

Introduction to Vida Scudder, “The Social Teachings of the Church Year”

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“The Social Teachings of the Church Year” by scholar, mystic, activist, and Christian Socialist Vida Dutton Scudder (1861–1954) was presented in 1918 as a lecture at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts and subsequently published in the first volume of the *ATR*; a monograph with the same title was published three years later, including the entire liturgical year from Advent to Trinity Sunday interpreted through the lens of the social gospel movement. The original lecture was one of the first given by a woman in an Episcopal seminary. By her own admission, Scudder published the monograph for “liberal Christians with affection for the Prayer Book.” Scudder believed that spiritual formation should be available to all, and thus, she wrote “The Social Teachings of the Church Year” not for trained theologians, but for the people of God, schooled in faith and love through participation in the seasons of the church year.

Confirmed in the Episcopal Church in the 1870s by Phillips Brooks at Trinity Church, Boston, Scudder’s spirituality and social consciousness was soaked in the liturgical life of the *Book of Common Prayer*. A devout Anglo-Catholic, and considered the second founder of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross (SCHC)—a third-order devotional society for women combining social activism with intercessory prayer—Scudder was deeply committed to the creation of a new social order infused with Christian spirituality. She profoundly believed that lasting peace on earth would only come to pass in response to humanity’s collective repentance and fervent prayers. Her belief in “Social Christianity” gave Scudder a means to connect her

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devotional life with public ministry in a church with limited vocational opportunities for women.

Interested more in understanding Christian experience than in academic theology, Scudder believed that the liturgical year was both grounded in ancient truths and a living journey of the soul. Her 1918 lecture and later monograph were inspired primarily by three political convictions. First, Scudder believed that the earth was poised on the brink of a new democratic era, whereby private capitalism would yield to some form of socialism. Secondly, she was convinced that the new world order would only be safely accomplished if religion, freed from theological abstractions, nourished the souls of Christian radicals. Lastly, Scudder's vision was grounded in the teachings of Jesus, and a catholic vision of the social order as the mystical body of Christ, present in every eucharist, the sacrament of unity, and that which brings together all creation in the kingdom of God.

Vida Dutton Scudder was a brilliant scholar, and one of the first women to attend Oxford University as a graduate student. Until her retirement in 1928 she combined a scholarly career at Wellesley College with intense social activism. For example, during one six-year period, 1887 to 1893, Scudder began the College Settlements Association, joined the Society of Christian Socialists, began her lifelong association with the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross, and with Helena Stuart Dudley founded Denison House in Boston, the third settlement house in the United States. During the same years, she became a charter member of a worker's organization, the Brotherhood of the Carpenter, and worked at the Christian Social Union. Not content to be a titular member of her many organizational alliances, Scudder actively contributed her time, skills, and financial resources to most of them.

As Scudder's spirituality and social consciousness deepened, neither her family nor her employer completely understood or appreciated her radicalism. She grew increasingly uncomfortable with a life of studying English literature, and the complacency of the church amidst so much dire poverty. She was desperate to reconcile her social activism with a life immersed in prayer and silence. Scudder experienced a mental breakdown at the age of forty and moved to Italy for two years, where she was nourished by medieval literature and the lives of mystical saints. The works of Catherine of Siena and Francis of Assisi, who were not particularly popular saints among

mainline Christians of Scudder's day, spoke to her personal despair and gave her courage to challenge the institutional church as they did in their own eras. Catherine of Siena was a role model of prayer and activism for Vida Scudder; Franciscan spirituality continued to feed Scudder's ministry throughout the rest of her life, and she became a noted authority in the field. Thirty years later, during her last trip to Italy, Scudder had a unitive experience while kneeling at the foot of the cross in San Damiano, where Francis also received his vision to rebuild the church. There and then Scudder consecrated herself to spending her life rebuilding the church to become the embodiment of Christ in the world.

Upon returning to Massachusetts from her first Italian pilgrimage, Scudder opened programs for immigrant Italians at Denison House. In 1911 she organized the Episcopal Church Socialist League, and in 1919, the Church League for Industrial Democracy. Although initially supportive of the entry of the United States into World War I, she eventually embraced pacifism. "The Social Teachings of the Church Year" was published during Scudder's initial work in the 1920s with the American Civil Liberties Union, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Until the end of her life, Scudder kept her red membership card from the Socialist Party in her home oratory. She did so as a constant reminder that social teachings are inextricably linked to gospel values, and that it was her vocation as a Christian to seek ways to usher in God's kingdom on earth.

Vida Dutton Scudder. This is a reproduction of a book published before 1923. This book may have occasional imperfections such as missing or blurred pages, poor pictures, errant marks, etc. that were either part of the original artifact, or were introduced by the scanning process. We believe this work is culturally important, and despite the imperfections, have elected to bring it back into print as part of our continuing commitment to the preservation of printed works worldwide. We appreciate your understanding of the imperfections in the preservation process, and hope you enjoy this valuable Introduction to Vida Scudder "The Social Teachings of the Church Year." ATR.pdf. Published in the Anglican Theological Review, 99.1. So frequently, the merit and worth of Mary Magdalene has been her controversy in the Church. That is the popular conception. After all, how widely spread is the belief she was married to Jesus. 18 Scudder, Vida Dutton, Social Teachings of the Christian Year (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1921), 148-51. 19 The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, 7 volumes (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1910-1915), Volume II, 92; Volume III, 96. 20 Walter Rauschenbusch, edited and introduced by Raushenbusch, Paul B., Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke Up the Church (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). 21 Hinson-Hasty, Elizabeth Beyond the Social Maze: Exploring Vida Dutton Scudder's Theological Ethics (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 24, 30-33