

THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF EVANGELIZATION

George Hoffman

Rev. Hoffman, Teddington, England, is the Director of TEAR Fund (The Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund).

We would like to reaffirm that the meeting of human need in whatever form it confronts us is simply obedience to the command of God and, as Paul says: "A faithful confession of the Gospel of Christ."

We do not believe therefore in evangelization *through* social service. We recognize that social service must be an integrated part of our evangelization. It is in itself an essential expression of the love of God for his world.

We deplore the disparities and uneven distribution of the resources in God's world. And we repent of our corporate and individual identification with a status quo which exploits, perpetuates, or at best ignores the factors which create conditions that dehumanize our fellowmen and degrade the image of God in which they were made. And we must devote ourselves to a far greater measure of sacrificial involvement in society in the Name and for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We recognize that much of the poverty in the world is poverty of opportunity and not just poverty *per se*. We acknowledge therefore the need to devote more thought and action to helping those who are unable to help themselves and are the victims of injustice and exploitation. We were rebuked by Prov. 31:8, "To speak up for the poor and the needy and see they get justice." And unless we are to act like ostriches in the face of the overwhelming teaching of Scripture, we must fulfill our rights and responsibilities on behalf of those whose rights and responsibilities are proscribed or denied.

However, we saw a danger of being preoccupied with world problems in terms of impersonal facts and figures remembering that "statistics don't bleed — humans do." Surely we are called in the words of a popular song to be "people who love people." As Jesus did. As Eliza Doolittle said to Prof. Higgins in the musical *My Fair Lady*, the world is saying to us as Christians, "Don't just tell me you love me — show me."

There has been much talk here about our being all one in Christ Jesus. The time has come, we believe, to stop just professing it and to start practicing it. In this connection we will never learn to bear one another's burdens until we start to care for one another as brothers. As the Living Bible translates I John 3:18, "Let us stop just saying that we love people: let us really love them and show it by our actions."

To fulfill our respective goals we desire to forsake our overt identification as agencies and organizations for the good of the people we are seeking to serve. We must cooperate for Christ's sake. So often the only reason for an organization's independence is to promote its own program as a fund-raising flag. And we must beware of capitalizing on the plight of those who suffer for the sake of the funds we are seeking to raise.

We call therefore upon evangelicals worldwide to cooperate more effectively and to coordinate more efficiently as we assist those we seek to serve. This could prevent the scandal of unnecessary duplication and wasted time, energy, and limited resources.

We recognize only too well that the heart of all our society's problems is the problem of the human heart. Nevertheless we urge evangelicals to think through the basic principles that relate to our social responsibilities. Let us face up to the commands of Scripture in meeting human need and tackling the social problems that confront us at local, national, and international levels.

Finally we recall the words of Dr. Josip Horak of Yugoslavia speaking at the Berlin Congress: "The most important thing for Christians today is not simply to talk about their opportunities but to use them."