted the inequality desired by God. We have felt obliged and compelled to raise our Christian voice with boldness and passion and without respect of persons, asking men to resist the Mammon of our century and to choose the side of the little folk in the land. We have never obscured the fact that according to Jesus' own word, and the word of his holy apostles and the voice of history, there will always be very few rich people among the children of God, and that the grace of God is drunk most deeply in the circles of the little folk from among whom Jesus preferred to choose his friends.

Can anyone deny this? Dare anyone contradict this? Do people not see—in the capital city and the seat of government²⁹ as well as in our towns and villages—that it is indeed so and not otherwise?

When from the side of democratic socialism and anarchism an enticing, defiant call is targeted also at *our* working people and little folk [*kleine luyden*], with the aim of making them forsake their God, stimulate their greed, and inflame their passions, is it then not our calling, our bounden duty, to make the voice of our Savior heard in reply to those cries out of the depths, and yes, to quell that greed but also to implant the spirit of mercy and the tone of holy sympathy in their hearts?

Of course, that many do not follow us in this matter and even judge us harshly does not only partly impair our strength but also calls forth excesses in words and deeds that we, too, find offensive.

Who among the mighty of the earth is blameless before his God if he condemns such excesses yet shuts his ears to the word we recalled earlier? "Take heed, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity."

Therefore, we care little if people call out to us that we flatter and mislead the people. We *may* not, we *can* not, we *will* not fail, in the name of Jesus, to raise this testimony in this generation. Even if people should leave us standing alone, we would continue to cry out as long as we were given breath.

We respect the notables among Christians; we thank God that even among those of high social rank he has plucked a few out of the fire; we value highly the blessing they can bring us. Thus precisely for this reason the voice may not be

²⁹ That is, in Amsterdam and The Hague.


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stifled that tries to persuade them to follow in Jesus' footsteps also in the social field. Even in the midst of social unrest they can be a credit to their Savior, but only if, like Jesus, they stretch their hands toward the multitude and say with undivided heart, "These are my mother, and my brothers, and my sisters," and so keep them from greed and iniquity.