

Christian Socialism as a Political Ideology

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Abstract

A study of Christian Socialism is valuable at a time in which Christianity has become, in the minds of many, intrinsically associated with right-wing politics and conservatism. In addition, recent publications on this topic have focused on history and biography rather than the details of what Christian Socialists actually believed. This thesis considers that topic under three main headings: (1) 'The Basis of Christian Socialism'; (2) 'The Route to Christian Socialism'; (3) 'Christian Socialist Society'. Firstly, Christian Socialists based their socialism mainly on the Bible, church teaching and the sacraments, to a far greater extent than any other sources. Secondly, Christian Socialists called for a revolution but were committed to democratic methods, suggesting a synthesis between revolutionary and democratic socialism. In practice this can be sketched out as a three-stage process: first, persuading people of the deficiencies of capitalism and the need for socialism; second, the election of a Labour government / the persuasion of other politicians to adopt socialism; third, the establishment of socialism, brought about by a socialist government and population. Thirdly, Christian Socialists sought to create a society of co-operation and collectivism, equality, democracy and peace. Their vision of this society was for the most part highly utopian, due to the belief that the new society would be the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. There are several criticisms of Christian Socialism which have been made, both from a Christian and from a socialist perspective, over, for example, the viability of the Christian Socialist methodology and the validity of the Christian Socialist use of Scripture and church teaching. It will be concluded that the concept at the core of Christian Socialism is brotherhood, based on the idea of the universal Fatherhood of God, and that other key concepts – co-operation, equality and democracy – are derived from this. In seeking co-operation, equality and democracy Christian Socialism is not necessarily distinct from other forms of socialism, but it is distinct in drawing upon Christian theology as a basis for these concepts as well as the language to describe a future socialist society.

Introduction

A study of Christian Socialism is valuable at a time in which Christianity has become in the minds of many intrinsically associated with right-wing politics and conservatism. This issue has been highlighted by Andy Walton, Andrea Hatcher and Nick Spencer, writing for Theos, who were spurred to carry out their research investigating the “increasing number of claims that a US-style Religious Right either exists or is rapidly emerging in Britain”.¹ The researchers cite, for example, a 2011 *New Statesman* article by Andrew Zak Williams, which argued “that the Christian movements both here and in the USA clearly feel most at home on the right [...] [T]he agendas of the Christian church and the political right-wing make comfortable bed-fellows. You know the kind of thing: anti-abortion, anti-unions, opposed to same-sex marriage and tough on crime”.²

Even if we conclude with Walton, Hatcher and Spencer that there is no “Religious Right” operating in the UK – at least not as a coherent mass movement – we still have to admit that this is a reality in the United States. Daniel K. Williams writes of evangelical Christians “taking over the Republican Party” in order to further their political agenda.³ This agenda includes both social issues – such as campaigns against abortion and same-sex marriage – but has also led to Christians embracing right-wing economic ideas such as “limited government” and “free markets”; for example, 81 per cent of Tea Party activists identify themselves as Christian.⁴ The existence of this socially conservative and pro-capitalist Religious Right in the culturally-dominant US, and the perceptions of its existence here in the UK, can serve to obscure the history, traditions and ideas of left-wing Christianity in this country.

A number of excellent works about Christian Socialism have been published in the last twenty years. These include Chris Bryant’s *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (1996), Alan Wilkinson’s *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (1988) and Graham Dale’s *God’s Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100*

¹ A. Walton, A. Hatcher and N. Spencer, *Is there a ‘Religious Right’ Emerging in Britain?* (London, 2013), p.8.

² A.Z. Williams, ‘Faith should not dictate political affiliation’, *New Statesman*, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/06/god-debate-faith-grayling>; accessed 14th Dec 2015.

³ D.K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford, 2010), p.2.

⁴ D. Brody, *The Teavangelicals: The Inside Story of How the Evangelicals and the Tea Party are Taking Back America* (Grand Rapids MI, 2012), pp.9-10.

Years of Labour (2000). This thesis, however, aims at an exposition and systematisation of Christian Socialist ideology, belief and doctrine, which is not sought after by these works, which instead focus more on the history or biography of those organisations and individuals regarded as Christian Socialists.

Dale follows this approach explicitly, with chapters focusing – for the most part – on just two individuals from a particular period, for example: ‘John Wheatley and Philip Snowden: 1919-26’; ‘Eric Heffer and Tony Benn: 1980-92’; and ‘John Smith and Tony Blair: 1992 onwards’. A similar approach is followed by Wilkinson, with chapters on ‘Henry Scott Holland’, ‘Charles Gore’, ‘R.H. Tawney’ and ‘William Temple’. Later chapters include biographical sketches of key figures; for example, the chapter on ‘Politicians’ includes a section detailing the life and career of John Wheatley.⁵ The same is true of Bryant, with chapters titled ‘Parliamentary Lives’ and ‘Two Boys from Rugby’, the latter focusing on R.H. Tawney and William Temple.

For the most part these authors offer an engaging and well-researched history rather than an in-depth focus on beliefs, doctrine or ideology. There are a few exceptions to this general rule. Dale sets out a number of Christian principles – “a commitment to service”, “a sense of urgency” and an “emphasis on equality” – arguing that Christian involvement has imbued the Labour Party with these same values.⁶ Bryant also sets out some core beliefs, such as “that gross inequality is not how God would have us live; that rapacious greed and political indifference are not Christian options; that the market was made for humanity, not man for the market”, and so on.⁷ However, this does not amount to the explication or systematisation of Christian Socialism to which we are aiming. Another key text, Peter d’A Jones’ 1968 study of *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914* goes into more detail than these more recent works, but it is still a “narrative”, a work of history, with sections and chapters arranged historically rather than thematically.⁸

It is also worth noting that Dale, Wilkinson and Bryant are each what we might term “insiders”; they themselves are Christian Socialists, members of both the Christian Socialist Movement (now Christians on the Left) and the Labour Party. This is why, as part of the conclusion to his *Personal History* Bryant relates: “In 1993 I became the [Christian

⁵ A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), pp.213-5.

⁶ G. Dale, *God’s Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 Years of Labour* (London, 2000), pp.299-33.

⁷ C. Bryant, *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (London, 1996), p.313.

⁸ P. d’A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), p.435.

Socialist] Movement's Chair. Eighteen months later we opened our new Westminster office ...".⁹ It is also why Dale and Wilkinson both draw conclusions about what the Christian Socialists ought to be doing. Dale argues that the Christian Socialist "commitment to service on behalf of others must remain central to Labour politics", and concludes that "in Christ our weakness can be strength, and through prayer and perseverance we can build a society infused with the values of the rule of God".¹⁰ It is, according to Wilkinson, "time that the churches and the Left more openly reassessed the Thatcher revolution", and he praises Tony Blair and Frank Field for their "political courage in paying tribute to some of its positive features".¹¹ By contrast, this thesis is written by an outsider, and aims – as far as it is possible to achieve it – at objectivity in examining the motivations, beliefs and aims of Christian Socialism.

It be be added that Christian Socialism was a formative influence on the Labour Party, and therefore on mainstream British socialism as a whole. For example, we will see that Christian Socialism focused on ethical arguments against capitalism rather than materialistic, economic ones, which has also been true of Labour. It is also the case that Christian Socialism disavowed violence in seeking political change (we will see that this amounted to seeking a revolution by democratic means) resulting in a British socialism that did not seek a violent overthrow of the political or economic system.

The relevance of this research into Christian Socialism is therefore found in that it seeks to correct the tendency to associate Christianity with right-wing politics, by showing that there is a strong tradition of left-wing Christian thought. It also seeks to fill a gap in the existing writing on this topic by aiming at an exposition and systematisation of Christian Socialist ideology, belief and doctrine rather than a historical or biographical account. The thesis will be undertaken, as far as is possible, from a more detached standpoint, rather than from the position of a Christian Socialist researching and critiquing his own movement. Finally, Christian Socialism has had, via the Labour Party, a formative influence on British Socialism as a whole.

⁹ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.312.

¹⁰ Dale, *God's Politicians*, p.230 and p.233.

¹¹ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.248.

Research Questions

In researching this topic we should be able to find answers to the following questions:

- (1) What does Christian Socialist ideology consist of? What principles and concepts are common to Christian Socialists?
- (2) Is Christian Socialism necessarily distinctive from other kinds of socialism?
- (3) To what extent does Christian Socialism draw its ideas from theology or religious teaching, and to what extent from other sources?
- (4) What kind of society – if any – do Christian Socialists seek to create? How do they seek to create it – by revolutionary or democratic means?

The title of this thesis is ‘Christian Socialism as a Political Ideology’, and therefore it is necessary to provide working definitions of those terms. For the purposes of this thesis Christianity is identified with mainstream, orthodox, Trinitarian Christianity. This would include the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, and Nonconformist denominations such as Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists, among others; it would exclude groups such as Unitarians, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses who, for example, may have their own scriptures or reject the deity of Christ.

Socialism may be defined as that which is opposed to capitalism and the free market, desiring instead some form of collective, co-operative or planned economy and a society in which people are equal to one another and are treated as such. For the purposes of this thesis, socialism is that which seeks to replace capitalism with such a co-operative system, rather than simply making reforms to the existing system in order to alleviate the harm it is perceived to cause.

A political ideology is, in effect, a belief system consisting of beliefs about the form government should take; the way in which society, or individuals within society, should act; and the way the economy should be managed (or not, as the case may be), among other things. Carmines and D’Amico, for example, explain “that political opinions and attitudes are linked together in a coherent system”, and that, therefore, “political ideology is a set of

interconnected beliefs, held by a group of individuals”.¹² This is also the view of Teun A. Van Dijk, who writes that “whatever else ideologies are, they are primarily some kind of ‘ideas’, that is, *belief systems*”.¹³ Political ideologies are “clusters of ideas, beliefs, opinions, values, and attitudes usually held by identifiable groups”, and the purpose of this investigation is to determine which ideas, beliefs, opinions, values and attitudes are held by Christian Socialists.¹⁴

Focus of Research

Accounts of Christian Socialism sometimes begin with F.D. Maurice and his associates – men such as Charles Kingsley and Thomas Ludlow – and the inauguration of *Politics for the People* in 1848. We, however, will focus on the next generation of Christian Socialists, whose lifetimes give us a period from the late-Nineteenth to the mid-Twentieth Century. The reason for this is the suggestion gained from initial reading that these early Christian Socialists were paternalists rather than socialists. Bryant, for example, points out that “much of the first Christian Socialist writings seem no more than pious, paternalist but benevolent Toryism”.¹⁵ Wilkinson also writes of this form of Christian Socialism as “paternalistic”, adding that “Maurice held traditional views about social rank, monarchy and aristocracy and was opposed to unions. The workers should be given the vote only when they were educated”.¹⁶ The same, says Bryant, is true of Kingsley, whose “own instincts, framed partly by the rural environment in which he worked, were those of a Tory paternalist. He believed in social reform, not political reform, and his concern was as much with the morality of the poor as with their living conditions”; the concern for Kingsley and Ludlow was not to espouse socialism, but to find “what Christianity had to offer the *challenge* of socialism”.¹⁷ Insofar as this is the case, we may conclude that the Christian Socialism of this period was not socialism at all. Instead of focusing then on Maurice, Kingsley and Ludlow, we will

¹² E.G. Carmines and N.J. D’Amico, ‘The New Look in Political Ideology Research’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18 (2015), pp.206-7.

¹³ T.A. Van Dijk, ‘Ideology and Discourse Analysis’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11, 2 (2006), p.116. [Emphasis in original.]

¹⁴ M. Freedon, ‘Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy’, in G.F. Gaus and C. Kukathas, eds, *Handbook of Political Theory* (London, 2004), p.6.

¹⁵ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.41.

¹⁶ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, 18.

¹⁷ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.37 and p.41. [Emphasis mine.]

focus on “their successors in the Guild of St Matthew and the Christian Social Union”, as well as their successors in the Labour movement.¹⁸

A case-study approach was followed in order to maximise the depth of the research, with the focus on a number of key individuals who were identified during the proposal and initial reading stages of this research:

- John Clifford (1836-1923) – Baptist minister, President of the Christian Socialist League
- James Keir Hardie (1856-1915) – Labour politician, often considered the founder of the Labour Party
- Stewart Headlam (1847-1924) – Anglican minister, founded the Guild of St Matthew
- Henry Scott Holland (1847-1918) – Anglican minister, founded the Christian Social Union
- Samuel Keeble (1853-1946) – Wesleyan Methodist minister, founded the Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service
- George Lansbury (1859-1940) – Labour politician, Labour Party leader 1932-5
- Richard H. Tawney (1880-1962) – Labour political activist, economic historian
- William Temple (1881-1944) – Anglican minister, successively Bishop of Manchester, Archbishop of York and Archbishop of Canterbury
- Wilfred Wellock (1879-1972) : Labour politician, ILP MP, Independent Methodist lay preacher
- John Wheatley (1869-1930): Labour politician, founder of the Catholic Socialist Society

These individuals were chosen, in the main, because they had written books, pamphlets and articles about Christian Socialism and their own political views which provide a basis for our exposition and systematisation of Christian Socialist ideology. Several also founded their own Christian Socialist organisations, adding another aspect to the study. They were chosen to be as representative as possible: for example, of the ten, five are politicians or primarily political thinkers, while five are ministers of religion. There is a reasonable mix of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.60.

religious denominations, with five Anglicans (Headlam, Holland, Lansbury, Tawney and Temple), four Nonconformists (Clifford, Hardie, Keeble and Wellock), and a Roman Catholic (Wheatley), as well as of social backgrounds, with some – such as Headlam and Tawney – coming from quite privileged backgrounds, and others – such as Clifford and Hardie – coming from poorer, working-class backgrounds.

The individuals chosen for this study had to be those who were self-identified as Christian Socialists, or those who were consistently identified as such in the secondary material encountered at the initial reading stage. They had to be those who were, in keeping with the definitions above, genuinely socialists rather than merely social reformers, and practising Christians rather than merely those who acknowledged in some vague way the morality of Christianity. On the first point, for example, Maurice, Kingsley and Ludlow were excluded for not being genuine socialists; the same would apply to great Christian reformers such as Lord Shaftesbury and William Wilberforce.

On the second, Tony Benn, as an example, would not be included, for though he cited the ethical influence of Christianity, he did not regard himself fully as a Christian. In *God's Politicians* Dale includes a section on Benn, quoting him: “Anyone who really thinks that Clause 4 and common ownership was invented by Karl Marx [...] might go back to the Acts of the Apostles for the idea of all things in common”; He, however, also has to quote Benn’s answer to the question of whether he believed that Jesus Christ is Lord: “Since I don’t believe in lords in any shape, it is a bit difficult to acknowledge Jesus as one”.¹⁹ Bryant calls Benn an “agnostic”.²⁰ Benn’s writing of a “political commitment [which] owes more to the teachings of Jesus – without the mysteries within which they are presented – than to the writings of Marx” has echoes of Clement Attlee: “Believe in the ethics of Christianity. Can’t believe in the mumbo-jumbo”.²¹

This latter issue also caused the abandonment of an investigation into John Trevor, the Unitarian minister who founded the Labour Church Movement. It soon became apparent that Trevor and the Labour Churches could not be regarded as practicing Christianity. Jones, for example, argues that Trevor’s views “were closer to the Ethical Culture movement than to Christianity”, and states outright that the Labour Churches “were not essentially

¹⁹ Dale, *God's Politicians*, p.199.

²⁰ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.287.

²¹ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.287; Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.216.

Christian”.²² John Callaghan, in his *Socialism in Britain*, suggests that “the Labour Churches dispensed with Christianity virtually altogether”.²³ According to Trevor himself: “The attempt to bring the thought of Jesus into the life of today as a guide and standard is an anachronism [...] [T]he Labour Church is not a Christian Socialist Church, but is based simply on the conception of the Labour Movement as being itself a religious movement”.²⁴ Here we have moved beyond religious socialism to the idea of socialism as a religion. This is the difference between, for example, Stewart Headlam basing his socialist beliefs on the two Christian sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, and J. Bruce Glasier’s view that socialism itself was a sacrament.²⁵ Trevor and the Labour Church Movement were therefore omitted.

In practice, of course, this process proved to be far from an exact science. For example, near the beginning of his *Industrial Day-Dreams*, Samuel Keeble disavows the expression “Christian Socialism”, preferring instead “social Christianity”.²⁶ Wilkinson suggests that R.H. Tawney was “not happy about the idea of ‘Christian Socialism’ [...] To blend Christianity and socialism might (he considered) imperil the distinctiveness of each”.²⁷ Henry Scott Holland, on further reading, might be excluded for being a reformer rather than a socialist, while Keir Hardie might be excluded given that, at least according to Glasier, he had eventually “given up all belief in the Christian Church as an exclusive means of salvation [...] [H]e probably accepted the Bahai teaching which would include Buddha and other ‘Redeemers of Men’ in a common brotherhood”.²⁸

We could, if we were so minded, find grounds to exclude every person in this study, and be left with no study at all. This, however, does not cast doubt over the legitimacy of the study. Instead, it tells us something about the nature of Christian Socialism, and hints at its inconsistencies, internal confusions, and even contradictions, to which we shall return.

It may also be argued that the study is flawed insofar as figures which fulfil the criteria to the same extent as those included have been excluded. Such argument may be made on behalf of a large group of individuals, such as Richard Acland, Margaret Bondfield, Charles Gore, Arthur Henderson, Conrad Noel, Margaret McMillan or Phillip Snowden. A

²² Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.29 and p.458.

²³ J. Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), p.58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.29-30.

²⁵ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (Oxford, 1997), p.36.

²⁶ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.13.

²⁷ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.101.

²⁸ J. Bruce Glasier, *Keir Hardie: A Memorial* (London, 1915), pp.69-70.

particular example might be made of Gore, a key thinker who argued for the existence of “what can rightly be called a Christian socialism, by the very fact that the law of brotherhood is the law of Christ” and called for a revolution through “gradual and peaceful means”.²⁹ Such objections to the validity of this research are, however, groundless; this thesis makes no claim to being exhaustive, but rather to being representative. In the particular case of Gore, his close relationship with Scott Holland within the Christian Social Union made the inclusion of both men unnecessary. Holland was preferred on the grounds that he appeared to be identified as the more influential figure; Bryant views him as the founder of the CSU, while Wilkinson chose to subtitle his work *Scott Holland to Tony Blair*.³⁰ The exclusion here of some individuals is therefore no commentary on the worth of their contribution to Christian Socialist thought or their importance within the Christian Socialist tradition.

Methodology

As this research involves the study, interpretation and explanation of texts a hermeneutic methodology will be adopted. Michael Freeden explains that “hermeneutics is the study of the theory and practice of understanding and interpretation”.³¹ Similarly, Louis Berkhof describes it as “the science that teaches us the principles, laws and methods of interpretation”.³² Anthony Thiselton adds that “[h]ermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts”, and that this is especially the case for texts “written in another time or a context of life different from our own”; this would apply to the Christian Socialist texts with which we shall be dealing.³³

Hermeneutics, write Alvesson and Skoldberg, “is useful or the very extended sphere of research that consists in the interpretation of texts in the literal sense of the word: interviews, documents, notes from participant observation, as well as other researchers’ theories, conceptualizations and so on – in short, the working field of *discourse*”.³⁴ Eric D. Hirsch notes two functions of hermeneutic interpretation: “the understanding of meaning and

²⁹ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.80.

³⁰ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.97; Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, front cover.

³¹ M. Freeden, ‘Hermeneutics’, in L.M. Given, *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (New York NY, 2008), p.385.

³² L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids MI, 1992 – original publication 1950), p.11.

³³ A.C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids MI, 2009), p.1.

³⁴ M. Alvesson and K. Skoldberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research* (London, 2010), p.106. [Emphasis in original.]

the explication of meaning”.³⁵ From this then we can see the relevance of this methodology: it is a form of discourse analysis which aims at the understanding and explication – or explanation – of meaning. We may also observe that hermeneutics is an appropriate methodology for the study of ideology, for, as J.B. Thompson points out, “ideas circulate in the social world as utterances, as expressions, as words which are spoken or inscribed”, and that “ideology operates through language”.³⁶ It is also appropriate for a historical study, as noted by Kevin Hickson, who adopted hermeneutics as a framework for his study of the 1976 IMF crisis: “Hermeneutics is concerned with the recovery of the historical actors’ own beliefs and interpretations and the understanding of the context in which they operated”.³⁷ Note here that the point is the “recovery” of “beliefs”.

The adoption of hermeneutics is made with the assumption that the texts we shall examine have a definite meaning, which we can – or can attempt to – understand and expound. This goes against the thinking of some hermeneutic theorists, such as Heidegger, in whom “the shift is made from the primacy of the text to the primacy of the interpreter. Indeed, for Heidegger the interpreter is himself the source of meaning [...] Heidegger seems to disallow the cognoscibility of any objectively valid and determinate meaning”.³⁸ The same is true of Gadamer, who “continues the attack on objective textual interpretation by emphasizing that meaning is not to be identified with authorial intention”.³⁹ Hirsch, however, differs on this point:

Meanings that are actualized by a reader are of course the reader’s meanings – generated by him. Whether they are also meanings intended by an author cannot be determined with absolute certainty, and the reader is in fact free to choose whether or not he will *try* to make his actualized meanings congruent with the author’s intended ones. No-one disputes that a reader can *try* to realize the author’s intended meaning. The two important questions are: (1) whether he should try, and (2) whether he could succeed if he did try [...] [M]y emphatic answer to both questions is yes.⁴⁰

³⁵ E.D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago IL, 1974), p.19.

³⁶ J.B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Political Ideology* (Cambridge, 1984), p.2 and p.5.

³⁷ K. Hickson, *The IMF Crisis of 1976 and British Politics* (London, 2005), p.6.

³⁸ J. Vines and D. Allen, ‘Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Proclamation’, *Criswell Theological Review*, 1.2 (1987), p.312.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.314.

⁴⁰ Hirsch, *Interpretation*, p.8. [Emphases in original.]

Hirsch criticises those who he says argue that “genuine knowledge of an author’s meaning is impossible” and speak of the “incommutability” of “ideologies, worldviews, and so on”; borrowing a phrase of Karl Popper, he suggests that such a person “exaggerates a difficulty into an impossibility”.⁴¹ Hirsch relates that “I was once told by a theorist who denied the possibility of correct interpretation that I had not interpreted his writings correctly”, and jokes that nobody “has yet produced a textual commentary under a fair-labelling statute, with a disclaimer stating: ‘This criticism is a work of fiction; any resemblance between its interpretation and the author’s meanings are purely coincidental’.”⁴² Much more seriously, it is “the Holocaust [which] appears as a touchstone and breaking point for the whole discussion of hermeneutic re-constructionism and postmodern relativism: if there is no correspondence between language and reality [...] how then can it be said that the Holocaust has taken place?”⁴³

Vines and Allen argue that “meaning is not a construct of the interpreter’s subjectivity alone”, adding that “[u]nless we maintain the otherness or objectivity of textual meaning, then we must face squarely the fact that we could not interpret at all”; here Vines and Allen are following a traditional hermeneutic which “assumed that a text contained a determinate meaning which with the proper exegetical process could be discerned by an interpreter”.⁴⁴ Alan Cairns adds: “Dealing with what is written is the task of all true interpretation”.⁴⁵ Paul Ricoeur also firmly relates interpretation to “what is actually written”. Ricoeur’s view is that an “interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another interpretation [...] [I]f it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. The text displays a limited field of possible constructions”.⁴⁶

Hirsch describes the acquisition of knowledge as “a process rather than a static system, and the direction of the process is toward increased probability of learning the truth”.⁴⁷ This process has been modelled by hermeneutic theorists as a circle. The original hermeneutic circle rests on the assumption that “the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole”, and *vice-versa*; in this process “you begin, for

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.147-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.6 and p.157.

⁴³ Alvesson and Skoldberg, *Reflexive Methodology*, p.114.

⁴⁴ Vines and Allen, ‘Hermeneutics’, p.313 and p.310.

⁴⁵ A. Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast, 1998), p.176.

⁴⁶ P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth TX, 1976), p.79.

⁴⁷ Hirsch, *Interpretation*, p.152.

example, in some part, try tentatively to relate it to the whole, upon which new light is shed, and from here you return to the part studied, and so on".⁴⁸ The validity of this model is seen in the instructions of Berkhof: "It is not sufficient that the interpreter fixes his attention on the separate clauses and sentences; he must acquaint himself with the general thought of the writer or speaker".⁴⁹ A more recent version, termed the alethic hermeneutic circle, models the process, not from parts to whole, but from original understanding – or pre-understanding – to understanding; that understanding then becomes a pre-understanding which underlies even greater understanding, and so on.⁵⁰ According to Bengt Gustavsson our pre-understanding is the foundation to our understanding and subsequent explanation of a text.⁵¹ Alvesson and Skoldberg view these two hermeneutic circles "as complementary rather than opposed to each other".⁵²

Both models are valid for this research. For example, the work of George Lansbury was approached with some prior knowledge – a pre-understanding – of Lansbury's life and thought, but this was to be modified and made clearer as more of Lansbury's work was studied, leading to a better understanding of Lansbury. In addition, it is the case that the parts of Lansbury's work – "separate clauses and sentences" – only make full sense when related to the whole, but also that the whole – the "general thought" of Lansbury – only makes full sense in relation to these parts. However, Hirsch warns us against taking "too literally or too consistently" the model of a hermeneutic circle, for this can lead to "the position that accurate reconstruction of past meaning is impossible".⁵³

Another helpful aspect of hermeneutics as a methodology is the importance placed considering context when examining and seeking to understand texts. Cairns argues that the "historical background of the writer and those whom he addresses will be of real help in establishing his meaning".⁵⁴ Berkhof goes even further: "It is impossible to understand an author and to interpret his words correctly unless he is seen against the proper historical background".⁵⁵ Freeden explains that "understanding can be manipulated, mistaken, and misguided", and for this reason "hermeneutic theories of understanding take into account the

⁴⁸ Alvesson and Skoldberg, *Reflexive Methodology*, p.92.

⁴⁹ Berkhof, *Biblical Interpretation*, p.99.

⁵⁰ Alvesson and Skoldberg, *Reflexive Methodology*, p.96.

⁵¹ B. Gustavsson, *The Principles of Knowledge Creation: Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (Cheltenham, 2007), pp.115-7.

⁵² Alvesson and Skoldberg, *Reflexive Methodology*, p.97.

⁵³ Hirsch, *Interpretation*, p.5 and p.82.

⁵⁴ Cairns, *Theological Terms*, p.175.

⁵⁵ Berkhof, *Biblical Interpretation*, p.114.

social, cultural, and political contexts, past and present, in which understanding and misunderstanding take shape”.⁵⁶ For our purposes this context can be provided by general works about Christian Socialism, biographies of the men being studied, and other works about the history and politics of the period under consideration.

The Thesis

The main body of the thesis which follows is split into four sections. The first considers ‘The Basis of Christian Socialism’, with chapters describing the use of Scripture as a basis for Christian Socialism, the use of the church – its teaching and sacraments – and, finally, other influences on the Christian Socialists. The conclusion that Christian Socialists were influenced by and argued from the Bible and the teaching and example of the church is hardly groundbreaking. However, the extent of the reliance on these sources, over and above other influences such as Karl Marx or Henry George, is well worth noting; it comes as a corrective to any notion that even these religious men had a pretty much secular outlook and approached politics in a secular way. It was no exaggeration for Keir Hardie to write that “the impetus which drove me first of all into the Labour movement, and the inspiration which has carried me on in it, has been derived more from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, than from all other sources combined”.⁵⁷

The second section examines ‘The Route to Christian Socialism’ – how Christian Socialists sought to bring about a socialist society. Here will be a systematisation of the writings on this topic found in various places, and the exposition of a three-stage approach: firstly, successful persuasion of the deficiencies of capitalism and the need for a socialist alternative; secondly, the election of Labour to a position of power, or the ‘conversion’ of those already in power to socialist principles, meaning that, in either case convinced socialists would now be in power; thirdly, the reorganisation of society by a socialist state, aided by a supportive and co-operative population. We will be able to conclude that Christian Socialism in this period, by seeking revolutionary change via democratic means, offers a synthesis between revolutionary and democratic socialism; or, as Wilfred Wellock

⁵⁶ Freeman, ‘Hermeneutics’, p.386.

⁵⁷ J. Keir Hardie, ‘Labour and Christianity: Is the Labour Movement against Christianity?’, in *Labour and Religion: by Ten Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.49.

puts it, “Parliamentarianism [...] combined with a revolutionary spirit and method”.⁵⁸ These conclusions, however, will be tempered by a consideration of some of the confusion and inconsistency evident on this point, especially in the writing of Wellock.

The third section considers ‘The Christian Socialist Society’, describing the kind of society aimed at by the Christian Socialists. This will prove to be a difficult task, firstly because of the – sometimes intentional – vagueness on this topic, and secondly because it is at times unclear if a policy or proposal is being made or supported as part of short-term reforms to the existing system or whether it would be part of a new socialist society. Nevertheless we will be able to draw some conclusions about the nature of the collectivism and co-operation aimed at by Christian Socialists, as well as other principles which would colour the makeup of any Christian Socialist society. We will conclude that Christian Socialists in general held a Utopian vision of the future, in which the establishment of socialism is equivalent to the setting up of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, leading to the abolition of war, poverty, overwork, and even sickness and premature death.

The fourth section is ‘A Critique of Christian Socialism’, outlining, firstly, a socialist critique, and secondly a Christian critique. Little appears to have been written directly critiquing Christian Socialism, but by examining Christian writings about socialism in general and socialist writings about Christianity or religion in general – as well as other forms of socialism – it is possible to construct a critique of Christian Socialism from these perspectives. We will conclude finally that the key characteristic of Christian socialism is brotherhood, as derived from the idea of the universal Fatherhood of God, and that other concepts – co-operation, equality and democracy – are drawn from this. Christian Socialism is not distinct from other socialisms in espousing co-operation, equality and democracy, but it is distinct in drawing these from ideas from Christian theology.

⁵⁸ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), pp.35-6.

Section One: The Basis of Christian Socialism

1. The Fatherhood of God and the Example of Christ

Christian Socialists are marked out by their use of the Christian religion as a basis for socialism, rather than economic or sociological analysis in the manner of Marxism or Fabianism. In that sense, Christian Socialism is “rightly bracketed with other ‘ethical’ socialisms. But although it has fed from them and into them, it rests on unique foundations”.¹ These foundations include the Bible, as well as the teaching and sacraments of the church. James Keir Hardie, for example, “would as easily apply the Old Testament as the New, and also argued from the practice of the early Church and the teaching of the Church fathers [...] [T]he overriding force is of a simple appeal to the ethical wisdom of the Bible”.² The same is true of Stewart Headlam, whose political views were “firmly based on the Bible and the creeds”, and George Lansbury, who was “a Socialist because the Christian religion teaches us that love, co-operation, brotherhood are the way of life which will give us peace and security”.³ Wilfred Wellock saw that “[m]ost socialists rested their case solely on the economic argument, whereas I saw the basic error of capitalism in certain spiritual deficiencies”.⁴

Politics then was viewed in moral terms by Christian Socialists, with capitalism viewed as immoral. Wellock writes of “the inhumanity, the moral bankruptcy of capitalism [...] It is obviously immoral, and a colossal social crime that almost all the economic benefits of mass-production should be reaped by a minority”.⁵ R.H. Tawney, similarly, views the “industrial problem is a moral problem”.⁶ Tawney believed then in the application of morals to industrial questions.

While, on the face of it, these morals may have been sourced from any religious or ethical system, or simply those arrived at by Tawney himself, in practice his morals – like those of all Christian Socialists – were drawn from Christianity. Tawney’s “private diary

¹ P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.8.

² *Ibid.*, p.30.

³ K. Leech, ‘Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924, and the Guild of St Matthew’, in M.B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England* (London, 1968), p.78; Election pamphlet for Lansbury as candidate for Bow and Bromley, 3 November 1935, London School of Economics [LSE] archive, Lansbury/15 361-2.

⁴ A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life in Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.11.

⁵ W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What it is and Why it is Necessary* (Manchester, 1921), p.5.

⁶ J.M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, eds, *R.H. Tawney’s Commonplace Book* (Cambridge, 2006), p.12.

over a two year period, seems to indicate that his high view of Scripture and the teachings of Christ were for him a signpost that pointed to the service of the poor and concurrently, to the infinite value of human beings which for him was most powerfully demonstrated at Calvary in the grace of his God”.⁷ His “foundational arguments are always unchallenged statements of Christian doctrine, and the edifice of his social theory essentially stands or falls by its Christian basis”.⁸ Tawney sums this up in his own words: “The essence of all morality is this: to believe that every human being is of infinite importance, and that no consideration of expediency can justify the oppression of one by another. But to believe this it is necessary to believe in God”.⁹

Christian ministers who espoused socialism pointed to this disconnect between the capitalist system and Christian morality. John Clifford, the Baptist pastor, wrote in a tract for the Fabian Society, that free-market capitalism was “more in keeping with the gladiatorial than the Christian theory of existence. It provides for ruthless self-assertion rather than self-restraint. It does not inspire brotherly helpfulness, but the crushing of competitors and thrusting aside of rivals”.¹⁰ Samuel Keeble, a Methodist minister, agrees:

No system of industry which proceeds upon the principle of unscrupulous competition, of treating human labour as a mere commodity, and human beings as mere ‘pawns’ in the game of making money, as mere means to a selfish end; of taking advantage of one man’s poverty and necessity, and of another man’s ignorance; which sanctions the law of might, and not of right, and the principle of survival of the fittest for success in the scramble for material wealth – no such system [...] can by any stretch of generosity be called Christian.¹¹

The same stance was taken by career politicians, who might have been expected to avoid such statements of religion or morality. George Lansbury wrote that “[m]y reading and my prayers and all united to confirm my faith that Socialism, which means love, co-operation and brotherhood in every department of human affairs, is the only outward expression of a Christian faith”.¹² Hardie, in similar vein, remarked that “[t]he only way you can serve God

⁷ M. Beech and K. Hickson, *Labour’s Thinkers: The Intellectual Roots of Labour from Tawney to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), pp.33-4.

⁸ C. Bryant, *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (London, 1996), p.189.

⁹ Winter and Joslin, *Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, p.67.

¹⁰ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ: Fabian Tract No.78* (London, 1898), p.7.

¹¹ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.190.

¹² Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.207.

is by serving mankind. There is no other way. It is taught in the Old Testament; it is taught in the New Testament”.¹³

Hardie here refers to the teaching of the whole Bible, which was one of the key sources – if not the key source – from which Christian Socialists gained the basis for their socialism. Theologically different Christian Socialists may have had different views of the Bible: Keir Hardie refers to it being “inspired” (or, at least, that Christians are “taught to look upon [it] as inspired”), while Stewart Headlam refers to the Bible “not as the infallible Word of God, but as the most inspiring literature of a nation whose best men were convinced that there was one righteous God, and that personal and social righteousness was the main thing”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, each one appears to have found in the Scriptures arguments, justifications and a basis for socialism. In this chapter we will consider the basis for socialism as drawn from the doctrine of God’s Fatherhood, and, consequently, man’s brotherhood, as well as the example of Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man

A key theme in Christian Socialist writing is that all men are brothers, and that all humanity – far from being a disparate collection of individuals – comprises one big family. This view is based on Christian teaching as a whole – for example, the first person of the Trinity is described in the Bible and in Christian theology as Father, leading Christian Socialists to conclude that all the people in creation are His children, and therefore brothers and sisters.

This idea was also based on the words of Christ recorded in Matthew’s Gospel: “But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven”.¹⁵ Stewart Headlam also points to the words of Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named”.¹⁶ “[H]ere is St. Paul,” writes Headlam, “dwelling on the universal

¹³ J. Keir Hardie, ‘Labour and Christianity: Is the Labour Movement against Christianity?’, in *Labour and Religion: by Ten Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.54.

¹⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity: Keir Hardie Library No.4* (London, 1907), p.4; S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.11. [Headlam is here referring to the nation of Israel.]

¹⁵ Matthew 23:8-9. [Unless otherwise stated scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: King James Version*. Scripture quotations marked “ESV” are taken from the *Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.]

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:14-15.

Fatherhood of God”.¹⁷ This idea of, as Lansbury phrased it, God’s “Fatherhood and the consequent Brotherhood of man”, or in the words of Hardie, “that Gospel [...] proclaiming all men sons of God and brethren one with another”, was for Christian Socialists an argument against capitalism and an argument in favour of socialism.¹⁸

Samuel Keeble identified “the great Christian principles of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man” as in tension with the selfishness and individualism of capitalism. Competition, according to Keeble, “is contrary [...] to the teaching of the Christian religion, which [...] condemns selfishness, and demands that men love their neighbour as themselves. It is contrary, because Christianity proclaims the brotherhood of men”.¹⁹ Lansbury agrees with Keeble’s analysis, writing that despite this “brotherhood” and the fact that “men and women are equal in the sight of God” it remains the case “that under our present social conditions this equality is not realized”.²⁰ The problems of capitalist society exist, according to Lansbury, because “we have refused to believe that it is possible to live as brothers and sisters should live”; “I believe,” he adds, “in the Fatherhood of God, in the Brotherhood of Man, and in the fact that men and women can co-operate, if they will”.²¹ John Wheatley took up a similar theme in a letter to the *Glasgow Observer*, ‘A Catholic Defence of Socialism’, asking, “in a society which is one of the swindler versus the swindled, how can there be brotherly love?”²² It is clear then that to Christian Socialists this idea of God’s Fatherhood and the familial relationship between all the people He has created meant that Christianity and capitalism were completely at odds with one another; that capitalism stood condemned because it ignored and made impossible to practice the brotherly relations that should be exercised by God’s children.

If capitalism denies this idea of universal brotherhood, Christian Socialists believed that socialism was the economic and social system which enshrined it. This was proclaimed in the declaration of John Clifford’s Free Church Socialist League:

¹⁷ S.D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with Other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), p.119.

¹⁸ Interview with Lansbury from the Christian Commonwealth Newspaper, 11 August 1915, LSE archive, Lansbury/7 213; J.T. Leckie, *Socialism in Britain: From the Industrial Revolution to the Present Day* (London, 1972), p.106.

¹⁹ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.17 and p.214.

²⁰ ‘The future of the poor law, address by Councillor George Lansbury’, reprinted from the East London Observer, 23 October and 6 November 1909, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 a3.

²¹ G. Lansbury, ‘Back to the Galilean!’, in *The Religion in the Labour Movement* (London, 1919), p54.

²² J. Hannan, *The Life of John Wheatley* (Nottingham, 1988), p.11.

Believing that the principle of Brotherhood as taught by Jesus Christ cannot adequately be wrought out under existing industrial and commercial conditions, and that the faithful and commonplace application of this principle must result in the Socialization of all natural resources, as well as the instruments of production, distribution and exchange, the League exists to assist in the work of eliminating the former by building the latter Social Order.²³

In the words of Keeble, “[t]he other great cry of Socialism is for *brotherhood* – the most Christian of cries”; “The Socialist,” writes Keeble, “who demands brotherhood in industry is far nearer the mind of Christ than the economist who clamours for ‘free’ competition”.²⁴

This is also the view of Henry Scott Holland, who writes that it is socialism which “tells of the Fatherhood of God, bringing Peace and Goodwill: of the universal brotherhood of men”.²⁵ Wheatley agrees, writing that it is socialism “which emanates from that spirit of brotherhood which is ever present in the heart of man but is so often suppressed by the struggle for existence”.²⁶ The idea also seems to have found acceptance in the writing of Tawney, who calls for “a society which [...] holds that the most important aspect of human beings is not the external differences of income and circumstance that divide them, but the common humanity that unites them, and which strives, therefore, to reduce such differences to the position of insignificance that rightly belongs to them”.²⁷ According to one biographer: “Since all men were the children of God, each was infinitely precious, an end not a means, rich in the possibilities for self-development, brothers and sisters in a shared humanity and a common civilisation. This is what is described as Tawney’s principle of equal worth”.²⁸ It is for this reason that Clifford calls for “the reorganization of the industrial life of the country on the bases of justice and brotherhood”.²⁹

It is clear then that for the Christian Socialist, socialism is simply a natural consequence or outworking of Christianity; the Bible teaches that God is the Father, and socialism is the system whereby the people of the world or of a particular society can live as brothers and sisters. The practice of Christianity should, therefore, necessarily lead to the practice of socialism, as George Lansbury wrote: “If anywhere in the world there is true

²³ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.203.

²⁴ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.151 and p.152. [Emphasis in original.]

²⁵ H. Scott Holland, ed., *Our Neighbours: A Handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.9.

²⁶ I.S. Wood, ‘John Wheatley and Catholic Socialism’, in A.R. Morton, eds, *After Socialism? The Future of Radical Christianity* (Edinburgh, 1994), p.20.

²⁷ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.167.

²⁸ A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.70.

²⁹ Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ*, p.2.

Christianity it will be found ranged on the side of International Socialism, proclaiming in clear language the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man".³⁰ For Lansbury, therefore, a Christianity that did not accept and support socialism was not worthy of the name, not a "true Christianity".

While Lansbury offers the opinion that a Christianity which rejects socialism is false, William Temple makes the different but related implication that a socialism which rejects Christianity is completely without foundation:

Apart from faith in God there is really nothing to be said for the notion of human equality. Men do not seem to be equal in any respect, if we judge by the available evidence. But if all are children of one Father, then all are equal heirs of a status in comparison with which the apparent differences of quality and capacity are unimportant; in the deepest and most important of all – their relationship with God – all are equal.³¹

Here, Temple observes not only that this Christian doctrine is a basis for socialism, or that Christianity should lead to socialism, but also that there is no other reason to accept or implement socialism. For Temple, faith in God as the Father is the only reason to accept equality, because without this fundamental belief human beings are clearly unequal, and an unequal capitalist society is merely a reflection of that natural inequality.

Keeble expresses a similar view: "In so far as Socialists wish for brotherhood, Christians are with them, but the 'brotherhood' of secularist Socialists is indeed a sentimental thing. There is no brotherhood where there is no Fatherhood".³² The words of Keir Hardie could also be interpreted as suggesting the same point: "The meaningless drivel of the ordinary politician must now give place to the burning words of earnest men; whose hearts are on fire with love for their kind, men and women who believe in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of men".³³ While Hardie's comment is most likely aimed at the elected Tory and Liberal politicians, perhaps he also had in mind that other socialists are just as capable of being "the ordinary politician" who had failed to grasp this fundamental truth.

³⁰ Newspaper article by Lansbury from the Daily Herald, 'The Dayspring in Russia' 18 March 1920, LSE archives, Lansbury/8 104.

³¹ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942)

³² S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.161.

³³ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie's Speeches and Writings From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.10

Hardie makes it clear that he is not one of these, declaring that “I believe in Christ’s Gospel of love and brotherhood and service”.³⁴

Here, Hardie grounds his belief in the brotherhood of man in “Christ’s Gospel”. Keeble agrees with this, writing that “if Christ came to teach anything, and if reason and God’s Word have any validity, then all we are brethren, the human race is God’s family, and mutual service is the only true law of human or industrial society”.³⁵ Stewart Headlam describes Christian Socialism in similar terms: “Christian Socialists therefore say that it would be worth while to try the experiment, which such a one as Jesus said would succeed, to try and live in rational, organised, orderly brotherhood”.³⁶ In these quotations we can also note the importance of the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospels.

The Example of Christ

According to Peter d’A Jones, “Christian Socialism was a ‘Christ-centred faith’ in that it focused on the life and message of Christ”.³⁷ Alan Wilkinson suggests that this was particularly the case for “Nonconformist socialists [who] did not argue their case from the sacraments, liturgy and the Fathers, but focused on Jesus”.³⁸ For example, Samuel Keeble made the argument that:

It is high time, then, that Christian teachers proclaimed that Christian business men, at least, are expected to respect the dignity of human nature in the humblest of their servants, to remember that Christ died for the day-labourer as well as for his master, and that if they be Christians, even rough, unskilled labourers are temples of the Holy Ghost and kings and queens unto God, most precious in His sight.³⁹

Keeble adds that “a system which unblushingly proceeds upon the principle of selfishness must be contrary, as a system, to the teaching of Christ”.⁴⁰

³⁴ Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches*, p.90.

³⁵ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.200.

³⁶ S.D. Headlam, *Christian Socialism – A Lecture: Fabian Tract No.42* (London, 1899), p.3.

³⁷ P. d’A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1811-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), p.88.

³⁸ A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), p.62.

³⁹ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.229.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.222.

We can see, therefore, the importance of Christ's work and teaching to Nonconformist Socialists as a basis to their ideology. Clifford declares that "no other name than that of Christ is given whereby we can have social salvation", and that if individualistic capitalism "is in the least bit in accordance with the mind of Christ, then I must confess that I have failed to read aright its wonderful contents".⁴¹ Hardie, a member of the Evangelical Union, explained that "the impetus which drove me first of all into the Labour movement, and the inspiration which has carried me on in it, has been derived more from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, than from all other sources combined".⁴² Hardie here expresses the extent to which Christ is the basis of his socialism and his commitment to the Labour movement – "more than all other sources combined" – more than the rest of the Bible, more than church teaching or the sacraments, more than the economics, sociology and philosophy that provided the basis for other types of socialism such as Marxism, or socialist societies such as the Social Democratic Federation or the Fabian Society.

Yet the writings of Christian Socialists from other denominational backgrounds suggest that Jesus Christ was no less significant for them. Stewart Headlam, an Anglo-Catholic, also saw Christ as the basis for socialism: "All those ideas which we now express vaguely under the terms solidarity, brotherhood, co-operation, socialism, seem to have been vividly present in Jesus Christ's teaching".⁴³ For Headlam, Christ was "a radical reformer", "a Socialistic carpenter" and a "revolutionary Socialist from Galilee".⁴⁴ John Wheatley, a Roman Catholic, similarly argued that the "Divine Founder" of the Church "on every occasion condemned the accumulation of wealth".⁴⁵ This view is expounded by Wheatley in *How the Miners are Robbed*, in which he imagines a trial of capitalists and those who have supported them. One of the witnesses called to give evidence before the magistrate on behalf of the capitalist accused is a clergyman:

Mag. - My dear sir, you are injuring Christianity by trying to explain away that on which it was founded. Did not its Divine Founder say – 'Woe to the rich, for you have your consolation.'?

⁴¹ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches: Fabian Tract No.139* (London, 1908), p.11; Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ*, p.7.

⁴² Hardie, 'Labour and Christianity', p.49.

⁴³Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.73.

⁴⁴ S.D. Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress: Being Sermons and Lectures* (London, 1878), p.7; J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam's Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.24. Leech, 'Headlam', p.78;

⁴⁵ I.S. Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), p.18.

Wit. - Yes, your honour; but I think He meant they should use their wealth properly.

Mag. - Why close your eyes to the fact that it is not the mismanagement of wealth, but the possession of it that is here condemned? ⁴⁶

George Lansbury, another Anglican, also declares the significance of Christ: “I am a socialist pure and simple. I have come to believe that the power which should and which will, if men allow it, work our social salvation, is the power which comes from a belief in Christ and his message to man”.⁴⁷ Lansbury went so far as to describe Christ as “the greatest revolutionary force of His times”, adding in a reference to the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection that “I believe, too, that He lives now to give men and women the revolutionary spirit”.⁴⁸ For Lansbury, Jesus was “the lonely Galilean – Communist, agitator, martyr – crucified as one who stirred up the people and set class against class”.⁴⁹ This is an example of the tendency not just to follow the teaching of Christ, but to identify Him as a practising socialist and member of the working class.

Wheatley did similarly to Lansbury, arguing that Christianity was founded by a member of the working class – Christ.⁵⁰ Here, Wheatley can claim that Christianity in general or Roman Catholicism in particular is the basis for socialism and supportive of the rights of the workers because it is the creation of a working-class man. Henry Scott Holland, an Anglican priest, argued that the solution to social problems could only be found in “the person and life of Christ”, and – refuting the notion that followers of Christ should focus merely on spiritual matters, or life after death – that “the more you believe in the Incarnation the more you care about drains”; “If we believe in the Incarnation”, wrote Holland, “then we certainly believe in the entry of God into the very thick of human affairs”.⁵¹ A similar argument was advanced by a Nonconformist, Keeble: “The Immanence of God in the world [...] calls for Christian effort to make society sensitive and responsive to the divine presence

⁴⁶ J. Wheatley, *How the Miners are Robbed: The Duke in the Dock (startling court case)*, (Nottingham, 1973 – original publication 1907), p.17. [Wheatley refers here to Luke 6:24 – “But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.”]

⁴⁷ G. Dale, *God’s Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 Years of Labour* (London, 2000), p.106.

⁴⁸ Lansbury, ‘Galilean’, p.56.

⁴⁹ J. Schneer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester, 1990), p.1.

⁵⁰ Hannan, *Wheatley*, p.31.

⁵¹ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.178; Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.72; Holland, *Our Neighbours*, pp.144-5.

and power”.⁵² On this reading, Christ appears to have a clear significance for Christian Socialists of all denominational types.

Christ’s Sermon on the Mount was a particular influence on Christian Socialists with “its message of hope for the poor and forgotten”.⁵³ This was especially the case for Keir Hardie, who refers to the Sermon a number of times in *From Serfdom to Socialism* and *Can a Man be a Christian On a Pound a Week?*. “Socialism”, wrote Hardie, “is the application to industry of the teachings contained in the Sermon on the Mount”, which is “a consistent and powerful argument against property”; the Sermon, “whilst it perhaps lends but small countenance to State Socialism, is full of the spirit of pure Communism”, and it would be “an easy task to show that Communism, the final goal of Socialism, is a form of Social Economy very closely akin to the principles set forth in the Sermon on the Mount”.⁵⁴

Verses such as “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” and “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” were given socialist interpretations: the Kingdom of Heaven belonged to the poor rather than the rich; the Earth would be inherited by the meek rather than being controlled by the capitalist and landlord class.⁵⁵ In *Christian Communism* Wilfred Wellock implies that these opening verses of the Sermon – known as the Beatitudes – are ignored and even reversed by capitalism: “To oppress and disinherit the meek and increase the power of the mighty; to denounce and imprison the peacemakers and extol the preachers and doers of violence; to scoff at the advocates of justice, honesty and mercy; and persistently crush the economically weak”.⁵⁶ Lansbury agrees, arguing that “we are in that condition because we have not taken the Sermon on the Mount as the guiding star of our lives”.⁵⁷

Another key section of the Sermon comes where Christ explains: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon”.⁵⁸ The word “Mammon” traditionally refers to material wealth, as is reflected in more recent translations of the Bible: “You cannot serve God and money”.⁵⁹ Christian Socialists pointed to this verse to show that

⁵² S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.29.

⁵³ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (London, 1997), p.44.

⁵⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *Can a Man Be a Christian On a Pound a Week?* (Manchester, c.1905-10), pp.13-4 and p.3; J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.38 and p.36.

⁵⁵ Matthew 5:3, 5.

⁵⁶ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.12.

⁵⁷ Lansbury, ‘Galilean’, p.54.

⁵⁸ Matthew 6:24.

⁵⁹ Matthew 6:24. [ESV]

capitalism was immoral because it involved the worship of money and profit rather than the Christian God. For example, Lansbury wrote that “[w]e have succeeded in setting up a god whose name is Mammon, and in creating poverty in the midst of plenty”.⁶⁰ A journalist reporting a speech by Lansbury reported: “Society was not based (he said) on the principle of Christ, but on the principle of money worship”.⁶¹ Hardie argued that society should be “cleansing our moral sewers of the poisons with which selfishness and Mammon-worship have tainted them”, and that the work of the Independent Labour Party (and the Labour movement generally) was to rescue “[h]umanity from the brutalizing power of Mammon”.⁶² Wellock pointed to the condition of the European continent in the aftermath of the First World War, writing that “Europe lies in ruins, a deliberate, daring sacrifice to the god Mammon”.⁶³

Other sections of the Sermon were important as well: Hardie used the command “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” in campaigning against the apparent hypocrisy of Christian business owners who mistreated their employees.⁶⁴ He also reminded his readers of Christ’s teaching – as he interpreted it – that “the possession of private property came between a man and his welfare both for time and eternity”, and that men should “follow the example of the flowers of the field and the birds of the air and hold all nature’s gifts in common”.⁶⁵ Keeble makes a similar argument, referring to the command “[l]ay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” as a social principle which ought to be applied.⁶⁶

Christian Socialists made reference to other of what Hardie called “Christ’s denunciations of wealth” in the Gospels.⁶⁷ There are, for example, Christ’s instruction to the rich young man, “sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven”, and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in which the rich man is condemned to hell while Lazarus – a beggar – is welcomed into the presence of God.⁶⁸ In a sermon Stewart Headlam argued that this parable was a warning to those “who are in positions of power or influence, but are not socialists in their use of their various powers”,

⁶⁰ ‘These Things Shall Be’, Church Socialist League, LSE archives, Lansbury/8 127.

⁶¹ Newspaper cutting about Lansbury speaking at Llanelly, 1919, LSE archives, Lansbury/8 99.

⁶² Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches*, p.68 and p.79.

⁶³ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.4

⁶⁴ Matthew 7:12; Dale, *God’s Politicians*, p.31.

⁶⁵ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.36; Hardie, *Can a Man Be a Christian*, p.3

⁶⁶ S.E. Keeble, *Towards the New Era: A Draft Scheme of Industrial Reconstruction* (London, 1917), p.13; Matthew 6:19.

⁶⁷ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.39.

⁶⁸ Luke 18:22; Luke 16:19-21.

while in his tract for the Fabian Society Headlam explained that “the rich man was in Hell simply because he allowed the contrast between rich and poor to go on as a matter of course, day after day, without taking any pains to put a stop to it”.⁶⁹ Hardie went even further: “Dives was sent to Hades for apparently no other reason than that he was rich, Lazarus went straight to Abraham’s bosom because of his earthly poverty”.⁷⁰

In the same way Keeble pointed to the warning against seeking material again: “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”.⁷¹ Scott Holland concludes that Christ “denounced vehemently the sins to which the rich were so inevitably prone, and enthusiastically praised the virtues that sprang inherently out of simplicity of life, and are found so characteristically of the poor”.⁷² These denunciations were a powerful argument for Christian Socialists against capitalism, which appeared to reply upon the pursuit of wealth and profit, even at the expense of others. According to George Lansbury, the “gospel tells us that we have got to go out into the world and preach the gospel; not get on and get rich! We have got to preach the gospel that you and I are part of one another; my life is no good unless yours is good; yours is not good unless my life is good”.⁷³

Christian Socialists used the other parables and teachings of Christ as arguments in favour of socialism, or even in favour of specific policies. Stewart Headlam pointed to the parable of the sheep and the goats, in which Christ judges the world in righteousness, commending those who provided for the poor and needy and condemning those who failed to do so.⁷⁴ “It is this parable,” said Headlam, “which seems to compel every Christian to be a socialist”.⁷⁵ Headlam went further than this in his Fabian tract, arguing that “even in the case of those who said they did not know God, who would call themselves or be called by others Atheists, Jesus Christ said that if they were taking pains to see that the people were properly clothed, fed and housed, however much they might say that they did not know God, God knew them and claimed them as His”.⁷⁶ For Headlam, therefore, socialism was such an outworking of Christianity that even those who outwardly denied it were doing God’s work.

⁶⁹ Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.79; Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.4.

⁷⁰ Hardie, *Can a Man be a Christian*, p.3. [“Dives” is the name traditionally given to the rich man, even though he is not named in Scripture]

⁷¹ S.E. Keeble, *Money and How to Use It* (London, 1921), p.2.

⁷² Scott Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.156.

⁷³ Lansbury, ‘Galilean’, p.56.

⁷⁴ Matthew 25:31-46.

⁷⁵ Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.83.

⁷⁶ Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.4.

Hardie agrees with this assessment, writing that “the Socialist who denounces rent and interest as robbery, and who seeks the abolition of the system which legalises such, is in the true line of apostolic succession with the pre-Christian era prophets [and] the Divine Founder of Christianity”.⁷⁷ Samuel Keeble similarly invoked the parable of the Good Samaritan to argue that when the churches (represented by the two religious Jews who refused to help the injured man) ignore the needs of labour or the working-class, God will send to society a “Good Samaritan” in the form of socialism from outside the church.⁷⁸

Keeble also uses the phrase from the Lord’s Prayer “Give us this day our daily bread” as an argument in favour of a living wage.⁷⁹ He backs up this argument with a reference to the Parable of the Vineyard, in which a man hires workers for his vineyard:

After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market-place, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.⁸⁰

Keeble argued that, a denarius per day being a reasonable amount on which to live, each of the workers in the parable received a living wage, even those who had not been hired for a

⁷⁷ Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.4.

⁷⁸ Luke 10:25-37; Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.234.

⁷⁹ Matthew 6:11; Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.243.

⁸⁰ Matthew 20:2-16. [ESV]

full day. This point was made elsewhere by Keeble: “Our Lord makes the man in the parable fix his wages not by the laws of any political economy, but by the law of justice, in its widest sense. ‘Whatsoever is *right* I will give thee.’ [...] The whole parable of the labourers in the vineyard turns, so far as its business aspect is concerned, on the employer refusing to pay less than the wage determined”.⁸¹ Scott Holland also references this parable:

Remember that text which is so direly misquoted: ‘May I not do that what I will with mine own?’ The words are flung at us, as if they would justify the most harsh and arbitrary exercise of the rights of property. In reality, they are used in the parable to justify action of exactly the opposite character. The Master of the Vineyard [...] is arguing for that liberty to be humane and equitable, and kindly, which every man claims in cases where he is own master.⁸²

Headlam points to the words of Christ, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”, interpreting this as a reference to physical labour, and therefore an invitation to the working class – and any others in society who work honestly.⁸³ Headlam argued that those who did not work were condemned by the example of Christ, Who when tempted by Satan refused to turn stones into bread to feed Himself.⁸⁴ Christ refused, Headlam said, to “give sanction to those who get bread without work [...] The first victory of Christ is, then, over those who would get their daily bread not by daily work but by some trick”.⁸⁵

John Clifford refers to the words of Christ, “one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren”, to argue: “One is your Master, and no one else has just ground for treating a worker as though he were only a tool, or part of a machine for making money”.⁸⁶ Wellock refers to the same passage, which continues: “Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant”.⁸⁷ “None shall be masters, but all shall be servants one of another”, writes Wellock, adding that this is one of the statements into which “modern society [should] be brought into absolute conformity”.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Keeble, *Material Life*, p.116. [Emphasis in original.]

⁸² Holland, *Our Neighbours*, pp.38-9.

⁸³ Matthew 11:28; Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, p.22.

⁸⁴ Matthew 4:3-4.

⁸⁵ Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, pp.65-6.

⁸⁶ Matthew 23:8; J. Clifford, *The State the Church and the Congregation* (London, 1908), p.59.

⁸⁷ Matthew 23:10-11.

⁸⁸ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or the Road to the New World* (London, 1922), p.41.

Reference was also made to the doctrine of salvation through Christ, which was interpreted as referring to society as well as the individual. Above we have seen Clifford declare that “no other name than that of Christ is given whereby we can have social salvation”, a reference to the words of the Apostle Peter before the “rulers, elders and scribes” of Israel when being questioned over the healing of a disabled man: “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole [...] Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”.⁸⁹ This idea was further expanded by Clifford in another tract:

He, and He alone has the words of eternal life. Social redemption is in Him. Power, method, impulse, dwell there in God-like fullness. At this late day in the world’s life, and in the full radiance of the experience of centuries, it still abides true, ‘in none other is there salvation’; for neither is there any name under heaven, that is given among men, whereby society must be saved.⁹⁰

The same concept is found in the writing of other Christian Socialists; Wellock, for example, makes mention of “social salvation” twice in *The Way Out*.⁹¹ William Temple argued that “for the sake of social redemption quite as fully as for individual redemption, we have still to preach the need of conversion and bring home the Gospel in all its power to the souls of individual men and women”.⁹² Lansbury calls it a “fact that for the workers there is no chance of social redemption unless they all combine and, by using the power which combination gives alter the whole basis of our social life”.⁹³ He offers the conclusion “that the power which should and which will, if men allow it, work our social salvation, is the power which comes from a belief in Christ and his message to man”.⁹⁴

The teaching and example of Christ, therefore, proves to be vital in providing a basis or underpinning to Christian Socialism. The Christian Socialists showed the immorality of the capitalist system from the Gospels, and pointed out that Christ taught and practised

⁸⁹ Acts of the Apostles 4:5, and 10, 12.

⁹⁰ J. Clifford, *The New City of God: The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel* (London, 1888), p.12.

⁹¹ Wellock, *Way Out*, p.7 and p.17.

⁹² W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), pp.129-30.

⁹³ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York NY, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.43.

⁹⁴ Dale, *God’s Politicians*, p.106.

socialism – or, at least, principles of brotherhood, co-operation, care for the poor and condemnation of the rich which were embodied in the modern world by socialism. As Keir Hardie summed up: “Christianity on its social side can never be realised – if it is to be interpreted in the light of Christ’s teaching – until there is full, free Communism”.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Hardie, ‘Labour and Christianity’, p.51.

2. Old and New Testament References

Christian Socialism, as we have seen, was underpinned by the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God – and the consequent brotherhood of man – and the example and teaching of Jesus Christ as found in the four Gospels. However, this was not the full extent of Christian Socialist argument from the Bible; many other passages from both Old and New Testaments served as part of their basis for socialism. John Clifford, for example, picks up on the themes we encountered in the previous chapter by writing: “Therefore we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto social salvation”.¹ The phrasing itself, however, is taken from elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”.² Stewart Headlam’s Guild of St Matthew quotes two socialist principles from Pauline epistles:

‘If a man will not work,’ the apostle had written, ‘neither let him eat’. Christians were thus enjoined, like socialists, to condemn an economic system that allowed the idle few to extort rent and interest from the labouring many. Socialists also demanded a more equitable distribution of income, and this, too, was a biblical commandment. ‘The husbandmen that laboureth [...] must be the first to partake of the fruits’. To argue, therefore, that wages be kept low so that landlords and capitalists could obtain a return on their investments may have been economic orthodoxy, but it was Christian heresy.³

Samuel Keeble makes a similar argument that we have already encountered, writing that “Christians must heed, not political economy, but the Christian conscience and the Word of God, which say, ‘Rob not the poor because he is poor’,” but the verse itself is quoted from the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament.⁴ James Keir Hardie, as we have

¹ J. Clifford, *The New City of God: The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel* (London, 1888), pp.17-8.

² Romans 1:16.

³ J. R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003). [The first reference here is 2 Thessalonians 3:10, to which we shall return. The second Orens says comes from the Old Testament, but is fact from Paul’s Second Epistle to Timothy, specifically 2 Timothy 2:6.]

⁴ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.224; Proverbs 22:22.

seen, “would as easily apply the Old Testament as the New”.⁵ In this chapter therefore we will consider the case for socialism as made across the Old and New Testaments. We will also consider examples of Christian Socialists pointing to Scriptural principles rather than the very letter of the law, and refuting the use of Biblical texts by the opponents of socialism.

New Testament

Christian Socialists found a persuasive argument for socialism from Christ’s denunciations of wealth in the Gospels, and the same is true of other New Testament denunciations of wealth and warnings to the rich. Stewart Headlam, for example, cited the condemnation of those who become rich at the expense of their workers in the Epistle of James:

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.⁶

“The cry of the reapers,” wrote Headlam, “who have been defrauded of their wages enters into the ears of the God who fights”.⁷ It is worth noting additionally, that in Headlam’s interpretation, the Bible not only indicates that God condemns capitalism as immoral, but that He will get involved and fight on behalf of the disadvantaged workers – effectively, on behalf of socialism. Keir Hardie also referenced the above passage, pointing out that “James the Epistolian called upon the rich to weep and howl for the miseries awaiting them in the world to come”, and that “St. James in his Epistle rivals the old prophets in his treatment of those who grow rich at the expense of the poor”.⁸ The tract issued by George Lansbury and the other Poplar “rebels” in answer to accusations made against them also included a quote

⁵ P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.30.

⁶ James 5:1-4

⁷ S.D.Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.59. [The phrase “Lord of sabaoth” here can loosely be translated “Lord of armies”, hence Headlam’s reference to “the God who fights”.]

⁸ J. Keir Hardie, *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* (Manchester, c.1905-10), p.3; J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.39.

from the Epistle of James: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction”.⁹

Headlam also goes back to the opening chapter of Luke’s Gospel, before the birth of Christ, to the words of Mary (sometimes referred to as the Magnificat) upon hearing the news of her virgin conception. Mary sings that: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden [...] He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away”.¹⁰ Headlam writes: “let Socialists turn to Our Lady’s song, the Magnificat – ‘the hymn of the universal revolution’ – ‘the Marseillaise of humanity,’ which tells of the disposition of the mighty, the scattering of the proud, the emptying of the pockets of the rich”.¹¹ Samuel Keeble also held that the Magnificat indicates the damage to character rendered by the possession of riches.¹² Elsewhere Keeble refers to other of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ: “Collectivism can be expressed accurately in the terms of the Angelic song, ‘Glory to God in the Highest, peace on earth, goodwill towards men’”.¹³

One passage cited by a number of Christian Socialists is Paul’s commandment to the Thessalonians “that if any would not work, neither should he eat”.¹⁴ While this verse could be used as a defence of the capitalist system which compels men to work for a living, for Christian Socialists it was a condemnation of a ruling class who gained their living from the work of others. One of Hardie’s biographers explains that “some preachers called upon St. Paul’s assertion that those who would not work should not eat as a justification for harsh treatment of the unemployed. Hardie responded by calling upon St John Chrysostom’s interpretation that Paul was referring to rich idlers”.¹⁵

This is also the interpretation arrived at by John Wheatley, who in his fictional court case has the magistrate confront the pro-capitalist clergyman:

Mag. - You must have learned that St. Paul said – ‘If any man will not work
neither shall he eat’.

⁹ *Guilty and Proud of It: Poplar’s Answer* (London, 1927), p.1; James 1:27.

¹⁰ Luke 1:46-8, 52-3.

¹¹ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.20.

¹² S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.192.

¹³ S.E. Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism: Essays for the Times* (London, 1907), p.31. [Luke 2:14]

¹⁴ 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

¹⁵ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010), p.135; see also, Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.5 and Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.39.

- Wit. - I explain that away, your honour.
- Mag. - My dear sir, you are injuring Christianity by trying to explain away that on which it was founded.

The suggestion here is that this “clergyman” would be one of those mentioned above, who would apply the verse to the unemployed rather than the “rich idlers”. Stewart Headlam’s interpretation agrees with that of Hardie and Wheatley; Headlam writes that it is the duty of Christians “to give something back in brain-work or hand-work in return for the food, clothing and housing that he consumes”.¹⁶ The verse was one of two that were stated as undergirding socialism in a letter published by Headlam’s Guild of St Matthew: “Christians were thus enjoined, like socialists, to condemn an economic system that allowed the idle few to extort rent and interest from the labouring many”.¹⁷ Tawney may have had this verse in minds when he argued that landowners who currently perform no function ought to produce something in return for the income they receive: “The surest way to encourage production is to make it clear that those who do not produce will not consume”.¹⁸

Keeble’s view was that these “stern words were never meant to apply to the sick and the feeble, the aged and unfortunate”, but rather to the “luxurious unemployed” and the “rich unemployed”, for “every man should earn his daily bread, and not live idly on the compulsory labours of others”.¹⁹ In even harsher words, Keeble argued that:

it is distinctly laid down in the New Testament that if, in a Christian society, a man will not work, neither shall he eat. Therefore a system which produces a class of idlers, of consumers who are not all producers or necessary to production, who do nothing for their living, is a system self-condemned, however it may legalize the status of such social parasites. Such men have no moral right to eat.²⁰

Keeble also reverses the commandment, arguing that – logically – if those who refuse to work should not eat, then those who do work should expect to eat. In a capitalist society, argues Keeble, this is not the case, as many of those who work the hardest are paid much

¹⁶ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.59; S.D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with Other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), p.112.

¹⁷ J.R. Orens, *Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism*, p.97.

¹⁸ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.115.

¹⁹ Keeble, *Ideal of the Material Life*, p.201; Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.17.

²⁰ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.228.

less than is necessary for them to provide enough food for themselves and for their families.²¹

Paul's description of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians was also "important to Christian Socialists with its image of the body where every part has a function and where the body prospers by mutual inter-dependence and fellowship".²²

But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you [...] that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.²³

Wilkinson suggests that 1 Corinthians is particularly evident in R.H. Tawney's writings, for example, when Tawney writes: "A well-conducted family does not, when in low water, encourage some of its members to grab all they can, while leaving others to go short. On the contrary, it endeavours to ensure that its diminished resources shall be used to the best advantage in the interests of all".²⁴ William Temple similarly "compared Labour's ideal of brotherhood with the Pauline image of believers as the body of Christ".²⁵ Keeble declared that this image to be "the pattern to society. This is how men are meant to dwell together on all the face of the earth".²⁶

If this imagery taken from 1 Corinthians seemed to compel a co-operative order of society, then Christian Socialists argued for a collectivist order of society from Acts of the Apostles, in which Luke records that "all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need".²⁷ These verses seemed obviously to commend common ownership, as explained by Keir Hardie:

Here we have it clearly brought out that the direct outcome of the teachings of Jesus upon those who lived nearest to His time, and who became His followers, was to make them

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.245.

²² A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), p.105.

²³ 1 Corinthians 12:20-21, 25-26.

²⁴ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.105.

²⁵ G. Dale, *God's Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 years of Labour* (London, 2000), p.95.

²⁶ S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.256.

²⁷ Acts of the Apostles 2:44-5.

Communists. These early Christians found it impossible to retain property after they became Christians, since it raised artificial class distinctions in their midst and prevented the free play of that spirit of fraternal brotherhood which Jesus taught as one of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God.²⁸

It is interesting to note that Hardie reads into the passage that the motivation for collectivism was equality: in this case the abolition of “class distinctions”. We also see that Hardie links back to the key concepts of brotherhood and the teaching of Christ. Similarly to Hardie, Headlam comments that that “the first result of God’s good spirit working on men after the day of Pentecost was, that they had all things in common”; “The first Christians were, as you well know, in the simplest sense of the word communists – they put all their goods into a common fund and distribution was made to every man according to his need”.²⁹ William Temple also describes this practice of the early church as “voluntary communism”, but draws a distinction between this and “[m]odern communism” which we shall examine in Chapter 7.³⁰

Other New Testament verses were cited by Christian Socialists in their arguments for socialism. Henry Scott Holland, for example, made reference to another section of 1 Corinthians, Paul’s words about love: “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love”.³¹ Holland mockingly remarked “[i]magine putting up a stained-glass window to Faith, Hope and Political Economy”.³² John Clifford provides another example, invoking the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians: “for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”.³³ Clifford viewed socialism as the means by which this was to be accomplished, writing that socialism “is an ethical and religious effort, proceeding from within the soul of the human race, for pulling down principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places, and bringing every

²⁸ Hardie, *Can a Man be a Christian*, p.11.

²⁹ S.D. Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress: being Sermons and Lectures* (London, 1878), p.24; Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.29.

³⁰ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.47.

³¹ 1 Corinthians 13:13. [ESV]

³² C. Bryant, *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (London, 1996), p.98.

³³ 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

thought of men into the obedience of the teaching and spirit of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Leader of men”.³⁴

Clifford quotes the words of Paul again, this time from the book of Colossians, arguing that at least some poverty is caused by “a violation of that great law of labour, uttered by the artisan Paul, ‘Masters, render unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven’.”³⁵ Clifford also offers an interpretation of Paul’s teaching on obedience to government – “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” – writing: “if there be any collision between the ‘power’ that ordains and the ‘power’ that is ordained, *i.e.*, between the claims of God and of the State, then we, as the subjects of Jesus Christ, have no choice but to elect obedience to the ‘power that ordains’, and to accept and to endure all the consequences of our contentious decision”.³⁶

Samuel Keeble focuses on Paul’s letter to Philemon, in which Philemon is exhorted to receive as a brother his former slave Onesimus. The letter, according to Keeble, “set[s] forth in action all those principles of love, spiritual equality, and brotherhood which involved the ultimate destruction of both ancient and modern slavery, and slavery of every type”.³⁷ This, in Keeble’s view, also had application for employer-employee relations in general, for it “forbids the treatment of human beings in any factory or business establishment as mere machines, mere ‘hands’, mere ‘machine-minders’. It is unnecessary to say that this is exactly how many employers to-day, who do not shrink from calling themselves Christians, do regard their workpeople”.³⁸

Finally, George Lansbury and Keir Hardie both turn to Paul’s sermon at the Areopagus in Athens, as recorded in Acts of the Apostles. Paul declares that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth”.³⁹ Lansbury writes of having “learned the truth ‘God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth’. Because this is so we sing of the Red Flag and look forward to the day when the nations of the world will gather under this Red Flag and fling down their arms, destroy their custom houses, break down all barriers”.⁴⁰ Hardie argued that “Socialism would give reality to the

³⁴ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches: Fabian Tract No.139* (London, 1908), p.3.

³⁵ Clifford, *New City of God*, pp.27-8. [Colossians 4:1-3]

³⁶ Romans 31:1; J. Clifford, *The State the Church and the Congregation* (London, 1908), p.3.

³⁷ Philemon v.12, vv.15-16; Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, pp.22-3.

³⁸ Keeble, *Ideal of the Material Life*, pp.14-15.

³⁹ Acts of the Apostles 17:26.

⁴⁰ Open letter to electorate from Lansbury, General Election May 1929, LSE archive, Lansbury 9/39-41.

claim often insisted upon from the Christian pulpit, and yet so universally belied by our every day deeds, that God hath made of one blood all nations of the earth to dwell together in unity”.⁴¹ Although this is a New Testament reference it speaks of an Old Testament doctrine, that of creation, and Christian Socialists were just as capable of making arguments from socialism from the Old Testament Scriptures.

Old Testament

Samuel Keeble described how it is that “[t]he principles of a Christian social order are gathered, of course, from the teaching of Christ in the Gospels, and the teaching of the other writers of the New Testament; but they arise out of the social principles of the Hebrews, those of the Old Testament, given in the Law and the Prophets”.⁴² The Old Testament doctrine of creation, drawn primarily from the Book of Genesis, was key to the thinking of Christian Socialists; we have already seen that in Lansbury and Hardie quoting from Paul’s declaration in Athens. The concept of God’s Fatherhood is also linked to creation, as is the brotherhood that exists between those He has created. Wilkinson explains this in relation to the thinking of R.H. Tawney: “Fundamental to Tawney was his belief that there was a common humanity created by God, each member of which is of equal worth”.⁴³ Bryant agrees, writing that “for Tawney the doctrine of Creation meant that society must be based on the equal worth of all”.⁴⁴

Part of the importance of this doctrine was that human beings were created in God’s image, as described in the opening chapter of Genesis: “And God said, Let us make man in our image [...] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”.⁴⁵ Wilfred Wellock, for example, argued that the issue of whether a society should be socialist or capitalist “depends upon whether we are going to regard man as a beast or a soul, a collection of physical appetites or a spiritual being made in the image of God”.⁴⁶ Tawney, for another, viewed the consequences of capitalism as “an odious outrage on the image of God”.⁴⁷ Hardie agreed, asking “how long do you intend to

⁴¹ J. Keir Hardie, *The I.L.P. and all About It* (Manchester, 1908), p.8.

⁴² Keeble, *Material Life*, p.158.

⁴³ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.107.

⁴⁴ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.197.

⁴⁵ Genesis 1:26-7.

⁴⁶ W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1921), p.10.

⁴⁷ A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.93.

submit to a system which is defacing God's image upon you [...] which is blurring and marring God's handiwork, which is destroying the lives of men, women and children?"⁴⁸

William Temple also drew on the doctrine of creation and the consequent fellowship that should exist between people: "Man is created for fellowship in the family of God: fellowship first with God, and through that with all God's other children. And that is the primary test that must be applied to every system that is constructed and every change in the system that is proposed. Does it help us nearer towards the fullness and richness of personal fellowship?"⁴⁹ From this Temple argued that democracy was the best system, for by including everybody in the political process it led to the greater expression of fellowship.

Another important implication is that, the land being created by God, there was no right for it to be controlled exclusively by a land-owning class. In a speech, George Lansbury told his audience: "What we Socialists want is, you should claim that land was not made by man but by God, and belongs to the whole people, for the use of mankind and not for the profit of the idle few".⁵⁰ The inference of Christian Socialism then is that land created by God should be owned universally by all of His children. This theme was taken up by John Wheatley, responding to a group from his local church who, incited by the parish priest, had protested outside his house:

Don't you know that God who gave you life has created for you green fields and sunny skies, that he has given you the material and the power to have in abundance beautiful homes, healthy food, education, leisure, travel and all that aids in the development of cultured men and women. These gifts of God have been stolen from you.⁵¹

For Wheatley, as God's creation was intended for all people, the ownership of the land by a specific land-owning class was nothing more than theft. Stewart Headlam also took up this theme, paraphrasing from the Psalms – "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" – arguing: "The earth is the Lord's, and therefore not the landlord's; the earth is the Lord's, and He hath given it unto the children of men".⁵² The

⁴⁸ Holman, *Hardie*, p.167.

⁴⁹ W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), p.141.

⁵⁰ Newspaper article in the 'Liverpool Daily Post' on a speech by Lansbury at Carnarvon, 18 September 1911, LSE archive, Lansbury/4 219.

⁵¹ Wood, 'John Wheatley and Catholic Socialism', in A.R. Morton, ed., *After Socialism? The Future of Radical Christianity* (Edinburgh, 1994), p.21.

⁵² Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.15.

same verse is cited by Wellock, who viewed it as another statement into which “society [should] be brought into absolute conformity”.⁵³

Reference was also made to another verse in Genesis, in which Cain disavows his responsibility for his brother Abel: “And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?”⁵⁴ “[H]ow terrible”, proclaimed Headlam, “the evils which result from individual selfishness, from the reiteration of that cold sneer first learnt from Cain, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’.”⁵⁵ “Each of us is his brother’s keeper”, declared Lansbury, “and we are in our present plight because we refuse to act and live up to our responsibilities”.⁵⁶

Headlam also points to the account of the Exodus, in which the Jewish nation escaped from the rule of Egypt; he argues that the Passover meal “commemorated, what we should nowadays call the great strike or revolution, which Moses headed against the Egyptian tyranny”.⁵⁷ Samuel Keeble also refers to the Exodus account of Pharaoh denying the Israelite slaves the proper materials in order to make the bricks with which they were required to build:

But he said, ‘You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, “Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.” Go now and work. No straw will be given you, but you must still deliver the same number of bricks.’ The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they said, ‘You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day.’⁵⁸

“Capitalists must not”, writes Keeble, “try to make God’s children provide bricks without straw, for if they do there is for them a fearful looking for of fiery indignation and wrath. God is not dead, and He will hear the cry of the oppressed”.⁵⁹ Keeble here takes up Headlam’s theme of “the God who fights”, pointing to the eventual judgement carried out against Pharaoh and Egypt as a warning to the capitalist class.

Stewart Headlam is quoted above, arguing: “The earth is the Lord’s, and therefore not the landlord’s”. Samuel Keeble makes just the same argument: “The Hebrew regulations concerning the Sabbatic year, land-debts, rural housing, the pledge, and the year of Jubilee,

⁵³ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), p.41.

⁵⁴ Genesis 4:9.

⁵⁵ Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress*, p.18.

⁵⁶ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York NY, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.63.

⁵⁷ Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.16.

⁵⁸ Exodus 5:17-19. [ESV]

⁵⁹ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.229.

all declare that ‘the earth is the Lord’s’, and not the landlord’s, and they all aim at preserving the economic freedom of the worker and his family. There is no absolute property in land in the Bible”. For Keeble, this “Hebrew code is based on freedom, equality, justice, and aims at securing them, especially for the weak and defenceless”.⁶⁰ According to Headlam “a study of Hebrew polity shows that careful arrangements were made, by the Jubilee laws especially, to deal righteously with the land, to see that the whole community enjoyed its value”.⁶¹ Likewise, Hardie writes that “land could neither be sold outright nor held for more than a limited period as security for debt; even the debtor was freed from all obligations when the year of Jubilee came round”.⁶²

Temple agrees with this, writing: “There were thus to be rights to property, but they were to be rights shared by all, and were subject to the overruling consideration that God alone had ultimate ownership of the land, the families to whom it was allotted being His stewards”.⁶³ Temple also values the Jubilee laws, mentioned by Headlam and Hardie, and referred to by Keeble as “the Sabbatic year”. This law stated that every fiftieth year land that had been bought and sold was to return to those to whom it had originally been allotted – “And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan” – and Temple argued that this law should be reinstated in order to prevent monopoly of land.⁶⁴

In a similar way to these references to Hebraic land law, Christian Socialists could refer to the Ten Commandments to argue in favour of socialist principles. “In every church throughout the world”, wrote George Lansbury, “the words ‘Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy’ are said by the minister, and yet all these ministers know that hundreds of thousands of men and women, boys and girls, are not allowed to rest from their labours”.⁶⁵ Elsewhere Lansbury declared that “[t]he grievous spectacle of seven days’ work per week in a country which professes to honour the Sabbath has to be abolished”.⁶⁶ Keir Hardie attacked the factory owner Lord Overtoun along these lines, accusing him of the hypocrisy of being a member of a society for preservation of the Sabbath while forcing his employees

⁶⁰ S.E. Keeble, ‘Introduction’, in S.E. Keeble, ed., *The Social Teaching of the Bible* (London, 1909), p.19.

⁶¹ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.59.

⁶² Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.32.

⁶³ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.48.

⁶⁴ Leviticus 25:8 [ESV]; Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.118.

⁶⁵ Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty*, p.31. [Exodus 20:8]

⁶⁶ ‘The future of the poor law, address by Councillor George Lansbury’, reprinted from the East London Observer, 23 October and 6 November 1909, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 a3.

to work seven days a week, denying them any opportunity for rest or attendance at church on Sunday.⁶⁷

Headlam refers to the command “Thou shalt not steal”, applying it to wealthy in capitalist society: “it is just as possible, indeed much more probable, that the rich will rob from the poor, as that the poor will rob from the rich. ‘Thou shalt not steal’ is just the commandment we want to get kept; we want to put a stop to the robbery of the poor by the rich, which has been going on for so long”.⁶⁸ R.H. Tawney shows the influence of the second commandment which forbade idolatry – “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image [...] Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” – in viewing the status of money in capitalist society as idolatrous: “To kick over an idol, you must first get off your knees [...] Either the Labour party means to end the tyranny of money, or it does not. If it does, it must not fawn on the owners and symbols of money”.⁶⁹

“Social equality and fierce denunciations of the rich form the staple of the writings we are now taught to look upon as inspired”, wrote Keir Hardie. “What is now known as Socialism is woven from the same loom as was the vision of Isaiah”, and “the prophets of Israel are fiery publicists of the description we should now call Socialists or Anarchists”.⁷⁰ “As a matter of fact”, concludes Keeble, “the literature and law-books of the world, ancient and modern, cannot equal the social teaching of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and that teaching is the Christian’s by inheritance. It is really his prerogative and function to do with it what the Hebrew could not – make it operative”.⁷¹ From these examples we can see that Christian Socialists found bases and justifications for their political beliefs from throughout the Bible – the Old Testament law and history and New Testament epistles just as much as the life and teaching of Christ in the Gospels.

Scriptural Principles

None of this is to argue that Christian Socialists applied Biblical ideas unthinkingly and uncritically. For example, we saw that Stewart Headlam made an example of the sharing of goods in the Acts of Apostles, calling it communism. Some may have objected to this on the

⁶⁷ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings (From 1888 to 1915)*, (Glasgow, 1928), p.92.

⁶⁸ Exodus 20:15; S.D. Headlam, *Christian Socialism – A Lecture: Fabian Tract No.42* (London, 1899), p.15.

⁶⁹ Exodus 20:4-5; R.H. Tawney, ‘The Choice Before the Labour Party’, *Political Quarterly*, 3, 3 (1932), p.32.

⁷⁰ J. Keir Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity: Keir Hardie Library No.4* (London, 1907), p.4; F. Johnson, *Keir Hardie’s Socialism* (London, 1922), p.12.

⁷¹ Keeble, *Material Life*, p.16.

grounds that the modern industrial world is too complex for such a collectivist system to work; instead of refuting this completely Headlam concedes the point, arguing instead that “if in the process of God’s ordering of the world things have become complicated and this simple communism is no longer possible, the *principle* which inspired it is eternally true [...] we are still to be communists – sharers”.⁷² Here Headlam makes the point that even if the practice of the early church cannot be replicated entirely, there is still a principle which modern society is required to follow.

William Temple gives a similar treatment of the issue of property ownership. Temple argues that “[t]he institution of property is rooted in sin; for if all men loved God with all their hearts and their neighbour as themselves, they would cheerfully labour for the common good and would take for themselves no more than their fair share”; however, Temple immediately makes the point that, despite this, “men are sinful, so property rights are needed, not so much for the satisfaction of the rich as for the protection of the poor”.⁷³ According to Temple, a society without property is desirable, but concessions have to be made to human sinfulness – only in a perfect world can private property be completely abandoned.

Samuel Keeble argues that the Old Testament law could not be implemented in full, “but its aims, objects, and principles – which are divine and eternal – must govern our procedure”.⁷⁴ This is evident in Keeble’s treatment of interest or usury, pointing out that it “is explicitly condemned in the Old Testament, and implicitly in the new”.⁷⁵ Keeble quotes from the Old Testament law in Leviticus – “Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase” – and the words of Christ in Luke’s Gospel – “do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again”.⁷⁶ However, Keeble argues that it is the principle that is important:

[T]he Bible protests against interest were needful for the times in which they were made.

They were times of primitive economic conditions and undeveloped industrialism, times in which interest *could only be exacted from the needy and distressed* [...] Hence biblical

⁷² Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.29. [Emphasis in original.]

⁷³ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.49. [Temple is referencing the two commandments of Christ: Luke 10:27 – “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself”.]

⁷⁴ Keeble, *Social Teaching of the Bible*, p.19.

⁷⁵ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.172.

⁷⁶ Leviticus 25:36-7; Luke 6:34.

prohibitions do not avail for wholly changed social and economic conditions; otherwise, the whole Jewish polity would be a pattern for us. Nevertheless, those prohibitions and precepts are of permanent value, for they assert principles which, if observed, will safeguard both the individual and society against the abuses to which interest, however in itself right and necessary, is for ever liable.⁷⁷

Here Keeble argues that rules derived from the Bible, particularly the laws of the Old Testament, cannot, and perhaps should not, be followed to the letter. Keir Hardie, according to one biographer, “never said that Christianity and socialism were one and the same [...] But he saw an overlap between Christianity and socialism and he believed that the teachings of Scripture and the example of Christ oared insights for building a socialist and better society”.⁷⁸ Like Headlam then, Hardie and Keeble see that the Scriptures “assert principles” which should be implemented by society.

Arguing from Scripture

We saw above that opponents of socialism offered an interpretation of Paul’s statement that “if any would not work, neither should he eat”, and how this was refuted by the Christian Socialists. Supporters of capitalism and opponents of socialism were just as capable of using the Bible in order to make their case, and Christian Socialists were forced to make counter-arguments in order to uphold their beliefs.⁷⁹ For example, in his Fabian tract John Clifford complained that the opponents of socialism “denounce ministers who hold and teach that the laws of God run everywhere, even into wages and prices, into houses of toil and the sanitary conditions of factories and drapery establishments”.⁸⁰ Such were those who held that Christianity was a personal, individual matter and could not be applied to industry or to the economy. Samuel Keeble, who in his writings makes a point of countering the arguments made against Christian Socialism, dismissed this argument:

Against Christian Individualism, which demands ‘the simple gospel’, Christian Socialism maintains that the Christian Gospel is twofold – individual and social – that the former never has been, and never can be, neglected, but that the latter both has been and is grossly

⁷⁷ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.184. [Emphasis in original.]

⁷⁸ Holman, *Hardie*, p.135.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 11 for ‘A Christian Critique of Christian Socialism’.

⁸⁰ Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ*, p.2.

neglected. The social gospel is as sacred and as indispensable as the individual gospel – the two are complementary, and the neglect of either always brings its penalties.⁸¹

Opponents would use specific verses and passages in order to disprove the claims of Christian Socialists; for example, the words of Paul in his first letter to Timothy – “if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” – were used as an argument against stirring up discontent among the working class.⁸² This was a serious argument against Christian Socialism which sought, in the words of Headlam, “to stir up a divine discontent in the hearts and minds of the people with the evils which surround them”.⁸³ Keeble, however, completely turned the argument on its head: many working-class people did not have food and clothing, and were therefore logically “not to be content”. “There is nothing,” continued Keeble, “to make either Christian individuals, Christian churches, or Christian communities contented when workers have not the necessities of existence, but, on the contrary, discontented.”⁸⁴ Keeble made the same point more fully elsewhere:

A Christian, honest and industrious, conscientious and careful, who finds himself lacking [food and clothing], is not here to be exhorted to be contented. Both the circumstances themselves and the teaching of this very passage warrant the most energetic and definite discontent. If the wages and profits of labour and toil do not suffice to bring in this necessary minimum of food, clothing, fire, and house-room, Christians are justified both in being discontented themselves and in making other social victims discontented also. They suffer social injustice. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that there was discontent in the Apostolic Church because the ‘widows were neglected’, they did not receive their ‘daily bread’. The result of this discontent was not Apostolic rebuke but social reconstruction, the appointment of Stephen and others to the diaconate.⁸⁵

In a similar way, the instruction of John the Baptist in Luke’s Gospel to “be content with your wages” was also used as an argument against socialism.⁸⁶ “‘But,’ say some scandalized Christians with comfortable salaries and incomes, ‘what of the passage which says, “be content with your wages”?’”. Keeble, however, refuted this argument, pointing out

⁸¹ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.92.

⁸² 1 Timothy 6:8. [ESV]

⁸³ Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.5.

⁸⁴ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.244.

⁸⁵ Keeble, *Material Life*, pp.94-5.

⁸⁶ Luke 3:14.

that “these words were spoken to Roman soldiers, who were guaranteed by the State a good ‘living wage’, food, fire, clothing, and shelter, with perquisites and pickings, employment, and pension till death. Such, indeed, should be content with their wages – they had no grievance – a very different position from that of the average workman in Christian Europe and Christian England”.⁸⁷ For Keeble, the command to “be content” came to those who enjoyed the benefits of a living wage; that was not true for the working class in capitalist society, and therefore discontent was perfectly justified.

Another argument put forward from opponents of socialism is that Christ both blessed the poor in the Beatitudes, and stated that “ye have the poor with you always”; therefore, attempts to eradicate poverty were both undesirable and unworkable.⁸⁸ Stewart Headlam opposed this notion in his Fabian tract, writing, firstly, that Christ meant “that these poor men, notwithstanding their poverty, were better and happier men than their opponents”, but that this in no way suggested “that poverty—especially the grinding poverty which is found in our modern centres of civilisation — is the normal condition of things”.⁸⁹ Secondly, Headlam argued that Christ, in saying “ye have the poor with you always”, was simply noting the persistence of poverty in society, going on to add that even “under the best Socialist *regime* imaginable, if a man is a loafer [and] refuse[s] to work when he has every facility and opportunity for working, he will fall into poverty”.⁹⁰

Henry Scott Holland also detailed a counter-argument on this point, arguing that the poverty that Christ blessed was a simple, non-materialist way of living, which nonetheless provided for basic needs, as opposed to the desperate poverty of capitalist society. “[D]o we suppose,” asked Holland, “that Jesus Christ has laid his Blessing on this unholy Poverty? Do we really imagine that this is what He had in His eyes as He pronounced the benediction?”⁹¹

After all, Jesus did not intend to perpetuate even the Poverty that He blessed. He did not say ‘Blessed are the Poor! – therefore keep them poor.’ [...] The best of Poverities, the blessed Poverty, is to find its blessing in the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven. How much more, then, is that evil Poverty, that wicked Poverty, that fatal Poverty, which withholds from the Kingdom – to cease and disappear? Herein lies our task, the special task of Social Reform.⁹²

⁸⁷ Keeble, *Material Life*, p.96.

⁸⁸ Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20; Mark 14:7.

⁸⁹ Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ H. Scott Holland, ‘Our Neighbours’ (1911), cited in A. Bradstock and C. Rowland, eds, *Radical Christian Writings: A Reader* (Oxford, 2002), p.194.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.195.

“Poverty”, wrote Keeble, “miserable tragic poverty, is no ‘divine institution’. Nine-tenths of it is of human origin, due to unbrotherliness, injustice and greed. It is ‘always with us’ because individuals and society will not take the necessary steps, long ago indicated by Christ, to remove it”.⁹³

The idea of “divine institution” could be used against socialism, in the argument that the world was as ordained by God and ought not to be changed. This was refuted by George Lansbury: “Poverty, unemployment, casual labour, slums and all the social and economic evils from which we suffer, are not sent by God or Nature. They all arise out of conditions created by man, and by man can be removed”.⁹⁴ “He did not believe,” Lansbury wrote of himself, “that God was pleased to call people to live in slums or workhouses, prisons and such-like places, brought there by man-made conditions”.⁹⁵ That much is evident from a speech in which Lansbury declared: “We talk about God’s poor and God’s rich, but you can search the Book right through and you won’t find a word in the Master’s philosophy that has anything to do with the creating of rich and poor”.⁹⁶ Wilkinson credits the influence of Scott Holland’s Christian Social Union with the fact the verse

The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly
And ordered their estate

was removed from the hymn ‘All things bright and beautiful’ in the 1906 version of *The English Hymnal*, for the idea had spread that poverty was not ordained by God.⁹⁷

On a similar note, Keeble takes issue with the teaching of Thomas Malthus, the Anglican minister and economist: “Malthus declared that ‘The Great Author of Nature, with that wisdom which is apparent in all His works, has made the passion of self-love beyond comparison stronger than the passion of benevolence’. Hence, Malthus makes the Second Commandment false, which at least puts regard for others on a level with regard for

⁹³ S.E. Keeble, *Is There a Heavenly Father?* (London, 1904), p.17.

⁹⁴ Parliamentary Election, 1935, Lansbury/30 b 40-42, LSE archive.

⁹⁵ ‘What I should like to read about myself’ by the Rt. Hon. George Lansbury, extracted from *The Listener*, 22 July 1936, Lansbury/30 a 10, LSE archive.[This article was written in the third person.]

⁹⁶ Newspaper cutting from the *Gravesend Reporter*, about Lansbury delivering a speech to the Swanscombe Brotherhood, 21 March 1931, Lansbury/10 52.

⁹⁷ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.60.

ourselves”.⁹⁸ Keeble refutes the notion that the selfishness exhibited in capitalist society has been ordained by God.

In an article for the *Baptist Times* George Lansbury offered this challenge: “If we who based our Socialism on Christian ethics are wrong, you who think the present system right must find a way out of the morass which compels millions of our brothers and sisters to live a miserable existence on public and private charity [...] If we believe Him and His teaching, then we dare not accept as final the economic situation which faces us”.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.14. [Keeble is not here referring to the second of the Ten Commandments, but the second of the two commandments given by Christ Himself: Matthew 22:9 – “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”.]

⁹⁹ Letter from Lansbury to Rev John Charles Carlile, 22 January 1931, Lansbury/10 2-6, LSE archive.

3. The Church, its Teaching and Sacraments

We have seen that the basis of socialism for Christian Socialists is ethical, and that these ethics are drawn from Christianity. The previous chapters dealt with arguments for socialism from the Bible; this chapter considers the basis for socialism found in the church.

Throughout the writings of the Christian Socialists there are references to ways in which the church has provided for them a basis for socialism. Peter d'A Jones identifies an argument from patristics, being "that many of the church fathers were socialists and communists", and from the sacraments of the church such as communion and baptism, being "that the modern church in its worship, symbol and ritual exhibits a socialist faith"; to this latter phenomenon Jones gives the name "sacramental socialism".¹ We could add to the influence of the "church fathers" – men such as Augustine of Hippo Regius – the modern-day teaching of the church, including Catholic social teaching, the foundation of which was laid in 1891 with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* (otherwise known as *The Condition of Labour*) which "confirmed the need for the state to intervene to protect workers and poor people".²

Which Church?

Christian Socialists and those who have written about Christian Socialism have sometimes taken it as evident that Catholicism – whether in the form of Roman Catholicism or Anglo-Catholicism – is more suited to socialism than Protestantism. In the period we are considering, "the distinction between Protestant individualism and Catholic cooperation was becoming an intellectual commonplace".³ One writer points to "the mythology of the age, which lays it down that Protestantism, especially in such advanced forms as English Dissent, is necessarily individualistic, without social content, and inevitably and inseparably associated with Capitalism".⁴ Stewart Headlam's view was that, by contrast, "the Catholic

¹ P. d'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), pp.86-7.

² C.E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis* (Washington D.C., 2002), p.137.

³ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam's Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.61.

⁴ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.355.

Faith is essentially at one with the Socialist ideal”, and John Wheatley argued that “[t]he Catholic church has always leaned more to socialism or collectivism and equality, than to individualism and inequality. It has always been the church of the poor and all historical attacks on it have emanated from the rich”.⁵

One reason for this, as suggested above, is that the universal claims of Catholicism stand in contrast to the individualistic nature of much Protestantism, especially Nonconformity. One Roman Catholic writer describes how, in this view, the Nonconformist or evangelical congregation sect is different from the Catholic view of the church:

The sect type, as a small radical group, regards the world as evil and thus removes itself from the world so that the Christian community can live and follow the biblical demands of Jesus without being forced to compromise or be contaminated by the evil world. The church type, on the other hand, comprises saints and sinners, lives in the world, and attempts to have a direct influence on what transpires in all aspects of worldly existence [...] [B]ecause the Roman Catholic Church is the best illustration of the church type, it will be concerned about what happens in the world. The history of the Catholic Church testifies to its involvement in working for a better society.⁶

Another reason is that, as explained more fully below, arguments for Christian Socialism have often been made from the sacraments of the church, particularly baptism and communion. Anglo-Catholics raised these to the position of utmost importance in worship, while Nonconformists focused instead on the Word of God, the Bible. This difference is emphasised by the interior design of church buildings, as Headlam explains, declaring in a sermon that the Catholic tradition, as followed in the Anglican Church, makes “the worship of Jesus Christ the central act of our service: go into almost any Church you like and it is the altar, not the pulpit, which is the most prominent and exalted place”.⁷ “The Bible, and the Bible only, may be the religion of Protestants”, wrote Headlam, “but the Catholic Faith, with its one unique Christian service bearing witness to the Eternal Presence of Jesus Christ, is not founded on a book but on a Person”.⁸ It is the sacramentalism of Anglo-Catholicism

⁵ S.D.Headlam, *The Socialist's Church* (London, 1907), p.29; I.S. Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), p.18.

⁶ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.101.

⁷ S.D. Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress: Being Sermons and Lectures* (London, 1878). [Headlam is here referring to the Eucharist as “the worship of Jesus Christ”.]

⁸ Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, p.33.

allied to the strong association between sacramentalism and Christian Socialism which leads to the linkage of socialism with Catholicism.

These two reasons – the claims to universality and the focus on sacraments – are also drawn together, in that an understanding of the latter in light of the former are conducive to socialism. Take, for example, baptism. Headlam, again, writes that “we claim every little baby born into the world as being equal with every other little baby, no matter whether it be the child of a costermonger or the child of a prince”, before adding, in an aside to Protestants, especially those who practice believer’s baptism, “not waiting for conversion or illumination, or election or proof of godness, but simply because it is a human being, we claim it as of right a member of Christ, the child of God and an inheritor – not merely a future heir but a preset inheritor – of the Kingdom of Heaven”.⁹ For Headlam, socialist equality made perfect sense under a system in which all children in a country were christened, but not under a system in which either the children of believers only were christened, or mature believers themselves baptised. “Infant baptism”, writes one of Headlam’s biographers, “was the surest safeguard against exclusiveness and the sectarian mentality which Headlam saw to be subversive of both Catholicism and Socialism”.¹⁰

This view has sometimes led to criticism of Protestantism by Christian Socialists, such as those essayists from the Church Socialist League who in *Return to Christendom* attacked Protestantism for its individualism and ignoring of social problems, and argued that the Reformation had undone the Christian values which had underpinned medieval society.¹¹ R.H. Tawney, in the words of a biographer, argued that “Protestantism, and Calvinism in particular, replaced social solidarity with individualism, and encouraged the separation of economic and ethical interests”.¹² John Wheatley, similarly, contrasted the collectivist spirit of the Church of Rome with the individualism of Protestantism, following on from the Reformation.¹³

These views, however, are countered by some writers on this subject, and by the Nonconformist Christian Socialist themselves. Interestingly, it is a biographer of John Wheatley who notes that the “Labour movement in Britain would never have come into

⁹ S.D. Headlam, *Christian Socialism: A Lecture – Fabian Tract No.42* (1899), p.6.

¹⁰ K. Leech, ‘Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924, and the Guild of St Matthew’, in M.B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England* (London, 1968), p.73.

¹¹ G. Taylor, *Socialism and Christianity: The Politics of the Church Socialist League* (Sheffield, 2000), pp.77-8.

¹² L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), p.231. [Goldman suggests that Tawney may not have been a theological Anglo-Catholic, despite his Anglo-Catholic views about Protestantism and individualism, see p.231.]

¹³ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.18.

existence without the belief, particularly strong among Nonconformist Christians, that this could, and must, be done,” adding that Wheatley’s “task was perhaps a harder one, coming as he did from a church with a tradition of formidable sanctions against intellectual dissent among its own ranks”.¹⁴ Another writer argues that “the kind of Christianity which counted for most in the history of the Labour movement was that kind which found its formal expression in the several denominations of Nonconformity”.¹⁵

Nonconformist Christian Socialists were just as capable of finding from within their own tradition a basis for socialism. Samuel Keeble, a Wesleyan Methodist minister, saw socialism displayed in England’s Protestant tradition: “In the past the Church has been very prominent in all the social revolutions of England – the Lollard movement owed much to Wyclif and his poor priests, and the Stuart tyranny was struck down by the Puritans”.¹⁶ Keeble elsewhere cites the Puritans of England and Covenanters of Scotland as part of this socialistic tradition.¹⁷ Wilfred Wellock, an Independent Methodist lay preacher, noted in similar vein that the socialist movement followed “in the spirit of men like Wyclif, Luther, Knox”.¹⁸ Keir Hardie, a congregationalist, also points to this tradition, writing of John Ball, the “Communitic teachings of Wycliffe”, “John Huss the Communist”, Thomas Muntzer, the Anabaptists and the Levellers.¹⁹

Keeble admitted that “[t]he Roman Catholics, making much more of the Church, the Christian body politic, and less of the individual than Protestants, naturally were earlier in the field of the social question”, adding that “Protestantism has grievously suffered from the individualism grafted upon it – bad stock on a good stem”.²⁰ Keeble then accepts part of the case against Protestantism, but argues that a disinterest in the welfare of society is not natural to Protestantism but an unfortunate mistake, due to the Reformers’ “zeal for the emancipation of the individual from superstition and spiritual tyranny”; they nevertheless “did not wholly lose sight of [the] social environment”.²¹ The Baptist minister John Clifford goes on the offensive against Catholicism, referring to Ernest Renan’s writing about the Church of Rome: “Renan has described the steps by which the ‘Church became all in

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁵ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.355.

¹⁶ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics*, (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.220.

¹⁷ S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.21.

¹⁸ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the Road to the New World* (London, 1922), p.31.

¹⁹ J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), pp.40-1.

²⁰ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.178.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.67.

Christianity'; and so displaced much of Christianity; and then he speaks of the one step more by which 'a bishop becomes all in the Church,' and thus gets rid of much of the Christianity that remained"; Clifford concludes: "We do not recognise that bishop. We are not of that Church, and refuse to take our social and economic ideals from either him or it".²²

Church Teaching as a Basis for Socialism

The writings of Christian Socialists nevertheless indicate that, whatever church background they were from, they in part derived their socialist beliefs from the teaching of the church. John Wheatley's political beliefs, for example, have been described as "socialism illuminated by these insights into its relationship with church teaching and moral law".²³ In his *Catholic Working Man* Wheatley's arguments were "reinforced with wide-ranging quotations from the church fathers, Cardinal Manning and, perhaps most effectively in its immediate local context, Archbishop Maguire himself", Maguire being the Archbishop of Glasgow who had criticised Wheatley for his socialist views.²⁴ We see here that Wheatley employs a mix of church teaching both historical and contemporary, including reference to "the church fathers", the patristic identified by Jones. The same line is taken by Hardie, who argues that the "early Church Fathers" were those who "spoke out fearlessly [...] on the side of Communism", adding "that for nearly seventeen centuries the common people and their leaders believed Communism and Christianity to be synonymous terms".²⁵ "[I]f men accepted the teaching of the Christian Church," wrote R.H. Tawney, "they would have a body of principles not only resting on authority [...] but setting out the main lines of a moral scheme of the universe and deducing man's duties and rights, freedom, responsibility, justice, etc".²⁶

It is Samuel Keeble who gives the most extensive treatment of the teaching and example of the church throughout history, giving in his *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* – after a similarly extensive discussion of Scriptural reasons for socialism – just over forty pages to a chronological account of socialism throughout the history of the church. We shall therefore follow his chronology. Keeble begins by noting the contribution

²² J. Clifford, *The New City of God: The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel* (London, 1888), p.13. [The "bishop" in question is the Pope, the Bishop of Rome.]

²³ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.27.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.26.

²⁵ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.40 and p.42.

²⁶ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.183.

of the earliest Christians to social reform, adding that the earliest Christians “protected the poor, the widow, and the orphan”, and “dignified labour by engaging in it”.²⁷ Temple also appeals to the behaviour and example of the early church as a whole rather than just those regarded as fathers of the church: “The primitive Church expressed its intimacy of inner fellowship by a spontaneous community of goods. It was a small fellowship of persons filled with the spirit of Christ and therefore with love for one another. This expressed itself in a voluntary communism”.²⁸ Hardie does likewise, explaining that “it is now known that Communism in goods was practiced by Christians for at least three hundred years after the death of Christ”.²⁹

Keeble then references some of the apocryphal gospels and epistles from the early church, quoting first the Epistle to Diognetus: “It is not by exercising lordship over his neighbours, or by desiring to be greater than those that are weaker, or by being rich and oppressing those who are poor, that happiness comes, nor can anyone by these things become an imitator of God, but whoso bears his neighbour’s burden”.³⁰ Keeble then points to the “Way of Darkness” described by the writer of the Epistle of Barnabus – “not to administer righteous judgement to the widow and orphan and to have no compassion on the poor, nor to take any pains for such as are heavy-laden and oppressed; it is to be advocates of the rich, but unjust judges of the poor” – and contrasts it with the writer’s “Way of Light” – “thou shalt communicate to thy neighbour all thou hast; thou shalt not call anything thine own”.³¹ It is particularly this latter command that points to communal ownership rather than merely care for the poor. Finally Keeble quotes from the Shepherd of Hermas: “Justify the widow, judge the cause of the fatherless, and spend your riches and your wealth in such works as these”.³²

Keeble then moves on to the writings of those regarded as the Church Fathers, first pointing to the words of Tertullian: “We who mingle in mind and soul have no hesitation as to fellowship in property”. Cyprian is then quoted, commanding that Christians should “imitate the equality of God in the common gifts of nature, which the whole human race should equally enjoy”. “The unequal division of wealth,” writes Ambrose of Milan, “is the

²⁷ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.36 and p.51.

²⁸ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.47.

²⁹ Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.5.

³⁰ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, pp.37

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, pp.37-8.

result of egotism and violence”.³³ Again, these quotes appear to compel both equality and common ownership.

Keeble also writes of Augustine of Hippo Regius, who is elsewhere quoted: “Let us, therefore, my brethren, abstain from the possession of private property, or from the love of it if we cannot abstain from the possession of it”.³⁴ William Temple also points to Augustine in his discussion of private property. According to Temple, “St. Augustine taught explicitly that private property is the creation of the State and exists only in virtue of the State’s protection. But the state, according to him, has its origin in the sinfulness of men, which must be kept within bounds. So the state has a divine authority, yet was instituted only because of men’s sin”, the point of this being that in Temple’s view property rights “are always an accommodation to human sin, are subordinate to the general interest, and are a form of stewardship rather than of ultimate ownership”.³⁵ Temple’s view would agree with that of Tawney – that property rights are not absolute but rather “subordinate to the general interest” – but the significance here is his appeal to a church authority, Augustine, to make his point.

Keeble then looks to a later period of church history, arguing from the teaching of John Wyclif – “the ideal remains that no man should hold separate property, and that all should be had in common” – and his contemporary, John Ball – “things would never go right in England as long as goods were not in common, and so long as there were villeins and gentlemen”.³⁶ Keeble offers some praise for Martin Luther, but criticises Luther for his opposition to the peasants, which “accounts for the atheistic and material form which German socialism has generally assumed [...] It was pitiful that ‘the monk that shook the world’ for religious freedom, who, like a lion, confronted Pope and Emperor, should quail before property”.³⁷ Instead Keeble quotes Thomas Munzter: “our sovereigns and rulers are at the bottom of all usury, thievery, and robbery; they take all created things into possession”.³⁸ Keeble turns to other figures from this period, such as Jean Calvin, Hugh Latimer and Thomas More.³⁹ We have already noted instances of Wilfred Wellock and Keir Hardie citing individuals and movements from the Reformation era as examples for socialism.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.39 and p.41.

³⁴ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.227.

³⁵ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.50.

³⁶ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, pp.59.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.68 and p.71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.72.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.73, p.76 and p.77.

Christian Socialists not only looked back to the church of the past for inspiration, but could also find elements of socialism in the modern-day church. Stewart Headlam, according to one biographer, “used the Book of Common prayer as a textbook in socialism”.⁴⁰ Headlam also gave a socialist interpretation to passages from the Anglican Catechism. The Catechism, for example, reads: “My duty toward my neighbour is to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do to me”; according to Headlam this is a condemnation of “those who say that it is my duty [...] to get all I can out of my neighbour, to take advantage of him, to catch him when he is weak and alone, when he has a large family, and make him work for me at just as low wages as I can get him to take”.⁴¹ Headlam quoted the Catechism instruction to “hurt nobody by word or deed”, arguing that “we can’t quite, according to the Catechism, leave these matters to supply and demand”.⁴²

Headlam also cited the Catechism on entering into a debate about the role of such teaching in an industrial dispute. “It was, for instance, claimed during the lock-out of the agricultural labourers that the low condition of the workers was in part due to the teaching of the Catechism about submissiveness. Headlam soon stressed that the Catechism spoke of ‘that state of life into which it *shall* please God to call him’, not ‘*has* pleased’, thus encouraging, as he said, a ‘divine discontent’.”⁴³ For Headlam, the Catechism spoke of socialism because it did not call men to submit to any conditions, but only to the condition of life which God shall eventually call them, that being a socialist way of life; therefore they should be discontent with anything less than that. It may be that George Lansbury also held to this interpretation of the Catechism, as evidenced in the statement he made of himself: “He did not believe that God was pleased to call people to live in slums or workhouses, prisons and such-like places, brought there by man-made conditions”.⁴⁴

Tawney references the Book of Common Prayer in arguing that a prosperous society “depends upon co-operative effort, and co-operation upon moral principles. And moral principles are what the prophets of this dispensation despise. So the world ‘continues in scarcity,’ because it is too grasping and too short-sighted to see that ‘which maketh men to

⁴⁰ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.1.

⁴¹ Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress*, p.108.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.109-10.

⁴³ Leech, ‘Headlam’, p.73.

⁴⁴ ‘What I should like to read about myself’ by the Rt. Hon. George Lansbury, extracted from *The Listener*, 22 July 1936, London School of Economics [LSE] archive, Lansbury/30 a 10. [This article was written in the third person.]

be of one mind in a house’.”⁴⁵ Here Tawney is quoting from the Book of Common Prayer paraphrase of Psalm 68: “He is a Father of the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widows; even God in his holy habitation. He is the God that maketh men to be of one mind in an house, and bringeth prisoners out of captivity”.⁴⁶ The references to the fatherless and the widows may have had resonance for Tawney, while the phrasing here shows that it is God that makes men of one mind, able to co-operate in the way Tawney views as necessary in order for society to prosper.

Catholic Social Teaching

That which came to be known as Catholic social teaching has been identified as important in the political thought of John Wheatley.⁴⁷ “Catholic social teaching”, according to one writer, “unequivocally maintains that the purpose of the state is to promote the common good, both for individuals and in terms of conditions appropriate for all”.⁴⁸ The only major document to have been written during Wheatley’s lifetime was Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum* or *On the Condition of Labour* in 1891, an encyclical written in response to the problems caused by the industrial revolution. “*Rerum novarum* – in opposition to laissez-faire liberalism and individualism – called for government intervention to protect workers. The state should intervene not only for the good of all but for the good of a particular class”.⁴⁹

It is not difficult to see why such a document could be used by socialists such as Wheatley to argue for socialism, or as a basis or their personal socialist beliefs. For instance, Leo writes: “But all agree, and there can be no question whatever, that some remedy must be found, and quickly found, for the misery and wretchedness which press so heavily at this moment on the large majority of the very poor”.⁵⁰ Again Leo refers to “the cruelty of grasping speculators who use human beings as mere instruments for making money”, and calls for rulers to ensure that the poor are “housed, clothed and enabled to support life”.⁵¹ Here Pope Leo seems to be supportive of socialist ideas.

⁴⁵ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.12.

⁴⁶ E.M. Knowles, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford, 1999), p.136.

⁴⁷ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.160.

⁴⁸ D. Cloutier, ‘Modern Politics and Catholic Social Teaching’, in D.M. McCarthy, *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids MI, 2009), p.106.

⁴⁹ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.147.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.174.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.199 and p.188.

However, *Rerum novarum* “had, in fact, rejected socialism as an answer to social problems”.⁵² Pope Leo opposed socialism for its rejection of private property – “the main tenet of socialism, the community of goods, must be utterly rejected” – and for giving too much power to the state, despite his not fully rejecting state intervention. He also believed that equality in society was unobtainable: “in capability, in diligence, in health, and in strength; an unequal fortune is a necessary result of inequality in condition”.⁵³ This rejection of socialism was the Vatican’s consistent position: Pope Pius IX had rejected socialism and communism in his *Syllabus Errorum* (the *Syllabus of Errors*) in 1864, as did Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno*, or *In the Fortieth Year*, so called because the encyclical was written in 1931, forty years after the publication of *Rerum novarum* (and also a year after the death of Wheatley). Indeed Pius XI was specific in his condemnation: “Whether socialism be considered as a doctrine, or as a historical fact, or as a ‘movement’, if it really remains socialism, it cannot be brought into harmony with the dogmas of the Catholic Church [...] ‘Religious socialism’, ‘Christian socialism’ are expressions implying a contradiction in terms. No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist”.⁵⁴ According to the Church of Rome then socialism is a worse evil than capitalism: “socialism is intrinsically evil because it contravenes basic Christian teachings on private property and class relations, whereas capitalism is not intrinsically evil but often leads to abuses. Thus, the condemnations are not symmetrical. Socialism alone is intrinsically evil”.⁵⁵

Given then that *Rerum novarum* specifically rejected socialism, how could an argument for socialism be framed from Catholic social teaching? It was perhaps “by virtue of its consistent endorsement of the legitimate claims of the working class”, and that the encyclical “had endorsed many aspects of the labour movement’s social and political programme, particularly affirming some of the political devices by which socialism was to be approached (a living wage, rights of association)”.⁵⁶ These things being so clearly stated, socialists could argue that *Rerum novarum* in practice did support their cause. This was the case for Samuel Keeble, who cited Pope Leo, “though he condemned Socialism”.⁵⁷

Wheatley additionally argued that the socialism rejected by the Vatican was different to the socialism espoused by the British labour movement. Early in his political life

⁵² Wood, *Wheatley*, p.20.

⁵³ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.199, p.138 and p.150.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.200.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.47 and p.48.

⁵⁷ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.177.

Wheatley wrote to the *Glasgow Observer* in reply to an anti-socialist lecture given by the Catholic Truth Society in which he distinguished between moderate socialism that did not threaten the church and more radical socialism which was anti-Christian.⁵⁸ In response to Pope Leo's specific point about property rights Wheatley wrote in his *Catholic Working Man* that "Socialism is defined as the public ownership of land and capital. This does not mean the abolition of all private property".⁵⁹ One Roman Catholic writer describes how, according to Catholic social teaching:

Socialism violates the right to private property which allows persons to sustain their lives and the social good by the free and intelligent use of their possessions. Likewise it intrudes on family, not only by denying private property, but also by its conception of an all-encompassing state (since the state is suppose[d] to represent the will of a classless society). State socialism undermines the relationship between parents and children.⁶⁰

Wheatley, as it were, refutes this, arguing: "Our Socialism is not confiscation nor robbery nor the destruction of family life, nor anything like what you have heard our opponents describe it. It is simply a scheme to abolish poverty".⁶¹ Wheatley's socialism then, on paper at least, is perfectly compatible with the teaching of the Vatican. In this way Wheatley became "an effective and eloquent protagonist of a non-Marxist socialism which Catholics could in good faith espouse".⁶²

Wheatley, however, did sometimes fail to reconcile his political and religious beliefs. When a letter from a priest, Leo Pusissant, used quotes from *Rerum novarum* to attack Wheatley's socialism, this "led Wheatley to call in question the claims of that encyclical to *ex-cathedra* status".⁶³ This means that Wheatley was reduced to denying that *Rerum novarum* embodied the infallible teaching of the Pope, implying therefore that the document was not binding on Roman Catholics. Beatrice Webb recalls a meeting with Wheatley shortly before his death, in which, losing faith with a parliamentary route to socialism, he told her that "[h]e would be a Communist if he were not a pious Catholic".⁶⁴ However, despite these difficulties we can see how Wheatley found some basis for his

⁵⁸ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁶⁰ Cloutier, 'Politics and Catholic Social Teaching', p.135.

⁶¹ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.26.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.185.

socialism in Roman Catholic social teaching, and how other Christian Socialists found arguments for their socialism in the teaching of the church both past and present.

Sacramental Socialism

Peter d'A Jones identifies the sacraments as an important aspect of Christian Socialist belief. To this Jones gives the name "sacramental socialism", explaining this as "a phrase which stands for the belief that the best proof and witness of the socialism of Christ is in the Holy Sacraments of the Church – especially Baptism and the Mass (or, as some Anglicans preferred to call it, the Lord's Supper)".⁶⁵ We have seen above that the sacraments as a basis for socialism carried more weight with those from a Catholic tradition, particularly Anglo-Catholics, and it is Stewart Headlam who focuses more than any other on the connection between the sacraments and socialism. Headlam writes: "Baptism, the Sacrament of Equality, and Holy Communion, the Sacrament of Brotherhood: these two are fundamental, the one abolishing all class distinctions, and admitting all into the Christian Church, simply on the ground of humanity; the other pledging and enabling all to live the life of brotherhood".⁶⁶

Headlam saw that his followers in the Guild of St Matthew were also given to the same understanding of the sacraments as representing socialism, writing that "[w]e have from the beginning in this Guild, and rightly, connected the restoration of the Mass to its proper place with our secular and political work; our sacramentalism with our Socialism [...] we are Socialists because we are Sacramentarians".⁶⁷ James Adderly, a Guild member, said that baptism is "the entrance of every human being into the greatest democratic society in the world", while the mass is "the weekly meeting of a society of rebels against a Mammon-worshipping world order".⁶⁸

Headlam viewed the mass or Lord's Supper as important, partly because of its origins in the Old Testament Passover meal; the Passover, he wrote, "commemorated, what we should nowadays call the great strike or revolution, which Moses headed against the Egyptian tyranny".⁶⁹ Its greatest significance, however, was as a symbol of brotherhood and

⁶⁵ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.28.

⁶⁶ Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, p.5.

⁶⁷ Leech, 'Stewart Headlam', p.71.

⁶⁸ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.159.

⁶⁹ S. D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with Other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), p.16.

equality. This view was shared by Henry Scott Holland, who linked the “social solidarity of man” with “the essential solidarity of Church fellowship” as expressed in the Eucharist.⁷⁰ William Temple, similarly, viewed the Eucharist as “the perfect picture of the Christian society”.⁷¹ Holland’s Christian Social Union passed a resolution that its members should be those who had a “bond of union in the Sacrament of Christ’s body”, on the grounds that this allowed the CSU to “demand from Communicants that social service to which their Communion pledges them”.⁷² Headlam reportedly declared that “those who come to Holy Communion must be holy communists”.⁷³ Both the CSU and the Guild of St Matthew asked that members pray for their societies at communion services.⁷⁴

As well as representing brotherhood and equality, the communion service helped those who were present to live a life committed to those socialist values; as Headlam says, “pledging and *enabling* all to live the life of brotherhood”.⁷⁵ Holland believed that “this supreme effort to create a new social conscience in Church workers, must of sheer necessity involve corporate Acts of worship, Communion with one another, in the intimacies of the innermost shrine, gatherings around the one Altar, to partake of the one Bread, and to drink of the one Cup”.⁷⁶ One writer on Catholic social teaching describes this view of the sacrament:

The Eucharist gathering is first a community in which we experience this new ontological reality that continues to challenge us by word and gesture, transforming us into an authentic expression of Christ’s way of being human [...] Thus transformed we can carry out the mission of Christ in the world, bringing forth the kingdom of God through service to the poor, to those who are slaves, those who daily face humiliation and death in a thousand different ways.⁷⁷

She continues: “In expressing our identity as one body through the Eucharistic communion we are, in turn, committed to manifest that reality outside the church, to act as a sign of God’s love and to call the world into this relationship. The Eucharist is the most public,

⁷⁰ H. Scott Holland, ed., *Our Neighbours: A handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.60.

⁷¹ W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), p.113.

⁷² Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.178; Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.60.

⁷³ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.215.

⁷⁴ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival.*, p.177.

⁷⁵ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.5. [Emphasis added.]

⁷⁶ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.62.

⁷⁷ R. Stoicoiu, ‘Eucharist and Social Justice’, in D.M. McCarthy, *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids MI, 2009), p.48.

radically social act we do as a church”.⁷⁸ Headlam and Holland would certainly agree.

George Lansbury also speaks of the meaning of this Sacrament, writing that “the Communion service to me is not only the sacrifice again of Christ but a reminder of all the good men and women who have made their sacrifices in order to make the world better”.⁷⁹

For Lansbury then, the significance is a reminder of sacrifices made for socialism.

Headlam linked the mass with baptism as we have seen above, writing that “we claim every little baby born into the world as being equal with every other little baby, no matter whether it be the child of a costermonger or the child of a prince”.⁸⁰ Headlam viewed the two sacraments as complementary:

And so, just as the most old-fashioned clergyman, whatever may have been his politics, or views on social questions, was by the mere fact of his baptising the labourer’s little baby bearing witness to the truths of equality in a more far-reaching way than any French Revolution ever did: so the quietest and the most retiring of you when you kneel on Easter morning to receive Jesus Christ for your strength and refreshment, are also bearing witness to truths which, when realised, will regenerate the world: which will put down the mighty, scatter the proud, empty the pockets of the rich.⁸¹

Headlam also makes brief mention of other sacraments.⁸² “Confirmation”, writes Headlam, is that “by which the child, beginning the critical period of adolescence, is strengthened by his conscious membership of the Socialist Society”; marriage serves as a reminder of duties towards that society; penance promotes progress by encouraging the acknowledgement of mistakes.⁸³ We can therefore see that for Stewart Headlam, as well as for other Christian Socialists, the sacraments of the church provided a basis for their socialist beliefs.

Church Opposition to Socialism

Despite the enthusiasm of Christian Socialists for the socialism they saw preached in and through the church’s teachings and sacraments there was a problem with this perspective,

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.51.

⁷⁹ Interview with Lansbury from the Christian Commonwealth Newspaper, 11 August 1915, LSE archive, Lansbury/7 213.

⁸⁰ Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.28.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.27-8.

⁸² [The Church of Rome teaches that there are seven sacraments, while most Protestant churches believe only baptism and communion are found in the Bible.]

⁸³ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.7.

namely that the church was often opposed to socialism. We have already encountered the view that the Reformation and Protestantism had ushered individualism into the life of the church and prevented it from being that which held society together as an ethical community; we have also seen that, despite the influence of Roman Catholic social teaching, successive Popes have rejected socialism as unworkable and, in any case, wicked. Establishment, in the view of Christian Socialists from various traditions, was also a major factor in compromising the church's socialist message. Keir Hardie alleges that "[t]he Church only began to reject Communism after it became part of the state".⁸⁴ John Clifford similarly argues that establishment "tends to make the Church self-seeking instead of self-sacrificing, unprogressive and reactionary instead of leading the highest and best movements of mankind".⁸⁵ George Lansbury criticises "official Christianity" for giving its support to war, "as it always has done on behalf of all war since that fateful day in the history of Christianity when Constantine established the Christian religion as part of the State machinery of Government".⁸⁶

For this reason some Christian Socialists were opposed to the church being part of the state. Clifford sees a remedy in the church being "free in all its activities from the control of Princes and Parliaments, and from the interference of civic and political organisations of every kind".⁸⁷ Headlam agreed with his fellow Fabian Clifford on this point, writing in his Fabian tract on *Christian Socialism*: "A complete Christian Socialism cannot be brought about until the Church is free to use influence and discipline for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth".⁸⁸ This theme was taken up again by Headlam a few years later, when he argued that Anglicans should "want to help set the Church free to manage her own affairs, to elect her own clergy, to be a real power to help bring about those secular reforms which are necessary in order to make this diocese of ours into a part, a beautiful part, of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth".⁸⁹ Clifford and Headlam both mention that the church must be "free" from the state in order to function properly and truly espouse socialism. Tawney also views freedom of the church as a priority; the church, he writes, "must be free to be a servant", adding his support for disestablishment by arguing that "[t]he

⁸⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity*, Keir Hardie Library No.4, ILP (London, 1907), p.5.

⁸⁵ J. Clifford, *The State the Church and the Congregation* (London, 1908), p.9.

⁸⁶ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York NY, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.95.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁸⁸ Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.9.

⁸⁹ S.D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with Other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), p.56.

ancient question of whether church is to be above state or state is to be above church, finds its solution in a free church refusing the temporalities for the sake of the spiritualities”.⁹⁰

Because of these issues – individualism, establishment, opposition to socialism – Christian Socialists were often found criticising the church. This is a theme that Keir Hardie returns to repeatedly in his tract *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?*. “In what follows”, Hardie begins, “I do not seek to assail Christianity or impugn its teachings. But I cannot accept current theology as being other than a travesty of what Christ taught”.⁹¹ Hardie goes on to criticise those who profess Christianity and yet live “an idle luxurious life at the expense of the poor toil-worn workman with his pound a week”, while the workmen himself is excluded from the fellowship of the church for being unable to “wear good clothes, pay seat rents, and subscribe to the minister’s salary”.⁹² Hardie concludes: “modern Churchianity is not only un-Christian, but anti-Christian. I can find no points of correspondence between the teachings of Jesus, as contained in the New Testament, and the teachings of the modern pulpit”.⁹³

A particular example is found in Hardie’s anger about the relationship between the church and Lord Overtoun, a Scottish factory owner known to be a particularly harsh employer. For example, as already noted, Hardie accused Overtoun of the hypocrisy of being a member of a society for preservation of the Sabbath while forcing his employees to work seven days a week, denying them the opportunity to attend church on Sunday. “I mean to try”, writes Hardie, “whether the Christian Church cannot be so stirred up on this matter as to insist on men who make so much profession of Christianity as Lord Overtoun makes first of all giving some evidence of the faith that is in them by their treatment of the workpeople. If they will not treat these humanely, then the Church should not accept for its altar the blood-stained gifts which have been procured by the destruction of men, body and soul”.⁹⁴ Whether that could be the case is in Hardie’s view doubtful; as he notes elsewhere “the political economist wields more influence in church councils than does the Religious Teacher, and that Adam Smith and ‘The Wealth of Nations’, is a more potent factor than the Sermon on the Mount, and the Apostle.”⁹⁵

⁹⁰ J.M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, eds, *R.H. Tawney’s Commonplace Book* (Cambridge, 2006), p.71.

⁹¹ K. Keir Hardie, *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* (Manchester, c.1905-10), p.1,

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁹⁴ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings (From 1888 to 1915)*, (Glasgow, 1928), p.92.

⁹⁵ J. Keir Hardie, ‘Labour and Christianity: is the Labour Movement against Christianity’, *Labour and Religion: by Ten Labour members of Parliament and other Bodies* (1910), p.48.

Hardie could be virulent in his denunciation of what he saw as hypocrisy within the church and among Christians: “If the spiritually proud and pride-blinded professors of Christianity could only be made to feel and see that Christ is here ever present with us, and that they are laying on stripes and binding the brow afresh with thorns, and making shed tears of blood in a million homes”.⁹⁶ John Clifford recalled that Hardie “was pained by the excessive care which the Churches showed for the ‘respectable’, and what seemed to him their cruel indifference to the oppressed and the poor”.⁹⁷

Yet Hardie’s was not the only voice criticising the church in this way. Clifford himself, in milder language, writes that the church has shown “little courage in championing the cause of justice and social betterment”.⁹⁸ Stewart Headlam agrees, asking “is it not true that the Church has, for the most part, either ignored or opposed those in our own times who have done most to this end?”⁹⁹ “Church people”, in the view of Henry Scott Holland:

were hopelessly behind in all the movements for Social Reform. They did not count, practically, in the Cause. They held coldly aloof from the struggle. They bore no part of the burden. They, more than any, refused to bring their Faith to bear upon the actual facts of Commerce and Industry. They shut it up within the closed doors of sacred Churches, and left the outer world of temporal affairs to go its own bad way, as if it could never be expected to conform to Christian Ethical standards, or to glorify God in Jesus Christ our Lord. They continually formed a block of solid and stolid obstruction to every movement of the Spirit as it strove to transfigure Society into something that would reflect the City of God. The main mass of the Church’s folk had betrayed the Creed that they professed to hold.¹⁰⁰

R.H. Tawney argued that compromise should be “as impossible between the Church of Christ and the idolatry of wealth, which is the practical religion of capitalist societies, as it was between the Church and the state idolatry of the Roman Empire”, and that a “Christianity which resigns the economic world to the devil appears to me, in short, not Christianity at all”.¹⁰¹ George Lansbury agreed, writing that “[i]f Christian ministers decide

⁹⁶ Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches*, p.73.

⁹⁷ J. Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H.: Life, Letters and Reminiscences* (London, 1924), p.130.

⁹⁸ Clifford, *State, Church and Congregation*, p.10.

⁹⁹ Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress*, p.24.

¹⁰⁰ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.57.

¹⁰¹ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (London, 1997), p.74; A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester 1987), p.99.

that the principles of our religion cannot be practiced, we ought to close up our churches and cease praying in our Parliaments”.¹⁰²

John Wheatley offered specific criticism of his own parish priest, Andrew O'Brien: “One of his favourites poses is as the friend of God’s poor. While God’s poor are prepared to act like slaves and sycophants they are flattered, but independence is treated as a deadly sin”.¹⁰³ Wheatley indicates in his fictional trial of capitalists and their allies that the church is often on the side of the capitalists, having the workman “Old Dick” include the “clergymen” in the list of those who had told him “not to listen” to the Socialist, and having the two capitalists call upon a clergyman in their defence.¹⁰⁴

Wilfred Wellock points to the hypocrisy of society as a whole: “We call ourselves a Christian people and the most civilised nation on the face of the earth, and yet our civilisation is characterised by methods of refined barbarism”.¹⁰⁵ Tawney, again, takes up a similar theme: “To suggest that an individual is not a Christian may be libellous. To preach in public that Christianity is absurd is legally blasphemy. To state that the social ethics of the New Testament are obligatory upon men in the business affairs which occupy nine-tenths of their thought, or on the industrial organization which gives our society its character, is to preach revolution”.¹⁰⁶ It is for these reasons that Samuel Keeble urges patience with socialists’ opposition to Christianity, writing that the “Christian Socialist has to bear all this meekly, knowing that the Christian Church has given only too much ground for this hostility and suspicion”.¹⁰⁷

How then could Christian Socialists take the church as a basis for their socialism? The reason is that, in the view of Christian Socialists, in opposing socialism the church was opposing its own teaching. Therefore Lansbury observes that the “Churches are bankrupt because they are not true to their creed”, and Tawney similarly argues that the churches failed to repel individualism because “they did not possess [...] faith in their own creed”.¹⁰⁸ “Tawney’s charge”, suggest one biographer, “was that the Christian churches combined a

¹⁰² Draft of Lansbury’s broadcast to the USA during his visit, 21 April 1936, LSE archive, Lansbury/16 72-81.

¹⁰³ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.29.

¹⁰⁴ J. Wheatley, *How the Miners are Robbed: The Duke in the Dock (startling court case)*, (Nottingham, 1973 – original publication 1907), p.14, pp.17-8.

¹⁰⁵ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.6.

¹⁰⁶ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.180.

¹⁰⁷ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.91.

¹⁰⁸ Lansbury/8 99; Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.184.

doctrine about the importance of treating people as ends with an acquiescence in a social and economic system which treated them unequally and instrumentally as means”.¹⁰⁹

In this conception then, the Christian Socialists found their basis for socialism in the creeds of the church – creeds which the church itself often failed to live up to. Stewart Headlam explains, for example, that “[i]n order to understand the connection between the Church and Socialism, we must blot out from our memory the Bishops’ votes in the House of Lords: the action and talk of the highly-placed laymen and lay-women [...] and go straight to the basis and Sacrament of the Church”.¹¹⁰ This is reflected in the criticisms of Keir Hardie. He writes that the “rich and comfortable classes have annexed Jesus and perverted His Gospel”, and that the “modern Christian Church is a reflection of the modern business world”.¹¹¹ “The Christian world”, writes Hardie, “has gone sadly astray. They do not know that they have forgotten the centre cross and are worshipping at the cross of the thief”.¹¹² The criticism here is of the modern church – the one that has “gone sadly astray”, having allowed its creed to be “annexed” by the capitalist class. “Christianity is no longer a reality”, Hardie concludes; “the religious form may still exist, but once again the spirit has passed away and has found embodiment elsewhere”.¹¹³

There was, therefore, an ideal church, which existed in the past – hence references to the church fathers or the early church – which was still reflected in some of the modern church’s teaching, liturgy and sacraments. Christian Socialists felt themselves to be representing this ideal church having understood properly the true meaning of both the church’s teaching and the Bible; by contrast, many within the church – including its modern-day leaders – failed to understand, having been corrupted by individualism and capitalist economics.

Hardie’s writings reflect a pessimism about the state of the church, writing, as we saw above, “Christianity is no longer a reality [...] the spirit has passed away and has found embodiment elsewhere”. One of Hardie’s biographers argues that he “never claimed that socialism replaced Christianity or the church”, yet Hardie’s suggestion that “Christianity is no longer a reality” and that “the spirit” of Christianity “has found embodiment elsewhere”

¹⁰⁹ Wright, *Tawney*, p.92.

¹¹⁰ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, pp.4-5.

¹¹¹ Hardie, ‘Labour and Christianity’, p.52; Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches*, p.101.

¹¹² Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches*, p.37.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.54.

suggests that this indeed was his view.¹¹⁴ In a speech Hardie is reported to have said: “Christianity today lay buried, bound up in the cements of a dead and lifeless theology. It awaited decent burial, and they in the Labour movement had come to resuscitate the Christianity of Christ”.¹¹⁵ We may then conclude that Hardie did believe that the spirit of Christianity had passed away from the church and was now embodied in the socialist or labour movement.

This, however, was not the view of other Christian Socialists. R.H. Tawney, in the final chapter of *The Acquisitive Society*, sees the church as having a vital role, supplying the moral and ethical basis for his functional society. The church:

will define [...] the lines of conduct and organization which approach most nearly to being the practical application of Christian ethics in the various branches of economic life, and having defined them, will censure those of its members who depart from them without good reason. It will rebuke the open and notorious sin of the man who oppresses his fellows for the sake of gain as freely as that of the drunkard or adulterer. It will voice frankly the judgement of the Christian conscience on the acts of the State, even when to do so is an offence to nine-tenths of its fellow-citizens. Like Missionary Churches in Africa to-day, it will have as its aim, not merely to convert the individual, but to make a new kind, and a Christian kind of civilization.¹¹⁶

For Tawney, the church’s involvement in and support for a new society is not just desirable, but necessary. William Temple argues that the church “has a concern for the basic needs of citizens, and must point out conditions which flout Christian conscience”.¹¹⁷ John Clifford suggests a similar role, writing that the “churches can and ought to keep the minds of men alert to note every existing wrong in the framework of society”.¹¹⁸ Clifford believed that the Holy Spirit would “convince the churches of their sin in not undertaking with more definite purpose and sustained enthusiasm the greater and inclusive task of social salvation”.¹¹⁹ Wilfred Wellock argues that “instead of the churches ‘standing off’ where politics are concerned [...] they must go right into politics, taking the Gospels with them”, while Samuel

¹¹⁴ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010), p.200.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.85.

¹¹⁶ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.189.

¹¹⁷ A.M. Suggate, ‘William Temple’, in P. Scott and W.T. Cavanagh, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford, 2004), p.169.

¹¹⁸ Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.14.

¹¹⁹ Clifford, *New City of God*, p.11.

Keeble sees a role for the church in “declaring social duties, and pointing out social perils and evils”.¹²⁰ Here the Christian Socialists see the church living up to its creed and playing its part in bringing about socialism. For Stewart Headlam, “the Christian Church [...] might be, and ought to be, *the* great agency for human progress in religion, politics, society, customs, and institutions”.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Wellock, *The Way Out*, p.42; Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.19.

¹²¹ Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress*, p.vi. [Emphasis in original.]

4. Christian Socialist Predecessors and Other Ethical Thinkers

In the two previous chapters we have seen how the Christian Socialists, as we might expect, derived their political views from the teaching and tradition of Christianity. This includes the Bible itself – most notably the idea of the fatherhood of God and the life and teaching of Christ, though there are examples of Christian Socialists making arguments for socialism from all sections of Scripture – the teaching of the church – including reference to the Church Fathers, the teaching and example of prominent Christians from all ages – and the sacraments administered by the church. In this chapter we will examine other key influences on Christian Socialism.

There are many sources of influence that appear in the writings of these Christian Socialists, or have been identified in their thinking by others. For example, we have seen in the previous chapters that Samuel Keeble based his argument against interest or usury on the Bible, as well as the early church and theologians both of the Church of Rome and Protestantism; however, he also chooses to cite Aristotle as a final authority in his argument.¹ R.H. Tawney quotes Matthew Arnold against inequality.² Wilfred Wellock followed the example of Ghandi, publishing *Ghandi as a Social Revolutionary* in 1950. George Lansbury had done likewise in *My Quest for Peace*, published 1938.³ One writer points out that “Henry Scott Holland and the young William Temple both drew on Bosanquet’s idea that the individual only found full development in the state”.⁴ Graham Dale sees that John Wheatley was influenced by the Roman Catholic economist Francesco Nitti, who “argued that Christians should hold everything in common, and, if need be, this could be done through the moral agency of a collectivist state”.⁵ Finally, Chris Bryant identifies Thomas Wodehouse’s *A Grammar of Socialism* as an influence of Stewart Headlam.⁶

¹ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), pp.174-5.

² R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London, 1938 – original publication 1931), p.1 and p.24.

³ G. Lansbury, *My Quest for Peace* (London, 1938), p.13.

⁴ M. Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004), p.54.

⁵ G. Dale, *God’s Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 Years of Labour* (London, 2000), p.72.

⁶ C. Bryant, *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (London, 1996), p.76.

It is not possible to include every single reference or quote used by these Christian Socialists to someone or something which has influenced them and their beliefs. In chapters four and five we will consider persons or ideas which are mentioned or alluded to frequently, and therefore constitute a key influence or contribute to a pattern of political thinking. These include Christian Socialists of previous generations (the likes of Frederick Maurice and John Ruskin, as well as T.H. Green), other socialist thinkers and traditions (particularly Karl Marx and Henry George, and also including Fabianism, Guild Socialism and Chartism), as well as examples drawn from the already-existing practices of society, those areas in which co-operation already existed. We will conclude that Christian Socialists drew their beliefs and ideas from wide variety of sources, although the weight of evidence suggests that it is the Bible and the teaching and history of the church which dominate Christian Socialist thought.

Other Christian Socialists and Ethical Political Thinkers

Christian Socialists in this period were inspired and influenced by those previously identified as Christian Socialists and sometimes considered to be the founders of the movement, including Frederick Maurice and Charles Kingsley. A 1908 report by the Pan-Anglican Conference stated that “the Guild of St Matthew, the Christian Social Union [and] the Church Socialist League” were the “children of Kingsley and Maurice”.⁷ One writer points to William Temple and his career within the church as being “the logical conclusion of the Christian Socialist Movement begun by Maurice”.⁸

Stewart Headlam, in a lecture entitled *Maurice and Kingsley: Theologians and Socialists* credits those men with “revealing the theological basis of Socialism, by showing how essentially Christian it was”, adding that “[t]hey brought into the world of thought all the suggestion which is contained in that most pregnant phrase, ‘Christian Socialism’.”⁹ Headlam’s view of his own Guild of St Matthew in this lecture is that it has “to some degree carried on the tradition” established by these early Christian Socialists, especially Maurice.¹⁰ In *Priestcraft and Progress* Headlam speaks of his “great obligations to Mr Maurice” and thinks of his own work as “an earnest attempt to apply his principles and teaching to the

⁷ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.227.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.372.

⁹ S.D. Headlam, *Maurice and Kingsley: Theologians and Socialists* (London, 1909), p.5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

needs of our time”.¹¹ One of Headlam’s biographers points to the influence of Maurice on Headlam, explaining that “Maurice’s insistence on the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Humanity through the Eternal Sonship of Christ came as an immense liberating experience to Headlam”.¹²

In the same way the Christian Socialism of Samuel Keeble is said to have drawn “its inspiration from the earlier work of F.D. Maurice and his stress on the Fatherhood of God and the ethical imperatives of Christ’s teaching as the Incarnate God at work in humanity”.¹³ In *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* Keeble, as part of his detailed historical account of the spirit of Christian Socialism, expresses his admiration for Maurice and his companions, writing that they “rendered most valuable service on sanitation, sweating and co-operation, and still more valuable in their very able and informed application of Christian principles”.¹⁴ Keeble’s biographer points to Maurice as one architect of the “Social Gospel” that Keeble espoused.¹⁵ George Lansbury praises Charles Kingsley, among others, for “a great effort to stir the conscience of the church”, while James Keir Hardie lists him and Maurice as examples of establishment figures who came to believe in and campaign for socialism.¹⁶

Jones, however, has argued that although Christian Socialists “owed a debt to F.D. Maurice”, this was “perhaps not as heavy a debt as one might have supposed”.¹⁷ References to Maurice and his colleagues do not appear regularly, or even at all, in most of the Christian Socialist writings being considered here. Although, as Jones points out, Maurice clearly had some influence, the fewness of references to him and his work from the likes of Hardie, Lansbury, Tawney and Wheately suggests that his influence is limited.

Even Headlam, while perhaps unusual in his devotion to Maurice, differed from him and the early Christian Socialists in key respects. This “second generation of Christian Socialists” were “still imbued with Maurice’s religious humanism”, but wished to “associate more immediately with progressive developments in secular politics”; this included Stewart

¹¹ S.D. Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress: Being Sermons and Lectures* (London, 1878), p.vi.

¹² K. Leech, ‘Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924, and the Guild of St Matthew’, in M.B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England* (London, 1968), p.61.

¹³ T. MacQuiban, ‘Soup and Salvation: Social Service as an Emerging Motif for the British Methodist Response to Poverty in the Late 19th Century’, *Methodist History*, 39, 1 (October, 2000), p.33.

¹⁴ S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.136.

¹⁵ M.S. Edwards, *S.E. Keeble: The Rejected Prophet* (Chester, 1977), p.10.

¹⁶ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.102; J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.28.

¹⁷ P. d’A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), p.85.

Headlam.¹⁸ Indeed, one of Headlam's biographers suggests that "Maurice would have disapproved of Headlam's full-blooded radicalism".¹⁹ As well as this, Maurice's belief was that the Kingdom of Heaven had already been established on Earth, while Headlam – and the majority of others in this study – held that it had yet to be established. Nevertheless, this biographer concludes that Maurice's "ideas are the foundation upon which Headlam built his faith and politics".²⁰

Part of the reason for the limitation of Maurice's influence may be that "much of the first Christian Socialist writings seem to be no more than pious, paternalist but benevolent Toryism".²¹ If we accept that Maurice would have disapproved of Headlam's radicalism, we are left in no doubt as to how he would have viewed the labour politics of Hardie or Lansbury. It should, however, be noted that John Ruskin has also been described as a "Tory paternalist", yet he is still quoted and referenced by the Christian Socialists of this period.²²

According to Bryant "Ruskin was by no means a conventional Christian Socialist", but he was to prove "a significant link" between Maurice, Kingsley and Ludlow, "and their successors in the Guild of St Matthew and the Christian Social Union".²³ Ruskin, says another writer, "was not a Christian Socialist, though in more recent terminology he might be called a fellow-traveller".²⁴ Headlam's Guild of St Matthew is described as "Ruskinite".²⁵

The Radical Tradition, a collection of essays and articles by Tawney, includes a section on Ruskin in which Tawney praises his contribution and credits him with articulating the following idea:

The purpose of industry is service [...] industry should be subordinated to the community in such a way as to offer the best service technically possible; that those who offer faithful service should be honourably paid, and that those who offer no service should not be paid at all, because industry is a social function, and it is the essence of a function that it should find the meaning in the satisfaction not of itself, but of the end which it serves.²⁶

¹⁸ E. Norman, 'Stewart Headlam and the Victorian Christian Socialists', *History Today*, 37, 4 (1987), p.29.

¹⁹ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam's Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.13.

²¹ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.41.

²² A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), p.22.

²³ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.60.

²⁴ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.265.

²⁵ G. Taylor, *Socialism and Christianity: The Politics of the Church Socialist League* (Sheffield, 2000), p.13.

²⁶ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), pp.42.

Tawney quotes Ruskin arguing that men should only be paid for their service, and that landlords should only be paid insofar as they work, not merely because they possess land.²⁷ These are the same ideas and principles which Tawney would later expound in *The Acquisitive Society*. According to Wilkinson, Tawney drew “upon John Ruskin’s teaching that the function of the manufacturer is no more to work for profit than a priest’s function is to earn his stipend”.²⁸ This is also evident in the work of Samuel Keeble, who quotes Ruskin in full: “the merchant’s function is to provide for the nation. It is no more his function to get a profit for himself out of the provision that it is the clergyman’s function to get his stipend”.²⁹

Keeble quotes Ruskin often throughout the essays published as *The Ideal of the Material Life*, for example: “True justice consists mainly in the granting to every human being due aid in the development of such faculties as it posses for action and enjoyment”; “The characteristic of man”, writes Keeble, “is that he is a moral being, and therefore moral considerations, in his world, must take the first place. No one puts this better than Ruskin, who says that things can never be right, until the question with us every morning is, not how to do the gainful thing, but how to do the just thing”.³⁰ Keeble also expressed his admiration for Ruskin as a person: “Few greater and nobler sacrifices of property for the good of society have been made than that of John Ruskin, who sacrificed the whole of the fortune bequeathed him by his father - £127,000 – in social experiments and services for his country’s good. In addition to this, he gave his country his brain – his brilliant brain – imagination, insight, prophetic, literary and artistic gifts”.³¹ In *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* Keeble praises Ruskin, writing of his “masterly Christian and economic criticisms of industrialism and commercialism”, and numerous other references to Ruskin are found in Keeble’s work – for example, in *Industrial Day-Dreams* and *Christianity and Socialism*.³²

Keeble makes particular mention of *Unto This Last*, in which Ruskin argues against free-market economics and in favour of what today might be termed a planned economy and

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.44.

²⁸ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.103.

²⁹ S. E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), pp.40-1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.110, p.115.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.233.

³² S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, pp.151-2; Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.230; S.E. Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism* (London, 1906), p.11.

a welfare state.³³ George Lansbury, according to his son Edgar, was also greatly influenced by Ruskin, and especially *Unto This Last*. Edgar writes: “I can imagine only one condition upon which he [George Lansbury] would willingly attend say the Lord Mayor’s Banquet; it would be that he might read to the assembled notabilities a page or two from Ruskin’s *Unto This Last*. He quotes it often, in and out of the House of Commons, because he thinks it contains the key to the so-called problem of poverty”.³⁴ An example is found in Lansbury’s *Your Part in Poverty* in which he urges the better off to consider the plight of the poor: “As Ruskin has well said, the cruellest man living cannot sit at his feast unless blind to the misery and evil which accompanies his wealth”.³⁵

It is worth noting Wilkinson’s view that “Ruskin did not belong to the Christian Socialists and thought little of Maurice”, but even if he was not part of Maurice’s circle he appears to have espoused a form of Christian Socialism – he is included in the works of both Wilkinson and Bryant – and in any case he seems to have been at least as influential on the next generation of Christian Socialists as Maurice himself.³⁶ As an example, in 1893 all 44 members of a branch of Henry Scott Holland’s Christian Social Union had read *Unto This Last*.³⁷

While Jones points out that the debt to Maurice is perhaps not as great as might be imagined, he points to the influence of the “philosophical idealism” of T.H. Green.³⁸ Green, according to Wilkinson, “produced a philosophical foundation for the New Liberalism and for Anglican socialism [...] He believed that the state ought to promote the common good [and] taught that only in community could the individual find true significance and that the church and its gospel must advance social welfare and political justice”.³⁹ Green’s “Constructive Liberalism”, according to one writer, was “in essence the same” as the “ethical socialism” advocated by R.H. Tawney.⁴⁰

“The influence of T.H. Green was strongly felt” in the work of Tawney, “with its Idealist analysis of the derivation of rights from functions and its consequences for a ‘politics of conscience’”.⁴¹ Tawney followed Green in his “belief in an immanent God, in the

³³ Keeble, *Ideal of Material Life*, p.54.

³⁴ E. Lansbury, *George Lansbury: My Father* (London, 1934), p.24.

³⁵ G. Lansbury, *Poverty*, p.14.

³⁶ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.42.

³⁸ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.85.

³⁹ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, pp.42-3.

⁴⁰ M. Carter, *T.H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter, 2003), p.183.

⁴¹ A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.2.

moral personality of individuals, a commitment to a notion of common good and a Functional Society, and an ethical rather than economic approach to social reform”, as well as his belief that “every individual should possess equality of moral value” while still accepting “differences in material equality”.⁴² “Green argued that the essential part of being a moral person is that we should always be treated as an end and never as a means”; he “went beyond” the idea of equality of opportunity “and argued for a stronger form of equality”; he “was critical of landlords who have been allowed to misuse their land and pursue ends that conflict with the social good”.⁴³ All these things are also true of Tawney. Tawney also shared Green’s positive conception of liberty, as demonstrated in this passage:

[I]f the rights are to be an effective guarantee of freedom, they must not be merely formal, like the right of all who can afford it to dine at the Ritz. They must be such that, whenever the occasion arises to exercise them, they can in fact be exercised. The rights to vote and to combine, if not wholly valueless, are obviously attenuated, when use of the former means eviction and of the latter the sack; the right to the free choice of occupation, if expenses of entering a profession are prohibitive; the right to justice, if not poor man can pay for it; the right to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ if the environment is such that a considerable proportion of those born will die within twelve months, and that the happiness-investments of the remainder are a gambling stock.⁴⁴

Edward Caird could have been speaking of Tawney when he said that Green held “an intensely democratic or Christian tone of feeling that could not tolerate the thought of privilege, and constantly desired for every class and individual a full share in the great heritage of society”.⁴⁵

Green was “the chief intellectual influence on Henry Scott Holland”, who “belonged to Green’s inner circle of students” at Oxford.⁴⁶ Holland wrote that he had “taught us the reality of the co-operate life and the inspiration of the community. He gave us back the language of self-sacrifice, and taught us how we belonged to one another in the one life of organic humanity”.⁴⁷ Holland points, as an example, to “T.H. Green’s pamphlet on Liberty of Contract”, which “taught us how positive and constructive a policy is needed in order to

⁴² Carter, *Green*, p.165 and p.176.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.32, p.34 and p.35.

⁴⁴ R.H. Tawney, ‘English Politics Today: We Mean Freedom’, *The Review of Politics*, 8, 2 (1946), pp.224-5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁴⁶ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.67.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.43.

ensure the conditions which would enable men to be free to make a contract. Competition was, then, to be no blind mechanical force. We were deliberately to provide adequate equipment for the competitors”.⁴⁸ Holland here also follows Green’s positive conception of liberty. Holland, and his CSU colleague Charles Gore, are even described as “Greenians”.⁴⁹ Green is also among those referenced by Keeble in *Christian Responsibility*, and is recognised by Bryant as an influence on William Temple.⁵⁰

Each Other

While considering the contribution of Christian Socialists from a previous generation, we should not discount the influence that the Christian Socialists in this study had on each other. There are many examples in the writings of Samuel Keeble; for example, in *Christianity and Socialism* he regards John Clifford and Henry Scott Holland as influences on his political thought.⁵¹ In *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* he cites Stewart Headlam alongside Holland. Holland’s CSU in particular was the impetus for Keeble’s own Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service.

Keeble attended William Temple’s Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC), writing a report in which he praised Temple and the conference, approvingly quoting Temple’s description of “a great movement within the Church for the Kingdom of God on earth”.⁵² Keeble also quotes the work of Tawney a number of times; taking Tawney’s idea of an “acquisitive society”, he writes that “[t]here is no moral and spiritual health in such a society. It is sick unto death”.⁵³ Keeble also refers to Tawney’s work for the Sankey Commission in *The Ethics of Public Ownership*, concluding in like manner to Tawney that “[a] system by which 3,000 pits are owned and worked by 1,500 companies or individuals, with discontented workmen, is now finally condemned as wasteful and inefficient”.⁵⁴ Hardie prefigures the work of Tawney by declaring in 1907 that “[t]he landlord, *qua* landlord, performs no function in the economy of industry or of food production. He is a rent receiver and nothing more”; so does Wheatley in 1908, who

⁴⁸ Carter, *Green*, p.92.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.122.

⁵⁰ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.30; Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.178.

⁵¹ Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.36.

⁵² S.E. Keeble, *COPEC: An account of the Christian Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship* (London, 1924), p.9.

⁵³ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.182 and p.185.

⁵⁴ S.E. Keeble, *The Ethics of Public Ownership* (London, 1920), p.16.

imagines his “Socialist” character being asked by the “Magistrate”, “Are those shareholders unnecessary?”, and replying “Absolutely unnecessary, your honour; they are not managers, neither are they workmen”.⁵⁵

The close working and personal relationship between Temple and Tawney is well known; Tawney was also involved in COPEC, while sections of Temple’s *Christianity and the Social Order* were influenced by the work, as well as the criticism and suggestions, of Tawney – especially the appendix which suggested a programme of action in keeping with the principles expounded in the rest of the book.⁵⁶ Tawney was also “attracted by Henry Scott Holland’s mixture of socialism and Christianity”, and for this reason he joined the CSU.⁵⁷ Tawney’s *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* was before it was published as a monograph the inaugural set of Henry Scott Holland Memorial lectures.⁵⁸ We may also note that George Lansbury was a regular columnist in the CSU’s *Commonwealth* magazine.⁵⁹

Lansbury and his colleagues on Poplar Council enjoyed a measure of support from John Wheatley as the minister responsible for local government, and Wheatley praised the council for its work of “social emancipation”; it was, according to Wheatley, “only as the policy of Poplar permeated the country that they would march towards a different order of society”.⁶⁰ Wilfred Wellock, too, points to the example of Poplar Council in raising awareness of an ongoing injustice.⁶¹ Lansbury, in turn, praises Stewart Headlam, writing of his “magnificent work” in raising awareness of poverty within the church.⁶² Wellock also calls for society to accept the teaching of and be re-made in the spirit of Keir Hardie.⁶³ Hardie, as we have seen, was also praised by John Clifford, who wrote that he “read human life through Christ’s teaching – felt the compassion of Christ for those who were in any way wronged by others [...] He was pained by the excessive care which the Churches showed for the ‘respectable’, and what seemed to him their cruel indifference to the oppressed and the poor”.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.11; J. Wheatley, *How the Miners are Robbed: The Duke in the Dock (startling court case)*, (Nottingham, 1973 – original publication 1907), p.15.

⁵⁶ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.101 and pp.122-4.

⁵⁷ Carter, *Green*, p.179.

⁵⁸ L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), pp.228-9.

⁵⁹ Carter, *Green*, p.125.

⁶⁰ M. Lavalette, *George Lansbury and the Rebel Councillors of Poplar* (London, 2006), p.47; N. Branson, *Poplarism, 1919-1925: George Lansbury and the Councillors’ Revolt* (London, 1979).

⁶¹ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), p.46.

⁶² Lansbury, *Poverty*, p.102.

⁶³ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), p.31.

⁶⁴ J. Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H.: Life, Letters and Reminiscences* (London, 1924), p.130.

This is not to suggest that there was always harmony and agreement between this generation of Christian Socialists. We have already seen Headlam's opposition to the creation of a Labour Party, and could also mention the personal dislike that existed between Headlam and Keir Hardie.⁶⁵ John Clifford, as a Baptist minister attacked the Church of England, offending both Headlam and Scott Holland.⁶⁶ Even Temple and Tawney did not always agree: Tawney was critical of Temple's decision to leave the Labour Party upon being created Bishop of Manchester, but Temple felt a bishop should not be a member of a political party.⁶⁷ Temple criticised *The Acquisitive Society* for failing to consider the usefulness to society of the profit motive and the desire for individual betterment.⁶⁸

Tawney was also criticised by Lansbury, who opposed setting up a branch of Tawney's Workers' Educational Association in Poplar, fearing that it may distract workers from playing a part in the labour movement. Tawney had reportedly argued "that the Labour Party ought to get and train its young men", to which Lansbury responded: "I don't altogether agree: I'm very much afraid of taking them away from their work. They tend to become superior and 'intellectual' [...] I think the only 'intellectual' in our party has not been good for it"; in turn, "Tawney was equally critical of Lansbury's anti-intellectualism".⁶⁹ Lansbury, however, was not always so critical of Tawney. "Having served on the Archbishop's Committee on the Church and the Labour movement [Lansbury] criticized the other members, except Tawney, for rejecting Socialism, and considered himself a voice in the wilderness on this committee, again except for Tawney".⁷⁰

There were also differences between Headlam and Holland, and their respective organisations. It has been suggested that the CSU was founded in order "to create a group which could be 'Christian Socialist' in a broad way without having to live with Stewart Headlam".⁷¹ "The founders of the CSU were troubled by Headlam's revolutionary rhetoric and contempt for ecclesiastical authority. Headlam's heart was in the right place, they agreed; the same could not be said for his head".⁷² Despite all this though, it seems clear that

⁶⁵ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.146; P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.23.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.341.

⁶⁷ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.179.

⁶⁸ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.296.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.78-9.

⁷⁰ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.334.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.197.

⁷² Orens, *Headlam*, p.102.

the Christian Socialists of this period were just as influenced by each other as by their predecessors Maurice, Ruskin and Green.

5. Other Socialisms and Examples from Society

In the previous chapter we examined the influence on Christian Socialism by their predecessors in the Christian Socialist tradition, including men such as Maurice, Kingsley, Ruskin and Green. As well as those who can be identified as belonging to or associated with Christian Socialist tradition, the Christian Socialists were able to draw upon the thought of those from other socialist traditions. There are references throughout their writings to the thought of Karl Marx and Marxist socialism and the ideas of Henry George regarding a tax on the value of land, while the influence of Fabianism, guild socialism and Chartism can also be discerned. Christian Socialists, it will become apparent, could also look to the work of those outside the church or perhaps who did not make reference to Scripture or any form of Christian ethics as a basis for their socialist beliefs.

Marxism

R.H. Tawney refers to “the genius of Marx” in fortelling the effects of inequality in society: “They divide what might have been a community into contending classes, of which one is engaged in a struggle to share in advantages which it does not yet enjoy and to limit the exercise of economic authority, while the other is occupied in a nervous effort to defend its position against encroachments”.¹ Stewart Headlam, similarly, suggested that Marx had “formulated the scientific basis which underlies the ethical teachings of the New Testament”.² Samuel Keeble was also influenced by Marx, and “is reputed to be the first Methodist to have read *Das Kapital*”.³ Keeble takes a very even-handed approach, writing of *Das Kapital* that “[i]t is a wonderful book, full of genuine learning, passion, and love for the people”, and yet “much marred by materialistic philosophy, Hegelian jargon, and economic errors”.⁴ Again Keeble writes that “[i]n reading *Capital*, while annoyed by the Hegelian

¹ R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London, 1938 – original publication 1931), p.135.

² R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.82.

³ C. Bryant, *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (London, 1996), p.232.

⁴ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.34.

jargon and by the profanity which frequently mars it, as well as at Marx's false logic and crude theorizing, the reader cannot fail to be impressed by the new spirit which he introduces into political economy".⁵

Keeble accepted the idea of "surplus value" as used by Marx and Engels: "Beyond question, Marx shows that in modern industrialism capital gets more than its share. His main indictment of capitalism is true and awful. He makes an effective point when he shows that capitalist production rests on the appropriation of surplus value derided from the labour of the workers and benefitting from a surplus army of labour".⁶ Keeble, however, did not believe that the labour theory of value– the doctrine that the value of a commodity is created by the amount of labour expended upon it – employed by Marx and Engels was accurate, and he praised the Fabian society for their rejection of it. Tawney also criticises Marx's economics, writing that he "took an unduly mechanical view of the operation of economic factors and greatly underestimated the importance of factors which are not economic"; despite Marx's emphasis, "economic forces act, not directly but through human minds and wills".⁷ Despite this though, Keeble argues that "[n]o weakness in Marx's theory of value can impair the truth and importance of his revelation – for revelation it was – of the innate tendencies of the capitalistic system of industry to exploit the labourer".⁸

Keir Hardie perhaps makes the most overt references to Marx in his work, especially in *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* and *Karl Marx: The Man and His Message*. In the latter Hardie refers to the *Communist Manifesto* as "the birth certificate of the modern Socialist movement".⁹ In the former Hardie concludes: "The policy of the I.L.P. is in line with that preached and practiced by Karl Marx [and] Friedrich Engels [...] That policy is also mine, and I want the party to grasp it more fully", before closing with these words, derived from the *Communist Manifesto*: "WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE; YOU HAVE ALL TO GAIN, AND NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS".¹⁰ A similar declaration is made in *From Serfdom to Socialism*: "Workers of the world unite, wrote Karl Marx; you have a world to win, and nothing to lose but your chains".¹¹ Here Hardie demonstrates the influence of Marxist ideas, such as the theory of alienation: the result of factory working

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.62.

⁶ M.S. Edwards, *S.E. Keeble: The Rejected Prophet* (Chester, 1977), p.12

⁷ L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), p.177.

⁸ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, pp.164-6.

⁹ J. Keir Hardie, *Karl Marx: The Man and His Message* (London, 1910), p.10.

¹⁰ J. Keir Hardie, *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* (London, 1909), p.16.

¹¹ J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.86.

conditions, he wrote, “is to produce demoralisation of the most fatal kind. There is no sense of unity between the man and his work. He can have no pride in it since there is nothing personal to him which will attach to it after it is finished”.¹² Hardie also demonstrates influence by the Marxist view of there being several stages of history:

Socialism we believe to be the next step in the evolution of that form of State which will give the individual the fullest and freest room for expansion and development. State Socialism, with all its drawbacks, and these I frankly admit, will prepare the way for free Communism in which the rule, not merely the law of the State, but the rule of life will be – From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.¹³

The same influence is shown elsewhere by Hardie, writing: “Communism, *the final goal of Socialism*, is a form of Social Economy very close to the principles set forth in the Sermon on the Mount”.¹⁴ Here Hardie, like Marx, explicitly names communism as the stage which will follow socialism. Unlike Marx, he equates it with the realisation of the teaching of Jesus Christ.¹⁵

This being the case, it is hard to sustain Bob Holman’s view that Marx’s influence on Hardie was minimal, although there may be some truth in Holman’s assertion that “Hardie read some Marx and selected bits which fitted with his own views of an ethical and peaceful socialism”, such as “Marx’s later claim that in some countries socialism could be achieved by a peaceful process”.¹⁶ Nevertheless James Maxton was able to recall that Keir Hardie “was probably more Marxist in practice than those who paid greater deference to Marxist theories”.¹⁷

Maxton perhaps has in mind H.M. Hyndman’s Social Democratic Federation, of which Keeble jokes that they “swear by Karl Marx, and almost believe in the verbal inspiration of his *Capital*”.¹⁸ Hardie disagreed with the SDF refusal to support the Labour Party, writing that they “are not only not representing the Marxist tradition; they are outraging every principle of Marxian Socialist tactics”, as Hardie believed that the “Labour

¹² *Ibid.*, p.53.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity: Keir Hardie Library No.4* (London, 1925 – original publication 1907), p.3. [Emphasis added.]

¹⁵ [See Chapter 9 for a Marxist critique of Christian Socialism.]

¹⁶ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero* (Oxford, 2010), p.28, p.41 and pp.132-3.

¹⁷ J. Maxton, *Keir Hardie: Prophet and Pioneer* (London, 1939), p.14.

¹⁸ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.70.

party is the only expression of orthodox Marxian Socialism in Great Britain”.¹⁹ This assertion is based on his understanding, expressed in *Marx: The Man and His Message*, that Marx’s “abiding thought was that freedom could only come by the gradual evolution of a properly-equipped working-class party, taught class consciousness by actual experience gained in the struggle with Capitalism”, and that “Marx only knew of one way; the organisation of a working-class movement, which would in process of time evolve the Socialist state”.²⁰ For Hardie this “working-class movement” was the Labour movement, and the “working-class party” the Labour Party; in refusing to support Labour the SDF were refusing to support a working-class party and thereby rejecting the teaching of Marx. Indeed, Hardie quotes Engels:

The Social Democratic Federation here shares with your German-American Socialists the distinction of being the only parties to accomplish the bringing down of the Marxian theory of development to a rigid orthodoxy. According to them the working man is not to attain to this complete development (‘class consciousness’) through an evolution set in operation by his class feeling; but he has to swallow it down immediately as an article of faith and without development. Therefore, both remain only sects, and come, as Hegel says, from nothing, through nothing, to nothing.²¹

Hardie views these words of Engels as “a biting criticism of the S.D.F. attitude in standing outside the Labour Party”.²²

Keeble is also critical of Hyndman and the SDF for their unquestioning acceptance of the labour theory of value, while Tawney makes a similar criticism, writing in his diary that “Marxian socialists are not revolutionary enough. They say that capitalist society is condemned because the worker does not get the equivalent of what he produces. He does not. But why should he? The real condemnation of the capitalist spirit is contained in the suggestion that men should get only what they produced”.²³ In ‘The Choice Before the Labour Party’ Tawney writes: “The British Labour movement was offered in its youth a foreign, and peculiarly arid, version of Marxian socialism. It very sensibly rejected it – very sensibly, not because the doctrine was Marxian, but because, in its pedantry and lack of

¹⁹ Hardie, *Labour Alliance*, p.13.

²⁰ Hardie, *Karl Marx*, p.12 and p.15.

²¹ Hardie, *Labour Alliance*, p.14.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.164; J.M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, eds, *R.H. Tawney’s Commonplace Book* (Cambridge, 2006), p.69.

historical realism, it was anything but Marxian”.²⁴ Therefore we can see, as Wright concludes, that Tawney was influenced by and praised Marx, but did not believe that those who labelled themselves Marxist were necessarily following Marx.²⁵ We see the same pattern in the work of Hardie and Keeble.

Often the Christian Socialists do not mention Marx or Engels by name, but still make points that seem to be derived from Marxist thought. George Lansbury – who had been a member of the SDF early in his political career, and according to a biographer had studied Marxism and accepted some of its teachings – provides a number of examples.²⁶ For example, in a 1913 article on ‘Socialists and Socialism’ from the *Daily Herald* Lansbury declares that “everything of worth is produced by labour, and that those of us who obtain things without labour obtain them from those who do”.²⁷ In a 1912 *Labour Leader* article titled ‘How I Became A Socialist’ Lansbury makes the same point: “The poor are robbed daily. Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, and all the classes who are not engaged in manual labour, live on the backs of those who toil”.²⁸ The same ideas are drawn upon in Lansbury’s condemnation of childhood poverty: “These children are in these conditions because somebody is getting the result of the labour of their parents or of working-class parents generally”.²⁹

John Wheatley also appears to have been influenced by these ideas, attacking those who made money from housing without contributing any labour: “if all those who, by hand or brain, give service to the production of the house, take 3s. 3d., that section of the community who lend, not their labour but their credit, their surplus wealth – usually, not their savings but their leavings – take twice as much out of the rent of the house as all the useful contributions to the erection of the house”.³⁰ The same thinking is indicated in some of the exchanges Wheatley describes in his imaginary trial of capitalism, firstly between the judge and “The Duke of Hamilton”, a landowner, and secondly between the judge and “Old Dick”, a factory worker:

²⁴ R.H. Tawney, ‘The Choice Before the Labour Party’, *Political Quarterly*, 3, 3 (1932), p.26.

²⁵ A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.128.

²⁶ J. Schneer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester, 1990), p.19 and p.25.

²⁷ Article by Lansbury entitled ‘Socialists and Socialism’ from *Daily Herald* newspaper, 13 January 1913, London School of Economics [LSE] Archives, Lansbury/7 5-7.

²⁸ Newspaper article by Lansbury in ‘The Labour Leader’ titled ‘How I became a Socialist’, 17 May 1912, LSE Archives, Lansbury/5 36.

²⁹ Speech by Lansbury in the House of Commons entitled ‘Right to Work’, 10 February 1911, LSE Archives, Lansbury/4 172-4.

³⁰ J. Wheatley, *Houses to Let: A Speech in Exposition of Labour’s Fifteen years; Housing Programme* (London, 1924), p.7.

- Pris.* - [...] I don't require to work.
- Mag.* - No successful robber does. Why don't you require to work?
- Pris.* - I'm a wealthy man, sir.
- Mag.* - How did you come to be wealthy seeing you don't work, and wealth is the product of labour?
- [...]
- Mag.* - Then I suppose you were not aware that the market price of the coal you have produced would be £15,000?
- Dick* - I was not aware of that, your honour.
- Mag.* - What wages have you received?
- Dick* - On average 25s a week.
- Mag.* - Great Heavens! That means you have been swindled out at nearly £12,500!³¹

Stewart Headlam makes the same argument in his Fabian tract, again without mentioning Marx or Engels by name: “the reason why so many have to work under such evil conditions for so long a time is because they have to produce not only sufficient for themselves and their families, but also sufficient for a large number of others who are themselves producing nothing, or nothing adequate, in return for what they consume”.³² Perhaps for this reason Headlam's Guild of St Matthew pointed to “the present contrast between the great body of the workers who produce much and consume little, and of those classes which produce little and consume much” as being “contrary to the Christian doctrines of brotherhood and justice”, and point (b) of the Guild's platform was “to bring about a better distribution of the wealth created by labour”.³³

Henry Scott Holland's view, similarly, was that “the work of the master-capitalist consists more and more in sheer manipulation of the resources and opportunities supplied to him by the organised labour of others”, and William Temple asserts: “All wealth is a product of human labour expended upon God's gifts”.³⁴ Hardie, who we have already seen was an admirer of Marx, demonstrates his influence in *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* (c. 1905-10): “the total income of the nation is £1,750,000,000 a year, of which the

³¹ J. Wheatley, *How the Miners are Robbed: The Duke in the Dock (startling court case)*, (Nottingham, 1973 – original publication 1907), p.11 and p.13.

³² S.D. Headlam, *Christian Socialism: A Lecture – Fabian Tract No.42* London, 1899), p.8.

³³ Bryant, *Possible Dreams* (London, 1996), p.82.

³⁴ H. Scott Holland, *Our Neighbours: a Handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.113; W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.111.

usefully employed wage-earners receive less than £600,000,000 [...] he is paid one-third the value of his labour”.³⁵

There is also evidence that as well as elements of Marxist economics some of the Christian Socialists accepted what is described, in reference to Lansbury’s beliefs, as “the stages theory of history [...] Just as the ‘break up of feudalism’ had constituted a revolutionary transformation, so the capitalist system that has replaced it would inevitably be swept away by a higher stage”.³⁶ We have already noted the influence of this idea on Hardie, and it is also evident in John Clifford’s Fabian tract *Socialism and the Churches*. Clifford reflects the sense of inevitability in writing that socialism is “a movement, a tendency, a pushing forward of the inner soul of humanity towards its predestined goal”.³⁷ For Clifford, capitalism is the present stage of human history, while socialism is the next stage which will inevitably take its place. Clifford goes on:

I do not say that this movement is the *final* form of human society [...] But Socialism is the next, the necessary, the vital, the saving movement. Yet, just as the wage-earning period with its colossal capitalists; its giant plunderers, usurers, and sweaters; its princes of philanthropies; and its myriads of miseries and cruelties, was confessedly an advance in the conditions of slavery; so Socialism may only be a stage in the wonderful evolution of the manifold life of the children of God.³⁸

Again, Clifford does not mention Marx by name, and therefore his ideas could be derived from another source: perhaps a purely Fabian idea of society’s progress, or possibly Clifford’s reference to a “predestined goal” indicates influence by the Calvinist idea of predestination. However, the above quote shows that Clifford saw stages of human history, each an improvement on the last: first slavery, then a “wage-earning” capitalist period, then socialism, and then perhaps a further stage of improvement which would be brought about by the socialist stage; this leaves open the possibility of the communist stage which Marx believed would follow the socialist stage which would constitute the final stage of human existence. This then indicates Clifford’s influence by, if not slavish adherence to, the teaching of Marx, albeit with religious sentiments added.

³⁵ J. Keir Hardie, *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* (Manchester, c. 1905-10 – fifth edition), p.7.

³⁶ Schneer, *Lansbury*, p.25.

³⁷ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches – Fabian Tract No.139* (London, 1908), p.3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.8.

The Christian Socialists also showed some support for the Russian Revolution. A few of them were members of the Hands Off Russia campaign against British military intervention, including Wilfred Wellock, John Wheatley and George Lansbury. Lansbury was “a passionate supporter of the early gains of the Russian Revolution”.³⁹ At an event to celebrate the revolution, Lansbury declared to the crowd: “You are celebrating tonight a tremendous thing, the Russian Revolution. It is a fine thing to cheer these people, fine to feel you can sing about them, talk about them; a finer thing still is to emulate them and follow their example”.⁴⁰ Elsewhere Lansbury declared: “You have been told that Russia is in the grip of a gang of despots. The fact is that Lenin and his supporters have no individual power other than that delegated to them by the Soviets”.⁴¹

Lansbury travelled to Russia in 1920, publishing his findings and his experience that same year as *What I Saw in Russia*, in which he is fulsome in his praise of the revolutionaries and the new society which they are building against the odds: “In my judgement, no set of men or women responsible for a revolution of the magnitude of the Russian Revolution ever made fewer mistakes or carried their revolution through with less interference of the rights of individuals, or with less terrorism and destruction, than the men in control in Russia”.⁴² Lansbury was able to meet with Lenin, afterward describing him as a “champion in the cause of economic and social freedom”.⁴³ This assessment may, of course, be easily challenged, but our purpose is simply to show that Lansbury was influenced by the revolution.

Lenin explained to Lansbury that he was a convinced atheist, but Lansbury replied that “to me your idea of life is the only Christian way of living”; Lansbury goes so far as to write that “if it is true that we ‘worship God by doing good, that deeds not words are understood,’ then these Bolsheviks, feared and hated because they are feared, are the true Christians of today”.⁴⁴

Others were more reserved in their praise for Soviet Russia. Wellock, who visited Russia in 1927, was critical of the loss of workers’ freedom and self-management under the rule of Stalin, writing: “Whatever soul Russian communism ever had – and I had felt its impact in 1927 – Stalin’s purges seemed to have obliterated. He inherited from Lenin a

³⁹ M. Lavalette, *George Lansbury and the Rebel Councillors of Poplar* (London, 2006), p.5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁴¹ J. Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain Since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), p.96.

⁴² G. Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia* (London, 1920), p.xii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42 and p.107.

considerable spiritual legacy, and left behind a spiritual wilderness”.⁴⁵ Tawney’s view in 1949 was that “[o]nly ignorance or prejudice would deny the technical and economic achievements of the Soviet Union; but dams, bridges, power-plants and steel-works, however admirable, are not a substitute for human rights; and the contrast between Russian Police Collectivism and the socialism of Western Europe is too obvious to need emphasis”.⁴⁶ However, despite these criticisms Wellock and Tawney – like Lansbury – had been influenced by the Russian Revolution, or could at least praise some of its achievements.

Henry George

Another key influence was the work of Henry George, who in *Progress and Poverty* and other works proposed a tax on land values in order to abolish peacefully private ownership of land.⁴⁷ In *Thy Kingdom Come* George calls for “taxation for the use of all that value which attaches itself to land, not as a result of individual labour upon it, but as a result of the increase in population, and the improvement of society. In that way everybody would be equally interested in the land of his native country”.⁴⁸ More than anyone else Stewart Headlam advocated the proposals of George; in the words of Jones “it remained his main economic goal at all times”.⁴⁹ Headlam’s thinking was “dominated” by George’s ideas; “he remained all his life more of a Georgeite than a Socialist”.⁵⁰ These ideas were reflected in the published aims of Headlam’s Guild of St Matthew, of which the first was “to restore to the people the value which they give to the land”.⁵¹ Headlam, in his Fabian tract, calls the redistribution of land values “the main plank in the platform of the Christian Socialist, the chief political reform at which he aims”.⁵² Headlam continues his argument:

Why, you find land in the City of London worth more than £30 per superficial foot, land in Belgravia worth more than land in Bethnal Green; land in Bethnal Green worth more than land in Epping Forest. Now what is it that makes the land more and more valuable? Simply

⁴⁵ A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life in Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.59.

⁴⁶ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.158.

⁴⁷ P. d’A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), p.17.

⁴⁸ H. George, *Thy Kingdom Come* (London, 1889), p.12.

⁴⁹ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.103.

⁵⁰ K. Leech, ‘Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924, and the Guild of St Matthew’, in M.B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England* (London, 1968), p.189.

⁵¹ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.82; Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.114.

⁵² Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.11.

the people living or working in any neighborhood, or wanting to live and work there. Yet into whose pockets does the whole of this value go ? Not into the pockets of the men and women who create it, but into the pockets of those who, often simply because they are the sons of their fathers, are the owners of the ground rents and values. Robbery is the only accurate word which a Christian Socialist can use to describe this state of things.⁵³

Headlam goes on to argue that not just the land itself but the minerals produced beneath it, as well as the produce of the seas and rivers are claimed by “robber landlords”, “so that, as Henry George has well said, every salmon which comes up from the sea might just as well have a label on it, ‘Lord or Lady So-and-So, with God Almighty’s compliments’.”⁵⁴ These sentiments match those of George where he writes of his disgust that “our laws say that this God’s earth is not here for the use of all His children, but only for the privileged few”.⁵⁵

George Lansbury was also a supporter of Henry George’s scheme, writing that “I see no means for dealing effectually with the land question as a whole except by making all those who would wish to use land pay, not to private individuals, but to the State, for the use of such land”, and calling for “taxation of land values”.⁵⁶ In Lansbury’s view “Henry George, when he had called attention to the land question thirty years ago, was on perfectly sound ground. We cannot hope for a reformed society if land remains private property and all the value which the pressure of population gives it goes into the pockets of private people”.⁵⁷

Keir Hardie was a member of George’s ‘Land for the People’ campaign.⁵⁸ Henry Scott Holland writes of “the flaming portent of Henry George [...] He paraded the irony of the rich growing ever richer by the very same law by which the poor became ever poorer. No one who had once read *Progress and Poverty* could remain the same man that he had been. It changed the atmosphere. It left a mark that could not be effaced”.⁵⁹ Further, while it is not evident that Tawney was a supporter of George’s scheme, he does share George’s aim of “mak[ing] the holding of land unprofitable to the mere owner, and profitable only to the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.12-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁵⁵ George, *Kingdom*, p.5.

⁵⁶ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.102; J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), pp.117-8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁵⁸ J. Bruce Glasier, *Keir Hardie: A Memorial* (London, 1915), p.13.

⁵⁹ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.6.

user”.⁶⁰ This same theme is evident in Tawney’s *Acquisitive Society*; Tawney criticises “the practice of payment in virtue of property rights, without even the pretence of any service being rendered”, arguing “that industry should be subordinated to the community in such a way as to render the best service technically possible, that those who render that service faithfully should be honourably paid, and that those who render no service should not be paid at all”.⁶¹ “Tawney”, it is explained by Bickley, “is looking for a society where the exercise of economic power is contingent on social obligation. In such a society, individual rights and property could not be seen as absolute, but conditional only on the ordering and use against a greater principle or social object”.⁶² For both George and Tawney the possession of land was not an evil in of itself, only the wealth gained by land owners who did not work at the expense of those who did. William Temple takes a similar view, writing that a man who owns land must own it “not as a possessor of so much material resources, but as a steward and trustee for the community. Land not beneficially used should involve liability to fine, or, in extreme cases, to forfeiture”.⁶³

Jones, however, points out that not all Christian Socialists were as committed to George’s ideas as Headlam, asserting that “[i]t was misleading that Headlam claimed to speak for *all* Christian Socialists, because the majority of them were not in fact satisfied with George’s theory”, citing “the Christian Social Union, the Labour Church, and the Christian Socialist Society, none of which accepted the Single Tax”.⁶⁴ Indeed, one of Hardie’s early biographers records that he came to believe “that George’s panacea, the Single Tax on land, was not enough. Hardie wanted a legal eight hours’ day for the miners, and other industrial legislation which George regarded as unwarranted interference with individual liberty”.⁶⁵ Similarly, as early as 1895, George Lansbury writes in an election address that “I should support the taxation of ground values up to 20s in the £”, but adds, “though that is not going to improve the condition of the workers so long as they are compelled to labour for wages for the benefit of the employing classes”.⁶⁶ In *Karl Marx: The Man and His Message* Hardie credits Marx rather than George with advocating public use of land: “about the time Henry George was due to be born, Karl Marx was recommending that the rent of land should be

⁶⁰ George, *Kingdom*, p.16.

⁶¹ R.H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London, 1921), p.28 and p.14.

⁶² P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.43.

⁶³ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.112.

⁶⁴ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.137. [Emphasis in original.]

⁶⁵ G.D.H. Cole, *James Keir Hardie: Fabian Society Biographical Series No.12* (London, 1941), p.13.

⁶⁶ 'To the electors of the Walworth Division of Newington', August 1895, LSE archives, Lansbury/30 b2.

taken by the State and used for public purposes”.⁶⁷ Yet despite the reservations of Hardie and Lansbury, and that, as Jones points out, Holland’s Christian Social Union did not accept the Single Tax as an official policy, we can see the influence of Henry George on the Christian Socialists, especially on Stewart Headlam and the Guild of St Matthew.

The Fabians

The Fabian Society was also an influence on the Christian Socialists. Stewart Headlam, John Clifford, William Temple, R.H. Tawney, George Lansbury and Keir Hardie were all members, while Clifford and Headlam both wrote Fabian tracts.⁶⁸ Headlam was part of the committee that drew up the ‘Basis’ of the Fabian Society in 1887, “and, according to Sidney Webb he was responsible for some of the most extreme items”.⁶⁹

Fabians held a belief in “the inevitability of progress”, which we see reflected in Clifford’s “feeling that tomorrow must grow out of to-day, just as whatever elements we have of order and of progress, of liberty and good legislation, have grown out of yesterday”.⁷⁰ While his references to stages of history owe more to Marx, the general idea of progress inevitably taking place equally demonstrates a Fabian pattern of thinking. Scott Holland also demonstrates this, writing of socialism having “got hold of the real trend of things, under which we are all inevitably and rationally moving”.⁷¹ Holland’s CSU followed a Fabian pattern of working: “We form Reading Circles. We gather round the study of this or that qualified and adequate book. We meet to talk it round, and through, and over [...] At the end. We, perhaps, can manage to formulate certain conclusions, certain definite issues, which have resulted from the talks. Those can be reduced to print, and circulated. Our experiences are recorded; and we can go on to the next book”.⁷² As Jones observes: “In all this activity the CSU method was very Fabian”.⁷³

In this the CSU was followed by Samuel Keeble’s Wesleyan Methodist Union of Social Service: “Its object was defined as ‘the collection and study of social facts, the pursuit of social service, and the discussion of social problems and theories from the Christian

⁶⁷ Hardie, *Marx*, p.14.

⁶⁸ [Hardie may only have joined because he had to be a member of a socialist organisation to be secretary of the British section of the International: Bickley, *Building Jerusalem*, p.29.]

⁶⁹ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.190.

⁷⁰ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought* (1997), p.30; Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.6.

⁷¹ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.86.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp.67-8.

⁷³ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.186.

stand-point, with the view to educate the public opinion and secure improvement in the condition of life”.⁷⁴ Keeble praised the Fabians, writing that Fabian socialism “is a comparatively moderate and practicable thing [...] with its moderation, its spirit of compromise, its practical nature, its freedom from abstractions and logical pedantry, and, above all, its harmony with the methods of Democratic Constitutionalism”.⁷⁵

It should be noted regarding Tawney’s membership of the Fabian Society, that he has been viewed as simply a passive member, who “rejected their state-centric view of socialism”, and therefore should not be associated too closely with the Fabians. “Fabianism was about efficiency and mechanism; socialism, to Tawney, was about morality and individual generation”.⁷⁶ Tawney had written in his diary that “the Fabians are inclined to go wrong. They seem to think that you can trick statesmen into a good course of action, without changing their principles, and that by taking sufficient thought society can add several cubits to its stature. It can’t as long as it lives on the same spiritual diet. No amount of cleverness will get figs off thistles”.⁷⁷

Guild Socialism, Chartism and Syndicalism

Guild socialism – the idea of introducing workers’ control of industry via guilds for individual trades – also had an impact on the Christian Socialists.⁷⁸ According to one writer, guild socialism “was a principle which had an obvious appeal to a Christian Socialist, in that it was a return to a new form of the original ideals of Ludlow and Maurice”.⁷⁹ “It seemed most natural”, writes another, “for the CSL to support the principles of Guild Socialism, given that the guild idea was developed in the Middle Ages to accompany a Catholic interpretation of life”.⁸⁰ A Church Socialist League statement argued that guild socialism was “the best method of giving effect to the essentially Christian principles of liberty, equality and fraternity”.⁸¹

Beech and Hickson suggest that there are “four foundational precepts” of Guild socialism: (1) “the injustice of laissez-faire capitalism that not only exploits workers and

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Keeble*, p.30.

⁷⁵ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.74.

⁷⁶ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.170-71.

⁷⁷ Winter and Joslin, *Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, p. 46.

⁷⁸ Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.146.

⁷⁹ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.364.

⁸⁰ G. Taylor, *Socialism and Christianity: The Politics of the Church Socialist League* (Sheffield, 2000), p.33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.34.

treats them as means (labour) to an end (profit), but also “denies them individual liberty”, thus making them essentially slaves; (2) “that democratisation is central to socialism and this requires the working class, and the industrial workers in particular, to democratically control their industries and the production of goods by their labour”; (3) “anti-collectivism”, insofar as Guild socialism was committed to the autonomy of Guilds from the state rather than centralised control of industry; (4) “the necessity of guilds”.⁸² Of these, the first two could also be described as precepts of Christian Socialism, while Christian Socialists were at least open to the idea of guilds, if not committed to it; it is only the third, “anti-collectivism”, which is at odds with Christian Socialist thinking.

On the first point, the injustice of laissez-faire capitalism in its denial of liberty, Anthony Wright explains that “the prime concern” of guild socialists “was not with the economic extraction of surplus value but with the human implications of the treatment of labour as a commodity”.⁸³ This is in keeping with the Christian Socialist ethical focus on capitalism as that which leads to mistreatment and exploitation beyond just the economic; for example, Wilfred Wellock, as we have seen, explained that “[m]ost socialists rested their case solely on the economic argument, whereas I saw the basic error of capitalism in certain spiritual efficiencies”.⁸⁴

The counter to the first precept was the second; the cure for the abuses of illiberal capitalism was the application of democracy to all areas of life, as G.D.H. Cole argued: “that community is most free in which all the individuals have the greatest share in the governance of their common life”.⁸⁵ Cole was personally committed to democracy, while for guild socialism as a whole democracy was “a general theory of social organisation”.⁸⁶ As we shall see in Chapter 10, this is in keeping with Christian Socialist ideas about democracy. R.H. Tawney, for example, was a member of the London CSL, a branch which was “instrumental” in promoting guild socialist ideas in 1913.⁸⁷ He, “along with the Guild Socialists and thinkers like Harold Laski, did not – first and foremost – advocate extensive public ownership or welfarism, but the extension of democracy into areas of life that had

⁸² M. Beech and K. Hickson, ‘G.D.H. Cole’, in M. Beech and K. Hickson, eds, *Labour’s Thinkers: The Intellectual Roots of Labour from Tawney to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), pp.40-43.

⁸³ A. Wright, *G.D.H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford, 1979), p.74.

⁸⁴ W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1921), p.5.

⁸⁵ Wright, *Cole*, p.68.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.69 and p.59.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.31.

hitherto escaped its influence”.⁸⁸ This meant that workers should have control of their own industry, rather than it being directed solely by owners of industry who did not necessarily perform a function or seek what was best for society. This was another key part of Tawney’s *Acquisitive Society*.

Christian Socialists could also be supportive of the creation of guilds. Tawney also pointed to the forming of guilds in the building trade which encouraged “the discharge of professional duties”.⁸⁹ This step was necessary for all industry, “because the conduct of industry for public advantage is impossible as long as the ultimate authority over its management is vested in those whose only interest in it is the pursuit of gain”.⁹⁰ For Tawney the control of industry by guilds would allow industry to be conducted in a professional spirit of service to the nation, like the work of teaching or medicine, or the armed forces.

Keeble also made an example of the building guilds, arguing that the practice “seems to help the workers and the community and to hurt no-one”.⁹¹ Hardie pointed to “the Middle Ages” as “a time when every private interest was held in subordination to the common weal” and industry was managed by “the Guilds, the trade unions of the period, in which the craftsmen were banded together for mutual aid and support”.⁹² Wellock also supported Guild Socialism, believing that it would ensure fair distribution of both labour and reward and endorsing it in *Christian Communism*.⁹³

Lansbury was another supporter of guild socialism, and was the CSL president at the time it came it recommended the guild system.⁹⁴ “[T]he workers must”, he wrote, “if they are to get any kind of control over their lives, join together in great industrial unions or guilds, representative of particular industries, within which guilds a brain-worker and a hand-worker shall organise side by side and, in contract or partnership with the nation, carry on the work of supplying the nation’s needs”.⁹⁵ Lansbury suggests as further reading on the topic A.R. Orage and S.G. Hobson, *National Guilds: An Enquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out* and Cole’s *The World of Labour: A Discussion of the Present and Future of Trade Unionism*, as well as suggesting readers might write to the National Guilds League.

⁸⁸ Bickley, *Building Jerusalem*, p.44.

⁸⁹ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.99.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.92.

⁹¹ Keeble, *Christian Socialism*, p.224.

⁹² Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.18.

⁹³ Rigby, Wellock, p.28; W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1921), p.30.

⁹⁴ Taylor, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.41 and p.28.

⁹⁵ Lansbury, *Poverty*, p.113.

Had he been writing a decade later Lansbury might well have urged his readers to turn to *The Acquisitive Society*. That being said, it is the view of Wright that Tawney should best be understood as “an unorthodox guild socialist”.⁹⁶ There were some ideological differences between Tawney and Cole:

[I]n giving his own understanding of guild socialism as the ‘conduct of industry by professional organisations for public service’, it was clear why [Tawney] differed from some of its exponents. In particular, he could not share the ‘sectionalism’ of the functional democracy advocated by Cole, the leading guild theorist, with its erosion of the role of a supreme authority [...] [U]nlike Cole, his emphasis is less upon the assertion of democratic rights and more upon the assumption of professional responsibilities.⁹⁷

Yet, it seems clear that the idea of guilds was an influence in Tawney’s thought – even if there are different emphases in Tawney’s work and more orthodox Guild Socialism – as well as the thought of Keeble, Wellock, Hardie and Lansbury.

It may also be noted that Christian Socialists shared with guild socialists the belief that change must come from the workers themselves, as Wright explains: “that labour must be the agent of its own emancipation was for Guild Socialism not a slogan but a fact”.⁹⁸ Hardie, for example, write similarly of “the workers” achieving their own “political emancipation”.⁹⁹ This is a marked difference from the paternalism of the early Christian Socialists or the Fabian Society. Like the Fabians, however, Cole advocated and practiced “a creed of factual analysis and detailed investigation as the basis for social action”.¹⁰⁰ This approach, as we shall see, was also followed by Henry Scott Holland, Keeble and Tawney. Finally, Cole’s belief in an “alliance of manual worker and brain worker” is similar to Christian Socialist views of class equality, as explained in Chapter 10.

The Chartists seem also to have had some impact on Christian Socialism, especially the moral-force strand of Chartism which sought the moral and spiritual improvement of those to whom the Chartists wanted to extend democratic rights. John Clifford’s family were Chartists in his youth, and that formed part of the experience which influenced his political

⁹⁶ Wright, *Tawney*, p.69.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.69-70.

⁹⁸ Wright, *Cole*, p.77.

⁹⁹ Hardie, *Labour Alliance*, p.14.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *Cole*, p.87.

life thereafter.¹⁰¹ Keeble's view of William Lovett and the moral-force Chartists was that "they were but applying the Christian truths they had learned of from Wesleyan Methodism and the Christian Scriptures".¹⁰²

Tawney's *The Radical Tradition* includes a section on Lovett in which Tawney describes Lovett's views as being that "democracy is less an expedient than an ideal, the vision of liberty, fraternity, and equality [...] It is the only guarantee against mis-government and the one remedy for economic oppression".¹⁰³ Tawney shares with Lovett this view of democracy.¹⁰⁴ Tawney also quotes directly the words of Lovett: "Whatever is gained in England by force, by force must be sustained; but whatever springs from knowledge and justice will sustain itself".¹⁰⁵ He also asserts that the Chartist movement is so important because "[i]t was, as Marx pointed out, the entry in politics not merely of a new party, but of a new class".¹⁰⁶ According to one biographer, Tawney's division between those who work and those who don't – on the one hand owners or shareholders which perform no function, and on the other manual workers and managers – "was the sociology of the Chartists in the 1830s".¹⁰⁷

We can also identify in the writings of Keir Hardie, though he does not mention the Chartists by name, the moral-force way of thinking. Hardie, for example, calls for socialists to pledge themselves to abstain from alcohol, arguing: "The moral force of the Movement would be perceptibly increased if this were done, and it is moral force which carries a movement forward".¹⁰⁸ More generally Hardie writes that, "with all respect to many a good comrade who I know differs from me strongly on this point, I reaffirm my conviction that only by moral power can the necessary zeal and self-sacrifice be developed to carry this work through".¹⁰⁹

We may also note the connection between George Lansbury and the Syndicalists. Lansbury joined the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) in 1912, "though", according to one contemporary journalist, "he does not believe in Syndicalism".¹¹⁰ "I want

¹⁰¹ A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), p.39.

¹⁰² S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.129.

¹⁰³ Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.26.

¹⁰⁴ M. Beech and K. Hickson, *Labour's Thinkers: The Intellectual Roots of Labour from Tawney to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), p.26 and p.32.

¹⁰⁵ Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.21.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁰⁷ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.191.

¹⁰⁸ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie's Speeches and Writings From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.47.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.79.

¹¹⁰ Newspaper cutting from the Manchester Daily Despatch 'Mr. George Lansbury, the man who menaced the premier', 26 June 1913, LSE archive, Lansbury/28 72.

the Syndicalist and the Socialist to march side by side”, wrote Lansbury.¹¹¹ One writer describes Lansbury’s view as being that there was “truth in all these various expressions of socialist and anarchist faith, but none have all the truth”.¹¹² Tom Mann, the syndicalist activist, described Lansbury’s visit to Liverpool to support the 1911 strike, and how Lansbury had been influenced by syndicalism, but had not fully accepted it: “From that time his attitude was changed, and his faith in industrial solidarity grew; but George was, and, I suppose, still is a State-ist; he views the state as Society; he does not take the Syndicalist view that the organised State, with its government and officials and armed forces, was brought into existence by the opponents of the Workers, and functions only in the interests of the enemies of the workers”.¹¹³ While therefore Lansbury was influenced by the syndicalists, he never fully accepted their ideas. The same is true of Hardie, who wrote that “[s]yndicalism is the direct outcome of the apathy and indifference of this house towards working class questions and I rejoice on the growth of syndicalism”, but in practice rejected the syndicalist eschewal of parliamentarianism.¹¹⁴ Overall then we can trace in Christian Socialism the influence of moral-force Chartism, Guild Socialism and the Fabian Society, while the ideas of Karl Marx and Henry George seem to have had a major impact on the Christian Socialists.

Examples from Society

As well as other socialist traditions, the Christian Socialists were influenced by and used examples from society as it already existed or as it was already managed. This includes the extent to which collectivism and co-operation already existed in certain situations. One example of this we have already seen: R.H. Tawney points to the professionalism of medicine and teaching, which are run as public services rather than profit-making enterprises, and wishes to see that professional spirit extended to other industries as, he argues, it has been to the building industry. Tawney mocked those who opposed the extension of such professionalism, writing that “those who desire to maintain the system under which industry is carried on, not as a profession serving the public, but for the

¹¹¹ The Labour unrest. Its causes, effects and remedies. Wages, wealth, monopoly', parliamentary speeches by George Lansbury and others, 1912, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 a 5.

¹¹² Taylor, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.3.

¹¹³ T. Mann, 'George Lansbury', *Syndicalist* 1, 11, Dec 1912.

¹¹⁴ Holman, *Hardie*, p.170.

advantage of shareholders, attack nationalization on the ground that state management is necessarily inefficient, and tremble with apprehension whenever they post a letter in a letter-box"; he also points to the telephone network, the armed forces, the railways and the schools as examples of services which are successfully run without a profit motive.¹¹⁵

The example of the post office is also employed by John Clifford, who writes that though it is run by the state solely for the benefit of the public "[t]hey are honest and industrious. Our letters come with regularity".¹¹⁶ "*Laissez-faire* is practically dead", wrote Clifford:

We have become state-socialists without knowing it. The post office and telegraph, the factory and mining laws, the education of the young, care of the incapable, oversight of industrial corporations, are samples of legislation which may be usefully extended in the direction of the 'unearned increment of rent', the vesting of 'common lands' in country councils, the prohibition of the use of insanitary property, the establishment of 'home colonies' for the poor, and the development of the co-operation of the people in so far as it can be done without risk of injury to character.¹¹⁷

Samuel Keeble also argues that the post office, police, armed forces and museums show that collectivism and public ownership do work.¹¹⁸ Keeble praises the "movement on the part of the citizens to manage collectively, so far as practicable and profitable, all those affairs common to the whole body of citizens and essential to their happiness, convenience, and comfort [...] the wonderful development of modern Municipal Socialism, as witnessed in the operations of the famous London County Council, and of the Glasgow, Manchester and other corporations".¹¹⁹ Stewart Headlam cites the example of utilities being provided by local government, using the expression "Gas and Water Socialism".¹²⁰ Keir Hardie similarly uses the example of local authorities who provide clean water as a matter of public duty, arguing that necessities of life such as food, clothes, homes and energy should be provided in the same way.¹²¹ In another place Hardie makes the same point, writing that when water is

¹¹⁵ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.114. [Tawney is ironically pointing out that nobody fears state management to the extent that they fear to post a letter.]

¹¹⁶ Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.6.

¹¹⁷ J. Clifford, *The New City of God: The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel* (London, 1888), p.36.

¹¹⁸ S.E. Keeble, *Ethics of Public Ownership* (London, 1920), pp.6-7.

¹¹⁹ S.E. Keeble, 'The City, or Service of the Citizens', in S.E. Keeble, ed., *The Citizen of To-Morrow* (London, 1909), p.293.

¹²⁰ S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist's Church* (London, 1907), p.54.

¹²¹ J. Keir Hardie, *The I.L.P. and All About It* (Manchester, 1908), p.8.

provided by the municipality “producers and consumers are one and the same set of persons – the citizens. As the citizens are supplying themselves, they naturally see that they do it well”.¹²² According to Hardie: “When the State enters upon business in any department there is no logical halting-place short of complete State Socialism”.¹²³

Tawney cites other examples of how, in society as it already existed, ethical considerations trump free-market rights to seek one’s own wealth. “The reason for the abolition of slavery”, he writes, “is certainly not that after calculation the advocates of the change arrived at the conclusion that its abolition was more profitable than its maintenance. They acted as they did because they believed slavery to be wrong, and believing it to be wrong determined to get rid of it irrespective”.¹²⁴ Opponents of government intervention in the economy, writes Tawney, “do not complain that persons endowed by nature with unusual qualities of strength, audacity or cunning are artificially prevented from breaking into houses, or terrorizing their neighbours, or forging cheques”.¹²⁵ Samuel Keeble, likewise, declared: “The very men who support such a doctrine in State and in social relationships would be the first to oppose it when put forth by the bully and the burglar”.¹²⁶ The arguments being made here are that society has already accepted a measure of collectivism, co-operation, state interference and government regulation, and that such co-operation and regulation is successful.

In a similar way the Christian Socialists were happy to use the words and example of those who were not socialists. Clifford lists the Tory social reformer Lord Shaftesbury among those who have helped bring socialism closer to being a reality.¹²⁷ Scott Holland does similarly, writing of “the passionate insistence of Lord Shaftesbury” that there should be legislation to protect the most vulnerable in society.¹²⁸ Keeble uses the same example in *Towards the New Era* and *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order*, writing in the latter that “[t]he standpoint of [Shaftesbury] was definitely a social Christian one”.¹²⁹ It is worth noting, however, that Stewart Headlam did not believe that Shaftesbury’s factory legislation was socialist in nature, though he did view it as a necessity in society as it was constituted: “The Factory Acts, valuable and necessary in our present anarchic condition, are no part of

¹²² Hardie, *Can a Man Be a Christian?*, p.17.

¹²³ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.15.

¹²⁴ Winter and Joslin, *Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, p.32.

¹²⁵ Tawney, *Equality*, p.85.

¹²⁶ S. E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.119.

¹²⁷ Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.6.

¹²⁸ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.3.

¹²⁹ S.E. Keeble, *Towards the New Era* (London, 1917), p.26; Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.113.

Socialism; they are only temporary expedients to make things a little better for the wage slaves until wage-slavery is abolished by abolition of the monopoly in the means of production".¹³⁰ Nevertheless, Shaftesbury was an influential figure for some Christian Socialists, and they used him as an example of the kind of things they wanted.

Another example is Keeble's citation of French social reformer Count Adrien Albert Marie de Mun's objections to the mis-treatment of the poor, with Keeble adding: "These are not the utterances of a Socialist, but of an anti-Socialist, a sober, competent, responsible, Christian critic".¹³¹ In the same way Hardie uses quotes from a barrister, G. Balfour Browne, in support of his argument, adding that this argument, "coming from an avowed opponent of Socialism, shows the common sense side of the movement".¹³² Similarly, Tawney writes that:

If any one is disposed to think that this picture of the economic waste which accompanies the domination of production by business interests is overdrawn, he may be invited to consider the criticism upon the system passed by the 'efficiency engineers,' who are increasingly being called upon to advise as to industrial organization and equipment, and who, so far from being tainted with Socialism, have been nurtured on the purest milk of the Capitalist creed.¹³³

Here Tawney and Keeble are demonstrating the reasonableness of socialist ideas and demands by showing that they are accepted even by those who would never class themselves as socialists.

Finally, Christian Socialists – even those who were avowedly pacifist – pointed to the example of co-operation in the armed forces and the war effort as that which could sustain a collectivist society in peace time; as Wright says of Tawney: "It is impossible to read Tawney's commentary on the Great War, or even the Second World War, without being struck by his powerful sense of the moral unity of the event and of the need to extend such unity from the organisation for war to the social organisation of peace".¹³⁴ Society, wrote Tawney, must be given "a new direction and spirit by seeking to establish it on principles [...] which would make victory in this war a symbol of the victory of the social aspirations of the mass of Englishmen, in so far as they have become organised and

¹³⁰ Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, p.54.

¹³¹ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.173.

¹³² Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.15.

¹³³ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.172.

¹³⁴ Wright, *Tawney*, p.86.

articulate. Such principles are, incidentally, those for the sake of which we undertook the war”.¹³⁵ Tawney also uses the example of conduct in wartime to argue against the selfishness of those who seek only profit and financial gain from society:

When really important issues are at stake every one realizes that no decent man can stand out for his price. A general does not haggle with his government for the precise pecuniary equivalent of his contribution to victory. A sentry who gives the alarm to a sleeping battalion does not spend next day collecting the capital value of the lives he has saved; he is paid 1/- a day and is lucky if he gets it. The commander of a ship does not cram himself and his belongings into the boats and leave the crew to scramble out of the wreck as best they can; by the tradition of the service he is the last man to leave.¹³⁶

Lansbury, despite his pacifism, made a similar argument in 1917:

Just now we can see around us how much sacrifice people are making, how much they are giving up, in a great effort to destroy the Germans. It is the spirit behind this effort which we want to put into the work of destroying evil in our midst. We need all the enthusiasm, all the sacrifice, all the grit and determination that the men who are fighting in Europe have shown, but we shall have this satisfaction all the time, that the things we are striving to destroy are evil conditions, not human life.¹³⁷

William Temple offered a similar view during World War 2, from the perspective of one who supported the war: “By sacrifice and endurance we hope to win the war. Let us recognise, and root in our minds the conviction, that only by continual endurance and sacrifice can we win the peace”.¹³⁸

Keeble used the example of government control of industry during the Great War – “we witnessed Governments organising practically the whole nation, not for a few months, but for five years, controlling and carrying on its financial, economic, industrial and commercial life” – to argue that such a practice could work and was not as objectionable as some suggested.¹³⁹ Hardie agrees, and concludes: “If the State can build battleships and make swords, why not also trading ships and ploughshares? Since the state conveys letters

¹³⁵ R.H. Tawney, *Democracy or Defeat – By a WEA Soldier* (London, 1917), p.10.

¹³⁶ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.174.

¹³⁷ Lansbury, *Poverty*, pp.123-4.

¹³⁸ W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), p.182.

¹³⁹ Keeble, *Public Ownership*, p.9.

and parcels and telegraphs, why not also coal and wool and grain. And if the State insists in owning telegraph lines, why not also railway lines?"¹⁴⁰ We can see, therefore, that the Christian Socialists were able to draw inspiration from the existing structure of society, including examples from non-socialists and the co-operative spirit of wartime.

¹⁴⁰ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.15.

Section One Summary

For Christian Socialists, we may conclude, it was the Christian religion which was above all else the basis for their socialism. Christian Socialists looked to the Bible, arguing that it showed through the Fatherhood of God that all men were brothers; the capitalist system was then immoral and un-Biblical, in that it refused to allow men and women to live as brothers and sisters, instead causing them to fight and compete with each other to exist. Christian Socialists held up the teachings of Christ, such as the Sermon on the Mount, warnings about the dangers of pursuing wealth and His love for the poor as arguments in favour of socialism. Likewise, ideas and concepts from the New Testament letters as well as the Old Testament were used as a basis for socialism – for example the command “that if any would not work, neither should he eat” was used as a condemnation of the apparently idle capitalist class. Christian Socialists engaged in debate with those who tried to use the Bible to support the capitalist society, but did accept in some cases that the Bible laid down principles rather than rules which had to be followed.

Christian Socialists also found part of their basis for socialism in the church. Church teaching tended towards socialism, especially the teaching of authoritative figures or the example of ordinary Christians from the early church. Catholic social teaching, in the form of Pope Leo’s *Rerum novarum*, also seemed to argue for socialist solutions to the industrial and economic problems of the day. For Christian Socialists, especially Stewart Headlam, the sacraments of the church – communion and baptism – were signs of equality and brotherhood, and therefore pointed to socialism. When Christian Socialists faced opposition to socialism from within the church, they did not relinquish their position; rather, they asserted that they had a better understanding of the creeds of the church than did the church itself. The modern church did not overtly teach socialism because it had been corrupted by individualism and capitalist economics. The church of the past, by contrast, had not been corrupted and therefore taught socialism freely; the church could, in the future, rediscover its creed and play its part in the founding of a socialist society.

We can also conclude that there are a number of other key influences on the Christian Socialists and their political thought. This includes the previous generation of

Christian Socialists – F.D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley and the others in that circle, including John Ruskin and T.H. Green – even though these have been identified as being more paternalist than what we would identify as socialist. In the same way the Christian Socialists under consideration in this study in some cases influenced and motivated each other. The work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and Henry George appear to have had a large influence on Christian Socialist thought in this period, while we can also trace the influence of Fabianism, guild socialism and moral-force Chartism. Finally, we can also see that already-existing examples of successful co-operation and collectivism could inspire Christian Socialists, and that they sought to use such examples to persuade others.

However, not each Christian Socialist was influenced by these things in equal measure. For example, there are few references to Maurice, Ruskin or Green in the work of Keir Hardie, while Stewart Headlam does not appear to base any of his thinking on Marx or Engels; indeed, Headlam was opposed to the creation of the Labour Party which Hardie saw as the next step in putting Marx's theory into practice. Samuel Keeble stands between Hardie and Headlam, fulsome in his praise of Marx but also severe in his criticism. Headlam was devoted to the teaching of Henry George, which was only partially accepted by Hardie and George Lansbury, while – in contrast to Headlam's Guild of St Matthew – Henry Scott Holland's Christian Social Union did not accept George's ideas as official policy. Lansbury, R.H. Tawney and Wilfred Wellok each to some extent supported the ideas of Guild socialism, but there is no evidence that either Headlam or Hardie did. This being noted, the conclusion that all these provided a basis for Christian Socialist thought, while sustainable, has to be made with a note of caution, and consideration that the individuals which have been tagged with the label 'Christian Socialist' do not here constitute a homogenous bloc.

This again leads us to the view that no other source of inspiration had as much impact on the Christian Socialists as Christianity. The influence of the Bible and the teaching of the church both past and present appear to have had a much greater effect on the Christian Socialists as a whole; they all make reference to the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the teaching and example of Christ, and the teaching of the church throughout the ages. Christian Socialism, therefore, emerges from the church outwards, rather than from within politics; we can conclude that Christian Socialism is informed to a greater or lesser extent by Maurice, Kingsley, Ruskin, Green, Marx, Engels, George and

others, but that the basis of Christian Socialism is clearly the Christian religion as represented in the Bible and by the church.

Section Two: The Route to Christian Socialism

6. The Democratic-Revolutionary Synthesis

Having considered the philosophical basis of Christian Socialism we must consider the question of how Christian Socialists believed that socialism would be brought about. It is one thing to express a belief in socialism, to argue its Christian basis and its moral and practical superiority to capitalism, but that does not answer the question of how a socialist society would actually come into existence. In this chapter the question of whether Christian Socialism was a democratic or revolutionary form of socialism will be examined, with the conclusion that Christian Socialists sought to revolutionise society by peaceful, democratic means, thereby presenting a synthesis of democratic and revolutionary socialisms. In the following chapter the methods by which Christian Socialists sought to carry out this democratic revolution will be sketched out as a three-stage process.

Contradictory language

It should first be noted that the Christian Socialists could express themselves using quite revolutionary language. George Lansbury, for example, wrote in 1929 that when he returned from Australia in the 1880s, he did so as “a rebel, and I am still a rebel against the present man-made poverty and destitution”.¹ Lansbury had an uncompromising message for the oppressed of the capitalist system: “You have a right to rebel when you are tricked and deceived, it is the only course open to you [...] Burn and destroy property or anything you like”.² A newspaper account of a speech by George Lansbury similarly reports him as saying that “[t]he best message they could send to the poor was the preaching of revolt in order that they might seek to change their present conditions”.³

¹ J. Shepherd, *George Lansbury: At the Heart of Old Labour* (Oxford, 2002), p.15. [The poverty and mistreatment Lansbury suffered in Australia persuaded him all the more of the deficiencies and immorality of capitalism.]

² J. Schneer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester, 1990), p.119

³ Newspaper article in the *Halifax Evening Courier* about a speech by Lansbury at Sowerby Bridge, 26 February 1912, London School of Economics [LSE] archives, Lansbury/5 19.

James Keir Hardie wrote of his belief in “the conquest of political power as the method by which the workers would achieve their political emancipation”.⁴ Hardie’s view was the workers must “succeed in capturing and controlling the machinery of the State”.⁵ At Christmas Hardie offered “[t]he season’s greetings to all who are remembering that Christ came ‘not to send peace but a sword’ against wrongdoing in all its forms”.⁶

Stewart Headlam enjoined the working class to “strike down all evil customs and circumstances”; and argued that “in the light of the incarnation the social revolution, in the plain meaning of the words, is justified, nay, demanded”.⁷ One biographer notes that “Headlam’s revolutionary rhetoric” was troubling to the founders of the Christian Social Union, including Henry Scott Holland.⁸ Another affirms that “Headlam was a revolutionary”, adding that “[f]or this reason he was almost as much a misfit in the circles of the Fabians, ‘the patron saints of reformism’, as he was in those of conventional religion”.⁹ Similarly, a biographer of John Wheatley notes the “cutting and militant edge” to his speeches.¹⁰ Wheatley despaired of achieving socialism through Parliament, as did Wilfred Wellock, who called it “the grave of the people’s conscience”.¹¹ John Clifford, in one place, appears to refute the efficacy of a parliamentary route to change, writing: “If the progress of England depended to any considerable extent on parliament we might at once prepare for the utter collapse of our nation, and the Gibbon of to-day would find material for the story ‘Decline and Fall of Great Britain’ more abundant in House of Commons than in any other part of England”.¹² Wellock and Samuel Keeble both called for a revolution.¹³ R.H. Tawney did likewise, arguing during the First World War that “it is not true that war cannot be carried on during an internal revolution. It would be truer to say that it is only by means of something like an internal revolution that a war of principles can be carried on”.¹⁴

Christian Socialists, as already noted, were generally welcoming and supportive of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Hardie, Lansbury, Wellock and Wheatley were among

⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* (London, 1909), p.14.

⁵ J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.4.

⁶ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.73.

⁷ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.21, p.105

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.102.

⁹ K. Leech, ‘Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924, and the Guild of St Matthew’, in M.B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England* (London, 1968), p.84.

¹⁰ I.S. Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), p.155.

¹¹ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.185; A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life in Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.40.

¹² J. Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H.: Life, Letters and Reminiscences* (London, 1924), p.81.

¹³ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), pp.35-6; S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.212. [We will examine below the details of Keeble and Wellock’s calls for revolution.]

¹⁴ R.H. Tawney, *Democracy or Defeat – By a WEA Soldier* (London, 1917), p.9.

those who were part of the “Hands off Russia” campaign against British counter-revolutionary action. Lansbury was particularly vocal, declaring at an event celebrating the revolution that “[i]t is a fine thing to cheer these people, fine to feel you can sing about them, talk about them; a finer thing still is to emulate them and follow their example”.¹⁵

In other places, however, the Christian Socialists gave the impression of favouring an evolutionary rather than revolutionary route to socialism. Keeble writes that “force is anti-social and the programme of Socialism can be realised far more surely by evolution than by revolution”.¹⁶ Elsewhere he makes the same point: “Rash, violent revolution is no remedy. It retards growth”.¹⁷ Indeed, in Keeble’s view Christianity was able to prevent “revolutionary violence”.¹⁸ Wilfred Wellock, like other pacifists, condemned both “international war” and “class war”.¹⁹ Nor is this simply a disagreement between individuals. In spite of his revolutionary comments Lansbury, in a speech opposing militarism, agrees with Wellock, referring to “murder pure and simple, and as such to be condemned, whether committed in the name of war by Governments, or in that of Revolution by individuals”.²⁰ On this basis a biographer concludes that Lansbury was “a pacifist socialist, not a revolutionary socialist”.²¹ Keir Hardie, similarly, “opposed the use of violence as a means to political ends”.²² Here the pacifism of Christian Socialists overrules, with violent revolution and war between different classes held to be just as immoral as war between nations.²³

Keir Hardie, like Keeble above, saw evolutionary methods as the surest way of bringing about socialism, writing: “The walls of the industrial system, with its great wealth and resources, will not fall at the blast of any trumpet. The reconstruction of society on a Socialist basis must proceed by the same methods of evolution which have called the existing order into being”; “With the enfranchisement of the masses it is recognised that the ballot is much more effective than the barricade”.²⁴ Hardie therefore matched his fierce rhetoric with a parliamentary, constitutional campaign for socialism.

¹⁵ M. Lavalette, *George Lansbury and the Rebel Councillors of Poplar* (London, 2006), p.14.

¹⁶ S.E. Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism: Essays for the Times* (London, 1906), p.8.

¹⁷ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.204.

¹⁸ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.101.

¹⁹ Rigby, Wellock, p.67.

²⁰ Antimilitarism speech by Lansbury, *The Arbitrator*, May 1892, LSE archives, Lansbury/1 150.

²¹ Schneer, *Lansbury*, p.146.

²² B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010), p.96.

²³ [See Chapter 8 for a discussion of Christian Socialist pacifism.]

²⁴ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.28.

Hardie was instrumental in the creation of the Labour Party, having first been at the forefront of the Scottish Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party. The whole point of the Labour movement was to secure working-class representation in Parliament and thereby bring about at least some measure of socialism; Hardie writes in *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* of his belief that socialism could be brought about through Parliament.²⁵ Such was his view of electoral politics as the means to bring about socialism that after the defeat of 1895 he complained that there were “[s]ix years of Conservative rule to look forward to before another opportunity comes”, adding his instructions for campaigners: “Fight every bye-election, fight the Municipal Elections as they come around, prepare for the grand struggle at the next election”.²⁶ For Hardie every election was a fight for socialism. He “was never in favour of violence [...] Hardie was a constant believer in democracy and in the expectation that eventually an elected Labour government would legislate for much public ownership”.²⁷

John Wheatley held a similar commitment, arguing that “granted political liberty and constitutional respect, I would regard a resort to violence as a terrible crime”.²⁸ Tawney was another committed to the democratic process: “the centrality of the democratic method led Tawney to a parliamentary rather than a revolutionary brand of socialism”.²⁹ He argued that socialists should give up any suggestion “that violence is a card which socialists keep up their sleeves, to be played when they think fit”, and that voting rights were “the only guarantee against mis-government and the one remedy for economic oppression”.³⁰ Lansbury made a similar argument, voicing his support for female suffrage because, “to obtain possession of the land and to obtain possession of the railways and other means of life, we shall need political power”.³¹ Lansbury declared that “I have never accepted the theory of sudden revolution”, and that “whatever ultimate system is brought about, it will not be done by a sudden change or break”.³² John Clifford concludes: “Few now expect a

²⁵ Hardie, *Labour Alliance*, p.11.

²⁶ Hughes, *Hardie's Speeches and Writings*, p.49.

²⁷ Holman, *Hardie*, p.170.

²⁸ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.70.

²⁹ M. Beech and K. Hickson, *Labour's Thinkers: The Intellectual Roots of Labour from Tawney to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), p.32.

³⁰ R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London, 1938 – original publication 1931), p.268; R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.26.

³¹ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.119.

³² Letter from Lansbury to John Armitage, 9 March 1940, LSE archive, Lansbury/17 160-2; Letter from Lansbury to Harold Arthur Hill, 14 June 1929, LSE archive, Lansbury/9 173-4.

sudden revolution; most work to hasten a natural and orderly evolution of the Socialistic State”.³³

It could be added that Christian Socialist support for Russia was not absolute. In *What I Saw In Russia* Lansbury writes of “how impossible it is for me to discriminate between one form of killing and another”.³⁴ A large part of the reason he felt able to support the Russian revolution was set out in the introduction to the book, where he writes of his belief – sincerely held, whether or not we would think it justified – that “no set of men or women [...] ever made fewer mistakes or carried their revolution through with less interference of the rights of individuals, or with less terrorism and destruction, than the men in control in Russia”.³⁵ Samuel Keeble held a similar position of critical support, showing “considerable sympathy for the Soviet economic experiment; nevertheless, he thought Stalin was a murderer, and he said so to pro-Soviet friends”.³⁶ Wellock also describes his disappointment with what he saw as the loss of workers’ freedoms under Stalin: “whatever soul Russian communism ever had [...] Stalin’s purges seemed to have obliterated. He inherited from Lenin a considerable spiritual legacy, and left behind a spiritual wilderness”.³⁷ Lansbury argued: “To do as they did in Russia, wipe out a system with blood and fire, is simple; I do not say easy, but we, you, and I, want to transform, without killing anybody, private ownership into public ownership”.³⁸

Synthesis

How can we reconcile the revolutionary and evolutionary thought evident in the Christian Socialist writings? A large part of the reason for the apparent contradiction above is that Christian Socialists did seek to revolutionise society, but by peaceful means. Wilfred Wellock explains that “widely different things are meant and conveyed by the word revolution. Communism does not supply the only revolutionary policy conceivable, nor is there any reason why Parliamentarianism should not be combined with a revolutionary spirit and method”; he goes on to illustrate this point by arguing that the “strength of the

³³ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches: Fabian Tract No.139* (London, 1908), p.6.

³⁴ G. Lansbury, *What I Saw In Russia* (London, 1920), p.59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xii.

³⁶ M.S. Edwards, *S.E. Keeble: The Rejected Prophet* (Chester, 1977), p.55.

³⁷ Rigby, *Wellock*, p.59.

³⁸ Newspaper cutting from the Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph, featuring the policies of Lansbury as outlined by him in a public meeting to the people of Rushden, 21 March 1931, LSE archive, Lansbury/10 56.

Communist Party lies in the fact that it stands for revolution; its weakness lies in the fact that it endorses violence”.³⁹

Wellock “believed in the possibility of a nonviolent, peaceful change of society, a revolution through reconciliation which could avoid the worst manifestations of class conflict”; he sought after “a *process* of revolutionary change”.⁴⁰ “A ‘revolution by consent’, a revolution by constitutional means, was what Wellock demanded and urged. It was a strange conjunction of the orthodox socialist’s analysis of the workings of impersonal economic forces and the moral crusader’s faith in the possibility that those vested interests whose existence he condemned might be persuaded to divest themselves of their privilege for their own and the wider community’s sake.”⁴¹

Wellock was not the only one to hold views such as this. We saw Headlam described as “a revolutionary”, yet Headlam eschewed violence as the means by which to bring about the revolution: “The kingdoms of this world were indeed destined to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ: the Church was to conquer the Roman Empire: the revolution was to be accomplished: but the *method* by which this was to be done was to be all important. These good results were not to be snatched at, but to be brought about by moral means, *gradually*.”⁴² Headlam wrote of his belief in “the Social Revolution – which, I take it, will not come suddenly, but like the Kingdom of Heaven, of which it is a part, ‘without observation’.” This revolution was to be achieved without violence or the shedding of blood; “What! It is answered, a bloodless revolution – that is impossible! [...] but the blood of the Head and Representative of the whole human race was shed on Calvary, that was an all-sufficient blood-shedding, and by the power of that perfect sacrifice, if men choose, their Social redemption may be accomplished”.⁴³

A report of a speech by George Lansbury records his view “that Socialism was simply an organised state of Society, growing out of the present state and gradually coming into being by the consent and assistance of the people”.⁴⁴ This was also the view he expressed in conversation with Lenin, arguing “that we had all the machinery of administration; that we had our great trade union and co-operative movement and friendly

³⁹ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), pp.35-6 and p.38.

⁴⁰ Rigby, Wellock, p.29 and p.56. [Emphasis added.]

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.68-9.

⁴² S.D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with Other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), p.68. [Emphasis in original.]

⁴³ S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.13 and p.25.

⁴⁴ Newspaper article about a speech by Lansbury on socialism, 18 September 1912, LSE archives, Lansbury/6 140.

societies; that all these organisations, national, municipal and voluntary are training men and women for the work of administration, and that it would be quite easy for us to take over whenever the workers really desire to do so”.⁴⁵ “During the best part of my life I was a revolutionary,” declared Lansbury. “I am still, since I want to help transform society into a co-operative commonwealth. But I always thought violence was wrong – and futile. You cannot coerce people into the Kingdom of Heaven”.⁴⁶ Instead, “[t]he revolution we advocate is a revolution of thought expressed in legislation”, “a great revolution in men’s thoughts and action”.⁴⁷

It is for this reason that an interviewer of Lansbury writes: “It would be perfectly safe to describe Mr Lansbury as a revolutionist if it were clearly understood that a revolution does not mean a revolt”.⁴⁸ It also explains how we are to understand Lansbury’s support for the Russian Revolution; Lansbury did want to see the workers “emulate” the revolutionaries of Russia “and follow their example”, but peacefully, as quoted above: “To do as they did in Russia, wipe out a system with blood and fire, is simple; I do not say easy, but we, you, and I, want to transform, without killing anybody, private ownership into public ownership”.

Keir Hardie, it is argued, also “believed that workers could achieve a social revolution by democracy”.⁴⁹ This view explains how Hardie could hold a belief in parliamentarianism and also “the conquest of political power”, urging workers to aim at “capturing and controlling the machinery of the State”. Similarly, the *Methodist Times* records that “Mr. Keeble would appear to approve a socialism whose spirit is Christian and whose method is revolutionary, but not a materialistic socialism based on revolutionary violence,” adding that “if this is so, Keeble certainly does not stand alone”.⁵⁰

Keeble himself wrote that “[i]t is true that Christians are not red revolutionaries, but they are revolutionaries. They seek to revolutionize, by peaceful, and if possible, evolutionary, means”.⁵¹ It is for this reason that Tawney could write in 1952 of the growth of the Labour movement as representing a “revolt of ordinary men against capitalism”, and yet on the next page describe Labour’s method as “democracy [...] the sole political method

⁴⁵ Lansbury, *Russia*, p.171.

⁴⁶ Newspaper article from the Daily Sketch by Lansbury, explaining his background to Socialist thought, 18 June 1931, LSE archive, Lansbury/10 69.

⁴⁷ Parliamentary Election, 1929, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 b 35-7; G. Lansbury, *My Quest for Peace* (London, 1938), p.19.

⁴⁸ Interview with Lansbury from the Christian Commonwealth Newspaper, 11 August 1915, LSE archive Lansbury/7 213.

⁴⁹ Holman, *Hardie*, p.57.

⁵⁰ Edwards, *Keeble*, p.34.

⁵¹ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.212.

discovered by man of effecting bloodless change”.⁵² John Clifford similarly wrote of “[t]he quietly operative energy of the popular vote” being “at its revolutionary work”, while John Wheatley believed that a “Labour government” could “accomplish peacefully one of the most beneficent revolutions in the world’s history”.⁵³ Christian Socialists did therefore believe in revolution, but a revolution brought about by peaceful, democratic, parliamentary and constitutional means. This then represents a synthesis of democratic and revolutionary socialist methods.

⁵² Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.168 and p.169.

⁵³J. Clifford, *The New City of God: The primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel* (London, 1888), p.9; J. Wheatley, *Socialise the National Income!* (London, 1927), p.14.

7. The Revolution in Practice

Given that Christian Socialists aimed at a revolution, but one which would be undertaken without force of arms or any violence at all, how would such a revolution be carried out? Sometimes this was not clear, and we shall later examine some of the contradictions, confusion, and perhaps muddled thinking of Christian Socialists on this matter. However, it may be possible to discern a process that Christian Socialists expressed as the means by which socialism would be brought about, leaving our consideration of some of the flaws to one side for the time being. The process might be sketched out as follows: firstly, persuasion of the deficiencies of capitalism and the need for a socialist alternative followed by, secondly, the election of Labour to a position of power, or to the “conversion” of those already in power to socialist principles. In either case convinced socialists would now be in power, and the third stage would be the reorganisation of society by a socialist state, aided by a supportive and co-operative population.

Persuasion

The first step then in the Christian Socialist method of transforming society was the persuasion of the population to reject capitalism and embrace socialism. “If a Socialist government means business”, wrote R.H. Tawney, “then it must take the initiative, force the pace, and – I won’t say compel – but persuade men to be free”.¹ This process, however, had to begin well before a socialist party took office; indeed, it was necessary for that to happen, as Tawney explained: “Labour will not, however, win power in the first instance, or be in a position to use it, when won, with the vigour required, unless it has behind it, not merely a majority of voters, but a temper in the country which will see the job through”; for this reason, said Tawney, socialism must “argue and persuade”.² This was also the view of James Keir Hardie, who wrote that “Socialism cannot be imposed on an unwilling or unready people. The organisation of the masses, their training in politics, and their being made to feel

¹ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.177.

² R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London, 1938 – original publication 1931), p.273 and p.266.

a sense of responsibility for working out their own industrial, political and economic salvation, are all a necessary part in the evolution of the Socialist State”.³

We observed in earlier chapters that the Christian Socialists derived their socialism in large part from the reading of Scripture, and from the teaching and practices of their churches. The corollary to this is that Christian Socialists saw the Church and its proclamation of Christian teaching as one of the ways in which society could be persuaded to reject capitalism and seek the alternative. In his diary, Tawney argues for the application of “certain principles of social and economic conduct”, adding that “[t]his knowledge is, I would urge, the common property of the Christian nations”.⁴ For Tawney then society should be governed by Christian principles, and in the final chapter of *The Acquisitive Society* he argues that the responsibility for upholding these principles belongs to the Church: “Such a political philosophy implies that society is not an economic mechanism, but a community of wills which are often discordant, but which are capable of being inspired by devotion to common ends. It is, therefore, a religious one, and, if it is true, the proper bodies to propagate it are the Christian Churches”.⁵ Tawney sees the Church insisting on its members following these Christian principles, persuading society as a whole to follow them, and critiquing the actions of the state based on them: “Like Missionary Churches in Africa today, it will have as its aim, not merely to convert the individual, but to make a new kind, and a Christian kind of civilization”.⁶

Samuel Keeble makes the same argument as Tawney, viewing it as the role of the church to “cultivate a ‘divine discontent’”, and outlining a “Social Method” which “consists first of a fearless, frank and constant criticism by Christians” of the faults in the capitalist system.⁷ “We dwell”, wrote Keeble, “in the midst of a civilization which is largely the creation of Christianity itself, and have, therefore, a potent, if not an authoritative voice in matters ethical, social, and even political”. “In conversation, in public speech, in the home, from the desk, in day and Sunday schools, in the pulpit and in the Press, Christians should seek to create a strong public opinion against all unfair competitions”.⁸ Keeble concludes:

³ J. Keir Hardie, *The I.L.P. and All About It* (Manchester, 1908), p.11.

⁴ J.M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, eds, *R.H. Tawney's Commonplace Book* (Cambridge, 2006), p.31.

⁵ R.H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London, 1921), p.180.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.189.

⁷ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.104 and p.169.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.12 and p.86.

“the function of the Christian Church” is to aid Christians in working for the creation of a new society.⁹

William Temple reasons in the same way, arguing that “[t]he state must have some principles in which to guide its promotion of the good life for its citizens”.¹⁰ Temple’s view is that “there can be no Christian society unless there is a large body of convinced and devoted Christian people to establish it and keep it true to its own principles”.¹¹ This view is an echo of John Clifford’s, who wrote that “the churches can and ought to keep the minds of men alert to note every existing wrong in the framework of society”.¹² George Lansbury sought the “preaching” of “discontent”, and he foresaw that very role for the Church in post-revolutionary Russia, describing his belief that the Russian Church would “with whole-hearted purpose join Lenin and his comrades in recreating the moral and material life of the great nation.”¹³

Stewart Headlam often stated that the Church should be the means by which socialism was brought about, his view that “the Christian Church, and especially the Christian priesthood, might be, and ought to be, *the* great agency for human progress in religion, politics, society, customs, and institutions”.¹⁴ The Church could also help to “make the State minister to the well-being of the people instead of maintaining the monopolies of the few”.¹⁵ For Headlam “the one main function of the Christian Church is to carry out the principles of Socialism, that the Church is intended to be a great instrument for Social Reform”, and lest anyone should disagree “[i]t is for us to show that the reforms, the changes, which are needful for the well-being of the people, are fully sanctioned by Christian teaching”.¹⁶ Wilfred Wellock agrees with Headlam on this latter point, arguing that social and economic change would only be a reality when people were aware that the spiritual arguments were in favour of it, with the Church responsible for creating that awareness.¹⁷

⁹ S.E. Keeble, *Towards the New Era* (London, 1917), p.4.

¹⁰ A.M. Suggate, ‘William Temple’, in P. Scott and W.T. Cavanaugh, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford, 2004), p.160.

¹¹ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.115.

¹² J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches: Fabian Tract No.139* (London, 1908), p.14.

¹³ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York NY, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.43; Lansbury, *Russia*, p.52.

¹⁴ S.D. Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress: Being Sermons and Lectures* (London, 1878), p.vi. [Emphasis in original.]

¹⁵ S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.12.

¹⁶ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.48; S.D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), p.122.

¹⁷ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1912), pp.25-6.

In this conception then, socialism is morally superior to capitalism; this understanding is based on morals derived from the Bible and the teaching of the Church, so it is therefore the Church's role to make the moral case for socialism and uphold the Christian principles which will bring about the spiritual revolution and guide post-revolutionary life.

Part of Tawney's argument was that the social teaching of the Church, while applying to society as a whole, should be enforced by the Church on its own members. He goes so far as to say that the Church "will expect its adherents to face economic ruin for the sake of their principles".¹⁸ Keeble also sees this role for the Church, writing that "[i]t is high time, then, that Christian teachers proclaimed that Christian business men, at least, are expected to respect the dignity of human nature in the humblest of their servants".¹⁹ For this reason Keeble desired to see Christian social principles preached from the pulpit.²⁰ While Tawney envisaged the Church policing the actions of its members, he also believed that practicing Christians were the most likely to be persuaded to practice socialism voluntarily; "he sets", therefore, "about the task of turning Christians into socialists".²¹

Keeble also argued that "Christian people must be enamoured of the vision of the true social order".²² He held "that it is the business of the Christian Church fearlessly to teach such men their duty, and if they will not yield to the pleadings of love, to refuse to company with them as Christians. This would leave many churches crippled indeed, but also free from participation in disregard for human relationships, and in the oppression of the helpless".²³ Headlam felt that Christians could be turned to socialism because of the unity of rich and poor within the body of the Church: "when the people come to be united with [the rich] in common Churchmanship, they will be able to convince many of them that the necessary reforms, though they will make them poorer, will make them also happier, and will educate them so as to make them finer men and women".²⁴ This was the aim of Henry Scott Holland's Christian Social Union, which was "primarily an Anglican church society, concerned with propaganda among church folk".²⁵ In this view then a large part of the

¹⁸ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.189.

¹⁹ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1896), p.229.

²⁰ S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility or the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.275.

²¹ A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.33.

²² S.E. Keeble, *COPEC: An account of the Christian Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship* (London, 1924), p.16.

²³ Keeble, *Material Life*, p.15.

²⁴ Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, p.23.

²⁵ P. d'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), p.218.

Church's role was to persuade and to some extent coerce its own members first and foremost.

The Church's influence, however, was not to be limited to those who were already members. Lansbury, for instance, "had come to believe that the individual capitalists could never be coerced into socialism by trade unions or a political party, but that they might be reformed by the power of Christ-like example".²⁶ Similarly, Wellock "placed his faith in the possibility of so arousing the public conscience that the capitalists would be compelled to see the error of their ways, realise the ruin they were causing and, thereby seek their salvation by satisfying the people's legitimate demands".²⁷

Holland felt that the Church of England as the established national Church had a particular role, being "a Church specially charged with national responsibilities".²⁸ Headlam would probably have agreed insofar as the Church of England was a national Church, but he felt that disestablishment would aid the Church in fulfilling its role. "A complete Christian Socialism", he wrote in a Fabian tract, "cannot be brought about until the Church is free to use influence and discipline for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth".²⁹ Headlam wanted as many people as possible to be active within the Church of England, but with the aim that "as conscious Churchmen they will want to help set the Church free to manage her own affairs, to elect her own clergy, to be a real power to help bring about those secular reforms which are necessary".³⁰ The Baptist John Clifford also felt that the Church of England should be disestablished, arguing that establishment "tends to make the Church self-seeking instead of self-sacrificing, unprogressive and reactionary instead of leading the highest and best movements of mankind".³¹ The Church, therefore, should "be free in all its internal activities from the control of Princes and Parliaments, and from the interference of civic and political organisations of every kind".³²

It should be pointed out, however, that Christian Socialists did not necessarily see a role for the Church in providing specific policies. William Temple includes a section of practical suggestions in *Christianity and the Social Order*, but these remain only suggestions as to how the principles the Church proclaims could be carried out. Temple elsewhere

²⁶ J. Schneer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester, 1990), p.141.

²⁷ A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life in Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.36.

²⁸ H. Scott Holland, ed., *Our Neighbours: A Handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.58.

²⁹ S.D. Headlam, *Christian Socialism: A Lecture – Fabian Tract No.42* (London, 1899), p.9

³⁰ Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.56.

³¹ J. Clifford, *The State the Church and the Congregation* (London, 1908), p.9.

³² *Ibid.*, p.3

explains the reason for this: “it is the principle, and only the principle, which the Church as such has any right to proclaim. The rest is merely illustrative matter”.³³ The Church, according to Temple, “must point out conditions which flout Christian conscience. It cannot advocate specific remedies *qua* church, but it can stimulate those who respect its authority to find and apply for a remedy.”³⁴ This was also the position of Holland’s CSU, which “never declared itself for any given platform [...] practical reform suggestions were left to the individual consciences of members”.³⁵

The prohibition that Temple places on the Church as a whole is echoed by Keeble, who applied it to individual Christians. “Nor should any Christian interfere in labour questions, either by word or deed, who has not had some practical industrial and business experience and read some political economy”.³⁶ Nevertheless, the Church’s role remained to proclaim those Christian principles in order that society as a whole, and especially the Church’s own members, would be persuaded of the need to replace capitalism with socialism, and be equipped to actually do it. Keeble concludes: “A new public conscience needs forming, and this, as it is the business of, so only can it be accomplished by, the labours of the whole Christian Church, through her teachers, preachers and writers”.³⁷ To this end Keeble encourages “discussion and conference [...] the publication of Christian social literature of every kind,” and encourages Christians to pray, “seeking divine light, and in intercession for society”.³⁸ Lansbury also encourages this, writing that “our Labour movement wants men and women who will go down on their knees and pray for the success of the Labour movement”.³⁹ “Still more Christians know”, wrote Keeble, “that ‘the grace of God’ can and does change human nature”.⁴⁰

The Church however was not the exclusive means by which Christian Socialists sought to persuade society of the need to replace capitalism with socialism. Keir Hardie described how his “work has consisted of trying to stir up divine discontent with wrong”.⁴¹ Yet we have seen that Hardie was very cynical about the Church, writing that “the rich and comfortable classes have annexed Jesus and perverted His Gospel”, adding that the “modern

³³ W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), p.117.

³⁴ Suggate, ‘Temple’, pp.169-70.

³⁵ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.181.

³⁶ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.

³⁸ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.279 and p.271.

³⁹ G. Lansbury, ‘Power that Re-Makes Men’, in *Labour and Religion: by Ten Labour Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.74.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.269.

⁴¹ J. Maxton, *Keir Hardie: Prophet and Pioneer* (London, 1933), p.14.

Christian Church is a reflection of the modern business world".⁴² Hardie concludes that "Christianity is no longer a reality. The religious form may still exist, but once again the spirit has passed away and found embodiment elsewhere".⁴³ From this we may surmise that Hardie felt that the true spirit of Christianity was to be found in the Labour movement, which would be why he suggested that Labour and various socialist movements were to offer "constructive criticism, pointing out defects of capitalist legislation, and its inadequacy as a means of getting to the root of the social problem, and putting forward their own proposals".⁴⁴ This, minus perhaps the putting forward of proposals, is the role that the other Christian Socialists seemed to envisage for the Church.

George Lansbury also went through a period of disaffection from the Church and during that time like Hardie saw the socialist movement as carrying out the role that Christian Socialists generally saw for the Church. To that end he sought to model the Social Democratic Federation, of which he was then a member, on the Church. He suggested that a branch of the SDF "should never meet less than once a week", with that weekly meeting being "the high festival of the week, never to be missed, and should be to us what Sunday is to the devout Christian". He also called for a socialist Sunday school, which would include socialist songs and readings, and talks about the life and work of "the prophets of Socialism". Lansbury drew inspiration from the evangelism of the Nonconformist churches: "the Dissenters go in for what is called tract distribution, and also the lending of small pamphlets [...] why should we not follow in their footsteps?" He suggested door-to-door socialist evangelism and open-air socialist preaching.⁴⁵ It is not surprising that he was later to describe how "although for some period of my life I left the Church and Christianity on one side, I think it is only true to say this too, that all the time, at the back of my mind, I had the sort of feeling that you must have religious fervour and religious enthusiasm if you want to do anything".⁴⁶

Armstrong and Gray claim to see a similar way of thinking in the writing of Tawney. They argue that Tawney's work displays "the gradual displacement of Christianity and the Church by socialism and the Labour Party, as the main architects of the Good

⁴² J. Keir Hardie, 'Labour and Christianity: is the Labour Movement Against Christianity?', in *Labour and Religion: by Ten Labour Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.52; E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie's Speeches and Writings From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.101.

⁴³ Hughes, *Keir Hardie's Speeches*, p.54.

⁴⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* (London, 1909), p.11.

⁴⁵ Schneer, *Lansbury*, pp.31-3.

⁴⁶ G. Lansbury, 'The Power that Re-makes Men', *Labour and Religion: by Ten Labour Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.70.

Society”.⁴⁷ Tawney, according to Armstrong and Gray, believes that “political doctrines” are capable of both setting out the ends to which society should aspire and the means of reaching them, and this “reaffirms his abandonment of Christian exclusivity”.⁴⁸ However, Wright argues that the secular arguments in Tawney’s work do not reflect his own beliefs, but rather his desire to extend an argument for socialism beyond the adherents of the Church. Tawney, according to Wright, was simply avoiding the necessity of arguing “for the validity of Christian principles and their supernatural derivation [...] his aim is to persuade unbelievers of all kinds that the social problem is essentially a moral problem and that its solution is to be found in the realm of ‘principles’. In undertaking this exercise in persuasion though, it was necessary to begin ‘from the existing order’ rather than from *a priori* positions”.⁴⁹ Again, Wright argues that “he may have held privately that it was necessary to believe in God in order to believe in socialism, but this did not prevent him from constructing a public case for socialism in which God was conspicuous by his absence (except as an appendix for believers)”.⁵⁰ If Armstrong and Gray are correct that Tawney had begun to abandon the Christian basis of his socialism and his belief that the Church would hold together a new society in 1918, it is hard to explain away that appendix – the final chapter of *The Acquisitive Society* – first published in 1920.⁵¹ Beech and Hickson conclude that “for Tawney democratic socialism is only possible because it flows from his Christian faith”.⁵²

Tawney nevertheless sought to argue for socialism in a way that would also be persuasive to non-Christians, as did the other Christian Socialists. For this reason Stewart Headlam and John Clifford were both active members of the Fabian society, with Jones describing Clifford as “an energetic Fabian”.⁵³ Similarly, Holland’s Christian Social Union “was organized principally to study and to publicize social and economic problems”.⁵⁴ Holland insisted on “the necessity for study”, describing the process: “We gather round the study of this or that adequate book. We meet to talk it round, and through, and over [...] At the end, we, perhaps, can manage to formulate certain conclusions, certain definite issues,

⁴⁷ G. Armstrong and T.Gray, ‘Three Fallacies in the Essentialist Interpretation of the Political Thought of R.H. Tawney’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 15, 2 (2010), p.165.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.171.

⁴⁹ Wright, *Tawney*, pp.32-3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.136.

⁵¹ Armstrong, and Gray, ‘Three Fallacies’, p.169.

⁵² M. Beech and K. Hickson, *Labour’s Thinkers: The Intellectual roots of Labour from Tawney to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), p.28.

⁵³ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.334.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.181.

which have resulted from the talks”; the end result of this is that these conclusions “can be reduced to print, and circulated”, and this process would be carried a stage further by an annual conference to collate all the research from that year.⁵⁵ Jones points out that “[i]n all this activity the CSU method was very Fabian”.⁵⁶

The aim of all this research and dissemination, whether carried out by Clifford and Headlam through the Fabian Society, Holland’s CSU, Keeble’s Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service or any similar organisation was to persuade the population to see the problems with the existing system and seek to replace it. “Our purpose is nothing if not practical”, wrote Holland. “All our study must issue in action [...] we cannot be so tangled and arrested in the intricacies of the study that we fail to carry it forward to the conclusion for which it exists”.⁵⁷

Samuel Keeble, like Tawney, sought to persuade people that socialism was possible without reference to Christian theology. For example, in *The Ethics of Public Ownership* Keeble argues against those who would regard state control of industry as impractical. During the Great War, Keeble writes, “we witnessed the Government organising practically the whole nation, not for a few months, but for five years; controlling and carrying on its financial, economic, industrial and commercial life”.⁵⁸ Keeble goes on to debate with those who would challenge the legality of public ownership, citing an Act of Parliament which reserves the legal right for the government to purchase the railways; he then adds that, besides this, the only ultimate ownership of land in law is in the Crown, which in practice means Parliament.⁵⁹

Tawney, Keeble and the other Christian Socialists made regular use of such arguments that would be accessible to both Christians and non-Christians. Headlam, for example, makes the case that “the reason why so many have to work under such evil conditions for so long a time is because they have to produce not only sufficient for themselves and their families, but also sufficient for a large number of others who are themselves producing nothing, or nothing adequate, in return for what they consume”.⁶⁰ John Clifford describes collectivism: “Here is the great business of industrial life; let us manage it so that all may share in the responsibility and share in the gains, and share fairly

⁵⁵ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.65 and pp.67-9.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.186.

⁵⁷ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.69.

⁵⁸ S.E. Keeble, *The Ethics of Public Ownership* (London, 1920), p.9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁶⁰ Headlam, *Christian Socialism*, p.8.

and justly as nearly as possible; not one doing all the work and another taking all the gains”.⁶¹ Both Headlam’s and Clifford’s comments were made in Fabian tracts about religious socialism, yet even there many of the points are made without appeal to the Scriptures or the teaching of the Church. There were, therefore, several ways in which the Christian Socialists sought to bring society to the point where it accepted the need to replace capitalism with socialism.

Government

The second stage in our process is that, once thoroughly persuaded, the electorate would send the Labour Party into government, which would then be able to legislate for a socialist society; alternatively, the ranks of the convinced will include those in positions of power and authority, as well as those within the Liberal and Conservative parties, and these would then bring about the necessary reforms to society. There was some division between Christian Socialists on this matter. Many were active Labour members, not least Keir Hardie, George Lansbury, R.H. Tawney and John Wheatley, and it is therefore evident that these men and others involved with the party believed that Labour would be the force to bring about a socialist society.

Hardie, according to one writer, wanted “labour to capture the institutions of the State in order to emancipate itself from industrial serfdom”.⁶² Hardie specifically wrote of the need for the Independent Labour Party to being about socialism, and argued that “[i]f Labour is to rule Labour members must be sent to the House of Commons”.⁶³ Hardie was clear that it was “with the organisation of the enfranchised working class into a definite organisation of their own, industrial and political”, which would initiate “the final struggle for the freedom of the race”.⁶⁴ George Lansbury also wrote of the need for such an organisation, as implied in his remark that “our Labour movement wants men and women who will go down on their knees and pray for the success of the Labour movement”.⁶⁵ William Temple, at least earlier in his career, “attacked competition and urged full Christian support for Labour”.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.9.

⁶² G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (London, 1997), p.44.

⁶³ Hughes, *Hardie’s Speeches and Writings*, p.76 and p.69.

⁶⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *Karl Marx: The Man and His Message* (London, 1910), p.11.

⁶⁵ Lansbury, ‘Power that Re-Makes Men’, p.74.

⁶⁶ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.223.

Tawney's belief in Labour as the means for reform is seen particularly clearly in his essay 'The Choice Before the Labour Party', in which he argues that Labour should be a properly socialist party, and "an instrument for the establishment of a socialist commonwealth".⁶⁷ "The fundamental question", according to Tawney:

as always, is: Who is to be master? Is the reality behind the decorous drapery of political democracy to continue to be the economic power wielded by a few thousand—or, if that be preferred, a few hundred thousand—bankers, industrialists and landowners? Or shall a serious effort be made [...] to create organs through which the nation can control, in cooperation with other nations, its own economic destinies; plan its business as it deems most conducive to the general well-being; override, for the sake of economic efficiency, the obstruction of vested interests; and distribute the product of its labours in accordance with some generally recognised principles of justice?⁶⁸

Pointedly Tawney then adds: "Capitalist parties presumably accept the first alternative. A socialist party chooses the second".⁶⁹

Wilfred Wellock makes a similar argument to Tawney about the need for Labour to be a genuinely socialist party. "The supreme danger of a Labour Government," according to Wellock, "will be its fear of adopting and carrying through a revolutionary programme; and yet apart from such a programme it would have no *raison d'être*. Were it to pursue a merely reformist policy it would court disaster, for it would thereby virtually accept the capitalist system, play into the hands of the capitalists and enable them to prove the 'failure of socialism'".⁷⁰

Wheatley appears to feel the same way, judging by the "The Socialist's Evidence" given in Wheatley's fictional court case, in which two capitalists are tried for their "robbery of the workers":

Mag - Why have your Liberal and Tory friends been silent on this matter?
Wit. - They belong to the class which fattens on the robbery of the workers, your honour.
[...]
Mag. - How will you proceed?

⁶⁷ R.H. Tawney, 'The Choice Before the Labour Party', *Political Quarterly*, 3, 3 (1932), p.28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.26-7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁷⁰ Wellock, *The Way Out*, p.55.

Wit. - The first step is to have a majority of Labour Members in Parliament.⁷¹

“It would be political madness”, wrote Wheatley. “to leave the impression in the public mind that the Labour movement is not a menace to vested interests. These interests are keeping our people in the depths of poverty and are now actually threatening to throttle our national existence. We must destroy them rapidly in self-preservation”.⁷²

At an Independent Labour Party conference Wheatley echoed the words of Wellock, arguing that “Labour should not again accept office as a minority. If Labour went back as a minority Government, it went back to administer a capitalist order of society that would only bring discredit to the party”.⁷³ He later warned the party against “trying to administer a capitalist system in deepening crisis in which the working class would be the prime victims. Far better, he argued, to throw the responsibility on parties who professed to believe in the system”.⁷⁴ Wheatley here sounds like Tawney, who concluded his essay: “If capitalism is to be our future, then capitalists, who believe in it, are most likely to make it work, though at the moment they seem to have some difficulty in doing so. The Labour party will serve the world best, not by doing half-heartedly what they do with conviction, but by clarifying its own principles and acting in accordance with them”.⁷⁵

However, not all the Christian Socialists saw the election of Labour as the next stage on the way to socialism. Stewart Headlam, for example, “had no time for the idea of a working-class political party”.⁷⁶ Headlam remained a member of the Liberal Party as a Liberal-Radical, and reacted with disdain when the Fabian Society began to support Labour: “To advocate the introduction of workingmen, as such, into Parliament, as the Fabians now seem to be doing, is utterly absurd”. Headlam feared that the ILP would steal votes from Liberal-Radical candidates and lead to the election of more Conservative MPs. He refused “to vote for a man simply because he is a carpenter and will try to improve the carpenters’ wages”.⁷⁷

⁷¹ J. Wheatley, *How the Miners are Robbed: The Duke in the Dock (startling court case)*, (Nottingham, 1973 – original publication 1907), p.15. [Wheatley here suggests that the election of Labour is “[t]he first step”. We may maintain that it is the second, for the persuasion of the electorate is the necessary precursor.]

⁷² I.S. Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), p.118.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.181.

⁷⁵ Tawney, ‘Choice Before Labour’, p.34.

⁷⁶ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.138.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.140-1.

In *The Socialist's Church* Headlam drew a distinction between socialism and “Labourism”, which he characterised as “an unnecessary challenge to the middle classes, who stand to gain largely by Socialism, but who for the most part do not know this, and who think they are attacking Socialism, while really what they are attacking is class legislation in the interests of ‘Labour’.”⁷⁸ For Headlam, a working-class party and working-class representation was wholly unnecessary, as “the prophets of Socialism have been at work – telling forth the truth, bubbling over with enthusiasm – and the result is that the practical politicians are at last beginning to be alive to it”.⁷⁹ In Headlam’s view persuading the people of socialism would not result in Labour coming to power, but those who already held power coming to accept socialism. Instead Headlam wanted socialists to support the Liberal Party, declaring: “Yes, I am a Socialist, but I thank God that I am a Liberal as well”.⁸⁰

We can discern a similar way of thinking from Henry Scott Holland, although he did not come out against Labour in the same way as Headlam. Holland and the Christian Social Union were almost completely separate from the working classes and Labour.⁸¹ The “official line” of the CSU was that “Christians as such should never be absolutely committed to any political or economic system [...] it should always be possible for a sincere Christian to be either a good Tory or a good Radical, or even an honest Socialist or moral Individualist”.⁸² In *Socialism*, published by the Oxford branch of the CSU, it was described how “[i]n most countries Socialism is a hostile movement of the lower classes against the upper; in England it is rather a benevolent movement of the upper classes towards the lower”.⁸³ This paternalistic attitude left little room for a working-class party gaining representation in Parliament for working-class men. Neither the CSU nor Holland were antagonistic to Labour – Holland was in regular correspondence with Labour leaders, while George Lansbury and Ramsay MacDonald were both contributors to the CSU’s magazine.⁸⁴ The CSU nevertheless concentrated on acting as a pressure group on whoever had power, including Liberal and Conservative MPs.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, p.73.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁸⁰ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam's Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.116.

⁸¹ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, pp.217-8.

⁸² A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), p.51.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁸⁴ M. Carter, *T.H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter, 2003), p.125; Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.73.

⁸⁵ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.46.

John Clifford straddles these two approaches, supporting the Liberals as well as Labour, along with other progressive elements. “Socialism is not a class movement,” he argued. “Labour is in it; but so is science. The democrats of the streets proclaim its ideals, but so do the students of the universities. Agnostics confess its obligations, and orthodox Christians are eager to forward its aims”.⁸⁶ Clifford was aggrieved that “many Liberals have been averse to any fellowship with Socialists; and the Independent Labour Wing of the Socialist party has exhibited the same repugnance to Liberals”; these opposing forces, suggested Clifford, must “come together, and work together. Our ideas are the same. Our principles are the same. Our spirit is the same. Unity of method will make us triumphant”.⁸⁷ During the Boer war Clifford called for “a new party [...] composed of the most level-headed of the Socialists and the most radical of the [Liberal] Radicals”.⁸⁸

Hardie was opposed to a merger between Labour and the Liberals, arguing, firstly, that the Liberals were founded on capitalism while Labour were founded on socialism, and, secondly, that MPs who took the Liberal whip ended up voting against working-class interests. Hardie did make an approach to David Lloyd George, John Morely and John Burns, asking them to lead a Labour group in Parliament, but in this he was asking those men to leave the Liberal Party, rather than Labour joining with the Liberals.⁸⁹ Despite this though, Hardie became party to a pact after the 1910 election which arranged Labour support for the Liberal government in order to keep the Conservatives from power. Lansbury, however, refused to accept the Liberal whip.⁹⁰ As far back as 1894 Lansbury had declared, in an article about the aforementioned John Burns leaving the SDF for the Liberals, that the “ordinary workman does not understand the denunciation of the Liberal party one day and the glorification of it the next”.⁹¹ In 1934, Edgar Lansbury would record that his father would not “ever again become a member of a Labour Government which owes its tenure of office to the Liberal Party”, the situation in which Labour had found itself in 1924.⁹² This is the point made by Wheatley, above.

Hardie was in particular disagreement with Headlam over the need for a Labour Party and working-class representation. He may well have had in mind Headlam’s

⁸⁶ Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.6.

⁸⁷ J. Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H.: Life, Letters and Reminiscences* (London, 1924), p.147.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010_) p.97 and pp.118-9.

⁹⁰ J. Scheer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp.89-91.

⁹¹ Newspaper article about John Burns and the Social Democratic Federation, authored by Lansbury, 25 January 1894, London School of Economics [LSE] archive, Lansbury/1 203.

⁹² E. Lansbury, *George Lansbury: My Father* (London, 1934), p.201.

comments in *The Socialist's Church* about "Labourism" being "an unnecessary challenge to the middle classes" when in *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* he denied that Labour "shuts out the middle class"; by contrast, he argued, "there are in the ranks of the I.L.P. thousands of what, without offence, I may describe as the lower middle class and a fair sprinkling of the middle class itself. The bulk of these are good comrades and their services to the party are invaluable. They very often bring into the movement a higher ideal of Socialism, and a much needed sense of business methods".⁹³ At the creation of the Scottish Labour Party, Hardie declared: "If, therefore, any one, peasant or peer, is found willing to accept the programme and work with and for the Party, his help will be gladly accepted".⁹⁴ Nor was Hardie blind to the fact that members of the working class will not necessarily fight for socialism. "What difference will it make to me", he asked, "that I have a working man representing me in parliament if he is a dumb dog who will not bark, and will follow the leader under any circumstances?"⁹⁵ "A working man can play the knave and act the fool as well as any other", he accepted, "while the aristocracy may yield men prepared to sacrifice life itself, and all that is supposed to make life worth living, in order to help the workers".⁹⁶

While, therefore, Headlam views Labour as a barrier to middle- and upper-class involvement with socialism, Hardie believes that such men would be more than welcome to join with Labour in fighting for socialism. This disagreement though was never solved, and Christian Socialists remained divided on whether it was necessary for Labour to form a government or simply for the existing politicians and holders of power to accept the need for socialism.

Socialism

The third stage towards socialism is that the state – now, one way or another, in the hands of those who see the need for socialism – will bring about the necessary reforms to transform society. This use of the state and its institutions to bring about socialism was to begin at a local level; for example, George Lansbury stood for election as a Poor Law Guardian on a platform that included things like "trade union rates [and] hours of Labour", and a call to

⁹³ Hardie, *Labour Alliance*, p.7.

⁹⁴ Hughes, *Hardie's Speeches and Writings*, p.12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.16.

“lighten the burdens on the poorer parishes by compelling the richer ones to take share of the cost of finding suitable work on the land and in workshops for those out of employment”.⁹⁷ Holland urged people get involved: “There are Leagues of Help to belong to; or Children’s Care Committees; or the hundred and one civic activities for which the municipalities now put volunteers to use”.⁹⁸ “The Municipality is sacred to us”, wrote Holland. “It is our only instrument by which to fulfil the commandment of our Lord – ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’.”⁹⁹ Tawney also viewed local government as important: “When Birmingham and Manchester and Leeds are the little republics which they should be, there is not reason to anticipate that they will tremble at a whisper from Whitehall”.¹⁰⁰

John Wheatley saw a similar role for local government, writing that “democracy could raise a city which would be a worthy monument to the capture of civic power by the common people”.¹⁰¹ Earlier in his career “his council work drew him to the belief that energetic municipal action by socialists could, if widely enough diffused, make the role of the state redundant. He could write with eloquence of a civic, decentralised socialist future, in the attainment of which Glasgow could lead the way.” For this reason “[c]ontrol of a large elected local authority like Glasgow was always in his view a worthwhile socialist aim”.¹⁰²

Lansbury was for a time the mayor of Poplar Borough Council, and during that time the council was responsible for such reforms as creating washing facilities, a library and leisure facilities, and the appointment of a full-time TB officer.¹⁰³ After his tenure as mayor Lansbury was one of the leaders of what has become known as the Poplar Rates Rebellion, in which the council withheld payment due to London County Council and various metropolitan services as in order to continue paying poor relief to the unemployed and a living wage to council employees. Wheatley, the minister with responsibility for local government in the 1924 Labour government, rescinded the order of the previous minister for Poplar council to pay back the money it owed, citing administrative difficulties as his defence.¹⁰⁴ On leaving office, however, he made clear his “great joy and pride in being

⁹⁷ Leaflet advertising Lansbury's candidature for Guardian in Bow, 15 December 1894, LSE archives, Lansbury/1 222.

⁹⁸ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.72.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.81.

¹⁰⁰ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, pp.124-5.

¹⁰¹ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.40.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.41 and p.88.

¹⁰³ M. Lavallette, *George Lansbury and the Rebel Councillors of Poplar* (London, 2006), 12.

¹⁰⁴ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.125.

associated with Poplarism”, adding that “only as the policy of Poplar permeated the country would they march towards a different order of society”.¹⁰⁵

It was accepted that such reforms at a local level would not necessarily lead to socialism. Lansbury wrote that “we are not going to end Capitalism by Poplar methods”.¹⁰⁶ Wellock also warned that “if the capitalists do not accept Communism they will certainly prevent it from being established piecemeal fashion – that is, by means of ‘reforms’, for they will undermine and neutralise everything that is done”.¹⁰⁷ Wheatley might have felt that local government could create, as it were, socialism in one city, but his later campaign for Parliament and time spent as a Labour minister indicate that he came to realise the limitations of local government.

What then was the point of such work at a local level? George Lansbury supplies three answers. Firstly, as an act of persuasion and statement of intent: “if we can once let men and women understand that our proposals are practical, and in all ways better than our opponents, it will not be long before they [...] join us in working, not to palliate but to sweep away commercialism with its workhouses and prisons”.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, that the people must not be crushed by capitalism, or they will never have the strength or ability to revolt: “if we allow the condition of the people to get worse, there will be no material at all with which to work out social reform, to say nothing of social revolution”.¹⁰⁹ And thirdly, out of compassion and a desire to improve people’s lives in the short term as well as the long term: “I believe that the cure for industrial evils is to be found in the adoption of a Socialistic ideal. Until that time comes, however, I think that all of us ought to work and do what we can to palliate and alleviate the misery and distress which we see all around us”.¹¹⁰ “Lansbury and his friends had never equated Poplarism with Socialism. What they did believe was that as long as capitalism lasted, they must fight to alleviate the injustices. In so doing they would be demonstrating to the workers that Labour had something new to offer.”

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¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁰⁶ N. Branson, *Poplarism, 1919-25: George Lansbury and the Councillors’ Revolt* (London, 1979), p.166.

¹⁰⁷ W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1922), p.33.

¹⁰⁸ Schneer, *Lansbury*, p.40.

¹⁰⁹ Article by Lansbury titled ‘The Federation of Trade Unions’ in ‘The Worker’, January 1912, LSE archive, Lansbury/5 2-3.

¹¹⁰ Newspaper article authored by Lansbury for how to solve the unemployment problem through state labour colonies, 16 December 1905, Lansbury/2 173.

¹¹¹ Branson, *Poplarism*, p.215.

However, the key aim was to take control of the state itself. Henry Scott Holland identified municipality as the means by which the commandments of Christ could be carried out, but also recognised the limits of local government, and that being the case posed the question of “what is the instrument, the medium, the method by which we can travel far outside the Municipal borders, and embrace those remote multitudes of our neighbours? There is but one answer possible – the State”.¹¹² Holland argues that only the state can control everything within its borders and seek to intervene in international matters; therefore the state is the only viable means for the creation of a reformed society. “We invoke the State”, he continues; “We call upon it to relieve our individual conscience by doing for us what we are powerless to do for ourselves [...] The State must take up the task of neighbourly responsibility, or it can never be taken up at all”.¹¹³

Holland’s view of a powerful state can appear totalitarian, for example his argument that “Law is Liberty”. However, Holland has in mind, for example, factory legislation that frees the workers from the totalitarianism of their employers.¹¹⁴ Hardie sought to refute those who equated state power with totalitarianism: “The individualistic conception of the State as some external authority exercising a malign influence upon the life of the community is a travesty of fact. The State is that form of organised society which has evolved through the process of the ages, and represents the aptitude for freedom and self-government to which any people has attained”.¹¹⁵

Tawney likewise sought to reassure those who worried about the power of the state by suggesting that it was simply a neutral force – an “instrument” which could be used by whoever possessed it: “Fools will use it, when they can, for foolish ends, criminals for criminal ends. Sensible and decent men will use it for ends which are sensible and decent”.¹¹⁶ Like Holland, Tawney viewed the state as the means by which society could be reorganised in a beneficial way. John Wheatley also “presuppose[d] a benign and creative role for the British state”, and, interestingly, “he made no demand for the restructuring of its institutions before this role was asked of it”.¹¹⁷ This reflects Tawney’s view of the state as a neutral force; it did not need to be reshaped, merely redirected.

¹¹² Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.83.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.86.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.88-9.

¹¹⁵ J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), pp.6-7.

¹¹⁶ Wright, *Tawney*, p.113.

¹¹⁷ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.166.

Christian Socialists were not blind though to the risks of an overly-powerful state. Holland argued that municipal power would be a check on the ability of the state to act in a totalitarian way.¹¹⁸ Similarly, we have already seen Tawney arguing that empowered cities like Birmingham and Manchester would not “tremble at a whisper from Whitehall”. Samuel Keeble simply issued a warning: “When the individual is nothing and the State everything, evils of all kinds arise”.¹¹⁹

What specific things did Christian Socialists want the state to do? The first was to create a new spirit within society, conducive to living a socialist life. Holland argued that the state was to “create a social environment, a social atmosphere, which will enable any one, who wills, to make himself, by the help of God, good”.¹²⁰ The state, according to Holland, could make men good indirectly by encouraging goodness. Keeble makes precisely the same point: “You can make men good by Acts of Parliament which improve the environment, because men respond to them”.¹²¹ Wilfred Wellock also calls for the state to create an environment “wherein a new life and a new society can evolve”.¹²²

Secondly, Christian Socialists wanted to see the State taking industries and land into public ownership; in the words of Keir Hardie, to make “all capitalistic property public property”.¹²³ We have seen Keeble arguing for state ownership of the railways. In his diary Tawney calls for “a large transference of property rights [...] What I mean is (a) the municipalisation of urban land and the regular purchase of land by the state (b) the purchase of coal-mines and railways and licensed houses”.¹²⁴ Some Christian Socialists called for universal nationalisation, while others sought only the nationalisation of only key industries and land only where necessary.¹²⁵

Thirdly, there were several other reforms that Christian Socialists envisaged being carried out by the state. Tawney goes on to call for “(c) the creation of a really democratic system of higher education (d) heavy taxes on incomes from property”.¹²⁶ Keeble makes demands for “a legal minimum wage”, housing reforms, a shorter working day and a seventh day’s rest, and taxation of the wealthy.¹²⁷ George Lansbury’s policies in his 1900 Bow and

¹¹⁸ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, pp.71-2.

¹¹⁹ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.206.

¹²⁰ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, pp.88-9.

¹²¹ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.269.

¹²² Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.15.

¹²³ Hardie, *Marx*, p.11.

¹²⁴ Winter and Joslin, *Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, p.52.

¹²⁵ [See Chapter 9 for a fuller discussion of nationalisation.]

¹²⁶ Winter and Joslin, *Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, p.52.

¹²⁷ Keeble, *Towards the New Era*, p.24, pp.29-31, p.36 and p.39.

Bromley Parliamentary campaign included maintenance of the elderly and public provision of housing, as well as the nationalisation of land and railways. “The object of these measures,” he concludes, “is to enable the people ultimately to obtain the Socialisation of the Means of Production, Distribution and Exchange, to be controlled by a Democratic State in the interests of the entire Community”.¹²⁸

Occasionally introduction of a whole raft of socialist measures would be attempted in a single act of Parliament. Hardie introduced a private members’ bill to inaugurate “a Socialist Commonwealth founded upon the common ownership of land and capital, production for use and not for profit, and equality of opportunity for every citizen”.¹²⁹ Wheatley, along with James Maxton and others, tabled an amendment to the King’s speech, demanding for every worker “an income, including children’s allowances, sufficient to meet the human needs of himself and his family, and measures aimed at the re-organization of the industrial system so that it shall provide for the needs of the community, by nationalizing the key sources of economic power”.¹³⁰ Both of these were defeated, and given that Hardie and Wheatley knew that would be the likely outcome, these were probably more of a statement of intent rather than a serious attempt to bring about socialism.

There does appear to be some disagreement among the Christian Socialists about which of these things, if any, actually constituted socialism. John Clifford, for example, regarded the Royal Mail as socialist, on the grounds that it was state-owned rather than privately owned.¹³¹ Similarly, Samuel Keeble cited the Factory Acts as an example of socialism.¹³² However, R.H. Tawney viewed, for example, the welfare state as a step towards socialism rather than socialism itself.¹³³ He saw “nationalization as a means to socialist ends such as equality and not an end in itself”.¹³⁴ In the same way Keir Hardie argued that state ownership “is not an end, but only a means to that end. It is but the next stage in the evolution of a juster social order”.¹³⁵ “Socialism means fraternity founded on justice, and the fact that in order to secure this it is necessary to transfer land and capital

¹²⁸ Leaflet advertising Lansbury's Parliamentary Election bid in Bow and Bromley, [August?] 1900, LSE archive, Lansbury/1 334-5.

¹²⁹ T.L. Jarman, *Socialism in Britain: From the Industrial Revolution to the Present Day* (Ann Arbor MI, 1978), pp.106-7.

¹³⁰ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.181.

¹³¹ Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.4.

¹³² Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.134.

¹³³ Wright, *Tawney*, p.110.

¹³⁴ J. Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain Since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), p.152.

¹³⁵ F. Johnson, *Keir Hardie's Socialism* (London, 1922), p.13.

from private to public ownership is a mere incident in the crusade”.¹³⁶ Stewart Headlam went even further than this; the Factory Acts, cited as an example of socialism by Keeble, he did not describe as even a step towards socialism. “The Factory Acts, valuable and necessary in our present condition, are no part of Socialism; they are only temporary expedients to make things a little better for the wage slaves until wage-slavery is abolished by abolition of the monopoly of the means of production”.¹³⁷

To some, then, elements of socialism had already been introduced, and they desired the completion of this process; to others, though, socialism had yet to come about, and these things were merely stages that led to socialism, or temporary arrangements that would cease after the establishment of socialism. A good example of this latter viewpoint is John Wheatley’s Housing Act (1924) which increased the amount of money available for local authorities to build houses for low-paid workers. Clifford or Keeble might have regarded this as socialism, but Wheatley did not. Before drafting the bill he instructed his associate John Scanlan: “Clear from your mind any ideas that you will get any Socialism. What can we do that will be worthwhile for the workers of Britain?”¹³⁸ At the third reading of the bill Wheatley explained this attitude: “Why did I not introduce a Socialist measure? I was not in a position to introduce a Socialist measure. The country is not ready for Socialism. I wish it were ready for it. I will devote my life to an honest effort to prepare it for Socialism. Meanwhile I have to take things as I find them”.¹³⁹

Despite these differences, we can characterise the Christian Socialist non-violent revolution as having three stages: firstly, persuading people of the need for socialism; secondly, the election of Labour, or the acceptance of socialism by those who already hold power; thirdly, the use of existing state institutions to create a socialist society.

¹³⁶ Jarman, *Socialism in Britain*, p.106.

¹³⁷ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.54.

¹³⁸ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.122.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.139.

8. Confusion and Contradiction

In Section Two we have so far concluded that Christian Socialism offers a synthesis of democratic and revolutionary socialism, and that Christian Socialists aimed at a peaceful revolution carried out by parliamentary means. This might be termed a spiritual revolution. We also concluded that this spiritual revolution was to be carried out in three stages. In this chapter we will consider some possible issues with and objections to these conclusions.

A Democratic-Revolutionary Synthesis

There are a number of objections that might be made against the idea of a synthesis between democratic and revolutionary socialism. Firstly, it may be suggested that the contradictions which appear in Christian Socialist texts are apparent because of individuals changing their minds over time. The scepticism, for example, of John Wheatley and Wilfred Wellock regarding Parliament only appeared after each had served in Parliament, so it may be argued that they first supported and then came to reject democratic socialism. Lansbury appears to have moved in the opposite, direction, saying in an interview in 1915 that “I could not now take part in a revolution which meant the throwing up of barricades as once I thought I could”.¹ However, this interview came two years before Lansbury urged British supporters of Russia to emulate the revolutionaries; by contrast Lansbury’s comments condemning violence whether in war or revolution were made in 1892, more than twenty years before the interview. Wheatley advocated revolution prior to his stated disaffection with Parliament – indeed, while he was still in Parliament – while Wellock continued to advocate electoralism after his comments about Parliament. The explanation then that individuals simply changed their minds is insufficient to explain these contradictions.

Secondly, it might be argued, as opposed to there being a clear-cut change of mind, that what we find in the writings of Christian Socialists is merely evidence of confusion and imprecision of thought. This objection does carry more weight. For example, Lansbury declared his belief in pacifism “since I was a boy [...] my position personally has never

¹ Interview with Lansbury from the *Christian Commonwealth* Newspaper, 11 August 1915, London School of Economics [LSE] archive, Lansbury/7 213.

shifted”; on visits to working-class areas, claimed Lansbury, “I have said to them: ‘No, you must not rise, you must have no violence, you must trust to the winning of this through public opinion’. I have never at any time said to the workers of this country: ‘You must take up either arms, or sticks, or stones, in order to force your way to the end that you seek to attain’. [...] I have never under any circumstances said that I believe you could obtain Socialism by force”.² This statement is difficult to reconcile with Lansbury’s comment that “I could not now take part in a revolution which meant the throwing up of barricades as once I thought I could”, implying as it does that at one time he would have been willing to take up arms. It is even more difficult to reconcile with his comments, above: “You have a right to rebel when you are tricked and deceived, it is the only course open to you [...] Burn and destroy property or anything you like”.³

This being the case, could it be that when Hardie speaks of “the conquest of political power” or capturing the institutions of the state, he does mean by violent means rather than through the electoral system, and his other comments about electoralism represent simple confusion rather than any synthesis between socialist methodologies?⁴ It is possible, but this view does ignore that the idea of synthesis is not merely an inference from contradictions within Christian Socialist writings, but is stated outright. Wellock called for “Parliamentarianism [...] combined with a revolutionary spirit and method”; Headlam for “a bloodless revolution”; Lansbury for “a revolution of thought expressed in legislation”; Keeble for a revolution brought about by “peaceful and if possible, evolutionary, means”; and Wheatley for a “revolution” brought about “peacefully”.⁵ Hardie’s biographer is therefore justified in concluding that he “believed that workers could achieve a social revolution by democracy”.⁶ We will, however, reconsider some of the confusions and, indeed, contradictions below, in reference to the three stages of the revolution.

A third objection might be that, despite the Christian Socialist use of revolutionary language, that which they aimed at was not a revolution at all. Anthony Wright, for example, quotes Karl Kautsky from the German SPD: “Social democracy is a revolutionary party, but not a revolution-making party. We know that our objective can only be reached through

² G. Lansbury, *My Quest for Peace* (London, 1938), p.26.

³ J. Schneer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester, 1990), p.119.

⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* (London, 1909), p.14.

⁵ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or the Road to the New World* (London, 1922), pp.35-6; S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.25; Parliamentary Election, 1929, LSE archive, Lansbury/6 140; S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.212; J. Wheatley, *Socialise the National Income!* (London, 1927), p.15.

⁶ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010), p.57.

revolution. But we also know that it is no more in our power to make this revolution than it is in the power of our enemies to prevent it. We have no wish either to stir up revolution or to prepare the ground for one”; he then concludes: “Such formulations may now, with hindsight, appear to give the game away, reducing revolution to a metaphor and providing a rhetorical camouflage for political passivity”.⁷

Could Christian Socialist talk of “revolution” also be attacked in this way, being viewed as merely a “metaphor”? For one thing, most Christian Socialists could not be described as demonstrating the “political passivity” for which Wright feels Kautsky was seeking to provide “rhetorical camouflage”. It is only Henry Scott Holland among those being here examined who could possibly be viewed as politically passive, and Holland was never one to talk of revolution; those who did talk of revolution were those who were by any definition politically active. For another, the Christian Socialist use of revolution can only be viewed as metaphorical if we accept that a revolution necessarily means a forceful uprising against the existing system. On that definition, Christian Socialists are certainly being metaphorical. However, as Wilfred Wellock argued, “widely different things are meant and conveyed by the word revolution”, and violence is not “the only revolutionary policy conceivable”.⁸

A case in favour of the Christian Socialist synthesis of democratic and revolutionary socialism could be made by pointing out that Christian Socialists, unlike some other socialists who accepted the constitutional, parliamentary method, never came to abandon the goal of completely replacing capitalism with socialism.⁹ Parliamentary socialism, says Wright, “has certainly been prone to slacken its socialist resolve [...] It has frequently shown a capacity for degeneration into mere electoralism and governmentalism, making it impossible to claim, except in the rhetorical sense, that its reforming endeavours were part of a wider strategy of social transformation”.¹⁰

An example of this is found in Eduard Bernstein, who, rejecting revolution in the sense of the forceful overthrow of capitalism, came to favour a more reformist policy. “[F]or Bernstein, violent or illegal acts implied a commitment to revolutionary ends, and, vice-versa, peaceful parliamentary activity implied a commitment to reform within the

⁷ A. Wright, *Socialisms Old and New* (London, 1996), p.57.

⁸ Wellock, *The Way Out*, pp.35-6.

⁹ [A case could be made against Holland on this point, that he never aimed at replacing capitalism with socialism, but, again, Holland was not one of those who called for revolution.]

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.67.

framework of the law”; the SPD should therefore, said Bernstein, “make its mind up to appear what it is today, a democratic party of reform”.¹¹ “I frankly admit”, wrote Bernstein, “that I have extraordinarily little feeling for, or interest in, what is usually termed ‘the final goal of socialism’. This goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me; but the movement is everything”.¹² To other members of the SPD, Bernstein “seemed to have rejected the final goal of the movement”; he was “at least depicting political action as the day-to-day implementation of a general principle rather than the pursuit of a particular future objective”.¹³ Rosa Luxembour had Bernstein in mind when she wrote that:

people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place of* and in *contradistinction* to the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower route to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society, they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society [...] Our programme becomes not the realisation of *socialism*, but the reform of *capitalism*.¹⁴

In this view then, a commitment to a democratic, parliamentary route to socialism leads to the aim of reforming society as already constituted rather than replacing capitalism with socialism.

This accusation, however, cannot be levelled at the Christian Socialists, who did seek the replacement of capitalism by socialism. Lansbury, for example, saw people working to “establish a co-operative system of production and distribution to *replace* the present unsound order, based as it is on the subjection of the workers by means of the wages and profit-making system”.¹⁵ Again Lansbury held that “we should be able to transform Capitalism into socialism”, and that it should be possible for this to be achieved “in a peaceful, ordered manner”.¹⁶ John Wheatley, in the same way, foresaw “the end of the capitalist system”; Hardie, as we have seen above, called for the “reconstruction of society on a Socialist basis” and endorsed the ruling of the 1893 conference in Bradford at which the

¹¹ H. Tudor and J.M. Tudor, eds, *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898* (Cambridge, 1988), p.34 and p.35.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.21 and p.27.

¹⁴ Wright, *Socialisms*, p.60.

¹⁵ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty*, p.36. [Emphasis added.]

¹⁶ Correspondence between Lansbury and Richard Lee, 16-19 February 1935. Enclosed a copy of the statements made by Lansbury in the House of Commons, 14 September 1931, LSE archive, Lansbury/25 3 o 144-152.

ILP was founded, which “declared for Socialism as the ultimate aim of the Party”.¹⁷

Christian Socialists sought to bring about not just a reformed society, but a completely new and different order of society; in sum, a revolutionised society.¹⁸ On this basis then we can conclude that Christian Socialism does offer a synthesis between democratic and revolutionary socialism.

The Three-Stage Process

The characterisation of the Christian Socialist method of revolution as a three-stage process, it might be argued, overlooks the evidence of lack of clarity and inconsistencies in Christian Socialist writing, some of which we have already noted. It has been argued that R.H. Tawney’s philosophy lacked “any practical proposals to realistically create the social basis of co-operation on which any social advances could be *permanently* based”.¹⁹ The same has been said of Keir Hardie, who, according to one writer, “had no real policies to overcome these problems beyond the vague panacea of co-operation and state regulation [...] The potential resistance to change by the capitalist class was never measured, and plans to counter this resistance were never seriously countenanced”.²⁰ One of Hardie’s biographers writes that his “ideological position could be confusing [...] Eleanor Marx, understandably, accused him of being ‘ideologically unstable’.”²¹ “Tawney himself”, it has been argued, “would have been the first to admit that he was not a systematic social thinker and that the construction of a philosophical system was never his aim”.²² The same has been suggested of the movement as a whole: “None of the Labour leaders were systematic ‘theologians’, either in the sense of fully understanding or appropriating a Marxist analysis, or in developing a rounded Christian social vision. Rather, they drew organically, pragmatically and passionately on all available intellectual or moral resources to build their case for social change.”²³

Hardie dismissed questions about such specifics by arguing, “that belongs to the future, and is a matter with which posterity alone can deal”; his simple belief was that

¹⁷ J. Wheatley, ‘A Deceptive Concoction’, in J. Wheatley *et al*, eds, *Labour Exposes the Pensions Scheme* (London, 1925), p.8; Hardie, *I.L.P.*, p.9.

¹⁸ [See chapters 9-11 for details of the society imagined by Christian Socialists.]

¹⁹ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (London, 1997), p.79 [emphasis in original]

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

²¹ L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), p.8.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.29.

“[o]nce the principle has been accepted, then experience and common sense will find the way to overcome every difficulty which may arise in connection with its working”.²⁴ A biographer of Tawney sees the same way of thinking in his “argument that in principle socialism is superior to capitalism and that, once the battle of principle is won, then secondary matters of technique and machinery soon yield”.²⁵ This attitude could be characterised as “where there’s a will, there’s a way”.

Wilfred Wellock’s biographer identifies the same kind of uncertainty. “Just how this revolution was to be carried through without physical violence and the forcible overthrow of the possessing and ruling class was something which Wellock left unclear”; there was “very little in the way of a clear programme of action, a strategy for revolutionary change”.²⁶ This lack of clarity is evident in *Christian Communism*. “Would it not be rather nice, think you,” begins Wellock, “if humanity woke up some morning and decided to consider itself a rather big family, and began to modify social policies accordingly?”²⁷ According to Wellock, “Communism will be established by the declared will of the people,” but he is vague when it comes to how the people will come to will the existence of communism: “as a result of a vision which will come upon the people during an unexpected concurrence of events”.²⁸ This statement echoes a passage in *The Way Out*:

I have a vision, which I cannot shake off, of a mighty campaign which will sweep through the land like a tornado, which will so quicken the conscience and fire the imagination of the people that the recalcitrant elements in the community will be cowed into submission by its sheer spiritual momentum. And apart from such a campaign, a period of spiritual illumination and moral exaltation wherein great social changes will be made, I see no hope, in this age of social decay and financial supremacy, of rescuing Western civilization and establishing it on a basis of service, fellowship and goodwill.²⁹

We could point to not just the absence of practical proposals or clear thinking in Wellock’s work, but also a major contradiction. At times, as in the above passage, Wellock suggested that a spiritual change would come, leading the people to desire communism and then implement it. This is in keeping with the three stages we identified in the previous

²⁴ F. Johnson, *Keir Hardie’s Socialism* (London, 1922), p.8 and p.14.

²⁵ A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.145.

²⁶ A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life in Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.35.

²⁷ W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: what It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1922), p.1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.42.

²⁹ Wellock, *Way Out* p.29.

section. Wellock argued that “without a spiritual revolution – the perception of finer social values and ideas – an economic revolution will be impossible”.³⁰ In *Christian Communism* Wellock wrote: “It is my firm conviction that no social revolution will be successfully carried through, and that no real social progress will be made until at least a very powerful minority possess a much clearer vision of the life they would live and the world they would see”.³¹ However, this directly contradicts his statement earlier in the book that the “Communist or Christian spirit, the willingness to share [...] cannot be generated to any extent in capitalist conditions, a Communist order of society being absolutely essential thereto”.³² Here Wellock is arguing that a communist system must exist in order to bring about a communistic spirit, but elsewhere he argues that the communistic spirit must exist in order to bring about a communist system. The same argument had been made in *The Way Out*: “until the social system has been radically modified, spiritual rightness must remain impossible to all but a very small minority”.³³ Wellock contradicts himself about whether spiritual change precedes economic and social change, or whether economic and social change must create the spiritual change; nor does he explain, if the latter is the case, what will bring about the social and economic change.

Wellock is perhaps most honest in *Christian Communism* when he writes that “I do not think it is possible to say how the transition to Communism will be made”.³⁴ George Lansbury made the same confession in an article about his own socialism, admitting “as to how it will be done eventually I do not know”.³⁵ In a possible attempt to cover up his muddled thinking Wellock adds: “More than that, I do not think we should greatly concern ourselves about that question: our business is to create a Christian Communist consciousness, and to let the revolution, or what there be, come out of that”.³⁶ This reflects the views expressed by Tawney and Hardie about the acceptance of principles leading to the practical solutions being found.

Even here though the contradiction emerges; we have already seen how a few pages earlier Wellock denied that such a consciousness can exist until the revolution is successfully carried out, unless we make the generous assumption that Wellock meant

³⁰ Rigby, *Wellock*, pp.26-7.

³¹ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.30.

³² *Ibid.*, p.16. [Emphasis added.]

³³ Wellock, *The Way Out*, p.17. See also pp.14-15.

³⁴ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.32.

³⁵ Newspaper article by Lansbury in 'The Labour Leader' titled 'How I became a Socialist', 17 May 1912, LSE archive, Lansbury/5 36.

³⁶ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.32.

different things by “Communist or Christian spirit” and “Christian Communist consciousness”, but in any case such a difference is not made apparent. The result of this confusion was that Wellock gradually became disillusioned. On his time in the House of Commons as an Independent Labour MP Wellock wrote that “I never felt so impotent [...] I found that after a few years in the House of Commons, most Members seemed to lose their enthusiasm for idealistic objectives”.³⁷ Wellock eventually gave up on socialism itself: “No longer could he believe that socialism was the pathway to the good society and world peace, for socialism had fallen victim to the materialism of the machine age”.³⁸ We can see then some of the vagueness and inconsistency in Christian Socialist thinking about how socialism would be brought about, and that in Wellock’s case this in part led to his rejection of socialism.

It is these contradictions which are the most powerful counterargument to anything which may be concluded about Christian Socialist methods for bringing about a new society. We may disagree with the efficacy of seeking to bring about socialism through the existing structures of society, and argue that the three-stage process of doing so would not work, but this does not mean that Christian Socialism is not internally logical. However, the contradictions of Wellock destroy the internal coherence of, at least, his plan for bringing about socialism, and the vagueness identified in the work of Tawney, Hardie and Lansbury does not persuade us that they would have had any answer.

It is to be remembered that the three-stage model sketched out in the previous chapter was never expressed in full by any of the Christian Socialists. It is instead that which has been constructed from various Christian Socialist texts, and is therefore at best an imperfect representation of Christian Socialist thought even without noting the above contradictions. Perhaps then it is best to conclude that the model is not to be taken as a firm expression of doctrine, but that it nevertheless does have some validity in describing the methods of Christian Socialism to the extent to which they were expressed.

Given this validity, perhaps it is overly harsh to say that, for example, Tawney lacked “any practical proposals to realistically create the social basis of co-operation on which any social advances could be *permanently* based”, or that Hardie “had no real policies to overcome these problems”.³⁹ Hardie and Tawney both sought to create a strong body of

³⁷ Rigby, *Wellock*, p.50.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.84-5.

³⁹ Foote, *Labour Party Political Thought*, p.79 [emphasis in original] and p.49.

socialist opinion in all classes of society, which would not only bring Labour to power but sustain them as they used the state and its institutions to bring about socialism. There is no reason to doubt that a socialist government in a country almost wholly persuaded of socialism could have established socialism. This was the Christian Socialist view of how a new society would be established. Neither did they sit back and wait for this to happen, but worked to make it happen.

The criticism perhaps also overlooks the spiritual quality of Christian Socialism. There was a belief that God would bring about a new society, His Kingdom on Earth. For this reason Tawney sought to persuade Christians, who already possessed “so revolutionary a basis” to their thinking, Clifford and Headlam believed in the inevitability of socialism because it was being brought about by God, and Lansbury pointed to Christ, who “lives now to give men and women the revolutionary spirit”.⁴⁰ From a purely political perspective these things hardly add up to practical proposals; we can, for example, dismiss Keeble’s belief in prayer as a way of creating a socialist society. Yet to do so ignores that these men were Christians as well as socialists and overlooks a large part of the make-up of their political thought. Lansbury concludes that “if we get God behind us in spirit and in truth we will revolutionize the whole face of England”.⁴¹

⁴⁰ R.H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London, 1921), p.188; G. Lansbury, ‘Back to the Galilean!’, in *The Religion in the Labour Movement* (London, 1919), p.56.

⁴¹ G. Lansbury, ‘The Power that Re-makes Men’, in *Labour and Religion: by Ten Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.78.

Section Two Summary

Christian Socialists could express themselves using extremely forceful language, and often called for a revolutionary change that would sweep away capitalism and establish socialism. They were, nevertheless, committed to a democratic, parliamentary method of bringing about socialism. This contradiction can perhaps be explained with the conclusion that Christian Socialism offers a synthesis of democratic and revolutionary socialism. It may be noted that a commitment to democratic socialism has often led to the abandonment of socialist aims and a commitment to reforms under the existing capitalist system. Christian Socialists, however, did not relinquish the desire to overthrow capitalism and establish a completely new order of society.

The practicalities for this democratic revolution might be sketched out as a three-stage process: firstly, persuasion of the deficiencies of capitalism and the need for a socialist alternative followed by, secondly, the election of Labour to a position of power, or to the “conversion” of those already in power to socialist principles. In either case convinced socialists would now be in power, and the third stage would be the reorganisation of society by a socialist state, aided by a supportive and co-operative population.

We may note elements of confusion and imprecision of thought, as well as a few definite contradictions, in Christian Socialist thinking on this topic. However, the call for a peaceful, democratic, consensual and spiritual revolution is clearly expressed. The three-stage process is best understood as an imperfect model, but one which nevertheless has some validity. That given though, it is unfair to labour too much the extent to which Christian Socialists lacked practical proposals or refused to consider how they could bring about their aims. The spiritual nature of the movement should also be remembered, reminding us that moral persuasion, prayer and spiritual change were all practical means of revolutionising society in the minds of Christian Socialists.

Section Three: Christian Socialist Society

9. Collectivism and the Role of the State

Having considered how Christian Socialists sought to bring about socialism, we turn to question of what they were aiming for. What did a Christian Socialist imagine that society would be like once socialism had been brought into being? In this chapter we shall examine the Christian Socialist commitment to collectivism and co-operation, and consider whether this required a large and powerful socialist state. In later chapters we will examine some principles that would be enshrined in a Christian Socialist society – such as democracy, equality and pacifism – as well as the utopian element of Christian Socialist visions of the future.

Difficulties

There are two difficulties in trying to set out the Christian Socialist vision of a new society. The first is the extent to which Christian Socialists consciously avoided giving firm and definite proposals or policies. Peter d'A Jones writes of Henry Scott Holland's Christian Social Union that "practical reform suggestions were left to the individual consciences of members" rather than set out by the organisation itself; he then adds that "[t]his was a condition that characterised many 'Christian socialist' groups".¹ William Temple consistently argued that it was not for the church to suggest specific policies, but rather to proclaim Christian principles which would guide political decision-making.² Stewart Headlam made the same argument in a sermon, saying: "It is not my business, speaking to you from the pulpit, to deal with details, or to suggest definite action on the social and political problems, but it *is* my business to suggest, as I have done, the principles, and warn you, as I do now, as to what prevents those principles from being carried out".³ Similarly, Samuel Keeble wrote that the ideal situation was for the church to be "declaring social

¹ P. d'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), p.181.

² W. Temple, *The Place of the Church in Relation to Social Reform* (London, 1943), pp.9-10. See also, W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), p.v.

³ S.D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with Other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), p.123. [Emphasis in original.]

duties, and pointing out social perils and evils”, leaving the work of making specific changes to society to others.⁴

However, it was not just clergymen who disavowed themselves from making specific proposals or definite predictions; Keir Hardie took a similar attitude, writing: “To dogmatise about the form which the Socialist State shall take is to play the fool. That is a matter with which we have nothing whatever to do. It belongs to the future, and is a matter which posterity alone can decide. The most we can hope to do is to make the coming of Socialism possible in the full assurance that it will shape itself aright when it does come”.⁵

Fortunately this does not mean that these men contributed absolutely nothing of what they hoped to see in a socialist society. Temple, for example, added an appendix of practical proposals to *Christianity and the Social Order* in order to illustrate the principles he expounded in the rest of the book. Holland, Headlam, Keeble and Hardie all made suggestions as to what they hoped would be the case in a new society. However, this reticence to make firm proposals or set out a definite vision casts some doubt over whatever the Christian Socialists say about the potential future – is it a practical suggestion or simply an illustration of a principle? – and leads to predictions, policies and ideas being much more vague than perhaps ought to be the case.

The second difficulty comes of the fact that it is not always clear whether a policy suggested or supported is one that the Christian Socialist imagines will be part of a socialist society, or one which they view as a necessity in the current capitalist society. Are the Christian Socialists arguing for something that will be part of a new world, or simply a reform to the existing one? As an example, Keeble regarded the Factory Acts and municipal ownership of utilities as part of “state socialism”.⁶ Stewart Headlam, by contrast argued that “[t]he Factory Acts, valuable and necessary in our present anarchic condition, are no part of Socialism; they are only temporary expedients to make things a little better for the wage slaves until wage-slavery is abolished by abolition of the monopoly in the means of production”; however, he does concede that “the ownership and management by the State or the Municipality of certain great industries and enterprises – what has contemptuously been termed Gas and Water Socialism – is genuine Socialism so far as it goes, and will probably

⁴ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.19.

⁵ J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.96.

⁶ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.134 and p.136. S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist's Church* (London, 1907), p.53.

still be necessary when the ideal of Socialism has been reached”.⁷ Here Headlam makes a distinction between two things – factory legislation and municipal ownership of utilities – regarding the latter as part of socialism but the former as not; Keeble, however, identifies both as being part of socialism.

The difficulty here is that Christian Socialists viewed certain things as necessary reforms under capitalism, others as part of the establishment of socialism and perhaps some things as being both at the same time, and that this is not always made clear. For example, George Lansbury’s policies as an SDF member in 1894 included “trade union rates [and] hours of labour” for workhouse inmates, “lighten[ing] the burdens on poorer parishes by compelling the richer ones to take their share of the cost of finding suitable work on the land and in workshops for those out of employment”, as well as “socialisation of the means of production [...] to be controlled by a democratic state in the interests of the entire community, and the complete emancipation of labour from the domination of capitalism”.⁸ It might be assumed that the latter demand is a description of socialism, while the former are reforms to capitalism – after all, there would presumably be no workhouse inmates or unemployed after “the complete emancipation of labour” – but this is nowhere made explicit.

Sometimes this distinction is made clear, or at least hinted at. In suggesting some reforms pertaining to unemployment in 1929, Lansbury wrote: “I am still a Socialist, but I am also a realist, and as such I am not prepared to sit silent and see the manhood of our nation perish because a theory of life I hold is not at the moment practicable”.⁹ Lansbury’s ideas in this instance must then be reforms to capitalist rather than socialist proposals. Similarly, even though Keeble argued that “[w]e are not ready for an entirely non-competitive form of society” he held that “we must do what we can, not what we should like [...] Certainly, if we be wise, we shall not refuse to do anything at all because we cannot secure all we want”.¹⁰

Another example is afforded by John Wheatley’s housing bill. Wheatley declared that his proposals were “real capitalism – an attempt to patch up, in the interests of

⁷ S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.53 and p.55.

⁸ By-election address for Parliamentary representative of Walworth, February 1894, London School of Economics [LSE] archive, Lansbury/1 204-208; Programme for Guardians’ Election, Lansbury as Social-Democratic candidate for Bow and Bromley, [November?] 1894, LSE archive, Lansbury/1 222.

⁹ Memorandum regarding unemployment by Lansbury, 22 July 1929, London School of Economics [LSE] archive, Lansbury/19 81-94.

¹⁰ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), pp.80-81.

humanity, a capital ordered society [...] I am not submitting to the House proposals for changing the capitalist order of society. I am merely submitting proposals of a limited character”.¹¹ The housing bill, therefore, is an act of reform rather than the introduction of socialism. However, even when this is the case we can find – as in the example of Keeble and Headlam above – that what one Christian Socialist regarded as socialistic, another did not.

Keir Hardie is particularly confusing when he defines socialism as meaning “that land and industrial capital shall be held as common property to be administered by the community in the interests of the whole of its members; and that industry shall be organised on the basis of Production for Use rather than Production for Profit”, because he then argues that this “is not an end, but only a means to an end. It is but the next stage in the evolution of a juster social order”.¹² Does Hardie mean that the common ownership of “land and industrial capital” does not constitute socialism? Perhaps this is explained in the following statement by Hardie: “Socialism we believe to be the next step in the evolution of that form of State which will give the individual the fullest and freest room for expansion and development. State Socialism, with all its drawbacks, and these I frankly admit, will prepare the way for free Communism in which the rule, not merely the law of the State, but the rule of life will be – From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”.¹³

Hardie, in a similar way to Marx, believes that once capitalism has been replaced by socialism, socialism will then be replaced by communism. However, this explanation does not assist in alleviating confusion: most Christian Socialists have two forms of society in mind: capitalist society and its necessary reforms, as well as socialist society and its necessary components. Hardie confuses things further by adding a third: communism. This difficulty is exacerbated as other Christian Socialists – such as Headlam and Wilfred Wellock – also write about communism, but there is no indication that they mean, like Hardie, that communism will follow socialism; it appears more that they are using the terms socialism and communism synonymously.

Despite these two difficulties – the shying away from specific policies and the difficulty of knowing whether those policies which are put forward are reforms to capitalism or part of socialism (or, indeed, whether socialism is the final stage or itself an intermediate

¹¹ J. Wheatley, *Houses to Let: A Speech in Exposition of Labour's Fifteen Years' Housing Programme* (London, 1924), p.8 and p.11.

¹² J. Keir Hardie, *The I.L.P. and All About It* (Manchester, 1908), p.6.

¹³ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.89.

stage) – it is still possible to draw some broad conclusions about the kind of society envisaged by Christian Socialists. Even if only principles are put forward, with actual proposals lacking in specifics and relegated to the status of illustrations, or if we cannot always tell whether the proposals are reforms to capitalism or components of socialism, we can still grasp from this something of what the Christian Socialists were aiming for and working towards.

Co-operation and Collectivism

Like other socialists, Christian Socialists envisaged a society run co-operatively and collectively. For example, Keir Hardie's private member's bill called for "a Socialist Commonwealth founded upon the common ownership of land and capital".¹⁴ As early as 1888 Hardie called for "a new economic departure in which our entire industrial society shall be worked on the principle of one vast co-operative".¹⁵ The Independent Labour Party, under Hardie's influence, stood for "collective ownership of the means of production".¹⁶ Years later, R.H. Tawney, having become committed to some form of public ownership during his investigations into the coal industry, would oppose Hugh Gaitskell's attempt to remove Clause IV from the Labour Party constitution.¹⁷ Lansbury, as we have already seen, called for the "socialisation of the means of production [...] to be controlled by a democratic state in the interests of the entire community". John Wheatley, alongside James Maxton and others, tabled an amendment to the King's speech which called for "measures aimed at the re-organization of the industrial system so that it shall provide for the needs of the community, by nationalizing the key sources of economic power".¹⁸ "Britain", according to Wheatley, "should be treated as a National Workshop. No industry should be regarded as self-contained. Every industry must be looked upon and treated as a department of one workshop".¹⁹

This was not just the view of Labour politicians in this study, but also those engaged in Christian ministry; Stewart Headlam, for example, despite his Liberalism, "became a

¹⁴ J.T. Leckie, *Socialism in Britain: From the Industrial Revolution to the Present Day* (London, 1972), p.106-7.

¹⁵ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour's Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010), p.56.

¹⁶ J. Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain Since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), p.55.

¹⁷ L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), p.122 and p.282.

¹⁸ I.S. Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), p.181.

¹⁹ J. Wheatley, *Socialise the National Income!* (London, 1927), p.9.

champion” of “collectivist solutions”.²⁰ At the Christian Socialist Society in 1887 “Headlam endorsed a resolution calling for ‘the establishment of a system of National Cooperation under which land and capital being vested collectively in the whole people, it will be impossible for anyone to live on the labour of others’.”²¹ The platform set out by Headlam’s Guild of St Matthew sought “to restore to the people the value which they give to the land” and “to bring about a better distribution of the wealth created by labour”.²² William Temple also favoured some measure of co-operation, arguing that “the Christian is called on to assent to great steps in the direction of collectivism”.²³

Samuel Keeble, similarly, criticised “sweating”, “reduction of wages and unemployment”, and “those fluctuations of the market most of which might be avoided under a rational system of industry”; this “rational system” in Keeble’s view was one “which adjusted supply to demand, produced primarily for use and not profit, and kept a stern hand on the Stock Exchange”.²⁴ For John Clifford, socialism was “an endeavour to displace the fierce and disastrous competitive methods of industrial life, by the introduction of co-operative and organized action based on justice and intended to promote the general welfare”.²⁵ Clifford also summarises collectivism or co-operation like this: “Here is the great business of industrial life; let us manage it so that all may share in the responsibility and share in the gains, and share fairly and justly as nearly as possible; not one doing all the work and another taking all the gains”.²⁶ The Declaration of Clifford’s Church Socialist League held “that the principle of Brotherhood as taught by Jesus Christ [...] must result in the Socialization of all natural resources, as well as the instruments of production, distribution and exchange”.²⁷

We can therefore see that Christian Socialists sought in general a society which was managed in such a way as to provide for the needs of the whole community, rather than the *laissez-faire* society that exists under capitalism. This implies the nationalisation of both land and industry. As Hardie viewed it: “Make the worker his own employer and his own landlord and then he receives all which his toil creates. This is Socialism”.²⁸

²⁰ E. Norman, ‘Stewart Headlam and the Victorian Christian Socialists’, *History Today*, 37, 4 (1987), p.31.

²¹ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.57.

²² Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.114.

²³ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.227.

²⁴ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.70.

²⁵ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches: Fabian Tract No.139* (London, 1908), p.3.

²⁶ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ: Fabian Tract No.78* (London, 1897), p.9.

²⁷ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.203.

²⁸ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings – From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.70.

Christian Socialists foresaw a society in which land would no longer be a private monopoly; we observed in a previous chapter support – especially by Stewart Headlam, but also by others – for the Single Tax proposed by Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* which would serve to abolish peacefully private ownership of land.²⁹ According to Jones, “Headlam declared private property in land to be in ethical opposition both to the Ten Commandments and to the teaching and life of Jesus Christ”.³⁰ Another suggests that “to Headlam and the Guild [of St Matthew], private ownership of the land was the fundamental cause of social evil, for it embodied that individualism and isolation from God which was the effect of the Fall”.³¹

George Lansbury’s view was that there were “no means for dealing effectually with the land question as a whole except by making all those who wish to use land pay, not to private individuals, but to the State, for the use of such land”.³² Tawney wrote in his diary of the need for “a large transference in property rights”, which among other things would include “the municipalisation of urban land and the regular purchase of land by the state”.³³ Hardie argued for “a Co-operative Commonwealth in which land [...] shall be the property of the community”.³⁴ William Temple suggested in the latter part of *Christianity and the Social Order* that the government should acquire land for the building of houses, writing that “[i]f well-established vested interests are disturbed there should be compensation; but in no case should speculation in land values or vested interests be allowed to interfere with the use of land to the best public advantage”.³⁵ John Wheatley has his “Socialist” declare before the “Magistrate” that a Labour government “would take over the land and thus by one stroke save to the workers the amount of wealth the Duke takes”.³⁶

As well as land, Christian Socialists envisaged the common ownership of industry. Wheatley has his “Socialist” continue: “they would take over the mines and save the wealth taken by the colliery shareholders [...] They would take over the railways and again save what railway shareholders pocket. They would also cheapen house property by the amount which now goes in ground rents, and profits. They would organise industry so as to abolish

²⁹ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.116.

³¹ K. Leech, ‘Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924, and the Guild of St Matthew’, in M.B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England* (London, 1968), p.80.

³² G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.117.

³³ J. M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, eds, *R.H. Tawney’s Commonplace Book* (Cambridge, 2006), p.52.

³⁴ Hughes, *Hardie’s Speeches and Writings*, p.76.

³⁵ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.101.

³⁶ J. Wheatley, *How the Miners are Robbed: The Duke in the Dock (startling court case)*, (Nottingham, 1973 – original publication 1907), p.15.

all useless labour”.³⁷ For Lansbury, this was necessary for land reform to be at all effective: “I should support the taxation of ground values up to 20s in the £, though that is not going to improve the condition of the workers so long as they are compelled to labour for wages for the benefit of the employing classes”.³⁸ “The only possible remedy”, according to Lansbury, “is for you to obtain control of that upon which your lives depend, viz., the means and instruments of production and distribution, or, in other words, the land, machinery, tools, buildings, etc., and see that they are administered for the benefit of all, instead of, at the present time, for the interest of the few”.³⁹

Hardie wrote that “in addition to the land, the pits, and railways, and docks, and ironworks, and steelworks, and tinworks, should also belong to the people, and not to a few only”.⁴⁰ In Hardie’s view therefore, as well as collective ownership of the land itself, there should be collective ownership of all manner of industry. Stewart Headlam expressed the same view, arguing that “the main thing at which Socialism aims is that the great means of production shall be in the hands of the whole community, and therefore shall be taken out of the hands of private individuals”.⁴¹ Samuel Keeble foresaw the “possession by the community of all the instruments of production and distribution – land, machinery, railways and all means of transport or communication”.⁴² John Clifford hinted at holding to the same view, asking “if society is always a necessary factor in the production of the results of Labour, how can it be intrinsically unjust that society should ask to be heard as to the ownership and control, both of the instruments and the results of labour?”⁴³ Finally, Tawney’s view was that “industry should be subordinated to the community in such a way as to render the best service technically possible”.⁴⁴

However, the Christian Socialist view of collectivism is not as straightforward as might initially appear. While it might fairly be stated that Hardie, Lansbury and Headlam all favoured the nationalisation of industry and land the same is not necessarily true of all the Christian Socialists. For example, we saw William Temple’s idea that the state should

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ 'To the electors of the Walworth Division of Newington', August 1895, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 b 2.

³⁹ Bow and Bromley Branch of the Social Democratic Federation 'An address to the men and women of Bow and Bromley', 1892, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 a 1.

⁴⁰ F. Johnson, *Keir Hardie's Socialism* (London, 1922), p.11.

⁴¹ Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, p.57.

⁴² S. Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism: Essays for the Times* (London, 1906), p.18.

⁴³ Middlesbrough Election News, 2-11 January 1906, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 c 1. [The newspaper clipping of a story regarding Lansbury’s Middlesbrough election campaign also included sections of a lecture by Clifford.]

⁴⁴ R.H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London, 1921), p.14.

purchase land in order to build houses; however, Temple did not believe that full nationalisation of land was necessary, writing:

[I]t seems to me, we have been far too tender towards the claims that have been made by the owners of land and water as compared with the interests of the public, who need that land and water for the ordinary purposes of human life. *I am not myself at all persuaded that the solution of this problem is to be found in the nationalisation of land*; but I am persuaded that we need to find ways of asserting the rights of the public over the interests of the private owners; and we come back here to the great Christian principle that the right which attaches to ownership is a right of administration, but should never be a right to exclusive use.⁴⁵

Temple then adds to this: “Over land and water we must establish a social control, whether or not this carries with it national ownership. (Personally, I believe that it need not and hope that it will not; but the control is essential)”.⁴⁶ Temple’s view is that the confiscation of property was a last resort. A man who owns land, he writes, must own it “not as a possessor of so much material resources, but as a steward and trustee for the community. Land not beneficially used should involve liability to fine, or, in extreme cases, to forfeiture”.⁴⁷ Temple, therefore, sought a way in which the community as a whole could assert its interests over private property, but without necessarily taking that private property into collective ownership.

This was also the view of Samuel Keeble, who argued that “every property-owner, though he possesses a certain moral right to ‘his own’, and is granted full legal control, is yet not absolute owner, *but the steward of society*”.⁴⁸ Keeble did not necessarily want all industry to be nationalised, writing that “the natural grievances and injustices” felt by the labouring class could be remedied by “making the labourer master of his product, whether by systems of technical education, co-operative production, industrial partnership, municipal Socialism, or by other practicable methods”.⁴⁹ This suggests that he is not necessarily committed to nationalisation in every circumstance. In *Towards the New Era* Keeble argues for “State ownership of the *vital* industries and *some* of the national sources of wealth which

⁴⁵ Temple, *Church Looks Forward*, p.111. [Emphasis added.]

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁴⁷ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.112.

⁴⁸ Keeble, *Material Life*, p.224. [Emphasis in original.]

⁴⁹ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.90 and p.272.

should not be in private hands”.⁵⁰ The railways and coal mines are noted as industries which ought to be nationalised, but Keeble only goes far as to say that “[l]and nationalisation or the taxation of ground values is a matter for careful discussion”.⁵¹ Therefore, while committed to a measure of collectivisation, Keeble did not see full nationalisation as a necessity, nor as the only solution.

Tawney shares Keeble’s view that nationalisation is not always necessary. In *The Acquisitive Society* Tawney sets out his view of what a “Functional Society” ought to be like, arguing that the principle of function is a “standard for discriminating between those types of property which are legitimate and those which are not”.⁵² Tawney, therefore, is not opposed to all forms of private ownership of industry or land; only in those situations in which the owners perform no function is the ownership of land or industry illegitimate. Indeed, Tawney goes on to say that “the idea of some Socialists that private property in land or capital is necessarily mischievous is a piece of scholastic pedantry as absurd as that of those Conservatives who would invest all property with kind of mysterious sanctity. It all depends on what sort of property it is and for what purpose it is used”.⁵³

Part of Tawney’s argument is that nationalisation does not necessarily mean state management:

The merits of nationalization do not stand or fall with the efficiency or inefficiency of existing state departments as administrators of industry. For nationalization, which means public ownership, does not involve placing industry under the machinery of the political state, with its civil servants controlled, or nominally controlled, by Cabinet Ministers, and is compatible with several types of management [...] The authorities to whom it is entrusted may be composed of representatives of the consumers, or of representatives of professional associations, or of state officials, or of all three in several different proportions. Executive work may be placed in the hands of civil servants, trained, recruited, and promoted as in the existing state departments, or a new service may be created with a procedure and standards of its own. The industry may be subject to Treasury control, or it may be financially autonomous.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ S.E. Keeble, *Towards the New Era: A Draft Scheme of Industrial Reconstruction* (London, 1917), p.14. [Emphasis added.]

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.35 and pp.32-3.

⁵² Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.49.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.114.

Similarly, in *Equality* Tawney argued that “[w]hether control should take the form of regulation, or of their acquisition by the State and management by a public body, is a question of expediency, to be answered differently in different cases”.⁵⁵

However, Tawney also argues for what he terms “professionalization” of industry as an alternative to public ownership, describing “the difference between the existing industrial order, collectivism and the organization of industry as a profession [...] The first involves the utilization of human beings for the purposes of private gain; the second their utilization for the purpose of public service; the third the association in the service of the public for their professional pride, solidarity and organization”.⁵⁶ In this conception, industry is made to serve the public not by being nationalised, but by being run voluntarily according to a professional ethic which demands certain standards of service. As Tawney continues, “the alternative to the discipline which Capitalism exercised through its instruments of unemployment and starvation is the self-discipline of responsibility and professional pride”.⁵⁷ This is not to suggest that Tawney was against nationalisation – in *Equality* he called for the Labour Party to nationalise key industries in order to begin dismantling capitalism – but rather that, like Keeble, he did not view it as a necessity in every case. Tawney did envisage some industries remaining in private hands, but – as well as the introduction of a professional ethic – Tawney suggested a government department to ensure that industries remaining in private hands were conducted with due regard to the public interest.⁵⁸ Therefore, the principle of society being run co-operatively was still to be established with or without nationalisation.

Even those Christian Socialists most committed to collective ownership of land and industry did not foresee a society in which all property was abolished. In ‘Labour and Christianity’ Keir Hardie argued that “Christ in His Gospels denounced property in all its forms [...] Christianity on its social side can never be realised – if it is to be interpreted in the light of Christ’s teaching – until there is full, free Communism, and the very idea of private property has disappeared from men’s minds”.⁵⁹ Yet, in *The I.L.P. and All About It*, published around the same time, Hardie’s view on first consideration seems to be rather different:

⁵⁵ R.H. Tawney, *Equality*, (London, 1938 – original publication 1931), p.242.

⁵⁶ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.129.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.145.

⁵⁸ Tawney, *Equality*, p.273 and pp.234-6.

⁵⁹ J. Keir Hardie, ‘Labour and Christianity: Is the Labour Movement against Christianity’, in *Labour and Religion: By Ten Labour Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.51.

Neither does Socialism propose, to take away anyone's private possessions. Not only a man's tooth pick, but also his personal attire, his household goods and effects, and where he so desired it, his house, would all under Socialism still remain his personal private property. So too with his books, his pictures, and his money. He would be just as free to hoard his savings then as he is now, and just as free to spend them in any way his taste might dictate.⁶⁰

However, Hardie continues:

One thing alone he would not be able to do under Socialism ; he would not be able to buy a tract of land, and say to all the rest of the earth, 'No matter what your needs or necessities, this is mine, and you shall not be allowed to use it, save with my permission and on condition that you pay me tribute.' Neither would he be able to use capital for the enslavement of the worker, nor to live in idleness all the rest of his life upon interest extorted from the forced labour of others. With land and capital transferred from individual to communal ownership, industry would be organised for the purpose of supplying the means for a healthy and fully developed life for the whole of the community.⁶¹

Hardie therefore draws a distinction between different kinds of property: firstly, private property in the means of production, which ought to be owned communally; secondly, personal property – clothes, household goods, even the house itself. The latter is perfectly acceptable, while it is the former which is denounced.

John Wheatley made a similar argument writing that “Socialism is defined as the public ownership of land and capital. This does not mean the abolition of all private property”, and again that “[o]ur Socialism is not confiscation or robbery [...] It differs from the Socialism condemned by the Pope in that it retains the right to own private property. It is simply a scheme to abolish poverty”.⁶² The same is true of Samuel Keeble, who “never envisaged the disappearance of private property in the era of public ownership of basic industries and services. Christianity, he believed, favoured both jointly”.⁶³

We have already seen that Tawney did not imagine all property being abolished, because he divided property into two classes – legitimate and illegitimate – with the test of legitimacy being whether the ownership of any given piece of property corresponded with a

⁶⁰ Hardie, *I.L.P.*, p.7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Wood, *Wheatley*, p.23 and p.26.

⁶³ M.S. Edwards, *S.E. Keeble: The Rejected Prophet* (Chester, 1977), p.49.

function or not; “it is not private ownership”, he reminded readers in *The Acquisitive Society*, “but private ownership divorced from work, which is corrupting to the principle of industry”.⁶⁴ Like Hardie, Tawney does not even consider that socialism would remove the right to personal property, writing that “if by ‘Property’ is meant the personal possessions which the word suggests to nine-tenths of the population, the object of Socialists is not to undermine property, but to protect and increase it”.⁶⁵ Far from its abolition, Tawney wished to see a wider diffusion of property, with legitimate property rights being held by more people than were able to do so under capitalism.⁶⁶

Temple viewed the existence of property as being a result of human sin. This might cause us to imagine that he sought its abolition; instead he regarded it as a necessity. “The institution of property is rooted in sin”, Temple explained, “for if all men loved God with all their hearts and their neighbours as themselves, they would cheerfully labour for the common good. But men are sinful, so property rights are needed, not so much for the satisfaction of the rich as for the protection of the poor”.⁶⁷ In *The Church Looks Forward* he expands on this:

Now, if we did all love God with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves, we should work our hardest to produce what the whole fellowship needed: we should take our own reasonable share of it and no more; and we should be eager that everybody else should have what he needed also, and there would be no need for property rights. And, in consequence, the early theologians are always quite clear that property rights are rooted in sin. They don’t say that property is wicked: they say that the whole business is rooted in sin: that is, in the failure of man to rise to the height of his calling, and rights are needed, not for the security of the great property owners, but for the protection of the small property owners: because in a world in which people do not love God with all their hearts, and their neighbours as themselves the strong are going to take advantage of the weak and you need to protect the weaker members in such rights as they have been able to establish.⁶⁸

For Temple, the existence of legal rights to property were a source of protection to vulnerable property owners in a world of sinners. Temple also states his belief in “voluntary

⁶⁴ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p.82.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.83.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁶⁷ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.49.

⁶⁸ Temple, *Church Looks Forward*, pp.145-6.

communism”, based on the example of the Church as recorded in Acts of the Apostles: “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need”.⁶⁹ Temple’s view is that this “is as different from what is ordinarily called communism as anything can be; it is, indeed, its polar opposite. Modern communism abolishes legal ownership by private persons; under it no one has property to give away”, adding that “[t]o renounce property is a conspicuously vivid act of personal freedom; to have no property or be forcibly deprived of it is a serious infringement of personal freedom”.⁷⁰

However, this stress on the voluntary nature of relinquishing property does not mean that Temple was simply seeking more charity from the better-off. “If the present order is taken for granted or assumed to be sacrosanct”, he wrote, “charity from the more or less fortunate would seem virtuous or commendable”. However, “to those for whom the order itself is suspect or worse, such charity is blood-money. Why should some be in the position to dispense and others to need that kind of charity?”⁷¹ Temple, then, called for a change in the way society was organised, rather than mere charity. He also reminded those who did give charity that theology regards “almsgiving” not as a “kindness” or act of “mercy”, but an act of “justice”.⁷² Therefore the reorganised society envisaged by Temple was not just one that encouraged charity, but one which sought to establish justice.

This same view was held by other Christian Socialists. Stewart Headlam wrote of the charity of the upper-classes, asserting that “these monopolists will do almost anything for the people except one thing, and that is, they won’t get off their back”.⁷³ In a sermon at Westminster Abbey “Headlam told the well-to-do congregation that their almsgiving would be worthless unless they were also working ‘to get rid of the miserable class divisions with which England is cursed’”.⁷⁴ Samuel Keeble wanted “[t]hose in positions of power, rich men, capitalists, managers, and employers [to] never forget that justice precedes charity. Donations and great subscriptions to church, public, or party funds, whilst donors are sweating the workers, or appropriating more than their share of the wealth produced, can no longer be endured in professing Christian men”.⁷⁵ John Clifford also spoke of justice,

⁶⁹ Acts 2:44-45.

⁷⁰ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, pp.46-7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁷² Temple, *Church Looks Forward*, pp.146-7.

⁷³ Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.24.

⁷⁴ Orens, *Headlam*, p.21.

⁷⁵ S.E. Keeble, *Money and How to Use It* (London, 1921), p.10.

declaring that “[c]ollectivism approximates more closely to universal justice than the wage system”.⁷⁶ Similarly to Keeble, Clifford suggests that “[i]t is easier [...] to bestow a donation on a hospital than pay a fair wage to a toiler”, but that this was not sufficient. “Charity is good [...] but far to be preferred is the justice which quenches the need for it”.⁷⁷ Finally, George Lansbury made the distinction between charity and socialism in discussion with Simon Montagu, who sought to persuade Lansbury to remain within the Liberal party:

I told him I had become a socialist and wanted to preach socialism. He replied: ‘Don’t be silly, I am a socialist, a better socialist than you. I give a tenth of my riches each year to the poor’. I said: ‘Yes, I know how good you are and respect you more than it is possible to say, but, my dear friend, we socialists want to prevent you from getting the nine-tenths. We do not believe in rich and poor and charity. We want to create wealth and all the means of life and share them equally among the people’.⁷⁸

For Christian Socialists then, charity was not a bad thing in itself, except insofar as it prevented the establishment of justice or socialism.

The Role of the State

It might be supposed, given the commitment to collectivism, that Christian Socialists envisaged a society governed by a large and powerful state. Keir Hardie, for example, foresaw a society in which “land and machinery is socially owned [...] with the entire nation organised so as to turn each individual’s service to the most profitable account”.⁷⁹ George Lansbury sought “to replace the present system of society, the dominant features of which are ruthless competition and production for profit, by a society where the wealth of the community shall be equitably distributed”.⁸⁰ These aspirations would suggest the existence of a state large and powerful enough to carry them out. John Wheatley, for example, believed that public ownership necessitated state control of wages and prices.⁸¹ Stewart Headlam is described as calling for “an expansive role for the state in social regulation”, “a

⁷⁶ Lansbury/30 C 1.

⁷⁷ J. Clifford, *The New City of God: The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel* (London, 1888), pp.27-8.

⁷⁸ G. Dale, *God’s Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 Years of Labour* (London, 2000), p.110.

⁷⁹ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.101.

⁸⁰ Lansbury/30 a 1.

⁸¹ Wheatley, *Socialise the National Income!*, p11. See also, Wood, *Wheatley*, p.165.

redistribution of wealth by state action, and a full programme of educational and welfare provision by government”.⁸² Even those not necessarily committed to state ownership of industry made proposals that seem to rely on a powerful state. We have already seen William Temple suggesting that the government should be able to acquire land from private ownership in order to build new houses, while as a means of reforming the education system R.H. Tawney suggested a central authority which would govern all schools.⁸³

In the previous section we sketched out a three-part process by which Christian Socialists believed socialism would be brought about: firstly, persuasion of the deficiencies of capitalism and the need for a socialist alternative; secondly, the election of Labour to a position of power (or the “conversion” of those already in power to socialism); thirdly, with convinced socialists now in power, the reorganisation of society by a socialist state. This presupposes the existence of a powerful state to bring socialism into being, and very little in Christian Socialist writing suggests that this state would fade away after the establishment of socialism.

However, Paul Bickley argues that “the Christian Socialist tradition has tended towards a strong view of the diffusion of power and the redemption of social relationships through non-statist means [...] The Christian tradition, like other ethical socialisms, is therefore disposed towards non-statist responses to the problem of economic and political disadvantage”.⁸⁴ He cites the example of Tawney, who was suspicious of the idea of a benign state ruling over the people, writing that “[h]owever the socialist ideal may be expressed, few things could be more remote from it than a herd of tame animals with wise rulers in command”.⁸⁵ Bickley argues that “Tawney could never be at one with the Fabians or the Marxists, both of whom proposed to create social change through the agency of a powerful, ‘scientific’ state. Tawney’s vision was of human liberty and dignity in the context of accountability to a conception of the [common] good”.⁸⁶ This fits with Tawney’s view that nationalisation was not always a necessity, and that the important factor in industry was a sense of professional obligation.

⁸² Norman, ‘Headlam and Victorian Christian Socialists’, p.31.

⁸³ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.68.

⁸⁴ P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), pp.8-9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.44.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.46.

There does seem to be some tension in Christian Socialist thought between ideas about the role of the state and ideas about the freedom of the individual. For example, John Clifford sets out five “chief functions of the ideal state”:

(a) It should give liberty for the full utterance and development of the personality of every sane citizen of the commonwealth; (b) secure justice between man and man, and between all organisations of men within the State, so that there shall be fair play for each, and not the slightest shade of favouritism for any man as against another, or for any organisation as against another; (c) it should educate and drill every child of the commonwealth for *citizenship*, so that the life of the State may be continued in health and prosperity, and the future well-being of the State may be continued in health and prosperity, and the future well-being of the State secured; (d) it should neutralise, and as far as may be destroy, everything that makes for strife and division in the commonwealth, and seek to unify the life of the citizens; and (e) it will show mercy to the poor and needy.⁸⁷

Here Clifford sets out a vision of a large and domineering state, powerful enough to “educate and drill every child” in order to secure its own “health and prosperity”. He also argues that Christians ought to “seek with passionate ardour to incarnate a collective rather than an individualistic idea in society”, and that socialism involves “a State which shall exist for all and be served by all”.⁸⁸ However, Clifford’s first “chief function” is the liberty of individuals, and the state which is to “be served by all” is also one which “exist[s] for all”.⁸⁹ Clifford argues that collectivism “does not advocate the absorption of the individual by the State”, and that the principles of collectivism “must not be permitted to obliterate, or overwhelm, or fetter, the *freedom of the individual*”.⁹⁰

The same tension is evident in the work of William Temple. According to Matthew Grimley, “Henry Scott Holland and the young William Temple both drew on [Bernard] Bosanquet’s idea that the individual only found full development in the state”; he then quotes Temple in *The Education of Citizens*: “A man has no right to have his talents developed apart from his intention to devote them to the state, because his whole being is comprised in the fact that he is a member of the state [...] The man is essentially and before

⁸⁷ J. Clifford, *The State the Church and the Congregation* (London, 1908). [Emphasis in original.]

⁸⁸ Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ*, p.11; Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, p.5.

⁸⁹ Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ*, p.5.

⁹⁰ Clifford, *New City of God*, p.26. [Emphasis in original.]

all else a member of the state”.⁹¹ The older William Temple still regarded the state as representing the community, as well as putting forward as illustrations proposals which involved much state intervention; for example: “Family allowances – perhaps in the form of food and clothes coupons having the value of money – should be paid by the State to the mother for every child after the first two”; and: “The State should maintain a certain number of works beneficial to the community, from which private enterprise should be excluded, which it would expand and contract according to the general demand for labour at any time”.⁹²

However, in discussing the overreaction to capitalist individualism, Temple’s view is that “there was a tendency to swing over and lay all the emphasis upon the other note: community. Value was to be found in the whole society alone, not in its individual members, and this has found in the modern world two main expressions: Communism and Fascism, both of which are totalitarian”.⁹³ Elsewhere Temple declared: “Man is the child of God [...] for whom, therefore, the State exists and not he for the State”.⁹⁴ This was also the view of Samuel Keeble, who argued that “[t]he State must act for the benefit of the citizens as a whole; if necessary at the expense of a few”, but also that “[w]hen the individual is nothing and the State is everything, evils of all kinds arise”.⁹⁵

Returning to Henry Scott Holland, he saw a reformed society as being that in which the state ensures freedom and justice, saying that “[w]e must have all we can get of State order, of State machinery”.⁹⁶ This is reflected in *Our Neighbours* in which Holland – quite at odds with Bickley’s suggestion that Christian Socialism is “disposed towards non-statist responses to the problem of economic and political disadvantage” – argues passionately for the acceptance of state power and authority. We have already seen Holland’s view of the state as the means by which socialism can be carried out: “We invoke the State, then. We call upon it to relieve our individual conscience by doing for us what we are powerless to do for ourselves”.⁹⁷ Holland foresaw a society in which the state is responsible for the creation of “a social environment, a social atmosphere” conducive to justice and morality, as well as,

⁹¹ M. Grimely, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004), p.54.

⁹² Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.83 [Temple speaks of the state subsidising the cost of particular commodities as their being subsidised by “the whole community”], p.101 and p.112.

⁹³ Temple, *The Church Looks Forward*, pp.132-3.

⁹⁴ Temple, *Church in Relation to Social Reform*, p.11.

⁹⁵ S.E. Keeble, *Ethics of Public Ownership* (London, 1920), p.14; S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.206.

⁹⁶ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.195.

⁹⁷ H.S. Holland, ed., *Our Neighbours: A Handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.86.

more concretely, replacing the *laissez-faire* free market with a market which will, for instance, provide all workers with an adequate income.⁹⁸ Holland did not view the regulation that this would require as an imposition; rather, it provided freedom to those for whom free-market capitalism was an imposition. “Law is Liberty”, declared Holland, adding: “Law will move forward so that it may slowly take up every corner of our social life and organise it according to the mind and interpretation of the brotherhood”.⁹⁹

Holland’s view of the state, however, was perhaps softened in later years; in a lecture during the early months of the First World War he spoke of being “face to face with the notion of an absolute State that sweeps up all individual liberty”, adding that the state is “too huge, too remote, too abstract to allow us to find freedom in it”.¹⁰⁰ According to Wilkinson, Holland came to believe in smaller communities within the state that would help to sustain freedom and liberty.¹⁰¹

Keir Hardie also foresaw a key role for the state in a socialist society. Hardie’s view was that the state represented the interests of the workers: “To the Socialist, the State always means the People, and the People are the workers”.¹⁰² From this we can conclude that when Hardie writes of “land and industrial capital” being “common property”, in practice this requires state ownership. For example, Hardie argues that there is only “one solution” to industrial disputes between railway owners and the workers: “the State must own the railways”.¹⁰³ This is in keeping with the view that Hardie “was a collectivist who wanted the state to run essential industries”.¹⁰⁴

The same view could be attributed to George Lansbury. Lansbury sought “the full control, by the whole people, over the means of creating and distributing wealth”, but saw this role as belonging to the state: “the whole evil is summed up in the word ‘profit’, and that can only be wiped out by the State taking over all industries and working them not for profit, but to produce the things we need”.¹⁰⁵ It has been argued that Lansbury was “an ardent supporter of state supremacy, and he went so far as to endorse the system of compulsion that was beginning to emerge in the Soviet Union”.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, pp.88-9; Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.195.

⁹⁹ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.91 and p.99.

¹⁰⁰ A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), pp.71-2.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁰² Hughes, *Hardie’s Speeches and Writings*, p.18.

¹⁰³ J. Keir Hardie, *Killing No Murder!: The Government and the Railway Strike* (Manchester, 1911), p.22.

¹⁰⁴ Holman, *Hardie*, p.57.

¹⁰⁵ J. Schneer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester, 1990), p.27; Manuscript of Lansbury speech on the problem of unemployment delivered to the Christian Social Union, Oxford, May 1907, Lansbury/2 181-98, LSE archive.

¹⁰⁶ G. Taylor, *Socialism and Christianity: The Politics of the Church Socialist League* (Sheffield, 2000), p.41.

Like Holland, Hardie saw the state as the provider of justice: “Much may be left to the energy of the individual and the municipalities, but there is a minimum of humane living which it is in the interests of society to claim for every one of its members at the hands of the Central Government”.¹⁰⁷ Hardie and Lansbury therefore envisaged a state powerful enough to own land and industry, and provide “a minimum of humane living” to all the people that it represented.

Finally, despite Bickley’s description of Tawney as being suspicious of state power, he did not fear the state. Indeed, according to Anthony Wright, Tawney argued against both the Marxist claim that the state is essentially capitalist, therefore incapable of being used to socialist ends, and Friedrich Hayek’s claim that the state is essentially totalitarian.¹⁰⁸ As we have already seen, Tawney’s view was that the state was simply a neutral force – an “instrument, and nothing more” which could be used by whoever possessed it: “Fools will use it, when they can, for foolish ends, criminals for criminal ends. Sensible and decent men will use it for ends which are sensible and decent”.¹⁰⁹ Tawney goes on to describe the state as:

The faithful animal [which] will run our errands; fetch and carry for us; convey us on our journeys; attend our sick-beds; mind our children; show, on the rare occasions that we tell him, a handsome mouthful of sharp teeth, and generally behave like a useful and well-conducted cur. If he does not do his tricks nicely, we are quite capable of beating our own dog ourselves, as – to do him justice – he is well aware. It is really too much to expect us, at this time of day, to relapse into hysterics because some nervous professor has decided, on the grounds of high theory, that the harmless and obedient creatures, whom we have cursed, kicked and fondled all our lives, is in reality, not a dog at all, but a ferocious species of Siberian wolf.¹¹⁰

In this metaphor, Tawney views the state as able to perform a number of functions, including coercive functions – the dog’s “sharp teeth”. The state is also subject to control by the people, which fits in with the importance Tawney gives to democracy. Therefore, while Bickley is correct insofar as Tawney did not see the need for hands-on control by the state in

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, *Hardie’s Speeches and Writings*, p.29.

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Wright, *R.H. Tawney*, p.113.

¹⁰⁹ Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.164.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.164-5.

every sphere of life, neither was Tawney opposed to the idea of a relatively powerful socialist state.

10. Democracy, Equality and Conservatism

In the previous chapter we examined the nature of the co-operation and collectivism sought after by the Christian Socialists. In this we shall consider some other elements of the imagined socialist society, observing that Christian Socialists sought to establish the principles of democracy and equality. We will also consider some of the conservative elements of Christian Socialist thought.

Democracy

We have already seen that Christian Socialists, despite their revolutionary language, in practice sought a democratic route to socialism. However, democracy was not just the means by which socialism would be brought about, but would also be a feature of a socialist society. As R.H. Tawney put it: “The question for Socialists is not merely whether the state owns and controls the means of production. It is also, and even more important, who owns and controls the state. Democracy, in one form or another, is, in short, not merely one of several alternative methods of establishing a Socialist commonwealth. It is an essential condition of such a commonwealth’s existence”.¹ Tawney argued that undemocratic socialism would never gain enough support to be workable, writing that socialists “must face the fact that, if the public, and particularly the working-class public, is confronted with the choice between capitalist democracy, with all its nauseous insincerities, and undemocratic socialism they will choose the former every time. They must make it clear beyond the possibility of doubt that the socialist commonwealth which they preach will be built on democratic foundations”.²

Not all the Christian Socialists offer an extensive discussion of democracy in their work, but a commitment to democratic principles is implied in what they say and do. John Shepherd points to George Lansbury’s “unbridled passion for social justice and unshakable belief in democracy”.³ This can be seen in, for example, Lansbury’s desire to see self-rule given to India and Ireland as well as his support for the abolition of the hereditary House of

¹ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.170.

² A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.103.

³ J. Shepherd, *George Lansbury: At the Heart of Old Labour* (Oxford, 2002), p.3

Lords. Lansbury foresaw the extension of democracy via the creation of separate parliaments for England, Wales and Scotland, as well as Ireland.⁴ Lansbury's support for female suffrage, a topic to which we shall return, also points to his high view of democracy. Stewart Headlam also called for the abolition of the House of Lords, while John Clifford was a critic of the upper chamber, arguing against the Lords' veto.⁵

In a similar way, James Keir Hardie's favourable view of democracy is implied by his opposition to the undemocratic institution of monarchy.⁶ On the birth of the future Edward VIII, Hardie made clear his opposition in the House of Commons:

We are asked to rejoice because this child has been born, and that one day he will be called upon to rule over this great Empire. Up to the present time we have no means of knowing what his qualifications or fitness for that task may be. It certainly strikes me - I do not know how it strikes others - as rather strange that those who have so much to say about the hereditary element in another place should be so willing to endorse it in this particular instance. It seems to me that if it is a good argument to say that the hereditary element is bad in one case, it is an equally good argument to say that it is bad in the other.⁷

Here Hardie makes the point that the future ruler of the country may not be qualified to do so, and argues that if the hereditary House of Lords is to be opposed on the grounds of being undemocratic, then the monarchy must logically be opposed on the same grounds. The commitment to democracy of Lansbury, Clifford and Hardie is therefore evident.

Why did Christian Socialists commit themselves to democracy? Henry Scott Holland viewed it as an important safeguard if more and more power was to be left in the hands of the state. "[T]he only safety and resource lies in trusting a nation to make its own Laws [...] only under democracy can we afford to put out the amount of Legislation which our industrial situation necessitates. Any such minute regulation of the incessant details of daily labour would appear as an intolerable tyranny if any other authority than the workers' own attempted to impose it".⁸ Holland's view was that the "Government, which actually legislates and administers, through chosen representatives and qualified experts, must find

⁴ G. Dale, *God's Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 Years of Labour* (London, 2000), p.112 and p.114.

⁵ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.188 and p.193; P. d'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton NJ, 1968), p.345.

⁶ G.D.H. Cole, *James Keir Hardie: Fabian Society Biographical Series No.12* (London, 1941), p.28.

⁷ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie's Speeches and Writings - From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.35.

⁸ H. Scott Holland, ed., *Our Neighbours: A Handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.104.

its authoritative momentum in the living beings who lie behind it – in those very multitudes to whom its legislation is applied and whose interests it is to serve. Then, there will be nothing imposed; there will be no ideal dictated: there will be no artificial forcing”.⁹

William Temple did not accept that democracy was a result of the people’s sovereignty, as only God is and should be considered sovereign.¹⁰ However, he nevertheless did believe that democracy was the best system; by calling upon everybody to take a share in the responsibility of government democracy encouraged fellowship within society.¹¹ Democracy, though, must exist in subservience to the revealed will of God and be governed by Christian principles.¹² This was also the view of Samuel Keeble, who favoured democracy but also argued that “all forms of government should endeavour to become theocratic, in the sense that they explicitly acknowledge, by deed and not merely word, the ultimate authority of the moral law and the revealed will of God”.¹³

R.H Tawney’s commitment to democracy went deeper than others, insofar as he viewed democracy not just as a political system but a principle which should pervade the whole of society. Tawney “did not – first and foremost – advocate extensive public ownership or welfarism, but the extension of democracy into areas of life that had hitherto escaped its influence”.¹⁴ This was the point Tawney made in a lecture in 1941 in the United States, telling his audience that socialism meant “the extension of democracy from the sphere of government and law to that of economic life. Arbitrary economic power, exercised for purposes of personal profit is as incompatible with democracy as arbitrary political power”.¹⁵ Tawney elsewhere made the related argument that “democracy is unstable as a political system, as long as it remains a political system and nothing more, instead of being, as it should be, not only a form of government, but a type of society, and a manner of life which is in harmony with that type”.¹⁶

This included the extension of democracy into industrial life, and – in one form or another – workers having control over their own industry. Tawney therefore argues that industries ought to have “a constitution securing [their] members an effective voice in its

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.133.

¹⁰ A.M. Suggate, ‘William Temple’, in P. Scott and W.T. Cavanagh, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford, 2004), p.173.

¹¹ W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), p.143.

¹² Suggate, ‘Temple’, p.174.

¹³ S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), pp.211-12 and p.206.

¹⁴ P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.44.

¹⁵ L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), p.173.

¹⁶ R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London, 1938 – original publication 1931), p.xvii.

government”, and that “[w]hat is required is not simply to limit the power of Capital to impose terms upon Labour, but to make the workers, not the capitalist, the centre of industrial authority”, albeit “subject to such limitations upon their sovereignty as may be imposed in the interests of the community as a whole”.¹⁷ Tawney therefore foresaw a situation in which organisations within democracy were themselves democratic.

Equality

Christian Socialists, as might be expected, foresaw a society in which the principle of equality was enshrined. As George Lansbury explained, “true social co-operation means that we each give our very best, whether of brain power or manual power, for the service of mankind, and thus by equal service make it possible, so far as material things are concerned, equality of life for all”.¹⁸ Keir Hardie’s socialism, for example, has been described as “egalitarian”:¹⁹

Hardie’s socialism was essentially about equality. All people had a right to help shape a new kind of society. They could use their powers to achieve a more equal society by the public ownership of essential industries and just redistribution of goods between individuals. This material equality would occur when members were bound to each other by a commitment to the common good. This mutuality, this caring for each other, this fraternity, was the heart of socialism. And it extended to other races and so promoted peace.²⁰

Hardie imagined that “[u]nder Socialism there would be no exploiting class, no tyranny of one sex or race over another. Socialism would give reality to the claim so often insisted upon from the Christian pulpit, and yet so universally belied by our every day deeds, that God hath made of one blood all nations of the earth to dwell together in unity”.²¹

Hardie here suggests that human equality is based on a common status as God’s created beings. R.H. Tawney’s view was similar, described as being that “[s]ince all men were the children of God, each of infinitely precious, an end not a means, rich in the

¹⁷ Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.103 and p.110.

¹⁸ Lansbury, *Poverty*, p.15.

¹⁹ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010), p.57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.132.

²¹ J. Keir Hardie, *The I.L.P. and All About It* (Manchester, 1908), p.8. [Hardie is here referencing the Apostle Paul’s sermon at the Areopagus in Athens, recorded in Acts 17: “God that made the world and all things therein [...] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth”.]

possibilities for self-development, brothers and sisters in a shared humanity and a common civilisation. This is what is described here as Tawney's principle of equal worth".²² Samuel Keeble made the same argument: "Men are brothers, whether rich or poor, masters or men, high or low, white or coloured. They are equally the children of the heavenly father".²³ This was also the view of William Temple, who wrote that "apart from faith in God there is really nothing to be said for the notion of human equality. Men do not seem to be equal in any respect, if we judge by available evidence. But if all are children of one Father, then all are equal heirs of a status in comparison with which the apparent differences of quality and capacity are unimportant; in the deepest and most important of all – their relationship to God – all are equal".²⁴

Hardie explained that socialism "does not assume that all are alike, but only that all are equal".²⁵ This was the same view expressed by Tawney in *Equality*:

When the French [...] set [equality] side by side with liberty and fraternity as the motto of a new world, they did not mean that all men are equally intelligent or equally virtuous, any more than they are equally tall or equally fat, but that the unity of their national life should no longer be torn to pieces by obsolete property rights and meaningless juristic distinctions [...] When Arnold [...] wrote 'choose equality', he did not suggest, it may be suspected, that all children appeared to him to be equally clever, but that a nation acts unwisely in stressing heavily distinctions based on birth or money.²⁶

Equality, therefore, does not mean that everything or everyone must be the same. Lansbury, for example, writes: "I do not mean 'equality' in the sense of everybody having to do the same kind of work, but I do mean that men and women who toil shall receive the full fruits of their toil".²⁷ Tawney imagines society in the same way:

It is possible to conceive a community in which the necessary diversity of economic functions existed side by side with a large measure of economic and social equality. In such a community, while the occupations and incomes of individuals varied, they would live, nevertheless, in much the same environment, would enjoy similar standards of health and

²² Wright, *Tawney*, p.70.

²³ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.261.

²⁴ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.37.

²⁵ J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.10.

²⁶ R.H. Tawney, *Equality* (London, 1938 – original publication 1931), p.24.

²⁷ G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.19.

education, would find different positions, according to their varying abilities, equally accessible to them, would intermarry freely with each other, would be equally immune from the more degrading forms of poverty, and equally secure against economic oppression.²⁸

Tawney also argued, not for strict equality of incomes, but rather for “the pooling of [the nation’s] surplus resources by means of taxation, and the use of the funds thus obtained to make accessible to all, irrespective of their income”.²⁹ Therefore the Christian Socialist notion of equality was not that everybody would share the same characteristics, do the same work or receive the same income.

Instead, Tawney argued, “[t]he true meaning of equality, in short, is uniformity of legal rights. In this sense, and in this sense alone, is it proper to seek, or possible, to obtain it”.³⁰ Similarly, Keeble called for “[e]quality before the law, equal freedom, equal opportunities in the vital things of civilization”, as well as “equality of consideration, and equality of privilege”.³¹ Tawney and Keeble may have disagreed over Keeble’s phrase “equal opportunities”. Tawney felt that “equality of opportunity” was meaningless in a society without equality: “As though opportunities for talent to rise could be equalized in a society where the circumstances surrounding from birth are themselves unequal!”³² However, it is not evident that Keeble sought *only* equality of opportunity.

Most Christian Socialist calls for equality can be divided into three areas: sexual equality; racial and international equality; and class equality. John Clifford wrote that “the false idea of the inequality of the sexes has wrought incalculable mischief to the world through the injustice it has inflicted on women, refusing to them an equal share in the legislation and administrative activities of the State, holding back equal pay for equal work with men; refusing equal marriage and divorce laws, and equal municipal and political responsibilities and privileges”.³³ Keir Hardie argued that “[o]urs is the one political movement where women stand on terms of perfect equality with men”.³⁴ Stewart Headlam wrote of his concern that Labour would provide only for the needs of the male working

²⁸ Tawney, *Equality*, p.62.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.141.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.100.

³¹ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.243; S.E. Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism: Essays for the Times* (London, 1906), p.25.

³² Wright, *Tawney*, pp.72-3; Tawney, *Equality*, p.115.

³³ J. Clifford, *The Gospel of World Brotherhood According to Jesus* (London, 1920), p.140.

³⁴ Hardie, *I.L.P.*, p.13.

class, thereby excluding women and their needs.³⁵ Keir Hardie, for one, would presumably have disagreed with Headlam; both would agree that socialism should result in sexual equality, but while Hardie saw the Labour Party as the vehicle for socialism, Headlam makes the distinction between socialism and “Labourism”.

Hardie saw in socialism a call for sexual equality, and argued that socialism would free women by removing their financial dependence upon men.³⁶ George Lansbury argued against any view of women as being inferior to men: “We must also set our faces against all theories of inferiority where women are concerned: we must declare with unceasing insistence that motherhood and home-making are great services; above all, that women’s life and work together with man’s shall be recognised as of value to the State”.³⁷ Both Hardie and Lansbury expressed their view of sexual equality by campaigning in support of female suffrage. Hardie argued for the importance of women having the right to vote within the Independent Labour Party, and both “Hardie and Lansbury criticized Labour’s failure unanimously to support the women’s cause or condemn the force-feeding of women”.³⁸ Lansbury argued that “political power should be in the hands of women as well as men”.³⁹ In 1912 he resigned his Bow and Bromley Parliamentary seat in order to fight a by-election on the issue of enfranchising women, and the following year was imprisoned following a speech made in support of suffragette tactics.⁴⁰ Hardie resigned from the Labour Party executive in order to fight for Lansbury in the 1912 by-election.⁴¹

Nor were these men the only among Christian Socialists to support female suffrage. John Clifford, for one, “was always on the side of enfranchisement of women”.⁴² Samuel Keeble, for another, called for “full civic and legal recognition” for women, for:

they are equally important members of the community with men, and have their own rights and duties in relation to the community as such. They are under its laws, and profit or suffer by civic development and change quite as much as, if not more than, men. They are, as sisters, wives, and mothers, as well as workers, and often property-owners, a vital portion of the civic community, and should be legally recognised as such, with the full rights of

³⁵ S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), pp.80-1.

³⁶ J. Keir Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism* (London, 1907), p.63.

³⁷ Lansbury, *Poverty*, pp.71-2.

³⁸ J. Bruce Glasier, *Keir Hardie: A Memorial* (London, 1915), p.38; Dale, *God’s Politicians*, p.50.

³⁹ Lansbury, *Poverty*, p.119.

⁴⁰ Shepherd, *Lansbury*, p.115 and pp.131-2.

⁴¹ Holman, *Hardie*, p.164.

⁴² J.. Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H.: Life, Letters and Reminiscences* (London, 1924), p.200.

citizenship. There certainly cannot now be any healthy and progressive civic life where women do not claim, receive, and exercise equal civic rights and duties with men.⁴³

Elsewhere Keeble called for “Justice to Women”, pointing to “legal injustices in matters of divorce and property; political injustices, in matters of citizen rights and duties, and the franchise; industrial injustices, in sweating, defective factory laws and inspection, in the employment of married women, especially mothers, in the denial of equal remuneration with men for absolutely equal services; social injustices, in the prevalence of two standards of morality for the sexes – the more lenient for the not less guilty sinner, the man”.⁴⁴

However, it is not certain that all Christian Socialists viewed sexual equality as being of such great importance. R.H. Tawney has been criticised for the lack of references to women in his work. Tawney wrote of an imaginary “Henry Dubb”, the archetypal working-class man, a reference played upon by his biographer Anthony Wright: “Where, by the way, is the female Dubb in Tawney’s universe? There are far too many ‘men’ in his socialist argument [...] and a conspicuous absence of women (except, when needed, as wives, mothers and children). No doubt he meant to write about human beings, but he actually wrote about men”.⁴⁵ This criticism is echoed by Alan Wilkinson.⁴⁶ However, it would be wrong to argue from silence that Tawney was not in favour of sexual equality.

Another biographer points to a letter Tawney wrote to a friend from Baliol, in which he wrote that he was “plagued with old ladies” who ask him his views on female suffrage, “which are that women are all fools, that all women over 30 are damned fools, & that anyhow injustice is the best policy”; this, however, is defended as “knockabout student stuff, a display of bravado and self-mockery, and probably of no consequence in a political context”.⁴⁷ It is probably fair to say that a genuine argument against female suffrage would not refer to “injustice” being “the best policy”. It should be noted that Tawney “protested in 1933 when the University of Liverpool slipped into women’s contracts the stipulation that they must resign from the teaching staff on marriage”; he also “gave support to a campaign to raise funds for Hillcroft, the women’s adult education college in Surbiton”.⁴⁸ Tawney’s calls for equality can certainly be interpreted as including women; for example, Tawney’s

⁴³ S. E. Keeble, ‘The City, or Service of the Citizens’, in S.E. Keeble, ed., *The Citizen of To-Morrow* (London, 1909), pp.288-9.

⁴⁴ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.129.

⁴⁵ Wright, *Tawney*, p.146.

⁴⁶ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.111.

⁴⁷ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.301.

picture of a “society which [...] holds that the most important aspect of *human beings* is not the external differences of income and circumstance that divide them, *but the common humanity that unites them*, and which strives, therefore, to reduce such differences to the position of insignificance that rightly belongs to them”; this, according to Tawney, is the “society which British socialists are labouring to create”, as evidenced by the campaigning of Hardie and Lansbury.⁴⁹

It is also evident that Christian Socialists believed in racial and national equality. George Lansbury argued: “This Labour Movement of ours stands in a very real sense for the uplifting of the people of all races and classes”.⁵⁰ To Lansbury, “the mere accident of being born in a special part of the globe should not confer any special privilege or power upon anyone”.⁵¹ Keir Hardie explained that the “exploitation of the coloured races by the whites is just as obnoxious to the Socialist as is the exploitation of the poor by the rich”.⁵² “When Indian can meet European as a fully enfranchised equal”, wrote Hardie, “and compel that respect which is his due, then, and not before, will race prejudice begin to die out and finally to disappear”.⁵³ Samuel Keeble described a true, Christian patriotism, which involved “the love of other countries, as much as is the love of one’s own home”.⁵⁴ John Clifford, similarly, declared in stark language that “I do not care for the brotherliness that goes out to Timbuctoo and forgets the starving poor in Paddington; nor do I value highly the patriotism that talks incessantly of the workless in London, and is dumb as death about the atrocities in Armenia, and the lynching of negroes in the Southern States of America”.⁵⁵

Peter d’A Jones describes the Christian Socialist attitude to the British Empire: “Colonial expansion was the one object of censure common to almost all Christian socialists” who, like other socialists and liberals, viewed the Empire as an instrument of capitalist oppression.⁵⁶ However, Christian Socialists did not seek to abolish the Empire as such; rather, they sought to convert it into a Socialist Commonwealth. “In relation to the Empire leading Leftists such as George Lansbury and John Wheatley now argued that Labour should seek to transform the area under British protection into a commonwealth

⁴⁹ Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.167. [Emphasis added.]

⁵⁰ Manuscript of a speech by Lansbury entitled ‘The Chief Need of the Labour Movement’, 5 May 1911, LSE archive, Lansbury/4 202-205.

⁵¹ Antimilitarism speech by Lansbury, *The Arbitrator*, May 1892, LSE archive Lansbury/1 150.

⁵² Hardie, *I.L.P.*, p.13.

⁵³ Holman, *Hardie*, p.153.

⁵⁴ Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.197.

⁵⁵ Marchant, *Clifford*, p.99.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Victorian Christian Socialists*, pp.198-9.

based on socialist principles which, in contrast to the competitive, bellicose world of capitalism, would represent a new co-operative idea of international relations”.⁵⁷ As George Lansbury explained:

It is true we do not desire to maintain an Empire built on force, domination and exploitation: every such Empire of the past has perished. We love our own land and mean to rule ourselves: we think other peoples who love their land should enjoy the same right. Therefore we urge the workers of Britain, now they have the power, to transform the Empire into a commonwealth within which the so-called subject races shall become partners and comrades.⁵⁸

“There is no reason for breaking up the British Empire”, argued Lansbury, “any more than there is reason for smashing our own national institutions. Our duty is to transform the British Empire of Domination into a Commonwealth of free nations, including within this Commonwealth those people who desire to join with us”.⁵⁹ Similar views were held by Hardie, who, “was not opposed to imperialism as such, merely to its militarist and undemocratic form”.⁶⁰

Lansbury went a step further in arguing for a commonwealth, not just of those countries within the British Empire, but “a commonwealth of all the nations of the world, in which shall cease not merely ugly war, but also the internecine strife of competitive commercialism”.⁶¹ Similarly, Keeble – criticising the League of Nations as a “League of Victors” – argued that the League ought to be reformed, allowing all countries to be a part of it.⁶² William Temple also sought an international commonwealth, but based more explicitly on Christianity; Temple’s “aim was for the voluntary acceptance of a kind of ecumenical Christian commonwealth on a national and international scale”.⁶³ Lansbury’s view – expressed in the memorandum for a meeting with Adolf Hitler as part of his ill-fated peace campaign, to which we shall return – is that “an effort must be made to treat the world as an economic unity, all nations understanding that the prosperity of each means the prosperity of

⁵⁷ J. Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain Since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), p.107.

⁵⁸ Open letter to electorate from Lansbury, General Election May 1929, LSE archive, Lansbury/9 39-41.

⁵⁹ Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain*, p.107.

⁶⁰ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (London, 2007), p.52.

⁶¹ Manuscript of a speech by Lansbury entitled ‘The Chief Need of the Labour Movement’, 5 May 1911, LSE archive, Lansbury/4 202-205.

⁶² Keeble, *Christian Responsibility*, p.197.

⁶³ A.M. Suggate, ‘William Temple’, in P. Scott and W.T. Cavanaugh, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford, 2004), pp.165-79.

all”.⁶⁴ We can therefore conclude that the vision of a Christian Socialist future was one of racial equality and international co-operation.

While it might be imagined that Christian Socialists argued for the supremacy of the working class, it seems instead that they argued for class equality. This was a theme in the work of Stewart Headlam, especially in *The Socialist's Church*. Headlam argued that the working class and the middle class were both wage slaves, and that as such working-class and middle-class interests are “identical”; the word “worker” should therefore refer to “all those who with brain or hand are producing something adequate in return for what they consume”.⁶⁵ Headlam foresaw “a Society which knows no class distinction”.⁶⁶ It could be assumed that Headlam’s views derive from his own middle-class background and his opposition to the Labour Party. Here he points to “the danger of exalting the working class above the other workers who do not belong to the ‘working class’,” adding that “Labourism, for instance, is an unnecessary challenge to the middle classes, who stand to gain largely by Socialism, but who for the most part do not know this, and who think they are attacking Socialism, while really what they are attacking is class legislation in the interest of ‘Labour’.”⁶⁷

However, the same sentiments are shared by other Christian Socialists. Keir Hardie’s view was that “Socialism makes war upon a system, not upon a class”.⁶⁸ According to James Maxton, Hardie “wrote critically of the conception of the class struggle as a motive for social change”.⁶⁹ It is certainly true that, like Headlam, Hardie argued that “[t]he term ‘working class’ is not used in any restricted sense, but includes all who by head or hand are rendering useful service to the community”.⁷⁰ Like Headlam, Hardie foresaw a classless society, writing that socialism “will one day abolish class distinctions”.⁷¹ This was for two reasons. Firstly, there would be no private ownership of property: “When the property-less working class has made all capitalistic property public property, then classes will have disappeared, since that which now divides a community into classes, the private ownership of property, will have disappeared”.⁷² Secondly, everybody would be engaged in “useful

⁶⁴ Memorandum for interview with Hitler by Lansbury, 19 April 1937, LSE archive, Lansbury/16 145-7.

⁶⁵ Headlam, *Socialist's Church*, pp.78-9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.72 and p.73.

⁶⁸ Foote, *Labour's Political Thought*, p.43.

⁶⁹ J. Maxton, *Keir Hardie: Prophet and Pioneer* (London, 1933), p.14.

⁷⁰ Hardie, *I.L.P.*, p.11.

⁷¹ J. Keir Hardie, *Karl Marx: The Man and His Message* (London, 1910), p.15.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.11.

service to the community”, and therefore everybody would be part of the working class: “When the modern industrial movement reaches fruition, land, capital, and the State itself shall be owned and controlled by the useful classes. There shall no longer be an exploiting class left to reduce the workers again to penury and want”.⁷³ Hardie even agreed with Headlam’s view of the middle class as being oppressed by capital, going still further by including the “upper classes”:

The poverty of the poorer, the business of the middle, and the wealth of the upper classes, are but different forms of bondage. Socialism has its message of freedom for all three, To the poor it offers release from the bondage of thankless toil and harassing poverty; to the middle class it promises freedom from the tyranny of the market, and to the rich it holds out the hope of joy in life in exchange for the burden of property.⁷⁴

To Hardie then, just as much as to Headlam, socialism meant good news to all classes and sections of society. For this reason Hardie happily reports that “men and women from all ranks and classes of society are casting their lot in with the workers”.⁷⁵

R.H. Tawney agrees with Headlam and Hardie that there should not be a narrow understanding of who was and was not a worker. Tawney regarded manual workers and managers as being “different grades of workers”, adding that “an equilibrium between worker and manager is possible, because both are workers”.⁷⁶ This, however, was not the case for owners who performed no workplace function; because he performed no function, such an owner should not be considered a worker. “Joint councils between workers and managers may succeed, but joint councils between workers and owners or agents of owners [...] will not, because the necessity for the mere owner is itself one of the points in dispute.”⁷⁷ Tawney’s vision of society is one in which there would be no functionless owners or masters, but those who worked at management and organisation would take their “proper place as one worker among others”.⁷⁸ In ‘The Choice Before the Labour Party’ Tawney argued that the business of the party ought not to be “the passage of a series of

⁷³ Hardie, *Serfdom to Socialism*, p.60.

⁷⁴ Hardie, *I.L.P.*, p.6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁷⁶ R.H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London, 1921), p.94.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁷⁸ Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.110.

reforms in the interests of different sections of the working classes”.⁷⁹ In this he would have found the agreement of Stewart Headlam. “It is,” Tawney continues, “to abolish all advantages and disabilities which have their source, not in differences of personal quality, but in disparities of wealth, opportunity, social position and economic power. It is, in short – it is absurd that at this time of day the statement should be necessary – a classless society”.⁸⁰

For Tawney, the equality of people regardless of class meant that there should be no inequality in education, and that all children should be able to attend the same schools. Tawney argued that the “English educational system will never be one worthy of a civilized society until the children of all classes in the nation attend the same schools”.⁸¹ This view was shared by William Temple, who argued that the existence of private schools “makes a cleavage in the educational and social life of the country as a whole”, adding that “it should be possible for children from every kind of home to come into any kind of school provided that they are qualified by mental, physical and personal talents”.⁸²

Wilfred Wellock was another who made this equality of classes a key theme in his work; “saw the basic evil of capital as a moral or spiritual one, shared by capitalists and workers alike”.⁸³ In *Christian Communism* Wellock argued that “[i]t ought not to be forgotten that for the most part [capitalists] are the victims of circumstances, of a fatally false view of life, inculcated in the home, the church, in school and college, in consequence of which they have, though in a quite different way, as much to gain by resort to Communism as have the workers”; “Communism,” he declared, “is the condition of well-being to the capitalists no less than the workers”.⁸⁴ Wellock believed that capitalists would eventually come to accept the immorality of capitalism, and would therefore assist in the creation of a new society and their part in it.⁸⁵

This was also the view of Samuel Keeble, who argued that “the interests of Capital and Labour are identical – certainly all their permanent interests are, if their temporary interests are not, and therefore their strife is suicidal as well as fratricidal”.⁸⁶ Yet, like Wellock, Keeble was optimistic that this strife would pass, for the labourer “has friends even

⁷⁹ R.H. Tawney, ‘The Choice Before the Labour Party’, *Political Quarterly*, 3, 3 (1932), p.27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Tawney, *Equality*, p.177.

⁸² Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p.91.

⁸³ A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life In Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.6.

⁸⁴ W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1922), p.36 and p.42.

⁸⁵ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), pp.39-40; Rigby, *Wellock*, p.36.

⁸⁶ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.272.

among the capitalists themselves [...] this is perhaps the most hopeful sign of all, for when there are searchings of heart in the very camp of the enemy, victory is not distant”.⁸⁷ George Lansbury sought “to rouse an entirely different spirit, that recognises our common brotherhood and the unity of all life, rather than insist upon the rights and righteousness of ones own class as against the others”.⁸⁸ Lansbury perhaps sums up the Christian Socialist attitude to class equality: “Our Party is not a class or a sect. It comprises the whole mass of the nation. For to our ranks we welcome all who work, whether by hand or brain: the only test of membership is willingness to serve”.⁸⁹

Conservatism

There are elements of conservatism in Christian Socialist thinking. Given the religious basis, Christian Socialism is perhaps more prone to this than other forms of socialism. Attitudes to family, marriage and sexuality and alcohol, for example, reflected conservative Christian thinking, as well as the moral attitude of the period. In some instances conservative views were also held about the poor and unemployed.

In some cases the tag of conservative could be applied simply due to moderation, from, as an example, Henry Scott Holland’s Christian Social Union. Jones points out that “the CSU fell far short of what is traditionally regarded as socialism”.⁹⁰ This may not have been by design, but rather because of a focus on theological issues and matters such as religious education rather than on economics. Chris Bryant suggests this was a difference between the CSU and Stewart Headlam’s Guild of St Matthew, “with the Union far less certain than the Guild about any direct commitment to redistribution or economic socialism”.⁹¹

In 1897 John Carter, the secretary of the CSU, described the Union’s position as being that “it should always be possible for a sincere Christian to be either a good Tory or a good radical, or even an honest Socialist or a moral Individualist”.⁹² In 1905 a CSU pamphlet on *Socialism* argued that “[i]n most countries, Socialism is a hostile movement of

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.168.

⁸⁸ Interview with Lansbury from the Christian Commonwealth Newspaper, 11 August 1915, LSE archive, Lansbury/7 213.

⁸⁹ Parliamentary Election, 1918, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 B 29-30.

⁹⁰ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.205.

⁹¹ C. Bryant, *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (London, 1996), p.96.

⁹² Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.51.

the lower classes against the upper; in England it is rather a benevolent movement of the upper classes towards the lower".⁹³ In 1906 the CSU's executive included both a Liberal and a Tory MP, but no representative from the Labour Party.⁹⁴ By 1909 "rival Christian socialists were complaining of the Union's conservatism".⁹⁵ In 1911 Henry Scott Holland wrote that "we have not got to take a Competitive Society to pieces and reconstruct it on Co-operative lines. All that is needed is that we should emphasise again, and release into full play, the Co-operative powers which are already and always in action".⁹⁶

According to Alan Wilkinson, "[t]he CSU envisaged society as a partnership in which consumers would exercise ethical discrimination in purchasing; management would cooperate for the common good; and the state or city would act to regulate conditions and in some cases provide services".⁹⁷ On the face of it this seems a similar vision that that imagined by R.H. Tawney. However, Tawney wanted to identify and remove those owners of property who provided no service and performed no function, leaving only "managers" who actually worked for a living; there is no evidence that the CSU sought to do likewise. Perhaps then Tawney's vision can be defended as socialist, but the CSU's, as Jones puts it, falls short. Wilkinson, however, makes the case for the CSU's "right to be included in the socialist tradition", arguing that the term "socialism" has often been understood to mean "social reform" rather than revolution or "class war".⁹⁸ Nevertheless, there was a conservative element in the thought of Holland and the CSU which prevented a full and unflinching commitment to socialism.

The same could be said of Stewart Headlam and the Guild of St Matthew, though in Bryant's view the Guild made more of a commitment to socialism than the CSU. If anything Headlam was more bitterly opposed to Labour than the CSU, who were open to different political parties. However, as we have seen, Headlam's opposition was not because he was opposed to economic socialism, but because he differentiated between socialism and that which was proposed for the benefit of trade unions and working-class men. Samuel Keeble helped to found the Wesleyan Methodist Union of Social Service, one of a number of organisations influenced by the Christian Social Union. Similarly, the Methodist Union aimed at "social reform without socialism", and while it "continued to influence the Church

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁹⁵ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.216.

⁹⁶ Holland, *Our Neighbours*, p.115.

⁹⁷ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.47.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.52-3.

towards a social outlook, it was one increasingly divorced from that of the Christian Socialism that Keeble championed”.⁹⁹ However, we will see that Keeble himself demonstrated some conservative traits in his thinking.

Christian Socialists often had conservative ideas about marriage and sexuality. In this is shown most clearly the influence of religious belief; John Wheatley, for example, as a devout Roman Catholic refused to support a campaign to improve education about and supply of contraceptives.¹⁰⁰ William Temple argued that venereal disease would be almost completely eliminated if men and women ceased to practice “illicit sexual intercourse” or “fornication”, adding that this behaviour ought to be “something that arouses the condemnation of all decent citizens”.¹⁰¹ Temple stated plainly that “[a]ll sexual indulgence outside matrimony is contrary to God’s law and is sin”.¹⁰² Samuel Keeble records that one of the resolutions to come from Temple’s Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship was that “young people should receive instruction in the matters of sex, and in the nature of Christian marriage”.¹⁰³

Keeble’s view was that while “Socialism threatens the family and the Church, and through them morality and religion, Christian Socialism cleaves close to them both”.¹⁰⁴ Keeble argued that “Christians can never support those who extend the doctrine of all things in common – to wives”, adding: “‘Free love’, or unions and separations at will [...] mean the reign of animal passion and vice, the degradation of women and the abolition of family life”.¹⁰⁵ However, Keeble also suggested that capitalism was just as much an enemy to family life, Christian marriage and the status of women as non-Christian socialism.¹⁰⁶ Stewart Headlam argued that under capitalism it was as hard to make a good marriage as Ruskin and Morris had pointed out it was to make a good chair. Marriage, however, “cannot be conveniently socialized, while Chairmaking might be”.¹⁰⁷ According to Headlam, “free love” had “nothing at all to do with Socialism, which simply aims at the tremendous

⁹⁹ Edwards, *Keeble*, p.32.

¹⁰⁰ Wood, *Wheatley*, pp.146-7.

¹⁰¹ Temple, *Church Looks Forward*, p.66 and p.71.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.76.

¹⁰³ S.E. Keeble, *‘COPEC’: An Account of the Christian Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship* (London, 1924), p.12.

¹⁰⁴ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.90.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.146 and p.147.

¹⁰⁶ Keeble, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.9.

¹⁰⁷ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the Masses and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), pp.133.

revolution of getting the great means of production out of the Monopolists and into the hands of the people”.¹⁰⁸

George Lansbury supported the introduction of legal divorce in Russia, but only, it seems, with great reluctance, re-affirming his personal belief in the sanctity of marriage:

The longer I live the more convinced monogamist I am, but, and it is a very big but, I have seen so much downright misery, so much deceit and lying makebelieve by married people trying to make the outside world believe they love one another, when indeed they detest each other, that I support any rational means whereby such people may secure freedom from a tie which only degrades them both [...] In Russia and elsewhere the Church considers marriage a sacrament and binding for life; so do I, but this cannot be imposed by a law or a Church ordinance or a priest saying it is.¹⁰⁹

Keir Hardie also “stressed the values of family life”.¹¹⁰ There may well be a hint of Hardie’s conservatism when he wrote of Stewart Headlam that “[a]s a Scotsman and a Nonconformist, I well remember the shock it gave me that the leading member of the Guild divided his attention fairly evenly between socialism and the ballet”.¹¹¹ Headlam caused a great deal of controversy when he assisted in posting bail for Oscar Wilde. In this he demonstrated his own liberalism, but also the conservatism of the other members of the Guild. One called for a new leader who “would make it very clear that the Guild rejected doctrines subversive of Christian marriage”.¹¹² Another, Charles Marson, mocked Headlam, declaring that it was possible to build a new Jerusalem “without wading through Gomorrah first”.¹¹³

Another area in which Christian Socialists displayed quite a conservative attitude was alcohol. Keir Hardie was a lifelong teetotaler, who entered politics by campaigning for temperance. “When a man is so lost to moral control and to decency as to become a slave to a degrading influence in liquor” said Hardie, “he thereby forfeits his claim to be regarded as a responsible being fit to be entrusted with the duties of citizenship”.¹¹⁴ Hardie also wanted “the community” to have “the right to declare the liquor trade a public nuisance, and as such

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.134.

¹⁰⁹ G. Lansbury, *What I Saw in Russia* (London, 1920), pp.48-9.

¹¹⁰ Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain*, p.50.

¹¹¹ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.146.

¹¹² Bryant, *Possible Dreams*, p.92.

¹¹³ Orens, *Headlam*, p.122.

¹¹⁴ Hughes, *Hardie’s Speeches and Writings*, p.66.

to be voted out of existence”.¹¹⁵ Hardie’s ideas about drinking did change slightly; originally he regarded drinking as a cause of poverty, but later came to regard both as symptomatic of capitalism: “drunkenness, like gambling, immorality, and profligacy generally, is but a symptom of a more deeply-seated disease [...] the cause is unnatural, anti-human, respect-destroying conditions by which man is surrounded and, if the diagnosis be correct, the true remedy is to be found in cleansing our moral sewers of the poisons which selfishness and Mammon-worship have tainted them”.¹¹⁶

John Wheatley was also an abstainer from alcohol, and while an MP voted in favour of prohibition.¹¹⁷ Keeble was another fierce opponent of drinking, arguing that “it is utterly immoral to waste money required for necessities in drink” and that “working men should avoid drink as an enemy”.¹¹⁸ Keeble did not call for absolute prohibition, but came very close to it: “Drink reform should occupy a very prominent place in the workers’ programme. It should begin with the work of moral suasion [...] Then the movement should work up to the most desirable end of reducing the number of legalized temptations to drink and strictly controlling the drink-trade”.¹¹⁹ Keeble also makes the startling argument that “[i]f the resources already wasted in drink and gambling had been used by the working classes for the amelioration of their own condition and the strengthening of their own social and industrial position, they would have been in a state of prosperity today”.¹²⁰ This is the kind of argument that Hardie might have made early in his career, but later rejected.

Other Christian Socialists were not quite as stern regarding the consumption of alcohol. Lansbury was himself a teetotaler for most of his life, and included in one of his early election platforms a commitment to public control of liquor traffic.¹²¹ However, he was also criticised for allowing, as the First Commissioner for Works, the serving of alcohol at Hyde Park Lido, and late in life drank occasional glasses of wine for medical purposes.¹²² R.H. Tawney’s view was that the socialist society should not be “a herd of tame, well-nourished animals, with wise keepers in command. It is a community of responsible men and women working without fear in comradeship for common ends, all of whom can grow

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.67.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68.

¹¹⁷ Wood, *Wheatley*, p.86 and p.172.

¹¹⁸ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, pp.308-9 and p.310.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.311.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.309.

¹²¹ Leaflet advertising Lansbury's Parliamentary Election bid in Bow and Bromley, [August?] 1900, LSE archives, Lansbury/1 334-335.

¹²² Shepherd, *Lansbury*, p.345.

to their full stature, develop to the utmost limit the varying capacities with which nature has endowed them, and – since virtue should not be too austere – have their fling when they feel like it”.¹²³

The church pastored by John Clifford ran a temperance bar known as Clifford’s Inn, and Clifford himself was an advocate of temperance. However, he was also critical of those whose moral code consisted solely of “a series of negative commandments, such as ‘Don’t bet’, ‘Don’t drink’, ‘Don’t cheat’, ‘Don’t swear’,” and seemed to suggest that “on these and their like hangs all the law of human safety and progress”.¹²⁴ Stewart Headlam believed that men could be encouraged to drink less – for example, by making work healthy and pleasurable – but that full prohibition was “unchristian”.¹²⁵ “People drink too much”, argued Headlam, “because they have failed to realise how many and various are the delightful pleasures to be got out of life: yet only a few years ago there were serious religious people who told you that you must not dance, you must not play cards, you must not go to theatres, except perhaps for one or two, that you must certainly never go to music halls”.¹²⁶ Not all Christian Socialists, therefore, were completely opposed to the consumption of alcohol, or prioritised their opposition to it.

Christian Socialists could also demonstrate conservative attitudes towards the poor and unemployed. We have already seen Keeble arguing that the working class might have improved its position had men not given themselves so much to alcohol. For Keeble this was true not only of drinking, but other vices. “Much of the poverty of the lower labouring classes is self-caused”, he declared, “caused by sheer laziness, by drink, gambling, and vicious living”; Keeble argued that this applied to what he termed the “idle class”, a group distinct from the presumably more virtuous working class.¹²⁷ It is perhaps surprising to hear this from one who has been identified as a socialist, who professed some admiration for Marx, and who in the same book called for “the elevation of the working classes by putting them in full possession of the product of their labours, and therefore of themselves”.¹²⁸ However, Keeble’s views were more balanced than the above may suggest. Poverty, he suggested, also “comes to many who have no bad and many good habits, who are literally

¹²³ Tawney, *Radical Tradition*, p.168.

¹²⁴ Marchant, *Clifford*, p.55.

¹²⁵ S.D. Headlam, *The Meaning of the Mass: Five Lectures with other Sermons and Addresses* (London, 1905), pp.21-2 and p.64.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.38.

¹²⁷ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.293.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.90.

the *victims* of poverty”, those who are “honest, willing, industrious men [who] cannot earn their bread because they find no work to do”; of the “million of the unemployed amongst us”, Keeble continues, “only a small proportion are ‘wastrels’,” adding that due to research into the causes of poverty “the old cry that the unemployed are drinkers, idlers, loafers, inefficient, and ne’er-do-wells is finally silenced”.¹²⁹

George Lansbury took a similar tone to Keeble, arguing that there should be “no sympathy either with the rich loafer or the poor loafer. We want all men of the country to do their share of the work of the community”.¹³⁰ Lansbury favoured the setting up of labour colonies for the long-term unemployed, succeeding in setting up two of these at Laindon and Hollesey Bay, and suggesting that, in the labour colony, “the man or woman refusing to work should simply not eat”.¹³¹ Keir Hardie was also a supporter of this idea.¹³² Again, Lansbury wrote that “if each county or town had its labour colony, all tramps should be sent there [...] in every case no penal task should be enforced, simply ordinary work under ordinary conditions, and for punishment I should say, ‘No work, no food’.”¹³³ Lansbury applied a similar principle in his own business. When men came seeking employment they would be offered an immediate start, and if they sought to delay beginning work Lansbury would not employ them; a reporter explained that “he never believes a man wanted work unless he was willing to start at once”.¹³⁴ Lansbury, however, did not believe that most men would refuse work, pointing to the example of around one hundred men who were sent from the Poplar Workhouse to work in Essex: “Of the whole number sent, only some half a dozen proved wasters”.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, both Lansbury and Keeble demonstrate some conservative views about the poor and unemployed: that in at least some cases their problems were self-caused, the result of laziness and immoral living.

Does this mean that Christian Socialism is a conservative ideology? Sometimes it is presented as such, perhaps most recently by the “Blue Labour” movement. One of the leaders of Blue Labour, Jon Cruddas, regards George Lansbury as Labour’s greatest ever leader; an executive member of Christians of the Left (formerly the Christian Socialist

¹²⁹ Keeble, *Material Life*, p.179 [emphasis in original] and pp.207-9.

¹³⁰ Speech by Lansbury in the House of Commons entitled ‘Right to Work’, 10 February 1911, LSE archive, Lansbury/4 172-174.

¹³¹ Newspaper interview in the ‘Morning Post’ with Lansbury, 8 November 1905, LSE archive, Lansbury/2 138.

¹³² Holman, *Hardie*, p.123.

¹³³ ‘The position of the Poor Law in the problem of poverty’, paper read at a conference, c1905 (slip proof), LSE archive, Lansbury 29/1.

¹³⁴ Newspaper cutting from the Manchester Daily Despatch ‘Mr. George Lansbury, the man who menaced the premier’, 26 June 1913, LSE archive, Lansbury/28 72.

¹³⁵ Lansbury 29/1.

Movement), Ian Geary, is co-convenor of the Blue Labour Midlands seminar and co-editor of *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics*; and Christian Socialist Frank Field makes a contribution to the book. In his chapter Field argues that Blue Labour values such as “country, loyalty [...] the belief that duties beget rights” as being Christian values.¹³⁶

In some ways the connection is justified: “Blue Labour blends a ‘progressive’ commitment to greater economic equality with a more ‘conservative’ disposition emphasising personal loyalty, family, community and locality”, and to an extent this fits in with what we have seen of the conservative element of Christian Socialist thought.¹³⁷ However, while a mere “commitment to greater economic equality” may well be a fair definition of what Scott Holland was aiming for, it certainly does not do justice to the radical changes imagined by Keir Hardie, Lansbury, Wheatley, Tawney or Headlam. These all foresaw the replacement of capitalism by socialism, rather than the Blue Labour approach of simply managing capitalism in a fairer way.

Christian Socialism therefore combined elements of radical and conservative thought, though the extent of conservative thinking should not be assumed or exaggerated. As one writer notes, an analysis into non-Christian and Christian socialism does not “correspond in any way to an analysis into Left and Right, into moderate and extreme”, for “Christian Socialists in parliament have generally been on the left of the Labour Party and advocated a thorough-going Socialism [...] [T]hey have resisted the temptation to compromise with a capitalist system they have regarded as fundamentally unjust”.¹³⁸ The words of Conrad Noel provide an appropriate conclusion: “Christian Socialism [...] is not, as some appear to think, a particular variety of Socialism, milder than the secular brand, but economic Socialism come to by the road of the Christian faith and inspired by the ideas of the Gospel”.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ F. Field, ‘A Blue Labour Vision of the Common Good’, in, I. Geary and A. Pabst, eds, *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics* (London, 2015), p.60.

¹³⁷ I. Geary and A. Pabst, eds, *Blue Labour: Forging a New Politics* (London, 2015), back cover.

¹³⁸ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.341 and p.373.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.373.

11. Pacifism and Utopianism

So far in this section we have looked at some principles – collectivism, democracy and equality, for example – which Christian Socialists envisaged being part of a new socialist society. In this final chapter we will examine Christian Socialist pacifism and the belief that the world would be free from war. This will lead us to consider the utopian elements of Christian Socialist thinking about the nature of the new society.

Pacifism

One of the most pronounced aspects of Christian Socialism is pacifism. Jones described Christian Socialists as being “bitterly opposed” to the Boer War, adding that “Christian socialists preserved more of a united front against colonial war than did British socialists in general”.¹ Keir Hardie and John Wheatley, among others, were opposed to the First World War, while George Lansbury – “a convinced pacifist” – embarked upon a major campaign to try and prevent the Second World War.² However, we will see that not all Christian Socialists were pacifists, and even the opposition of those who were was not always absolute.

Henry Scott Holland was a fierce opponent of the Boer War; in a sermon at St Paul’s Cathedral he spoke of his disbelief “that we could fall so far from the very memory of Jesus Christ”, adding: “We should humiliate ourselves for the blundering recklessness with which we entered on the war, and the insolence and arrogance which blinded us so utterly”.³ Jones describes John Clifford as an “avowed pacifist” who was “bitterly against the Boer War”.⁴ Clifford persuaded a group of Nonconformist ministers to join him in calling for:

1. Immediate surrender of all arms.
2. Unlimited amnesty.

¹ P. d’A Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival* (Princeton NJ, 1868), p.9.

² G. Dale, *God’s Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 Years of Labour* (London, 2000), p.36, p.75 and p.109.

³ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.202.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.344.

3. A federation of South African states, with autonomy for each guaranteed,
4. Equality for all races.
5. Protection of the African natives and their rights as workmen to be secured.⁵

Clifford's view was that "[t]he war of man upon man is totally alien to the spirit and genius of the religion of Christ. His teaching condemns it. His example is against it. His cross forbids it [...] It is not because of Christianity, but against it; against its express teaching, and in direct opposition to the will of its Creator and Lord, that States and Churches have gone to war, and still prepare for war".⁶ Clifford imagined the "abolition of the idolatry of military leaders, and the extinction of the love of war", in order "that misguided nations may stand together in the interests of peace".⁷

As might be expected, Samuel Keeble and Wilfred Wellock – both Methodists – were opponents of war. "War is wholly un-Christian", wrote Keeble. "The resort to force is unbrotherly, contrary to love; it is irrational, contrary to reason; brutal, contrary to humanity. It cannot determine the question of justice, it merely determines that of strength".⁸ In Keeble's view "Socialism is infinitely truer to Christianity when it condemns war and armaments, and advocates universal disarmament and peace, than is that bastard imperialism and false nationalism which cultivates in a Christian country militarism, international strife and bitterness, and an exclusive arrogant patriotism".⁹ Keeble's *Methodist Times* newspaper was "strongly opposed to the Anglo-Boer war"; he wrote, for example, that those responsible for setting up concentration camps in South Africa were "traitors to the religion of Jesus Christ".¹⁰ For Keeble, writes his biographer, "the Gospel and war were mutually incompatible".¹¹

Wellock foresaw a society in which everyone accepted the principles of pacifism and non-resistance, and therefore had abolished war and military force.¹² John Wheatley suggested the same, noting sarcastically during the First World War: "We are assured that if Christ lived today he would don the patriotic khaki and place his services unreservedly at the

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.344-5.

⁶ J. Clifford, *The State the Church and the Congregation* (London, 1908), pp.13-4.

⁷ J. Clifford, *The New City of God: The Primitive Christian faith as a Social Gospel* (London, 1888), p.35.

⁸ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.272.

⁹ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.167.

¹⁰ M.S. Edwards, *S.E. Keeble: The Rejected Prophet* (Chester, 1977), p.26 and 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹² A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life in Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.22; Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.25.

disposal of Kitchener”.¹³ Keir Hardie agreed with this assessment, arguing that “war is of the Devil, not of Christ”, and adding that Christ “taught the doctrine of non-resistance even when attacked, as an integral part of his philosophy of life”.¹⁴ During the Boer War Hardie argued that “[w]hen clergymen advocate or support a war like the one now being waged they but proclaim themselves infidels who do not believe the gospel”.¹⁵ In this we can see that Hardie was a committed pacifist. As Maxton puts it, Hardie’s “opposition to war was a deep and fundamental part of his political faith [...] he saw in it nothing but a greedy capitalism using the lives of man to extend its power and to increase its range of profit-making”.¹⁶

George Lansbury was perhaps the most committed pacifist of all these men, “an absolute Christian pacifist”.¹⁷ His son Edgar quotes him thus: “I would close every recruiting station, disband the Army, dismantle the Navy, and dismiss the Air Force. I would abolish the whole dreadful equipment of war, and say to the world: ‘Do your worst’.”¹⁸ In perhaps his most famous stand for pacifism, the 1935 Labour Party conference, Lansbury told delegates: “If mine were the only voice in the conference, I would say, in the name of the faith I hold, the belief that God intends us to live peacefully and quietly with one another”.¹⁹

Lansbury’s pacifism forced him to resign as leader of a party that was willing to go to war against Germany and Italy. Afterwards in his own constituency election he campaigned on a pacifist platform, and embarked upon a remarkable global peace campaign in which he travelled to meet a number of world leaders.²⁰ This included in 1937 a meeting with Adolf Hitler, who was told by Lansbury: “I come to you solely in the cause of peace, peace secured not by war or force but by each nation agreeing to pool knowledge and resources for the service of one another”.²¹ In a telegram to Hitler, sent in April 1939, Lansbury reminded him that “[a]ll mankind is looking to you and Signor Mussolini for such a response as will lead all nations away from war and along the road to peace through cooperation and sharing territories, markets and resources for the service of each other”.²² Despite the failure of his campaign, Lansbury, in an article written less than a month before

¹³ I. S. Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), p.53.

¹⁴ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.101.

¹⁵ B. Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford, 2010), p.114.

¹⁶ J. Maxton, *Keir Hardie: Prophet and Pioneer* (London, 1933), p.12.

¹⁷ J. Shepherd, *George Lansbury: At the Heart of Old Labour* (Oxford, 2002), p.342.

¹⁸ E. Lansbury, *George Lansbury: My Father* (London, 1934), p.175.

¹⁹ Shepherd, *Lansbury*, p.325.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.330.

²¹ Memorandum for interview with Hitler by Lansbury, 19 April 1937, LSE archive, Lansbury/16 145-47.

²² Telegram from Lansbury to Hitler, 15 April 1939, LSE archive, Lansbury/17 88.

his death, confirmed that, “[a]s for myself, I remain an unashamed, solid-as-a-rock-of-granite pacifist”.²³

However, Lansbury’s enduring commitment to pacifism in its full extent was not the norm among Christian Socialists. While Henry Scott Holland was a vocal opponent of the Boer War, his Christian Social Union accepted the First World War as “a necessary evil”.²⁴ The same is true of Stewart Headlam, who opposed the Boer War, but “the German invasion of Belgium, his long-standing dislike of Prussianism, and the self-sacrifice of British soldiers, many of them from the East End, persuaded him that the nation was right to take up the sword”.²⁵ According to Headlam, “it was only when those who [...] worked for Peace were convinced that there was a spiritual idea to be maintained and that Liberty, national and individual Liberty, was at stake, that the nation was convinced it must take its share in this most righteous War”.²⁶

John Clifford, another who denounced the Boer War, “supported the [First World] war because the ‘progress of humanity’ depended on it”.²⁷ “Opposed uncompromisingly to the Boer War, he was wholly on the side of Britain in the Great War. And it is necessary, because he has been misrepresented, to make his position and reasons clear”.²⁸

While Dr. Clifford’s convictions led him to oppose the Boer War, he upheld the European War, but there was nothing inconsistent in this. From first to last his reasons were to himself perfectly justified. Oppression against the weak, come from whom it might, he felt bound to resist, and where wrong was inflicted he was ready to throw himself with every fibre of his being into means for remedying that wrong. In the Great War a smaller nation was ruthlessly trampled upon, and common humanity demanded that aid should be given.²⁹

Clifford was nevertheless sympathetic towards conscientious objectors, arguing: “It is altogether a mistake to imagine that these men are cowards. They are showing a courage such as witnesses to the stuff, the fibre, of which they are made”.³⁰

²³ *Ibid.*, p.345.

²⁴ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p.216.

²⁵ J.R. Orens, *Stewart Headlam’s Radical Anglicanism: The Mass, the masses, and the Music Hall* (Chicago IL, 2003), p.152.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ A. Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), p.39.

²⁸ J. Marchant, *Dr. Clifford, C.H.: Life, Letters and Reminiscences* (London, 1924), p.99

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.153.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.154.

Some Christian Socialists, therefore, who espoused pacifism were convinced of the necessity of entering the First World War. Even Keir Hardie, while he did not support the First War, chose not to actively oppose it, writing: “A nation at war must be united, especially when its existence is at stake. With the boom of the enemy’s guns within earshot, the lads who have gone forth to fight their country’s battles must not be disheartened by any discordant notes at home”.³¹

There were also some Christian Socialists who did not hold any commitment to pacifism. For example, R.H. Tawney enlisted in the Manchester Regiment and fought in the First World War, believing that it was a duty to resist Germany and, such being the case, it was wrong for an individual to stay at home while others did the actual fighting.³² He also resigned from the ILP due to its opposition to the war.³³ Although he later spoke of his shame at having enjoyed shooting at and killing the enemy, he nevertheless rejected pacifism as being utopian.³⁴ Tawney’s views regarding the Second World War were that “the war is a catastrophe, though in the circumstances we were, I think, right to go in”, and he served as a member of the Home Guard and Civil Defence Warden; in the post-war period he was opposed to unilateral nuclear disarmament.³⁵ Tawney disagreed with other Christian Socialists, concluding as he did, “I do not believe that capitalism is the sole cause of wars”, nor that “there is a distinctively socialist policy which at all times can be pursued”.³⁶

William Temple’s views agreed with those of Tawney. “Confronted twice with world war, Temple was no pacifist. He subscribed to just war theory, and considered pacifism as a universal principle to be heretical in tendency”.³⁷ Temple argued that the Nazis posed such a great threat that “[i]t is our duty as Christian citizens to do our utmost towards winning the war”.³⁸ Temple argued that having peace as the goal had two different effects:

It will lead either that form of pacifism which is ready to welcome pain and death, even of loved ones, rather than have recourse to the infliction of those, or else to the dedication of force to the maintenance of law between the nations as well as within them. Between those

³¹ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (London, 2007), p.66.

³² C. Bryant, *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* (London, 1996); L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), p.85.

³³ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.129.

³⁴ Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p.98 and p.103.

³⁵ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.250, p.282.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.278.

³⁷ Suggate, ‘Temple’ p.175.

³⁸ Temple, *Church Looks Forward*, p.3.

two I will not state the argument, but only record my own conviction that the latter, the subordination of force to law and to that end the endowing of law with force, is the more truly Christian way.³⁹

This conviction led Temple to support the controversial Allied bombing of German cities.⁴⁰ Stewart Headlam, similarly was, according to a biographer, “no pacifist and warned against what he considered hasty generalizations from the Sermon on the Mount”.⁴¹

Christian Socialism, therefore, tended towards pacifism, but it was not so absolute as might be supposed. Men such as George Lansbury and Wilfred Wellock stand out for their utter commitment to pacifism, as opposed to the qualified commitment to pacifism of John Clifford, or even Keir Hardie. Meanwhile, men such as R.H. Tawney and William Temple were statedly not pacifists. It would, therefore, be wrong to conclude that a commitment to pacifism is a necessary part of Christian Socialist thought or a pre-requisite for being considered a Christian Socialist.

Utopianism

The Christian Socialist idea of a new socialist society is a highly utopian one. Often descriptions of this society to come are fantastic, otherworldly visions of a time when all manner of ills would be banished and all people enjoy material and spiritual fulfilment. Most Christian Socialists seemed to identify this with the “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven” on Earth. Both R.H. Tawney and William Temple argued against this tendency, emphasising instead man’s imperfectability, but in this realism they were very much in the minority. Most Christian Socialists were lured on by a vision of a perfect world.

Part of the utopian Christian Socialist vision is that pacifism would finally triumph. Keir Hardie imagines a world of “kindly brotherhood” in which “wars would cease”, and writes of a future “triumph over war” that would be brought about by socialism.⁴² George Lansbury spoke of his “belief in the fatherhood of God, in the Brotherhood of Man, and in the fact that men and women can co-operate, if they will, so that there need be neither wars

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁴⁰ S.E. Lammers, ‘William Temple and the bombing of Germany: An Exploration in the Just War Tradition’, in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 19, 1 (1991), pp.71-92.

⁴¹ K. Leech, ‘Stewart Headlam, 1847-1924, and the Guild of St Matthew’, in M.B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England* (London, 1968), p.68.

⁴² J. Keir Hardie, *Can A Man Be A Christian on a Pound a Week?: Fifth Edition* (Manchester, c.1905-10), p.8; Hardie, *From Serfdom to Socialism*, p.104.

abroad nor class wars at home”.⁴³ In a very moving article from Christmas 1914 aimed at children, Lansbury expressed the hope that war would one day be a thing of the past: “Just how many of us are mourning and in sorrow because we have lost some loved one in the war? Well, all of us must remember there are millions of mothers and children in France and Belgium, in Germany and in Austria, all suffering just the same. When you are grown-up and are men and women like your fathers and mothers, you will manage the world differently”.⁴⁴ Wilfred Wellock took it as an irrefutable fact that war would no longer exist under socialism: “Obviously a society which orders its life on the principle of co-operation and mutual service has solved the problem of war, having gone right behind the principle of greed, which is the source alike of fear and war, to the fundamental unity of human nature”.⁴⁵

It was, however, not merely war that would be vanquished under Christian Socialism. As well as suggesting that “wars would cease”, Hardie also argued that socialism “could more than double the production of real wealth, reduce toil to a mere incident, abolish all poverty, and dethrone the brute god mammon”.⁴⁶ John Clifford envisaged a future in which brotherhood could “heal our diseased world, remove its woes, lead it in right paths, get rid of drunkenness and the money lust”, as well as making “wars cease to the ends of the earth”.⁴⁷ George Lansbury spoke of “a commonwealth of all the nations of the world, in which shall cease not merely ugly war, but also the internecine strife of competitive commercialism. And men and women, learning what love means, shall translate their love into actual deeds”.⁴⁸ Even as the Second World War drew ever nearer, Lansbury held out the belief that “[t]here is yet time to transform our civilization from a competitive mass of competing countries into a co-operative unity working with each other for the good of all”.⁴⁹

Samuel Keeble hoped for an “ethicized economy”, that would lead to “perfect industrial justice, mercy, and peace, and therefore into paths of industrial prosperity”.⁵⁰ Stewart Headlam wrote that under socialism “all the men and women and children of England shall be fed and clothed beautifully”, and that “the soul of man would be able to

⁴³ G. Lansbury, ‘Back to the Galilean’, in *Religion in the Labour Movement* (London, 1919), p.54.

⁴⁴ The Bow and Bromley Worker, 1 January 1910-December 1914, LSE archive, Lansbury/30 c 2.

⁴⁵ W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1921), p.25.

⁴⁶ Hardie, *Can A Man Be A Christian?*, pp.7-8.

⁴⁷ J. Clifford, *The Gospel of World Brotherhood According to Jesus* (London, 1920), p.150.

⁴⁸ Manuscript of a speech by Lansbury entitled ‘The Chief Need of the Labour Movement’, 5 May 1911, LSE archive, Lansbury/4 202-205.

⁴⁹ Draft of Lansbury’s broadcast to the USA during his visit, 21 April 1936, LSE archive, Lansbury/16 72-81.

⁵⁰ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.206.

expand, the body would become beautiful, and disease and premature death would be conquered”.⁵¹ Headlam imagined a renewed spiritual life; for example, in the new society “the Christian Sunday will be as a rule a day on which you hear Mass in the morning and from time to time make your Communion, a day for genuine healthy mental and bodily recreation, a day on which, as far as may be, no work shall be done except for such work as is necessary for the worship and recreation of the people”.⁵² Keir Hardie had a similar vision, imagining that a people freed from toiling under capitalism “would be set free for conflict with the powers of darkness in the higher spheres of mind and spirit. Art, science, literature, would flourish under Socialism as they have never done in any age of the world’s history [...] mankind would rise to heights which hitherto have only existed in the rapt vision of the seer or the poet”.⁵³

John Wheatley aimed at “the elimination of landlordism, private profit, interest privilege, poverty, disease and ignorance from human society and the fostering of international brotherhood”.⁵⁴ Clifford foresaw the end of theft and all manner of crime, sexism, and unemployment.⁵⁵ Lansbury wanted that “society should be organised from top to bottom so as to bring every man, woman and child full, free, happy lives”.⁵⁶ Wilfred Wellock believed that “a state of society is possible where everybody will be able to live after his or her own heart”.⁵⁷ Society would consist of small, rural communities of around 500 people, with people spending their time on arts and crafts, spending just a few hours a day working in the cities.⁵⁸ Wellock’s vision was of:

A community where none are in want, where all are able to develop freely, are decently and comfortably housed, and are equal as individuals one with another! A world where nothing counts but worth, real soul worth, and where fear is extinct, even the fear of poverty, which is the source of nearly all fear! A world where freedom to live, to do and be is the heritage of all, and where life stands before every individual waiting to be won! ⁵⁹

⁵¹ S. Headlam, *Christian Socialism: A Lecture – Fabian Tract No.42* (London, 1899), p.3; Headlam, *Socialist’s Church*, p.68.

⁵² S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), pp.12-3.

⁵³ J. Keir Hardie, *The I.L.P. and All About It* (Manchester, 1908), p.7.

⁵⁴ Wood, *Wheatley*, pp.72-3.

⁵⁵ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ: Fabian Tract No. 78* (London, 1897), p.8.

⁵⁶ Speech by Lansbury in the House of Commons entitled 'Right to Work', 10 February 1911, Lansbury/4 172-4.

⁵⁷ W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or the Road to the New World* (London, 1922), p.21.

⁵⁸ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.23; Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock*, p.28.

⁵⁹ Wellock, *Way Out*, p.69.

Examples of this utopian way of thinking could be multiplied, but it is clear enough that the Christian Socialist view of a new society was not one rooted in reality, but rather a vision of an entirely new and perfect world.

One writer suggests that “Socialism, in these hands, then, was little more than a word used to express approval for good things and a yearning for better things to come”.⁶⁰ Another criticises ethical socialism in a way that could be applied to here, arguing that their “political thought [...] was utopian in the worst sense of the word. It was basically a withdrawal from the world and, as such, it was impossible to translate into the practical policies of government [...] It had no answer to the problem of budget deficits, mass unemployment [...] it had no answer to the real world”.⁶¹ The accusation here would be that Christians Socialists lacked solid proposals for how their society would function. Their utopian vision was so disengaged from the world around them that it was simply a fantasy which could not become a reality. However, the Christian Socialist would respond that the new socialist society was not a concept of their own making, but rather the “Kingdom of God” on Earth.

For many Christian Socialists, the new socialist society is synonymous with the Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God. As Paul Bickley explains:

The New Testament announcement of the Kingdom of God looks like a profound reversal of the social order, where the first shall be last and the last shall be first, where those who care for the ‘least of these brothers of mine’ will be recognised by God. This is not an idle eschatological vision – pie in the sky when we die – but one which its proponents have often sought to realise within the present political order.⁶²

There are multiple examples of Christian Socialists referring to a future socialist society in this way. In his tract written for the Fabian Society, John Clifford writes that socialism is that “by which the Kingdoms of this world are becoming the Kingdoms of our God and of His Christ”, as well as being “that full redemption and regeneration of the individual and of the world which Jesus Christ came to effect”.⁶³ For Keir Hardie, the Lord’s Prayer, in which Jesus teaches His disciples to pray “Thy Kingdom Come”, was evidence that God’s

⁶⁰ J. Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain Since 1884* (Oxford, 1990), p.68.

⁶¹ Foote, *Labour’s Political Thought*, p.39.

⁶² P. Bickley, *Building Jerusalem: Christianity and the Labour Party* (London, 2010), p.4.

⁶³ J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches – Fabian Tract No.139* (London, 1908), p.8 and p.14.

Kingdom was to be set up on Earth.⁶⁴ “The Kingdom in Christ’s mind”, wrote Hardie, “did not refer to a heaven in the future: The Kingdom of God meant the establishment right here upon earth of a condition of things in which human life would be beautiful and would be free to develop upon Godlike lines”.⁶⁵

The same view was expressed by Stewart Headlam, who wrote that those who studied the teachings of Christ “will find that He said hardly anything at all about life after death, but a great deal about the Kingdom of Heaven, or the righteous society to be established on earth”, and that this earthly Kingdom of Heaven was to be “a righteous Communistic society”.⁶⁶ It is reported that the Bishop of Newcastle, after listening to Headlam, exclaimed, “Why, you talk as if you believe that Christ’s Kingdom was coming here on earth!” “What else should I believe?”, Headlam responded. “Of course I do”.⁶⁷ Henry Scott Holland, likewise, envisaged “a Kingdom of earthly righteousness and social happiness [...] The Holy Jerusalem descends from heaven to Earth: the City of God”.⁶⁸

Samuel Keeble also suggested that Christ had taught that His “Kingdom is to take visible shape upon the earth”, and that this would be a society “where the Lord Jesus is crowned its actual King, controlling by consent all the processes of production, distribution, and exchange, and the possession, use, and consumption of all material things”.⁶⁹ Elsewhere he wrote of “the kingdom of God”, “the grand and glorious setting up of a new social order on earth – the City of God, a ‘new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness’”.⁷⁰ “The future commonwealth”, in this view, was to “be a real theocracy; it will be ‘the father’s kingdom’ – the kingdom of God”.⁷¹

George Lansbury wrote that “the Kingdom of God is attainable here on earth”, and that men and women should be “determined in very deed to fight against the devil and all his works, and by God’s good grace to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth”.⁷² Wilfred Wellock urged “a passionate endeavour to make earth like heaven”, and the bringing about of “a Communist Society, in which alone the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is

⁶⁴ J. Keir Hardie, *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* (Manchester, c.1905-10), p.8 and pp.18-9.

⁶⁵ J. Keir Hardie, ‘Labour and Christianity: Is the Labour Movement against Christianity?’, *Labour and Religion: By Ten Labour Members of Parliament and Other Bodies* (1910), p.51.

⁶⁶ S. Headlam, *Christian Socialism: A Lecture – Fabian Tract No.42* (London, 1899), p.2; E. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge, 1987), p.109.

⁶⁷ E. Norman, ‘Stewart Headlam and the Victorian Christian Socialists’, *History Today*, 37, 4 (1987), p.31.

⁶⁸ H. Scott Holland, ed., *Our Neighbours: A Handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.152.

⁶⁹ S.E. Keeble, *Christian Responsibility for the Social Order* (London, 1922), p.236.

⁷⁰ S.E. Keeble, ‘Preface’, in S.E. Keeble, ed., *The Citizen of To-Morrow* (London, 1909), p.xi.

⁷¹ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.159.

⁷² Letter from Lansbury to Rev John Charles Carlile, 22 January 1931, LSE archive, Lansbury/10 2-6; G. Lansbury, *Your Part in Poverty* (New York, 1918 – original publication 1917), p.12.

capable of being carried out – a society where there are neither privileges nor classes, but where the meek inherit the earth and the cardinal sin is the laying up of riches”.⁷³

Once again examples could be multiplied, but the above is sufficient to show that for the Christian Socialist, a socialist society was synonymous with the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. The charge that Christian Socialists had no idea how such a society would function or be sustained might then be answered that God would sustain His own Kingdom; that this was no man-made utopia, but rather the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven. However, this is not the view of all Christian Socialists. Of the men in this study R.H. Tawney and William Temple opposed the view that such a heavenly Kingdom is to be established on earth.

Matt Beech and Kevin Hickson argue that “Tawney’s Christian socialism meant that he believed that humans could not make a perfect society, nor remove the sinfulness present in the human character”.⁷⁴ Anthony Wright agrees, making the point that Tawney’s belief in original sin gave him a more realistic view of human nature and the ability of men and women to form and function within a socialist society.⁷⁵

This view, however, is at odds with that of R.H. Preston, who has argued, according to Lawrence Goldman, that Tawney does not fully take into account man’s sinfulness; on this basis Lawrence Goldman argues that “[w]here human nature was concerned, Tawney was too much the optimist and utopian”, and again that in focusing on abstract moral improvements rather than tangible material improvements Tawney “verges on the utopian, or at least the unreal”.⁷⁶ It seems difficult to maintain, however, that Tawney did not fully grasp the sinfulness of human nature. Take, for example, Tawney’s view of original sin, being “that what goodness we have reached is a house built on piles driven into black slime and always slipping down into it unless we are building day and night”.⁷⁷ Neither is it fair to describe Tawney as utopian because his focus was on intangible justice rather than strict material equality. Hardie’s view that socialism “could more than double the production of real wealth, reduce toil to a mere incident [and] abolish all poverty” is altogether focused on the material, but it is far more pie-in-the-sky than Tawney’s thoughts about the future. It seems that Beech and Hickson, and Wright are correct in viewing Tawney as a realist.

⁷³ Wellock, *Christian Communism*, p.1 and p.14.

⁷⁴ M. Beech and K. Hickson, *Labour’s Thinkers: The Intellectual Roots of Labour from Tawney to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), p.28.

⁷⁵ A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), p.20 and p.111.

⁷⁶ Goldman, *Tawney*, p.296 and p.174.

⁷⁷ J.M. Winter and D.M. Joslin, eds, *R.H. Tawney’s Commonplace Book* (Cambridge, 2006), p.15.

William Temple was also a realist, arguing that the “assertion of Original Sin should make the church intensely realistic, and conspicuously free from Utopianism”.⁷⁸ “[I]t is our duty as Christians”, wrote Temple, “to think out that kind of action which is practicable in the world we know with such human nature as ours and that of our neighbours as its agent; not to dream of what would be a perfect world if everyone already were a perfect Christian. Even then if we should be successful in establishing it for a moment we should break it into pieces in a fortnight”.⁷⁹

The basis on which Tawney and Temple disagree with the others is not whether or not human beings were sinful, but rather whether or not that sinfulness could prevent the establishment of socialism. Headlam, for example, writes that people must “face the fact of sin”, and suggests that sin would not disappear under socialism; however, he nowhere suggests that this prevents the “righteous Communistic society” from being established.⁸⁰ Keeble wrote that “[a] New Theology which denies sin, grace, redeeming love, and the new birth cannot suffice for the spiritual needs of the Labour Movement”, but still maintained that God’s Kingdom could be established on Earth.⁸¹ Lansbury argued that “we must smash the notion that original sin is so firmly embedded in us it cannot by the Grace of God and the humility of men’s minds be changed”.⁸²

It seems that William Temple originally held the same view as other Christian Socialists. In a report on the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC), which took place in 1924, Samuel Keeble quotes, as we have seen, Temple’s view that the conference represented “a great movement within the Church for the Kingdom of God on earth”.⁸³ At some point Temple came to reject this viewpoint. In 1941 he argued that “[h]istory is not leading us to any form of perfected civilisation which, once established, will abide. It is a process of preparing the way for something *outside history altogether* – the perfected Kingdom of God”.⁸⁴ In 1942 he reiterated that “we cannot hope to see the Kingdom of God established in its perfection in this mortal life. That belongs to eternity”.⁸⁵ In an address that same year Temple declared: “The Christian religion gives us no assurance

⁷⁸ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.61.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.167.

⁸⁰ S. Headlam, *Priestcraft and Progress: Being Sermons and Lectures* (London, 1878), p.58; Headlam, *Meaning of the Mass*, p.9 and p.61.

⁸¹ Edwards, *Keeble*, p.8.

⁸² Letter from Lansbury to John Armitage, 9 March 1940, LSE archive, Lansbury/17 160-2.

⁸³ S.E. Keeble, *COPEC: An Account of the Christian Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship* (London, 1924), p.9.

⁸⁴ Suggate, *Temple*, p.168. [Emphasis added.]

⁸⁵ Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, p. 69.

that there will ever be upon this earth a society of perfect love, indeed it gives us many reasons to believe there never will be [...] Certainly it cannot be completely fulfilled on this planet”.⁸⁶ “We may not hope for the Kingdom of God in its completeness here,” Temple concludes, “but we are to pray for its coming and to live even now as its citizens”.⁸⁷ It seems though that Temple and Tawney are the exceptions here. The weight of evidence suggests that Christian Socialism can be fairly characterised as utopian, and that Christian Socialists saw the socialist utopia as the establishment of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

⁸⁶ Temple, *Church Looks Forward*, p.165.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2.

Section Three Summary

Christian Socialists sought a society which was organised co-operatively. For some, like Hardie and Lansbury, this necessitated the collective ownership of land and industry; for others, such as Tawney and Temple, this was only one possible solution. Christian Socialists agreed that personal property would remain as such; it was private property in land and industry which was disputed. Tawney and Temple's idea of a new society was a more voluntarist one, with members of an industry choosing to organise themselves according to professional standards, and owners of property engaging in voluntary communism. However, all sought the establishment of justice rather than the extension of charity.

There is some tension in Christian Socialist thought about what form the state should take. On the one hand, a powerful state is necessary to the achievement of co-operation and collectivism, and Christian Socialists were not reluctant to proclaim this necessity. On the other, Christian Socialists did consider individual freedom to be important, and therefore sought a society governed by a powerful state but with liberty for individuals.

As well as the institution of co-operation or collectivism, Christian Socialists pictured a democratic order in which all members of society would have a say in government and all members of an industry a say in the running of that industry. This society would be an egalitarian one, without any racial or sexual prejudice and without class distinctions. Christian Socialists did display some conservative tendencies, especially on issues such as sex and marriage, drinking and temperance, and this played its part in the imagining of a new society. Christian Socialism, however, is not to be thought of as conservative in the sense of making more moderate economic demands than non-Christian socialism; Christian Socialists in the period under consideration here demanded revolutionary change and the abolition of capitalism.

Christian Socialist visions of a new society were often utopian; poverty, disease and war would all be abolished. This view was sustained because, to the Christian Socialist, the new society would be the perfect Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Tawney and Temple dissented from this view, but their voices were in the minority. In calling for a collectivist, democratic, egalitarian society, Christian Socialism is not unique among

socialists; the linking, however, of a new social order with the Kingdom of God on Earth is a Christian Socialist distinctive.

Section Four: Critique, Conclusions and Final Summary

12. A Socialist Critique of Christian Socialism

There exists very little in the way of a direct critique of Christian Socialism. This may be because Christian Socialism was never as notable a variant of socialism as other forms, such as Marxism or Fabianism. The evidence suggests that in general potential critics of Christian Socialism have made their arguments against socialism as a whole. As such not all of the points they make apply; for example, the author of *Should a Christian embrace Socialism, Communism or Humanism?* argues that “Socialists believe that man can live in harmony with his fellowman (can achieve successful brotherhood) without God’s help”, and again that in socialism “man’s equality” is not based on “the fact that man is created in God’s image”.¹ These criticisms and others like them are clearly inadmissible as a critique of Christian Socialism.

In the same way socialist critique of religion is often inadmissible as a critique of Christian Socialism; Friedrich Engels contrasts socialism and Christianity thus: “Both Christianity and workers’ socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery; Christianity places this salvation in a life beyond, after death, in heaven; socialism places it in this world, in a transformation of society”.² Christian Socialism, by contrast, does foresee “a transformation of society” and a better world of the future. George Bernard Shaw attacks the idea of a “man of business who goes on Sunday to the church [...] there to renounce and abjure before his God the line of conduct which he intends to pursue with all his might during the following week”.³ However, not only does this miss the mark as a criticism of Christian Socialism, but many Christian Socialists – Keir Hardie and Stewart Headlam among others – offer their own attacks on hypocritical religion and would have agreed with Shaw.

Nevertheless, some socialist criticism of Christianity and some Christian criticism of socialism can be made to apply to Christian Socialism. In this section therefore we will

¹ L. Nyirongo, *Should a Christian embrace Socialism, Communism or Humanism?* (Potchefstroom, 1994), p.50 and p.51.

² F. Engels, ‘On the History of Early Christianity’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964).

³ G. Bernard Shaw, ‘The Basis of Socialism: Economic’, in G. Bernard Shaw, ed., *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (Boston MA, 1911) p.5.

examine, in turn, a socialist critique of Christian Socialism and a Christian critique of Christian Socialism.

Christianity as the Basis of Socialism

The basis of Christian Socialism is found in the Bible, church teaching and sacraments; in sum, to the Christian Socialist the Christian religion is the philosophical and moral underpinning of socialism. This is denied by other socialist groups. Marxism, for example, sees religion as merely the product of social and economic forces. Engels writes that “[a]ll religion [...] is nothing but the fantastic reflection of in men’s minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces”; what is referred to as “God” is then no more than “the alien domination of the capitalist mode of production”.⁴ Marx, therefore, can write:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again [...] Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness.⁵

This being the case, Marxism equates Roman Catholicism with the feudal period of history, and Protestantism with the capitalist period, for the Protestant Reformation marks the transition from “feudal Catholicism” to a society of “bourgeois character”.⁶ Engels gives as an example the theology of Jean Calvin, whose “predestination doctrine was the religious expression of the fact that in the commercial world of competition success or failure does not depend upon man’s activity or cleverness, but upon circumstances uncontrollable by him. It is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of the mercy of unknown

⁴ F.Engels, ‘Anti-Duhring’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), p.147 and p.148.

⁵ K. Marx, ‘Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right; in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), pp.41-2.

⁶ F. Engels, ‘Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), pp.264-5.

superior economic powers”, while H.M. Hyndman points to the dissolution of the monasteries as part of the establishment of capitalism in England.⁷

Marxism therefore denies the place given by Christian Socialists to their religion as the basis of socialism. Christianity is instead a means of preventing the transition to socialism. Engels points to, as an example, the “self-taxation of the bourgeoisie for the support of all sorts of revivalism, from ritualism to the Salvation Army”, while Hyndman imagines the words of a Christian minister to the working class, encouraging them to continue under the present system:

What you need, my weary, poverty-stricken, Christian brother, is not to get back your own extra labour, which you have expended, in the form of money or goods for your own use. That is – believe us, who are your true friends – robbery of the capitalists. You, my good man, should be thrifty, abstinent, saving, economical, and still go on steadily providing extra labour for others, until in turn you cease to be a labourer, turn capitalist, and extort extra labour for yourself.⁸

Hyndman explains: “Religion, which should have helped in the striving for a happier period, has suffered the rich and powerful to twist its teachings to their own account”.⁹ Hence Marx’s conclusion, noted above, that “[t]he abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness”.

In their only direct mention of Christian Socialism, Marx and Engels equate it with feudalism (perhaps suggesting, in addition, that they associated Christian Socialism with Roman Catholicism). In the *Communist Manifesto*, the pair describe what they term “feudal socialism”, by which the aristocrats survived the transition from feudalism to capitalism: “In order to arouse sympathy, the aristocracy were obliged to lose sight, apparently, of their own interests, and to formulate their indictment against the bourgeoisie in the interests of the exploited working class alone [...] In this way arose feudal Socialism”.¹⁰ Christian Socialism is apparently of the same genus:

⁷ F. Engels, ‘Introduction to the English Edition of Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), p.301; H.M. Hyndman, *England for All* (London, 1881), pp.14-5.

⁸ Engels, ‘Socialism: Utopian and Scientific’, p.312; Hyndman, *England for All*, pp.51-2.

⁹ Hyndman, *England for All*, p.194.

¹⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford, 1992 – original publication 1848), p.27.

As the parson has ever gone hand in hand with the feudal lord, so has Clerical Socialism with Feudal Socialism. Nothing is easier than to give Christian ascetism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and the mortification of the flesh, monastic life and the Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat.¹¹

Therefore, to Marx and Engels, and Marxists such as Hyndman, Christianity was associated with either feudalism or capitalism. Far from being the basis of socialism, it was a barrier to the realisation of a socialist society and must be abolished.

Similar ideas were held by other socialists. In the *Fabian Essays in Socialism* Sydney Olivier, in an observation similar to the Marxist view of religion, argued that morality is simply the product of society, with the existence of moral ideas and codes resulting from economic realities. “Before society was, morality was not”, Olivier wrote, adding that even “Socialist morality, like all of the preceding systems, is only that morality which the conditions of human existence have made necessary”.¹² Unlike the Marxists, Olivier did not link Roman Catholicism and feudalism, instead recognising Catholicism as genuinely socialist. However, he did make the link between Protestantism and capitalism, writing that the socialistic achievements of Catholicism were undone by “Protestant Individualism [which] founded the modern land system upon its confiscated estates; destroyed the medieval machinery of charity and education; and in religion rehabilitated the devil, and the doctrines of original sin and the damnable danger of reason and good works”.¹³ This view matches that of Stewart Headlam, and may also have found agreement in John Wheatley; however, John Clifford and Samuel Keeble, among others, would have strongly disagreed.

Other criticisms of Christianity from various socialist groups mean that, to them, the religion could never be the basis of socialism. The attitude expressed in the *Syndicalist* newspaper attests to this: Christianity is “a religion which pays no heed to anything except the Soul”, and James Larkin’s activism in Dublin is criticised on the grounds that “his mind is warped by clericalism. Where the wealth is, there will the priest also be. So long as the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.28.

¹² S. Olivier, ‘The Basis of Socialism: Moral’, in G. Bernard Shaw, ed., *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (Boston MA, 1911), p.112 and p.116.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.114.

wage-slaves of Dublin or anywhere else respect priests their servitude is hopeless”.¹⁴ Jack Radcliffe, a contributor to the *Syndicalist*, opines that:

It would be curious to know, if it were possible, why Catholics (or Anglicans, or Nonconformist Christians, for that matter) interest themselves in Socialism. In the mind of a Christian, of course, the welfare of the soul is an infinitely more important matter than the welfare of the body. But Socialism has no interest save the improvement of purely material conditions. Hence, what do these good Christian ‘souls’ want with Socialism. God is their master, and His heaven is their reward. Let them look to that [...] ‘God’ is always on the side of the rich and powerful.¹⁵

Marx and Engels also take this materialistic view of socialism, arguing that it is materialism that leads to socialism, rather than religion, spirituality or morality.¹⁶

Additionally, Christianity cannot lead to a new society, for, according to Marx, “it teaches, as religion must: Submit to the authority, for all authority is ordained by God”.¹⁷ Engels argues that Christianity recognises equality only in original sin and election, and that this “vague Christian equality could at best resolve into civic ‘equality before the law’.”; in addition, the traces of common ownership which are also found in the early stages of the new religion can be ascribed to solidarity among the proscribed rather than to real equalitarian ideas”.¹⁸ This can be viewed as a direct challenge to the Christian Socialist view of human equality as derived from God’s creation of all people equally in His image, and this doctrine as the basis for societal equality. A further blow is sustained by Engels’ argument that rather than man being made in the image of God, God is in fact made in the image of man.¹⁹ Engels, though not dealing purposely with Christian Socialism, strikes at its very heart with his view, expressed in a letter to Marx, that “so-called Holy Scripture is nothing more than a record of the old-Arabian religious and tribal tradition, modified by the early separation of the Jews from their consanguineous but nomadic neighbours”, as well as his assertion that neither the baptism nor the Eucharist existed in early Christianity – based

¹⁴ A.D. Lewis, ‘Topical Yarns’, *Syndicalist*, 3, 4, July 1914; ‘Trite and Tripe’, *Syndicalist* 3, 2, Feb 1914.

¹⁵ J. Radcliffe, ‘About Gadflies – and Other Things’, *Syndicalist* 1, 9, Oct 1912.

¹⁶ K. Marx and F. Engels, ‘The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), p.67.

¹⁷ K. Marx, ‘The Leading Article of No.179 of Kolnische Zeitung’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), p.37.

¹⁸ F. Engels, ‘The Peasant War in Germany’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), p.103; Engels, ‘Anti-Duhring’, p.145.

¹⁹ Engels, ‘Feuerbach and Classical German Philosophy’, p.241.

on their perceived absence from the Book of Revelation – and therefore must have been later inventions.²⁰ The basis of Christian Socialism in Scripture, church teaching and the sacraments is summarily dismissed.

Christian Socialist Method

The Christian Socialist method of bringing socialism about also comes under fire from other forms of socialism. This is especially the case when it comes to the syndicalists of the early twentieth century, who rejected the parliamentary route by which Christian Socialists, among others, sought to replace capitalism with socialism. In a *Syndicalist* article on ‘What is Syndicalism?’ the unnamed author explains:

We part company with the Socialists in thinking that the effectiveness of sending men into a moribund Parliament of a moribund State can in any manner of way compare with the effectiveness of organising men into all-powerful industrial unions [...] [T]o the extent that political action does not distract the workers from industrial unionism we have no quarrel with those who thus employ themselves [...] But to those Socialists who look for a social transformation to come about by the election of a Socialist majority to the House of Commons we can but extend our pity.²¹

Radcliffe argues that “[t]he only way Socialists have ever succeeded in getting into Parliament has been by sacrificing their Socialist principles”, and that “Parliament is essentially a capitalist instrument. It is designed, simply and solely, to give expression to, to extend, and to safeguard capitalist interests. It could be made to do nothing else, even were there a strong party of uncompromising Socialist members seated there”.²² This offers a stark contrast to R.H. Tawney’s view of the state as “an instrument, and nothing more”.²³ Again Radcliffe writes that “[i]f the Socialists were to capture Parliament it would be of no use to them, for it could not be made to respond to the needs of the Socialist Commonwealth, which would then be at the point of actual inauguration”.²⁴ It might be

²⁰ ‘Engels to Marx’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), p.120; Engels, ‘Early Christianity’, p.345.

²¹ ‘What is Syndicalism?’, *Syndicalist* 1, 3, Mar-Apr 1912.

²² J. Radcliffe, ‘Syndicalism and Socialism’, *Syndicalist* 1, 5, June 1912.

²³ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.164.

²⁴ J. Radcliffe, ‘Syndicalism and Socialism’, *Syndicalist*, 1, 6, July 1912.

remembered that Keir Hardie introduced a private members' bill to inaugurate "a Socialist Commonwealth founded upon the common ownership of land and capital, production for use and not for profit, and equality of opportunity for every citizen".²⁵ The Christian Socialist hope of capturing Parliament and thereby bringing about socialism is repudiated in the strongest terms by the syndicalists.

It was George Lansbury who was often mentioned in the *Syndicalist* in connection with this controversy, probably because of his close connection to the syndicalists and their mutual admiration which made the disagreement still more obvious. Lansbury is well spoken of, described in the *Syndicalist* as one of "our excellent friends", and "a man of action and courage, a being possessing a heart and soul".²⁶ Even criticism is framed in glowing terms: "Our friend Lansbury thinks that all politicians are as honest as himself. We do not wish to flatter him, but he is one man among a thousand among politicians".²⁷ The differences however remained profound. Tom Mann wrote about Lansbury's visit to Liverpool for the transport workers' strike of 1911:

From that time his attitude was changed, and his faith in industrial solidarity grew; but George was, and, I suppose, still is a State-ist; he views the State as Society; he does not take the Syndicalist view that the organised State, with its government and officials and armed forces, was brought into existence by the opponents of the Workers, and functions only in the interests of the enemies of the Workers.²⁸

Criticism along these lines was not limited to the syndicalists. Anthony Wright explains that dounced the "reliance on the state to create socialism, a process which could only produce a bureaucratic leviathan".²⁹ G.D.H Cole dismissed the Labour Party as "that sad failure of Socialism", due to, as he saw it, its dependence on the Liberal Party and its exclusive focus on parliamentarianism.³⁰ Wright recounts that the guild socialist "antipathy to politics" drew:

²⁵ T.L. Jarman, *Socialism in Britain: From the Industrial Revolution to the Present Day* (Ann Arbor MI, 1978), pp.106-7.

²⁶ *Syndicalist*, 1, 5, June 1912; 'George Lansbury', *Syndicalist* 1, 6, July 1912.

²⁷ 'George Lansbury', *Syndicalist* 1, 9, Oct 1912.

²⁸ T. Mann, 'George Lansbury', *Syndicalist* 1, 11, Dec 1912.

²⁹ A. Wright, *G.D.H. Cole and Socialist Democracy* (Oxford, 1979), p.47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.81-2.

a sharp reaction from George Lansbury at the 1917 Conference of the national Guilds League, where a proposal to allow social bodies to affiliate to the League met opposition from those who suggested that the effect would be adilution of the movement, involving a shift towards political action. ‘Any one would think that a socialist was a species of leper’, was Lansbury’s reply, adding, ‘I don’t understand all this holy horror of politics’.³¹

Lansbury’s remarks may just as well have been addressed to the syndicalists. Wright explains that for guild socialists the “source of this horror was a belief that industrial emancipation could only be won by industrial action, not circuitously by a parliamentarism which seemed to ofer a short cut but which was really a cul-de-sac”.³²

Harold Laski made the observation in 1933 that the working class had discovered “that to have won formal political power was not to have gained the mastery they sought. They realised that the clue to authority lay in the possession of economic control”.³³ In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels also appear to reject a Parliamentary route to socialism in favour of revolution. Early in the book they argue that “the bourgeoisie has [...] conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”. In their conclusion they write: “The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only be the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions”.³⁴ This not only counters the Christian Socialist view of how to bring about socialism, but also undercuts the pacifism espoused by most Christian Socialists.

It should be pointed out that this was not the view of all Marxists. Hyndman’s view was that the people of the UK “perhaps alone among the peoples can carry out with peace, order, and contentment those changes which continental revolutionists have sought through anarchy and bloodshed”.³⁵ Keir Hardie suggested that Marx himself had second thoughts of revolution, arguing that:

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.81.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ H. Laski, ‘Democracy in Crisis’, in A. Wright, ed., *British Socialist Thought from the 1880s to the 1960s* (London, 1987), p.124.

³⁴ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p.5 and p.39.

³⁵ Hyndman, *England for All*, p.194.

his abiding thought was that freedom could only come by the gradual evolution of a properly-equipped working-class party, taught class consciousness by actual experience gained in the struggle with Capitalism, and by changes in the ownership of capitalist property forced on society by the workings of the capitalist system itself.³⁶

On this basis Hardie asserted that “[t]he Labour party is the only expression of orthodox Marxian Socialism in Great Britain”, and “[t]he policy of the I.L.P. is in line with that preached and practiced by Karl Marx [and] Friedrich Engels”.³⁷

Vladimir Lenin, for one, would have disagreed with this interpretation of Marx. Lenin, according to one biographer, possessed “an immense revolutionary drive”, writing – as an example – that “the fundamental economic interests of the proletariat can be satisfied only by a political revolution that will replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the dictatorship of the proletariat”.³⁸ Lenin reinforced this point in a meeting with George Lansbury, explaining:

You think you can establish the revolution without violence, I think you will not be able to do so. If in England you are able to do this, well and good. No one wants bloodshed merely for bloodshed’s sake, but it is necessary that the workers must arm in order to obtain the revolution. The workers must arm to protect the revolution because I do not believe the capitalist class will give in without a fight.³⁹

Lansbury explains that “Lenin is most definitely of the opinion, not that the workers want to fight or that he and his friends want to fight but that the capitalists will make them fight”.⁴⁰ This, however, does not negate a clear disagreement.

There was also disagreement over the role of different classes in socialist activity. Christian Socialists, as we have seen, were open to people of all classes joining with them. Marxists, by contrast, saw the coming revolution as a battle between the capitalists and the workers: “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat”.⁴¹ This is in stark

³⁶ J. Keir Hardie, *Karl Marx: The Man and His Message* (London, 1910), p.12.

³⁷ J. Keir Hardie, *My Confession of Faith in the Labour Alliance* (London, 1909), p.13 and p.16.

³⁸ C. Read, *Lenin: A Revolutionary Life* (London, 2005), p.14; V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (Peking, 1973 – original publication 1902), p.58.

³⁹ G. Lansbury, *What I Saw In Russia* (London, 1920), pp.170-1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁴¹ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p.3.

contrast to the view of Wilfred Wellock, for example, who believed that capitalists would eventually come to accept the immorality of capitalism, and would therefore assist in the creation of a new society and their part in it, or Samuel Keeble, who argued that “the interests of Capital and Labour are identical – certainly all their permanent interests are, if their temporary interests are not, and therefore their strife is suicidal as well as fratricidal”.⁴² Marx and Engels accepted that “the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population”, but only in the sense that those of the middle class may “sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the connection with the large capitalists”.⁴³ It was not, as Hardie asserted, that “the aristocracy may yield men prepared to sacrifice life itself, and all that is supposed to make life worth living, in order to help the workers”.⁴⁴

This was also a criticism made by the syndicalists. In a *Syndicalist* essay on ‘The Class Struggle’ it was explained that:

Socialists yet admit into membership in their party members of the capitalist class, merely because they subscribe to their doctrines, and consequently much dissension occurs and a drifting away from the fundamental basis upon which the party was originally formed. For these people, be they ever so sincere and honest, have proven time and time again by their actions their inability to see eye to eye with us on the problems which confront us daily in the workshop, and to act along lines which we consider to be to our material benefits.⁴⁵

Again it was George Lansbury who came in for personal criticism over his disagreement with the syndicalist view. “Lansbury believes that ‘women and men of all classes ... are awakening.’ He believes that ‘people whose lives have been spent in luxury ... are understanding that conditions are wrong.’ Syndicalists are opposed to such appeals to the rich”.⁴⁶

While Marxists and syndicalists sought to keep the upper classes out of their campaigns the Fabians took the opposite view, rejecting the idea of working-class involvement. This was a result of what has been described as the Fabian “distrust or

⁴² A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life In Peace* (Bridport, 1988), p.36; S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.272.

⁴³ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p.11.

⁴⁴ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.16.

⁴⁵ W. Gray, ‘The Class Struggle’, *Syndicalist* 2, 3 and 4, Mar-Apr 1913.

⁴⁶ A.D. Lewis, ‘Our Rebellion’, *Syndicalist* 3, 2, Feb 1914.

depreciation of political democracy”; the Fabian Society was “all in favour of government for the people but not necessarily *of* or *by* the people”.⁴⁷ Shaw, for example wrote: “To hand the country over to riff-raff is national suicide, since riff-raff can neither govern nor will let anyone else govern except the highest bidder of bread and circuses”.⁴⁸ Beatrice Webb expressed the same sentiment: “We have little faith in the ‘average sensual man’, we do not believe he can do much more than describe his grievances, we do not think he can prescribe his remedies”.⁴⁹ The Webbs “were perfectly conscious that socialism as they understood it had only a tenuous relationship to democracy in the usual sense of the word”.⁵⁰ Cole’s view of Webb was that he “still conceives the mass of men as persons who ought to be decently treated, not as persons who ought freely to organise their own conditions of life; in short, his conception of a new social order is still that of an order that is ordained from without, and not realised from within”.⁵¹

The Christian Socialist view of equality is also at odds with the belief of leading Fabians in eugenics. It was the view of H.G. Wells – supported by the Webbs and Shaw – that society should delete from within itself the “feeble, ugly, inefficient, born of unrestrained lusts, and increasing and multiplying through sheer incontinence and stupidity”; the Webbs similarly called for “intelligently purposeful selection” in order to facilitate the birth of “well-born” children and “prevent the persistent multiplication of the congenitally feeble-minded”.⁵² These opinions are far removed from the Christian Socialist way of thinking, in which human equality is drawn from idea about God as Father and creator. William Temple, for example, wrote that “apart from faith in God there is really nothing to be said for the notion of human equality. Men do not seem to be equal in any respect, if we judge by available evidence. But if all are children of one Father, then all are equal heirs of a status in comparison with which the apparent differences of quality and capacity are unimportant; in the deepest and most important of all – their relationship to God – all are equal”.⁵³

⁴⁷ G. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York NY, 1991), p.369. [Emphasis in original.]

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.371.

⁴⁹ Wright, *Cole*, p.55.

⁵⁰ Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, p.372.

⁵¹ Wright, *Cole*, p.71.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.367-8.

⁵³ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.37.

The Kingdom of God

The Christian Socialist vision of the new socialist society as the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven on Earth is another clear point of difference. For example, Marx and Engels viewed the idea of “the kingdom of God” as existing only “in the imagination”; it could not be realised, because it was not real.⁵⁴ By contrast the Marxist idea of a new society was one in which religious belief no longer played a part.

As we have seen, the Marxist view was that religions were simply the expression or reflection of materialistic forces, and that, as Engels wrote, the idea of God is only “the alien domination of the capitalist mode of production”, and when that mode of production is replaced so religious belief and the idea of God will disappear.⁵⁵ Marx also explained why religion would vanish under communism: “The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case, only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of every-day life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to nature”.⁵⁶

The idea of a new society as the Kingdom of God would also have been criticised by Cole, who held a libertarian suspicion “of large organisations that required one to conform or to behave in a prescribed manner”, a view which led to “his antipathy to religion”.⁵⁷ A similar view was taken by the syndicalists. Far from equating a socialist society and the Kingdom of God, religion and socialism had such different perspectives that the former must pass away for the latter to be established: “It is impossible for most people who are acquainted with modern knowledge to accept the views of the universe taken by the established religions. Therefore the old religions must be swept away in order that the new faith which will inspire revolutionary action may arise”.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Marx and Engels, ‘The Holy Family’, p.80.

⁵⁵ Engels, ‘Anti-Duhring’, pp.148-9.

⁵⁶ K. Marx, ‘Capital’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (New York NY, 1964), p.136.

⁵⁷ M. Beech and K. Hickson, ‘G.D.H. Cole’, in M. Beech and K. Hickson, eds, *Labour’s Thinkers: The Intellectual Roots of Labour from Tawney to Gordon Brown* (London, 2007), p.39.

⁵⁸ ‘An International Conspiracy’, *Syndicalist*, 3, 2 Feb 1914.

13. A Christian Critique of Christian Socialism

Having constructed a socialist critique of Christian Socialism, this chapter examines some of the arguments advanced against socialism by Christians in order to construct a Christian critique of Christian Socialism. This consists of: firstly, the overall incompatibility of Christianity and socialism; secondly, a defence of private property and inequality; thirdly, religious and moral disagreements; and, fourthly, economic disagreements. It should be noted that most of the sources drawn upon in this chapter are contemporary to the Christian Socialist figures being examined; it is not necessarily the case that Christians today would make the same objections or subscribe to the same arguments.

Overall Incompatibility

As we have already discussed, there is very little in the way of direct criticism of Christian Socialism, from socialists or Christians. For most Christians who have written on this subject, their critique of Christian Socialism seems to consist solely of the assertion that the idea is false, as Christianity and socialism are incompatible. The details of this incompatibility are drawn from their discussion of the doctrines of socialism in general. William Nicholas – a Wesleyan Methodist critic of socialism – writes that Christianity and socialism “are gravely dissimilar in origins, in principles, in aims, in methods, and in motives”; even given the possibility of some common ground, “to represent the two systems as similar, or as allied, or as closely related to each other, is a mistake”.¹ Again Nicholas argues: “Fidelity to truth should make us ever speak of Christianity and Socialism as distinct and, in many respects, antagonistic systems. Compromise is impossible. When Socialism loses its objectionable elements, it ceases to be Socialism, as it is presented to us by its acknowledged advocates and exponents”.² For this reason he concludes, “[w]e admit the excellence of the motives that influence Canon Shuttleworth, Mr. Headlam, and others, but we do not believe in their wisdom”, and writes of the difference between an “honest avowal

¹ W. Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism* (London, 1893).

² *Ibid.*, pp.105-6.

of Christianity” and the “assumption of the name of Socialism by what at least looks like a pious fraud”.³

In a similar way William Cunningham, writing for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, admits an overlap of interest between socialists and Christian social reformers, but points to the denial by socialists of any correlation between Christianity and socialism, concluding: “the insight of these non-Christian Socialists is not mistaken, whatever superficial resemblances there may be between Christian Philanthropy and Socialist schemes”.⁴ Robert Kane, in a Catholic Truth Society pamphlet makes the argument “a true Catholic cannot be a real socialist”.⁵ This prefigures the view of Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno*, an encyclical of 1936: “Whether socialism be considered as a doctrine, or as a historical fact, or as a ‘movement’, if it really remains socialism, it cannot be brought into harmony with the dogmas of the Catholic Church [...] ‘Religious socialism’, ‘Christian socialism’ are expressions implying a contradiction in terms. No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist”.⁶

Pius’ view that “[n]o one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist” is expressed by other writers. Kane argues of Christian Socialists: “On the one hand they dilute Socialism, and on the other hand they dilute Religion”; he repeats this assertion after criticism of the Roman Catholic economist Francesco Nitti – a key influence on John Wheatley: “Nitti and those who think like him are neither sterling Catholics nor staunch socialists”.⁷ Nicholas writes that, “[i]n addition to the socialists proper, there are the Christian Socialists”.⁸ Christian Socialism is therefore seen as illegitimate, not just on the grounds that it is not Christian, but also on the grounds that it is not truly socialist either.

Ronald H. Preston, writing in 1994, offers a brief but more detailed critique of Christian Socialism. Preston lists what he sees as the three traditional criticisms of capitalism made by Christian Socialists: “(1) Competition in itself is ethically dubious; (2) So is profit; production should not be for profit but for use; (3) The motive for economic activity should be service, not self”.⁹ Preston takes each of these criticisms in turn. On the first he writes: “I do not see any reason why Christians should be suspicious of competition

³ *Ibid.*, p.100.

⁴ W. Cunningham, *Socialism and Christianity* (London, 1909), p.27.

⁵ R.J. Kane, *Socialism* (Dublin, 1910), p.68.

⁶ C.E. Curran, *Catholic Social teaching 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis* (Washington D.C., 2002), p.200.

⁷ Kane, *Socialism*, p.9 and p.10

⁸ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p. 99.

⁹ M. Novak and R.H. Preston, *Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism?* (London, 1994), p.30.

as such [...] There must be a division of labour in society, and that will mean some grading according to standards such as cost, quality, natural talent and acquired skills. That will mean there will be successes and failures in our human communities”.¹⁰

On the second, it might be remembered that Christian Socialists such as George Lansbury and James Keir Hardie spoke of replacing production for profit with production for use. Lansbury’s comments are summed up in a newspaper report as being that “production for profit and dividends must be replaced by production for use and the general good”, while Hardie wrote that under socialism “industry shall be organised on the basis of Production for Use rather than Production for Profit”.¹¹ Preston takes a different view: “Those who talked of production for use and not for profit failed to understand the theory of the market, that it is the judgement of what goods and services customers think to be useful that in principle secures that they will be provided, and profits made. No better way of deciding the allocation of relatively scarce resources in the present, and between present use and future consumption, is on offer”.¹² On the final point, Preston simply notes: “Concern for the self is not the same as selfishness [...] A social order needs to achieve structures which foster the harmony of self interest with the common good”.¹³

Preston criticises Christian Socialists for failing to recognise the reality of original sin and the imperfectability of both individuals and the political system.¹⁴ A similar point is made by Lenard Nyirongo, writing in the same year, criticising “communists, socialists [...] who call themselves Christians [but] believe the root cause of evil is located in the social structures, established by colonialism, capitalism or racism. They do not see that destruction of these structures is not a cure because the same unregenerated man inherits the ‘new’ structures”.¹⁵ Nyirongo’s argument is that the establishment of socialism would not change human nature, and it is sinful human nature rather than any political system which is the cause of evil in this world.

The same kind of argument is made by earlier writers; Cunningham suggests: “It does not seem clear that a stronger sense of brotherhood and desire to engage in self-sacrifice for the common cause would be called forth universally by the mere force of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ ‘Newspaper cuttings from the East Anglian Daily Times, and the Methodist Recorder about the Christian Socialist Crusade, 19 March 1931’, London School of Economics [LSE] archives, Lansbury/10 50-1; J. Keir Hardie, *The I.L.P. and All About It* (Manchester, 1908), p.6.

¹² Novak and Preston, *Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism?*, p.31.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁵ L.T. Nyirongo, *Should a Christian embrace Socialism, Communism or Humanism?* (Potchefstroom, 1994).

changed circumstances”.¹⁶ This is also the view of Nicholas, who makes the case that, in a society in which everyone is guaranteed some small income but cannot earn more, “become the owner of private property”, or “save and hand down his savings to his children”, “men, sure of their daily bread, would do as little work as possible. To suppose otherwise is to suppose that Socialism, without any adequate motive or power, would make an immediate change in human nature, so that men would at once cease to be egotistic and become altruistic”.¹⁷ Charles Devas, writer of another anti-socialist pamphlet by the Catholic Truth Society, complains that “Socialists often argue from the natural goodness of man”, but in fact “real historical man [...] appears an idle, careless, and self-indulgent personage”.¹⁸

Michael Novak takes the argument a stage further, arguing not just against socialism but in favour of capitalism: “The Christian doctrine of sin practically demands that there be a division of power throughout the economy, such as the principle of competition effects”.¹⁹ Here Novak would find himself at odds with Nyirongo, who sees capitalism and socialism as equally corrupt, writing, for example, that as “the motive behind capitalism is to accumulate as much wealth as one possibly can, the result is always an imbalance: the rich grow richer and the poor, poorer”, and adding “[t]he idea that self-interest will naturally result in good for others has no validity”.²⁰ However, Novak’s view is seemingly supported by Catholic Social Teaching. In *Rerum novarum* Pope Leo XIII writes that arguments in favour of private property are “strong and convincing”, and John Donavon’s interpretation of Leo’s teaching is that “[p]rivate ownership, according to the law of human nature, is required for the preservation of life and for our well-being”.²¹ Here the argument is again made that elements of free-market capitalism are necessitated by human sinfulness. Some critics, therefore, argued that human nature made socialism impossible; others went even further, arguing that human nature makes capitalism a necessity.

Preston offers a critique of the Christian Socialist use of Biblical teaching in making their arguments in favour of socialism, arguing that “it is surely a mistake to take the teaching of Jesus (or Paul for that matter) as a rule for governments [...] to follow”. There are therefore principles to be applied rather than rules to be followed, especially as “we live

¹⁶ Cunningham, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.22.

¹⁷ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.208.

¹⁸ C.S. Devas, *Socialism* (New York NY, c. 1905), p.10.

¹⁹ Novak and Preston, *Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism*, p.19.

²⁰ Nyirongo, *Should a Christian embrace Socialism?*, pp.43-4.

²¹ J.F. Donovan, ‘Pope Leo XIII and a Century of Catholic Social Teaching’, in D.M. McCarthy, *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids MI, 2009), p.61.

in two Kingdoms of God, not one”, and these Kingdoms are “not identical”.²² It should also be noted that Preston’s treatment of the idea of the Kingdom of God differs from the Christian Socialist one, in which there was only one Kingdom of God which would be realised in the establishment of socialism.

Preston’s application of principles rather than rules is not completely at odds with Christian Socialism; for example, Samuel Keeble accepted that the payment of interest could not be abolished, even though it was forbidden in the Bible, writing that “biblical prohibitions do not avail for wholly changed social and economic conditions [...] Nevertheless, those prohibitions and precepts are of permanent value, for they assert principles which, if observed, will safeguard both the individual and society against the abuses to which interest, however in itself right and necessary, is for ever liable”.²³ However, Keeble would still go much further than Preston, arguing, for example, that the parable of the workers in the vineyard teaches that governments ought to mandate a living wage.²⁴ This is viewed as an error by Preston: “there is only one reward for all in the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed [...] and that surely is the message of the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, not that equal pay for all labour is just, irrespective of the amount”.²⁵ Preston therefore reasserts the spiritual meaning of the parable as the only true meaning.

Preston is not the only writer to advance arguments against the Christian Socialist interpretation of Scripture and view of Christianity. To begin with, Nyirongo denies that Jesus Christ is the revolutionary figure proclaimed by, for example, George Lansbury, who viewed Christ as “the greatest revolutionary force of His times”.²⁶ Nyirongo points out that Christ “did not come to fight for the poor. He also did not campaign for higher wages and better conditions of employment. He was more concerned with the state of the inner man than material equality [...] He did not fight for the poor nor incite the workers to campaign for better pay or seize capital”; Christ turned down the opportunity to teach that taxes should not be paid to Rome, and while some would argue that He was crucified because of His

²² R.H. Preston, ‘Locked in a Time Warp: The latest Christian Socialist Manifesto’, *Theology*, 104, 817 (2001), p.15.

²³ S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.184.

²⁴ See chapter 1, pp.11-12.

²⁵ Preston, ‘Time Warp’, p.16.

²⁶ G. Lansbury, ‘Back to the Galilean!’, in *The Religion in the Labour Movement* (London, 1919), p.56.

revolutionary teaching, Nyirongo points out that He was tried and convicted on false charges.²⁷

The *Church Times*, an Anglican newspaper, had in 1908 also declared that “Christ was not the leader of a social revolution, nor was the main task of the Church social, but religious”.²⁸ Lyman Abbott, a Congregationalist theologian, made a similar argument:

Jesus Christ [...] made almost no attempt to change social order or the social organism. The system of taxation that prevailed in the Roman Empire was abominably unjust. Christ said never a word about taxation. Labor was not only underpaid and ill paid, but, for the most part, worked with its hands in manacles; but Christ never said a word about slavery [...] he said almost nothing about social evils and a great deal about individual sins.²⁹

In the same vein Cunningham points out that Christ “did not profess to remedy injustice directly in the division of an inheritance”, a reference to an incident recorded in Luke’s Gospel: “And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”.³⁰ Cunningham implies from this that Christ would not be involved in labour disputes or arguments for redistributive taxation. Nicholas points to the same incident, asserting: “Our Lord’s reply is a tacit yet distinct sanction of the rightfulness of holding private property”.³¹

Defence of Private Property and Inequality

Many arguments were put forward in favour of private property. Nicholas goes on to point out that there is no condemnation of wealthy individuals in either the Old or the New Testament who held private property, concluding: “The right of private property is thus sanctioned by Christianity”.³² He also points to the commandment “[t]hou shalt not steal”,

²⁷ Nyirongo, *Should a Christian embrace Socialism?*, p.84 and pp.87-90.

²⁸ S. Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London, 1967), p.235.

²⁹ L. Abbott, ‘Christianity versus Socialism’, *The North American Review*, 148, 389, (April 1889), p.448.

³⁰ Luke 12:13-15.

³¹ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.118.

³² *Ibid.*, 119.

arguing: “Here God puts the sanction of His law around each man’s possessions”.³³ This point is supported by Kane, who accuses socialism of being “irremediably committed to the irremediable robbery of everybody who has anything worth robbing”.³⁴ The same point was made in a commentary on the *Fabian Essays in Socialism* by the *Nonconformist* newspaper in 1891.³⁵ Nicholas takes particular aim at those who would argue that private property in land is immoral:

The land that God gives is not more intended for all than are the other gifts of Providence. It requires, just as they do, the application of human labour to make it valuable [...] It would be just as sound reasoning to say no man can hold property in calico because cotton is the gift of God, or no man can hold property in linen because flax is the gift of God, as to say no man ought to hold property in land because land is the gift of God.³⁶

From this Nicholas denounces Henry George’s land scheme as “really a scheme of confiscation” which is “distinctly immoral because it violates the divine law”.³⁷

Similarly, Kane judges the socialist doctrine that “private ownership itself is wrong” as one of several “principles which no real Catholic can hold”.³⁸ Kane may well have had in mind *Rerum novarum*, in which Pope Leo declares that “the main tenet of socialism, the community of goods, must be utterly rejected”, and that “[e]very human being has by nature the right to possess private property as one’s own”.³⁹ Later, Pope Pius would make the same argument in *Quadragesimo anno*; socialists, in Pius’ view, “are wrong in thus attacking and seeking the abolition of ownership and all profits deriving from sources other than labour”.⁴⁰ David Cloutier explains that, according to Catholic Social Teaching, socialism “violates the right to private property which allows persons to sustain their lives and the social good by the free and intelligent use of their possessions”.⁴¹ To these critics of socialism therefore, private property – far from being condemned – was a right sustained by the Bible and church teaching.

³³ Exodus 20:15; Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.118.

³⁴ Kane, *Socialism*, p.81.

³⁵ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.286.

³⁶ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.197.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Kane, *Socialism*, p.69.

³⁹ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.199 and p.200.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.193.

⁴¹ D. Cloutier, ‘Modern Politics and Catholic Social Teaching’, in D.M. McCarthy, *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids MI, 2009), p.135.

A key section of the New Testament for Christian Socialists was the Acts of the Apostles, in which Luke records that “all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need”.⁴² They also pointed to historical evidence that this continued for centuries afterward, with Keir Hardie, for example, writing that “it is now known that Communism in goods was practiced by Christians for at least three hundred years after the death of Christ”.⁴³ Critics, however, disputed the idea that this meant that contemporary society should be organised upon the same lines. “It is”, wrote Nicholas, “to be observed that no divine command was given to establish this community of goods. No slightest hint was given that it was to be an example to all Christians everywhere”; it was, Nicholas argues, “with very questionable wisdom” that the early Christians “established this community of goods”, and that “[t]his earliest experiment in Christian communism, like all subsequently made, was an economic failure [...] a chronic poverty was the consequence”.⁴⁴

Nicholas refers to the words of the Apostle Peter in rebuke of Ananias – “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” – “evidently implying”, argues Nicholas, “that he need not have sold his property, if he had not wished to sell it; and that after he had sold it, he could do what he liked with the proceeds”.⁴⁵ This argument was also advanced by Kane: “Amongst the early Christians, there existed that sort of Communism which consists in the voluntary surrender, from religious motives, of all private property to the ownership and control of the community, but that could not, unless human nature were to cease to be human, become obligatory, universal, permanent. St. Peter declared that it was voluntary”.⁴⁶ Nicholas and Kane point to the voluntary nature of the communal ownership displayed by the early church in order to distinguish it from the communal ownership sought after by socialists.

However, for this argument to be sustained as a criticism of Christian Socialism it would have to be assumed that Christian Socialists envisaged a situation in which property would be forcibly confiscated, and this was not the case. William Temple, for example, recognised that this was “as different from what is ordinarily called communism as anything

⁴² Acts of the Apostles 2:44-5.

⁴³ J. Keir Hardie, *Socialism and Christianity* (London, 1907), p.5.

⁴⁴ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.113.

⁴⁵ Acts of the Apostles 5:3-4.

⁴⁶ Kane, *Socialism*, p.4.

can be; it is, indeed, its polar opposite. Modern communism abolishes legal ownership by private persons; under it no one has property to give away”, adding that “[t]o renounce property is a conspicuously vivid act of personal freedom; to have no property or be forcibly deprived of it is a serious infringement of personal freedom”.⁴⁷ Both Temple and Samuel Keeble refer to Peter’s words to Ananias to show, as Keeble phrased it, that “[t]he Christian, as citizen, has legal control of his property”.⁴⁸ Both, nevertheless, still maintained a call for society to be organised and property-ownership to be reformed.⁴⁹

Christian critics of socialism also deny the egalitarian ideas held by Christian Socialists. For example, Nyirongo argues that “God’s Word does not define equality in terms of communal sharing”, also denying that Christian doctrine can be used to support the equality of all people: “to the Christian man’s equality finds its expression in Christ. All those who are in Christ – rich or poor, master or slave – have one identity, are equal indeed (Gal. 3:28). Those outside Christ do not share this equality”.⁵⁰ The passage referenced by Nyirongo reads: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”.⁵¹ These verses do speak of Christian equality, but only for those who are Christians.

Devas accepts the idea, advanced by Christian Socialists, that there being one creator God, all His created people are equal. However, in his view, “Christianity preached no abolition of inequality of conditions; rather it taught that all inequality of rights and authority is from God”.⁵² Here Devas goes further than Nyirongo in accepting in theory the idea of equality before God, but rejects the idea of an egalitarian socialist society on the grounds that God has ordained inequality in some areas. This also appears to be the view of Pope Leo in *Rerum novarum*, who points to differences “in capability, in diligence, in health, and in strength; an unequal fortune is a necessary result of inequality in condition”.⁵³ Nicholas agrees, writing that Christianity “does not teach that all men are equal in intellectual or moral faculties, or ought to be equal in position or material possessions”, and that the “idea of equality must break down [...] God has not made men equal by nature, and

⁴⁷ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), pp.46-7.

⁴⁸ S.E. Keeble, *The Ideal of the Material Life and Other Social Addresses* (London, 1908), p.222; W. Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (London, 1944), p.145.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 9, pp.11-12.

⁵⁰ Nyirongo, *Should a Christian embrace Socialism?*, p.51 and p.52.

⁵¹ Galatians 3:27-8.

⁵² Devas, *Socialism*, p.6

⁵³ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.150.

any artificial attempt to do so must end in disappointment and failure”.⁵⁴ Novak concludes that the doctrine of God as creator in fact means the opposite to that argued by Christian Socialists: “Our God is not a God of uniformities [...] Indeed, God’s infinite perfection suggests infinite degrees of inequality”.⁵⁵ To these critics then, inequality is not an aberration but something ordained by God, and therefore something that cannot and should not be eradicated.

Religious and Moral Disagreements

Other arguments and counter-arguments were advanced on the basis of Scripture. Nicholas takes the encounter between Christ’s command to the rich young man, “sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor”, advanced at times as an argument for socialism, and argues that this “does not express a universal duty, but a specific command, given with a specific moral purpose”.⁵⁶ Similarly Nicholas disputes the Christian Socialist interpretation of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, arguing that if this is a condemnation of the rich then the beggar Lazarus is saved by being poor; therefore, nobody should seek to lift the poor out of poverty, for so doing might take away their salvation. “This”, he adds, “would be a settlement of the labour question that Socialists at any rate would not desire”.⁵⁷ Nyirongo, similarly, accepts that the parable is a “warning to the rich not to live selfishly”, but not that it is an argument in favour of socialism.⁵⁸

Kane turns the Christian Socialist arguments about Mammon-worship on their head, arguing that as a materialistic doctrine socialism is engaged in the worship of Mammon: “the idea that the end and aim of life, its object and its motive, are in material pleasure, and that Socialism alone is able to glut the populace with sensuous joy [...] That doctrine is false, unworthy of man; it is born and bred in the kingdom of Mammon”.⁵⁹ Cunningham, similarly, argues that Christians “must beware of a doctrine which tends to encourage men to set their affects on the things of earth”.⁶⁰ The *Church Family Newspaper*, an Anglican

⁵⁴ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.145 and p.151.

⁵⁵ Novak and Preston, *Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism*, p.20.

⁵⁶ Luke 18:22; Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.114.

⁵⁷ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, pp.115-6.

⁵⁸ Nyirongo, *Should a Christian embrace Socialism?*, p.84.

⁵⁹ Kane, *Socialism*, p.71.

⁶⁰ Cunningham, *Socialism and Christianity*, pp.27-8. [Cunningham is also referencing Colossians 3:2 – “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”.]

publication, also argued that socialism aimed at material, worldly improvements, while Christianity's focus ought to be spiritual.⁶¹

Critics of socialism reminded people that the Christian Gospel is essentially individualistic. This was an argument put forward more readily by Protestant writers. For example, Abbott makes the point that the “work of the Christian Church is, the work of Christ was, primarily individual; only secondarily social and organic. Christ's method was based on the assumption that, if individuals were made right, society would rectify itself; and that is the method which he has bequeathed to the Christian Church and Christian ministry”; change must “be wrought in the hearts of individual men”.⁶² Christians should, therefore, focus on individuals and eschew the socialist method of apparently trying to change society as a whole without seeking individual change. Cunningham agrees, arguing that while socialism's message is for society as a whole, Christianity “appeals to each individual personally by holding out an ideal, and stirring up his will”.⁶³

Others pointed to the perceived harm that socialism would do to family life. This argument tended to be advanced by Roman Catholics. Kane, for example, argued that “Socialists recognize divorce as a breaking of the marriage bond” and, more strangely, that “Socialists maintain that the child is the property of the State as against the Father's right”; these he includes in the list of socialist “principles which no real Catholic can hold”.⁶⁴ However, the *Church Family Newspaper* advanced similar arguments in a series of articles on socialism in 1907, criticising socialism for its hostility to marriage, desire to take children away from their parents, and support for contraception.⁶⁵

Devas explains that Christianity emphasises family life and provision within the family, and that this would be undermined by socialist collectivism which would emphasise the provision of the state.⁶⁶ This is also Cloutier's interpretation of Catholic Social Teaching, writing that socialism “intrudes on family, not only by denying private property, but also by its conception of an all-encompassing state (since the state is suppose[d] to represent the will of a classless society). State socialism undermines the relationship between parents and children”.⁶⁷ The fear of an “all-encompassing state” is one that characterises much Christian

⁶¹ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.238.

⁶² Abbott, ‘Christianity versus Socialism’, p.450.

⁶³ Cunningham, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.29.

⁶⁴ Kane, *Socialism*, p.69.

⁶⁵ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.237.

⁶⁶ Devas, *Socialism*, p.6.

⁶⁷ Cloutier, ‘Modern Politics and Catholic Social Teaching’, p.135.

writing about socialism. It was expressed, again in the *Church Family Newspaper*, in fears about state provision of meals for schoolchildren: “Parents who do their duty by their children are made to pay for those parents who bring their children into the world and refuse to recognise their responsibility. Then the demand never stops. If the children are to be fed they must be medically inspected; then they must be clothed, and after that will come fresh claims”.⁶⁸

This fear is also a feature of Catholic Social Teaching, as Curran reminds us: “Catholic tradition opposes totalitarianism – which makes the state supreme and takes away the basic rights and roles of individuals, families, and all other mediating institutions”.⁶⁹ For this reason, Curran explains, both “Leo XIII and Pius XI strongly opposed socialism, which gives too great a role to the state”.⁷⁰ Novak also makes this point based on the teaching of *Rerum novarum*: “In 1891 Leo XIII was justifiably eager to block the growth of the unlimited modern state. He urged free citizens by the practice of this virtue to associate themselves with one another to accomplish necessary social tasks, sometimes through the state, but more ordinarily through their own associations. It is necessary to keep the state limited and not to feed its appetite”.⁷¹

Some of the claims regarding the damage socialism would do to family life can be immediately dismissed, especially in the context of Christian Socialism. Kane’s claim, for example, that “Socialists maintain that the child is the property of the State as against the Father’s right” cannot be taken seriously. These, nevertheless, were arguments consistently advanced against socialism.

Fears about state power in general are more reasonably held. It might be objected that Christian Socialists did not aim at a totalitarian state, but, as we have seen, while there was an emphasis on individual freedom, in practice Christian Socialist aspirations required the existence of an active and powerful state.⁷² For this reason it is probably fair to say, as Nicholas does, that “Christian Socialists have decided leanings towards State Socialism”, and in his view this means that Christian Socialism “would interfere unduly with private property”.⁷³ Nicholas writes of “increased liberty”, and that “Socialism, if established, would lead to its absolute destruction”; “Socialism, that would train every man for a certain work,

⁶⁸ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.294.

⁶⁹ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.142.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.138

⁷¹ Novak and Preston, *Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism*, pp.12-3.

⁷² See Chapter 9.

⁷³ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.100.

that would appoint every man his place, that would apportion his wages and measure out his pleasures, would thus absolutely destroy individual liberty”; socialism’s plan to abolish private property, again, “destroys individual liberty”.⁷⁴

The same arguments are advanced by others. A *Church Times* article in 1885 insisted that socialism “tends to destroy individual effort, and to abolish liberty by abolishing private rights”.⁷⁵ Nyirongo asserts that “[i]f all life in society has to be organised centrally then state oppression and dictatorship is the result”.⁷⁶ Cunningham writes of “tyrannical government by a bureaucracy”, Kane also equates socialism with “tyranny”, while Devas takes the view that collectivism would involve such an extent of government intervention that it would of necessity be “despotism”.⁷⁷ To the Christian critic, therefore, socialism represents totalitarianism, dictatorship, despotism and tyranny.

Economic Disagreements

Christian writers did not just restrict themselves to moral or religious arguments against socialism; they also had their say on the alleged economic failings of socialism. Nicholas, for example, attacks the labour theory of value:

The fallacy of Marx is that he makes labour the only source of value [...] Labour will not create value unless it is labour widely expended on something furnished to us by nature [...] But we must add to this labour, ability to conduct business, knowledge of materials and of markets, enterprise that will venture to make goods for which there is not immediate demand, and that will extend commerce by seeking for new customers, if necessary new markets and probity that will secure the confidence of those with whom business is carried on.⁷⁸

This is an argument against Marx and Marxists in particular, yet we have seen that Christian Socialists for the most part did accept this theory, and even Samuel Keeble, who rejected this doctrine, observed that “[n]o weakness in Marx’s theory of value can impair the truth and importance of his revelation – for revelation it was – of the innate tendencies of the

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.123, p.140 and p.142.

⁷⁵ Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.277.

⁷⁶ Nyirongo, *Should a Christian embrace Socialism?*, p.56.

⁷⁷ Cunningham, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.28; Kane, *Socialism*, p.33; Devas, *Socialism*, p.9.

⁷⁸ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, pp.206-7.

capitalistic system of industry to exploit the labourer”.⁷⁹ Nicholas disagrees: “If labour were the sole source of wealth we should be logically and morally bound to accept all the parts of the socialistic scheme which properly follow from this supposition; but as labour is not the sole source of wealth, Socialism in its economic aspect, resting mainly on this foundations, falls to pieces”.⁸⁰

Kane agrees with Nicholas, arguing that the idea that “labour alone is the cause of value” is “false”, and adding that “since labour alone is not the only cause, source, and standard of value, the Socialist attack on the right of private ownership is absolutely foiled”.⁸¹ An 1888 *Church Times* article “produced arguments against the demand for the whole product of Labour, and pointed out the difficulties, which it regarded as insuperable, in the way of nationalization”.⁸² Pope Pius concludes that socialists “are wrong in thus attacking and seeking the abolition of ownership and all profits deriving from sources other than labour”.⁸³

Various other criticisms of socialism were offered by these Christian opponents. Kane made the argument that a classless state was impossible to realise, as any state “must have its great writers, its great statisticians, its great inventors, its great administrators, and, above all, its great officials”.⁸⁴ Pope Leo also suggested that a classless society was unnatural: “Just as the symmetry of the human body is the result of the disposition of the members of the body, so a State is fit ordained by nature that these two classes should exist in harmony and agreement, and should, as it were, fit into one another, so as to maintain the equilibrium of the body politic”.⁸⁵

Nicholas counters the assertion of Henry George that the poor are getting poorer under capitalism, pointing out that “wages have increased [and] the hours of labour diminished”, and adding that the increase in wages is not, as some socialists might argue, cancelled out by inflation.⁸⁶ Nicholas also counters the argument put forward by socialists that property rights lead to corruption, arguing that the misdeeds of the wealthy occur “because the laws are not sufficiently stringent regarding the sacredness of property. Our

⁷⁹ Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams*, p.166.

⁸⁰ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.206.

⁸¹ Kane, *Socialism*, p.6 and p.27.

⁸² Mayor, *Churches and the Labour Movement*, p.278.

⁸³ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.193,

⁸⁴ Kane, *Socialism*, p.56.

⁸⁵ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p150.

⁸⁶ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.185 and pp.186-7.

laws require to be strengthened in the exactly opposite direction to that aimed at by socialism”.⁸⁷

The conclusion to all these criticisms is that socialism is undesirable and morally wrong, but, more so, that it is utterly unworkable. “Socialism is necessarily a leap in the dark”, wrote Cunningham, “it can offer us only castles in the air which find little support from the organized study of actual experience”.⁸⁸ Devas agrees: “Every unearned advantage in the race for life would have to be neutralized, every undeserved defect compensated; and so great would be the complication that it would require more than human power and impartiality to adjust the points of this universal handicap”.⁸⁹ A person, according to Kane, “may dream dreams of how the world may become a paradise, men angels, and human society a home, like Heaven, but he does not understand, or will not think, of the practical difficulties, or the inviolable principles, which prove his system to be no more real than a fairy tale”.⁹⁰ These words amount to a fair criticism of Christian Socialism, especially when we consider the confused arguments of Wilfred Wellock, or Keir Hardie’s refusal to make firm plans or predictions about the new world he sought to bring about.⁹¹

It should be noted that these men were not blind to the problems caused under capitalism. We have already quoted Nyirongo against some capitalist ideas, and the older writers all admitted the need for reform. The *Church Family Newspaper* series on socialism ended with an article that “advocated social reform as the antidote to Socialism”.⁹² *Rerum novarum*, despite its fervent opposition to socialism, “in opposition to *laissez-faire* liberalism and individualism – called for government intervention to protect workers”.⁹³ Cunningham, likewise, agreed that people “may sympathize with the recoil from *laissez-faire*, and unrestricted competition, but these things are not essential to the existing social system”.⁹⁴ In other words, Cunningham argues that the worst elements of the existing social system can be eradicated without recourse to a new economic system, or a revolution of any kind, because they are not an inevitable part of that social system. This matches Nicholas’ view that “the hope of society is not by going forward to revolution [...] but in the gradual

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.170.

⁸⁸ Cunningham, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.25.

⁸⁹ Devas, *Socialism*, p.5.

⁹⁰ Kane, *Socialism*, p.9.

⁹¹ See Chapter 4, pp.22-4; Chapter 5, pp.1-2.

⁹² Mayor, *Churches and Labour Movement*, p.237.

⁹³ Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching*, p.147.

⁹⁴ Cunningham, *Socialism and Christianity*, p.23.

evolution of society by enlightened and progressive legislation under Christian influences”.⁹⁵ Nicholas makes it plain earlier in his work that those who would bring about such reforms are often those who disavow and repudiate socialism.⁹⁶ Devas called for “Christian Social Reform”, not as part of socialism but as an alternative to it, and argued for legislation to protect labour, encouragement of trade unions, unemployed benefits, and some elements of collectivism, but, again, denied that these were part of socialism.⁹⁷ Even Kane, the most hysterical opponent of socialism among the critics here examined, admits: “There is no need, no excuse for Socialism. But there is sore need of social reform”.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Nicholas, *Christianity and Socialism*, p.216.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

⁹⁷ Devas, *Socialism*, p.11, pp.12-14, and pp.7-8.

⁹⁸ Kane, *Socialism*, p.92.

Conclusion

This investigation has sought to discover and systematise the ideological beliefs of Christian Socialism. We have considered the philosophical basis of Christian Socialism, the ways in which Christian Socialists planned to bring about a new socialist society, and the nature of that theoretical society. We have also considered a critique of Christian Socialism, from a Christian perspective and from a socialist perspective. The investigation was based on the following research questions:

- (1) What does Christian Socialist ideology consist of? What principles and concepts are common to Christian Socialists?
- (2) Is Christian Socialism necessarily distinctive from other kinds of socialism?
- (3) To what extent does Christian Socialism draw its ideas from theology or religious teaching, and to what extent from other sources?
- (4) What kind of society – if any – do Christian Socialists seek to create? How do they seek to create it – by revolutionary or democratic means?

As far as possible this conclusion will set out the answers to these questions, as well as suggesting new questions raised by this research and the scope for further research.

The first question invites us to consider the nature of Christian Socialism as a political ideology. Ideologies are, as stated in the Introduction, “clusters of ideas, beliefs, opinions, values, and attitudes usually held by identifiable groups”, and the purpose of this investigation is to determine which ideas, beliefs, opinions, values and attitudes are held by Christian Socialists.¹ The ideological belief or concept which underpins all of Christian Socialism is that of brotherhood, and the other key concepts – co-operation, equality and democracy– are drawn from that. Brotherhood itself is drawn from Christian Socialism’s unequivocally Christian basis; the brotherhood of all humanity is due to the universal Fatherhood of God.

¹ M. Freedon, ‘Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy, in G.F. Gaus and C. Kukathas, eds, *Handbook of Political Theory* (London, 2004), p.6.

Co-operation was sought after because it allowed this principle of brotherhood to be expressed, as opposed to the unbrotherly competition of the capitalist free market. Samuel Keeble, for example, declared competition to be “contrary [...] to the teaching of the Christian religion, which [...] condemns selfishness, and demands that men love their neighbour as themselves. It is contrary, because Christianity proclaims the brotherhood of men”.²

Equality is also an expression of brotherhood, as argued by R.H. Tawney, who wanted “a society which [...] holds that the most important aspect of human beings is not the external differences of income and circumstance that divide them, but the common humanity that unites them, and which strives, therefore, to reduce such differences to the position of insignificance that rightly belongs to them”.³ For this reason Christian Socialists sought racial, sexual and class equality. “[I]f all are children of one Father” declared William Temple, “then all are equal heirs of a status in comparison with which the apparent differences of quality and capacity are unimportant; in the deepest and most important of all – their relationship to God – all are equal”.⁴

Democracy too was valued because it allowed the expression of brotherhood; all members of the human family had a say in how society should be managed. William Temple argued that human beings were “created for fellowship in the family of God”, and on this basis, democracy was the best system because every person takes part in government, and thereby enjoys fellowship with their brothers and sisters. This is in stark contrast to totalitarian systems, in which those with power and those excluded from power do not behave in a brotherly way towards each other.

The second question prompts consideration of whether the ideological make-up of Christian Socialism is unique. The plain fact of Christian Socialism’s commitment to co-operation, equality and democracy does not set it apart from other socialisms, or outside the socialist mainstream. However, the fact that these concepts are drawn from the principle of brotherhood, itself derived from belief in the universal Fatherhood of the Christian God, does constitute a Christian Socialist distinctive. The same is true of the general way in which

² S.E. Keeble, *Industrial Day-Dreams: Studies in Industrial Ethics and Economics* (London, 1907 – original publication 1896), p.17 and p.214.

³ R.H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature* (London, 1964), p.167.

⁴ W. Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order* (London, 1976 – original publication 1942), p.37.

Christian Socialism is derived from Scripture, church teaching and the sacraments; no other form of socialism is configured like this, including other forms of ethical socialism.

It may also be that the Christian Socialist synthesis of democratic and revolutionary socialism is also a distinctive. It might be objected that this synthesis was also maintained by others on the left, for example, the Labour Party and the guild socialists. Firstly, however, it can be argued that the reason for such a Labour commitment was due to the influence of Christian Socialist figures such as Hardie, Lansbury and Tawney. Secondly, Labour quickly came to a more reformist position, as argued by, for example, Tawney and Wellock, which precludes the idea of a true synthesis of revolutionary and democratic socialism.⁵ A similar point can be made of the guild socialists, for while G.D.H. Cole sought such a synthesis, as well as maintaining together other seemingly contradictory positions, the guild movement “disintegrated with Cole still struggling to maintain his coalition intact”, while Christian Socialism survives to the present day. This being said, contemporary Christian Socialism may also have disavowed this synthesis by adopting a more reformist position, a potential objection which requires further research.

Criticisms

The third research question concerns the extent to which Christian Socialists used religious arguments in favour of socialism as opposed to other sources. We have already concluded that the balance is demonstrably in favour of the former. However, we have not considered whether or not this is justifiable. Christian Socialists, as noted above, argued that capitalism was at odds with the Fatherhood of God and the consequent principle of human brotherhood, and that socialism would enshrine this principle. This interpretation, however, relies upon a universal application of the doctrine of God’s Fatherhood which is not sustained by Scripture. A key text is found in John’s Gospel: “Then said they to [Jesus], We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me [...] Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do”.⁶ If it is accepted that the key concepts of Christian Socialism are all drawn from the

⁵ R.H. Tawney, ‘The Choice Before the Labour Party’, *Political Quarterly*, 3, 3 (1932), p.22; W. Wellock, *The Way Out, or The Road to the New World* (London, 1922), p.12.

⁶ John: 8:42 and 44.

concept of brotherhood, itself drawn from the idea God's universal Fatherhood, then this counterargument destroys the very foundation of Christian Socialism.

There are other examples of Christian Socialist misinterpretation of Scripture, such as Samuel Keeble's use of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard as an argument in favour of a minimum wage. Keeble's interpretation overlooks the intent of Christ's parables to teach spiritual truths; in this case the parable refers to the common reward that each believer will receive – eternal salvation – regardless the stage of life at which they become saved. We may also take issue with the application of Paul's discussion of "the body" in 1 Corinthians 12 to the right ordering of society. The "body" referred to is not society but the church; Paul writes that "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body", and that this body is "the body of Christ", "the church".⁷ The idea that Christ was executed as a revolutionary must also be dismissed, given that this accusation was rejected by Pontius Pilate:

And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man [...] And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him.⁸

This stands as a denial of, for example, Lansbury's description of Jesus: "the lonely Galilean – Communist, agitator, martyr – crucified as one who stirred up the people and set class against class".⁹

Similar doubts could be raised over the Christian Socialist view of the church as a basis for socialism. For example, Stewart Headlam wrote of "Baptism, the Sacrament of Equality, and Holy Communion, the Sacrament of Brotherhood", adding that "these two are fundamental, the one abolishing all class distinctions, and admitting all into the Christian Church, simply on the ground of humanity; the other pledging and enabling all to live the

⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:14, 27 and 28.

⁸ Luke 23:1-4 and 13-14.

⁹ J. Scheer, *George Lansbury* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.1.

life of brotherhood”.¹⁰ Headlam’s view of christening is challenged by the Church of England’s own Thirty-Nine Articles, which view the sacrament as “a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church”.¹¹ Rather than a sign of equality then, christening differentiates between different classes of people.

The same is true of the Lord’s Supper: rather than “enabling all to live the life of brotherhood”, the Articles – based on 1 Corinthians 11 – restrict the sacrament to Christians, for when non-Christians eat the bread and wine “in no wise are they partakers of Christ: but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing”.¹² Headlam’s universal application of the sacraments is therefore denied by one of the foundational documents of his own church. Lansbury is also wrong in his view that “the Communion service to me is not only the sacrifice again of Christ but a reminder of all the good men and women who have made their sacrifices in order to make the world better”, for the teaching of Christ at the institution of the Lord’s Supper is that the sacrament is solely in remembrance of Him.¹³

Finally, we have already seen in our ‘Christian Critique of Christian Socialism’ that Catholic Social Teaching, including *Rerum novarum*, cannot be used to argue for socialism, given Pope Leo’s declarations that “the main tenet of socialism, the community of goods, must be utterly rejected”, and that “[e]very human being has by nature the right to possess private property as one’s own”.¹⁴ While, then, Christian Socialists turned to the Scriptures and to the church as a foundation for their socialism, this was not always justifiable.

The fourth and final question concerns the nature of the society sought after by Christian Socialists. In the ‘Socialist Critique of Christian Socialism’ we noted both Marxist and syndicalist objections to the Christian Socialists’ democratic methods. “Parliament is essentially a capitalist instrument,” opined one syndicalist writer; “It is designed, simply and solely, to give expression to, to extend, and to safeguard capitalist interests. It could be made

¹⁰ S.D. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.5.

¹¹ ‘Thirty Nine Articles of Religion’, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/109014/Thirty-Nine-Articles-of-Religion.pdf>; accessed 8th June 2015.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Interview with Lansbury from the Christian Commonwealth Newspaper, 11 August 1915, London School of Economics [LSE] archive, Lansbury/7 213; Luke 22:19-20.

¹⁴ C.E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis* (Washington D.C., 2002), p.199 and p.200.

to do nothing else”.¹⁵ It is not the place of this thesis to make the case either for or against democratic socialism, but simply to note that doubts can be expressed over viability of seeking revolutionary change by Parliamentary means. We can, however, note some of the issues on this matter that we have already encountered: for example, the criticism of individual Christian Socialists for their failure to make firm proposals for bringing about the necessary changes to society.¹⁶ In addition, there is the contradiction in the writing of Wilfred Wellock; in some places Wellock spoke of a spiritual change which would lead to material changes, but also declared that a “Communist or Christian spirit [...] cannot be generated to any extent in capitalist conditions, a Communist order of society being absolutely essential thereto”.¹⁷ For Wellock, a spiritual change was necessary to bring about socialism, but that spiritual change could only take place in socialist conditions. Considering both the lack of clear plans and this obvious dilemma, we can rightly be sceptical about the Christian Socialist programme.

The same is true of the Christian Socialist vision – insofar as there was one – of a new society. Firstly, there is the tension that exists between the stated commitment to individual liberty and the necessity – sometimes stated, sometimes implied – for a large and powerful state. For example, Keir Hardie’s argument that “[t]o the Socialist, the State always means the People” and Henry Scott Holland’s declaration that “Law is Liberty” can sound quite chilling in light of the decades of totalitarianism that have taken place since these things were said.¹⁸

Secondly, the utopianism of most Christian Socialists – in which the establishment of socialism would lead to the abolition of war, poverty, overwork, and even sickness and premature death – should not go unchallenged. Stewart Headlam, for example, imagined a time in which “the soul of man would be able to expand, the body would become beautiful, and disease and premature death would be conquered”, while John Wheatley, for another, foresaw the removal of “poverty, disease and ignorance from human society”.¹⁹ We can rightly dispute the likelihood of any political changes, no matter how revolutionary, leading to such wholesale improvements to human life; while we may allow that socialism would

¹⁵ J. Radcliffe, ‘Syndicalism and Socialism’, *Syndicalist* 1, 5, June 1912.

¹⁶ G. Foote, *The Labour Party’s Political Thought: A History* (London, 1997), p.79 and p.49.

¹⁷ A. Rigby, *Wilfred Wellock: A Life in Peace* (Bridport, 1988), pp.26-7; W. Wellock, *Christian Communism: What It Is and Why It Is Necessary* (Manchester, 1922), p.33.

¹⁸ E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings – From 1888 to 1915* (Glasgow, 1927), p.18; H. Scott Holland, ed., *Our Neighbours: A Handbook for the C.S.U.* (London, 1911), p.91.

¹⁹ S. Headlam, *The Socialist’s Church* (London, 1907), p.68; I. S. Wood, *John Wheatley* (Manchester, 1990), p.72.

eradicate poverty, it does not follow that in a socialist society ignorance, disease and early death would cease to exist. It might be countered that this socialist society was to be the Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God on Earth; this, therefore, involves a new spiritual state for humanity rather than just a new economic system, and suggests that it is God Himself bringing these things about. This, however, is no answer, for again we have to question the Christian Socialist use of theological ideas; nowhere in the Bible is the Kingdom of God established through political means, as the Christian Socialists sought to do it, or linked with any political system. We should therefore be sceptical of the Christian Socialist vision of a socialist utopia, and that scepticism is not abated by the spiritualisation of this utopia as the “Kingdom of God”.

Further Research

This thesis is of necessity limited in scope, given the case-study approach followed and the period of time chosen for study. This was not due to a flaw in carrying out the research, but a self-imposed limitation built into the research design allowing the in-depth study of key individuals rather than a broader inquiry which would include more people and organisations. It focused on, as was explained in the introduction, on the late-Nineteenth to mid-Twentieth Century rather than the contemporary, on the grounds that this was the formative period for Christian Socialism.

This does give rise to further research opportunities. Do the conclusions drawn in this thesis still hold true if other individuals from this period are considered? These might include Arthur Henderson, Philip Snowden, Margaret Bondfield, Ellen Wilkinson, Conrad Noel, Charles Gore or R.J. Campbell; further reading, though, would be required to decide both whether or not these individuals fit in with our criteria – that is, being genuinely socialists and practising Christians – and whether or not they left enough written material for the hermeneutical analysis of their works and exposition of their beliefs in line with the framework used in this thesis. Such a study would either confirm the findings of this research or call them into question, improving, in either case, our understanding of Christian Socialist beliefs in this period.

The research could also profitably be expanded into the present day. The difference between these two lines of inquiry is that a contemporary study would not call into question

these conclusions, made as they are about the earlier period, but would shed light on the extent to which Christian Socialism has since evolved or stayed the same. For example, do Christian Socialists, in a more secular age, still base their socialism on the Bible and the teaching and sacraments of the church to the same extent? Do they still foresee a utopian socialist society, the Kingdom of God on Earth? Perhaps most interestingly, does the idea of a Christian Socialist synthesis between revolutionary and democratic socialism still have any validity, or has the commitment to democratic means turned Christian Socialism into a reformist rather than revolutionary creed? Does Christian Socialism exist more now within the church rather than within the Labour Party or within political discourse in general? This latter study could incorporate Christians on the Left, founded as the Christian Socialist Movement in 1960, as well as other contemporary Christian Socialist groups such as Christians for Economic Justice and the Catholic Worker Movement, and potentially left-wing church groups such as the Progressive Christianity Network, thereby leading to a greater overview of Christian Socialism.

Final Summary

The concept at the core of Christian Socialism is brotherhood, that being derived from the idea of the universal Fatherhood of God. Other concepts – co-operation, equality and democracy – are part of the make-up of Christian Socialism because they allow for the expression of brotherhood, while their antitheses – competition, inequality and totalitarianism – do not.

Christian Socialists then found their basis in and made their arguments from the Bible, the church's teaching, and its sacraments, to a far greater extent than any other source. This included, among others, arguing for co-operation and equality from the idea of God's Fatherhood of all people, and their consequent brotherhood; the portrayal of Jesus Christ as a revolutionary who denounced the rich and powerful and cared for their poor; and the equality and brotherhood represented in the sacraments of communion and christening. Criticism, however, can be made of Christian Socialists for their misunderstanding or misuse of these ideas and doctrines.

By combining a commitment to a peaceful, democratic method of bringing about socialism, but by aiming at the overthrow of capitalism rather than reform, Christian

Socialism represents a synthesis of revolutionary and democratic socialism. There can be constructed from writings on this subject a three-stage approach to bringing about socialism: (1) persuading the people of the need for socialism; (2) electing a Labour government, or those already in power becoming socialists; (3) the establishment of socialism by the state, acting in accordance with the will of the people. Again, criticisms can be made of the efficacy of this approach, and examples made of the confusion and contradiction evident in writing about this matter.

Finally, the majority of Christian Socialists have a utopian vision of the future, suggesting that the establishment of socialism would lead to the abolition of war, poverty, overwork, and even sickness and premature death. Criticisms of this utopian vision may be countered by the assertion that the new society would be the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, but this leads once again to the accusation of misunderstanding or misuse of theology.

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