

A.M. VAN PESKI: "THE OUTREACH OF DIAKONIA" <sup>1</sup>

The study reviewed here concentrates on the problem of the outreach of Christian service. Although the social and economic techniques of international assistance have become far more efficacious and expert and although the resources for a massive increase in assistance seem to be available, a sincere will to use them to the full is not always apparent. In the opinion of the author, this predicament can only be interpreted in one way, namely that the outreach of service to which we are humanely committed is questionable to our contemporaries.

Firstly the essentials concerning serving man in the Old Testament are considered, followed by a study of the large part service occupies in the New Testament. Some consequent features of service in the early Church complete this picture. Leaping across many centuries there are a few case studies of types of service in later times. They include, amongst other, the Society of Friends (Quakers) which impressed with the quality of its service.

The third and largest part of the book is devoted to service to man in our present world, in the national context of the Welfare State and in the international field. In this section van Peski argues that the term Societal State is to be preferred for the present problem. The emphasis of the term societal is upon group structures and functioning rather than upon associational relationships. A discussion of the operational dimensions of the Churches is then followed by a selection of institutions which the author tried to sound as to their contribution to the realization of interdependence, solidarity and responsibility in present-day world reality. One of the institutions chosen is the Red Cross because its outreach-value, the positions in cooperation with others and the limitations of its activities provide an excellent test for what this type of organization (voluntary and private agencies) is able to accomplish.

In a short survey of the history of the Red Cross, the author underlines the religious background of Dunant and his influence on the creation of the YMCA. In a paragraph on Red Cross activities, international assistance in the case of natural calamities is the main

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topic. He describes the early history and the stages of development of this assistance, with such personalities as Gustave Moynier and Fr. Nansen. He stresses the value of the bilateral or regional agreements on mutual aid as well as the agreements for common action where the principle that Mr. J. Pictet called auxiliarity found new expression. This partial integration which is common in the societalizing processes of our time as van Peski has made clear, has left the fundamental Red Cross principles unviolated. In depicting the principles that have guided and still guide the development of Red Cross the author follows the description given by Mr. Pictet in his well-known book "Red Cross Principles". When reviewing the motivations and limitations of the Red Cross, van Peski warns against its tendency not to assume too great a diversity of tasks. That the Red Cross must take care, according to Mr. Pictet, not to dissipate its strength without any necessity seems absolutely sound in so far as it will stand aside, if any other organization can settle a given humanitarian problem satisfactorily, but the danger of this prudence is that it might shrink from new tasks as yet unsatisfactorily fulfilled, where it could at least consider offering its advice and/or cooperation. For example world poverty and social development, in the opinion of van Peski, invite courageous thinking by the Red Cross; the issue could certainly be brought under the heading of prevention of war.

Other organizations are studied in this part of the book, for example the World Council of Churches. In an epilogue the author tries to formulate his personal answer to the perennial question, what makes Christian service distinctive. That this cannot be the definite answer is in accordance with the very tenor of his study of the urgent problem of international service: it is fluid and requires new and further thought. He thus, in his thinking, joins Max Huber and those directly or indirectly involved in the task of building a better world who will follow him with great interest along the path on which thought constantly reactivates action.

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