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Socialism and Christianity in Edwardian Britain: A Utopian Perspective*

VINCENT GEOGHEGAN

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES ways in which Socialism responded to Christianity in Edwardian Britain; a period in which there is a palpable efflorescence of theoretical and polemical literature on this theme, and a wide-ranging *debate* on the topic in the Socialist movement.

This debate can be viewed from what one might term a utopian perspective. The subtle and sophisticated treatment of the Judaeo-Christian tradition by the utopian Marxist Ernst Bloch raises the question of Christianity as a possible *utopian resource* within Socialism. Furthermore, the soul searching associated with the Future of Socialism debate has brought to prominence a series of claims concerning the efficacy of a Christian Socialism. Finally, the recent development of “post-secular” theory, with its desire to salvage the positive dimensions of both the religious and the secular, creates a new interest in earlier attempts to explore both the potentialities and limitations of incorporating the religious into a new social order. Whilst the article is therefore primarily an attempt at historical recovery and taxonomy with all the methodological imperatives required by this project, the modern resonances also make it, to use Michel Foucault’s term, a piece of “reflection in history”.¹

In deciding what exactly is to be construed as utopian, two clear poles are to be avoided: the hyper-inclusive which defines as utopian any manifestation of hope, imaginative construction, or counter-factual, where, in Adorno’s words, “everything borders on being nothing” (210); and the hyper-exclusive which seeks to reduce the utopian to a literary device invented by Thomas More in 1516, which, as Ernst Bloch notes, “would be like trying to reduce electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name and in which it was first noticed” (15). The category “utopian” is used in this article to designate four different approaches. Firstly, there are those who are entirely happy with the term “utopian”, and use it as a self designation, as is the case with the Anglican Christian Socialist Percy Dearmer. Then there are those who are willing, even enthusiastic, to talk about their conceptions of a better society, but do not use the term “utopian”—these make up the bulk of the examples discussed. A third group comprises those who see themselves as non-utopian pragmatists, but who, nonetheless, develop conceptions of an alternative society; the Labour politician Ramsay MacDonald is one such case. Finally, there are those who consider themselves methodologically anti-utopian, as in the Marxist tradition, but who

are quite unable to do without some form of speculation about the future. Throughout the article, “utopian” will refer to the presence of an imagined and/or theorised alternative society deemed to be “good” or at least substantially better than existing society. The term is thus applicable, for example, to the “moderate” conceptions of social democracy as well as the more ambitious visions of revolutionary socialism. A “utopian” exploration of the Socialism/Christianity debate should, also, not involve an exclusive focus on the explicitly visionary in a text. A particular orientation to a desirable future may be discernible in both the critique of existing structures and the theory of agency, in the negative and implicit as well as the positive and the explicit.

The article is concerned simply with the debates *within* Socialism. No attempt is made systematically to map the complex positions of the various Christian friends and enemies of Socialism *outside* Socialism, though specific examples may be referred to in the explication of the Socialist response. The Socialist contributions are examined thematically rather than chronologically. More specifically they are arranged (roughly) along a spectrum beginning with the fiercest Socialist critics of Christianity at one end, through more positive appraisals, to the various denominational forms at the other. Given the confines of space and the sheer extensiveness of the debate, representativeness rather than comprehensiveness is the goal. It has simply not been possible, for example, to explore all the various nuances within British Marxism or to delineate the distinctive contributions of, say, Swedenborgian or Quaker Socialism. Finally, this is an examination of *ideas*, not political history. No attempt is made to assess the contemporary political strength of these positions, or to include only ‘important’ stances. Thus policy statements by influential members of relatively significant political parties can be found alongside the speculations of small revolutionary groups, tiny sects, maverick factions, and lone individuals.

Some initial scene-setting is required.² There had been lively debates about the relationship between Socialism and Christianity from the 1880s.³ In the years between 1906 and (roughly) 1910, however, there is a distinct revitalization of the debate, which is not only intense and self-referential, but is in many ways, given the transformations ushered in by the First World War, the final round of the engagement. In 1904 the Jesuit Victor Gertelmann brought out a revised and enlarged edition of Victor Cathrein’s *Socialism: Its Theoretical Basis and Practical Application*. In a section on Socialism in England the tone is dismissive:

Up to the present time socialism has made scant progress in England . . . The English mind is too practical to take stock in utopian dreams. The powerful trades-unions contend for what is immediately attainable without pursuing nebulous phantoms . . . The comparative insignificance of the socialist movement in England may be gathered from the fact that in the elections of 1900 but thirteen of the 670 members of Parliament were chosen as the representatives of labor, and even these were fusion candidates of the Liberals, Radicals, or Irish. But one member, Keir Hardie, owes his seat to the workingmen exclusively. (114–115)

The breakthrough made by the Labour Party in the 1906 General Election (29 M.P.s elected, which became 30 when a Lib-Lab member took the Labour Whip) generated a dramatic change of mood. The ideological effects were quite disproportionate to the relatively modest nature of the event.⁴ Max Beer, who was London correspondent of the Berlin *Vorwärts* at the time, later recalled the seismic effect of the election:

The Labour successes formed the sensation of the year. Newspapers and clubs, drawing-rooms and country houses . . . discussed hardly anything else but the political uprising of the working classes . . . and the remarkable thing was that the speakers and writers occupied themselves less with Labour than with socialism, although the L.R.C. was not socialist. A whole literature dealing with the history and essence of socialism came into existence with lightning rapidity; the socialist weeklies . . . gained a large circulation; everybody seemed to be anxious to get some knowledge of the new power which had so unexpectedly made its appearance. (324)

Old fears and hopes gained a new urgency. Since the 1880s, when Britain had witnessed the emergence of a Socialist revival and a revived labour movement, hostile elements in the churches, had viewed the new developments as inimical to their interests, whilst others in the ecclesiastical community considered the possibility of annexing these forces; likewise many Socialists had sought either to loosen still further the faltering grip of the churches on the working class, or to entice believers on board. On the other hand Christian Socialists and Socialist Christians, including clergymen sincerely convinced by the values and vision of Socialism, and Socialist activists who were devout Christians, had long worked for a positive synthesis of the two belief systems. All of which provided the scope for a multi-faceted debate. Amongst the adherents of Socialism relevant material from the past was republished, and previous contributions to the question incorporated into current presentations. Alongside the doughty champions of earlier struggles, newer voices were heard. The post-1906 debate was, therefore, both the inheritor of processes long maturing, and a separate moment in its own right.

The following categories are analytical, not contemporary self-descriptions. Any residual overlap between analytical and historical terms is dictated by the nature of the material. Furthermore the categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is logically possible to maintain a number of them simultaneously, and in practice this was the case.

Militant Atheism

This occupies the most virulently anti-religious end of the spectrum. A passionate atheism suffuses its Socialism. Its origins lie in the gradual defection, from the 1880s, of Secularists to Socialism (Pierson, 70–72). The Bradford-based Freethought Socialist League is a classic representative of this position. Its energetic publisher, the tailor J.W. Gott, issued a series of anti-religious pamphlets. The first two of his “Socialist Series” were by H.S.

Wishart, their titles graphically signalling their content: *Socialism condemned by Christ: A reply to Mr Philip Snowden's "The Christ that is to be"* and *The Useless Christ of the New Theology: A Reply to the Rev. T. Rhonda Williams*. The two fronts on which Wishart was fighting is apparent here: Socialist accommodation of Christianity, and Christianity's move towards Socialism. Wishart's conception of the good society is grounded in a rationalist atheism, which sees Christianity as a fundamentally malign phenomenon—"Christ the Great Enemy of the Human Race," proclaims one of his headings. A sound Socialism has to be grounded in reason, knowledge, science and mental freedom, whereas Christianity promotes error, superstition, obscurantism, and mental slavery. For Wishart the move away from the old theological certainties, as exemplified in the "New Theology" movement, is indicative of the teetering structure of Christianity, and is a tribute to the efforts of the Freethinking pioneers. He therefore finds it paradoxical that when the churches have at last admitted that they have relatively little to offer, some Socialists have decided that this is the time to move towards Christianity. The cast of his utopianism is thus clear:

Were any Municipality to engage an architect, or clerk of works, on some important edifice whose plans it was "impossible to know,"—and who left the "workers" to carry out the work without "settling anything for them,"—what an outcry there would be! Public indignation and the intervention of the Local Government Board, would very soon put a stop to such insane, if inspired, methods.

Is it little wonder that Socialists (or some of them) are accused of being "visionaries," when they are willing to leave the building of the "New Heaven on Earth" to such muddled minds and mad methods as these. Science, not "inspiration" is what is required; human effort not "Gods" or "Jesus" or "Spirit." Sociologists, NOT parsons must design and superintend the work. Otherwise, the "New Heaven on Earth," may (nay must) come to the same sad end as did the earlier and more sincere Christian endeavors in the same direction. (n.d. b, 4–5)

A further example of the militant atheist is Ernest Pack, author of, amongst others, *Christian Socialism Exposed: A Challenge to the Clergy* and *Did Jesus Christ of the Four Gospels Ever Live?* Pack is a crude polemicist prone to heavy-handed humour. Glimpses of his conception of the good life emerge in his "critique" of Christian values. Christianity's other-worldly orientation devalues this world; Socialism requires struggle to achieve its goals and labour from its citizens. To Jesus's injunction to "take no thought for the morrow" he retorts that this "is not Socialism, but Trampism, On-the-road-ism, and Won't-work-ism" (2). Meekness, turning the other cheek, love of enemies are deemed to be part of the problem, not the solution. Christianity gives divine sanction to class differences; Paul's image of God the potter crafting honourable and dishonourable bowls out of clay is reworked: "no man can expect to assist the cause of Socialism while he regards his more fortunate neighbour as a porcelain bowl, and himself as a common pot. These 'porcelain' and 'earthenware' distinctions must be done away with, for, as a matter of strict truth, we are all EARTHENWARE" (6). Quotation upon quotation is produced to demonstrate that Christianity is the very

antithesis of Socialism: obey the powers that be, women to be silent, knowledge leads to pride, faith conquers all, and so on and so forth. The Christian attempt to create a Christian Socialism is interpreted as merely the latest ploy by the clergy to annex and neutralise a popular competitor. As such, Christian Socialism threatens the very possibility of a Socialist society: “Socialism is popular, Socialism is embraced, Socialism is angelic—so very much so, indeed, that Socialism is in danger. . . . *for Socialism is about to be NOBBLED!* The parsons are determined to inject into its veins the blood of Jesus, and to imprint upon its banner the sign of the cross” (1).

In a sense the militant atheists are Secularists first and Socialists second. A Socialist society is above all a humanist society. Social transformation is ultimately about overcoming the domination of religious consciousness; of creating a world where “humans without God or Gods shall take their own destiny into their own hands” (Wishart, n.d. a., 3).

Marxism

Marxism shared with Militant Atheism a commitment both to atheism, here conceptualised as “materialism”, and to science, though now in the form of historical materialism. Much of the critique of religion is via a reduction of it to its historical moments, stressing its grounding in historically specific forms of economic interest and ideology. From the vantage point of the lofty peaks of master science, religion is deemed to be an unnecessary remnant of obsolete forms of social oppression.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain published *Socialism and Religion* in 1910. An historical account of the development of religion is provided: tribal religion, based on the fear and ignorance generated by primitive economic conditions, gives way to universal propagandist creeds such as Christianity which is linked to the expansion of the state and the emergence of feudalism. In time the emerging bourgeoisie usher in a new mode of production, the religious reflex of which is deemed to be Reformation protestantism. Modern capitalism, however, creates a material, cultural and social environment in which religion becomes less and less plausible, particularly to the class of the future, the proletariat. Not only is this historical method different from Militant Atheism, so too is the conception of a future Socialist Society. The critique of religion is extended into a critique of ethics and, implicitly, visions of an ethical Socialism.⁵ Ethics are the products of societies riven by fundamental class differences; they are devices generated by the hopeless task of reconciling irreconcilable differences. In a genuinely Socialist society, social harmony renders the ethical task redundant:

Where . . . the common good is visible and definite, and the interests of each do not conflict with, but promote, the interests of all, ethical codes as at present understood, die out, for the plain pursuit of each individual's interest results in rendering all moral preaching superfluous by advancing simultaneously the welfare of the whole. . . . Hence we are concerned, not with ethics, but with Socialism; for to be obsessed with the need for ethical codes is to be the dupe

of capitalist ideas. Ethics, even when honest, are but attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable antagonisms of capitalist society, and are doomed to sterility. With the abolition of class antagonisms the attempt to reconcile them become superfluous and so ethics disappear. (28–29)

From this perspective all the various efforts to generate a Christian Socialism are condemned. Furthermore, even the vocabulary of Militant Atheism is considered an unnecessary abstraction from an all-embracing Socialism, for “the Socialist has little need for such terms as Atheist, Free-thinker, or even Materialist; for the word, rightly understood, implies one who on all such questions takes his stand on positive science” (34). Militant Atheism too is thus consigned to the wastebin of history.

The idea that a future Socialist society embodies a fundamental break with the trajectory of modern religious/ethical thinking can also be found in a 1907 publication of the Social Democratic Party—Bax and Quelch’s *A New Catechism of Socialism*. An echo of Engels’s influential image of primitive communism can be detected in their assertion that history begins and ends on a collective basis, with tribal society at one end and Socialist society at the other. The assumption of Christian Socialism that Christianity embodies an ethic hostile to the individualism of capitalism is rejected. Compared to the two communal modes of human history, individualism characterises both capitalism and Christianity. Whilst not rejecting the idea of a Socialist ethics, it is clear that such an ethics has no point of continuity with contemporary ethics or with the ethical precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. As in the Socialist Party of Great Britain document a concrete community is posited in which an abstract morality has no validity. A social “is” replaces a Christian “ought”:

the Socialist conception of ethics is not . . . brotherly love, in the Christian sense. . . . Socialist ethics are neither altruistic nor egoistic; they are intrinsically neither selfish nor unselfish. As with other abstractions characterising the phase of human development generally called civilisation . . . so in ethics we find a purely factitious antagonism set up between the individual and society . . . Socialism presupposes a condition of things in which the good of all will mean the good of each. . . . Thus there will no longer be altruism and egoism, selfishness and unselfishness, existing as antagonistic abstractions, but selfishness and unselfishness must necessarily be alike social in the general run of conduct. (28–30)

Both texts share a belief that Marxist science has revealed a Socialist future that transcends the concerns of earlier religious and ethical debate. All attempts on the left to revivify Socialism with Christianity, or with atheistic humanism, merely reveal the antediluvian nature of these enterprises.

Humanist Socialism

This approach seeks to develop a humanist ethical socialism. Like militant atheism it is hostile to Christianity, but the vindication of atheism is not its driving imperative. It is not Secularism’s annexation of Socialism, but rather a search from within Socialism for a set of humanist ethics.

Such an approach can be found in Robert Blatchford's *God and My Neighbour* (for Blatchford see Laurence Thompson). The text was written in 1903 and thus predates the 1906–10 period. However, Blatchford's text was frequently referred to in the period of debate, and was clearly viewed as an important contribution to the debate. It could be argued that Blatchford belongs in a later category—amongst those socialists who were attempting to transform Socialism into a religion. It is undoubtedly the case that Blatchford was sympathetic to this latter enterprise, and indeed referred to *God and My Neighbour* as a “religious book” and himself as a “religious man”. Nonetheless the book lacks the whole panoply of religious importations associated with more mainstream protagonists of “socialism as religion”. Furthermore the entire thrust of the *argument* in *God and My Neighbour* is supportive of a humanist socialist perspective; whilst the humanist case is argued, the “religious” claim of the book is at a much more rhetorical level.

One immediate point of difference between Blatchford and the militant atheists was that he considered atheism philosophically unsustainable since it required a certainty impossible of achievement. He called himself an agnostic, though admitting that at an intuitive level he was an atheist. His preferred self-designation is “humanist”. He denies that the religious sentiment is universal, and asserts the reality of a non-religiously-based ethic, referring to young people of his acquaintance who have had no religious experience and who “are virtuous and courteous and compassionate and happy, and feel no more need of spiritual comfort or religious consolation than I do” (169). Equally rejected is the notion of a spiritual faculty, distinct from reason. The Judaeo-Christian ethical code is condemned as either anachronistic or unoriginal, and Jesus's teachings are deemed “imperfect and inadequate” (152). As in Marxism, though on a different theoretical basis, history is used to both deflate the contemporary claims of Christianity and to suggest the existence of a dynamic, perfectionist tendency in human affairs—a tendency towards a Socialist society. In Blatchford's conception, humans have evolved through successive forms of environmental determinism; the task is thus to usher in the yet higher stage of Socialism.

The references to the Socialist society of the future are predominantly about the ethical principles governing such a society, usually expressed in terms of their contrast with “Christian” principles. Whereas the militant atheists were mesmerised by the image of a society without God, Blatchford has a much broader perspective. As a consequence his text is prone to lists of the virtues and values of the Socialist society. These are expressed both negatively—no poverty, no ignorance, no crime, no idleness, no war, no greed, no gluttony—and positively—democracy, rights of the masses, unity, collective ownership, reason, knowledge and so forth. Throughout there is an attempt to ground critique, alternative, and theory of transition in a common value basis. Socialism is to emerge out of the critical politics of the people: “What we want is citizenship, human sympathy, public spirit, daring agitators, stern reformers, drains, houses, schoolmasters, clean water, truth-speaking, soap—and Socialism” (193).

Needless to say Christian Socialists rejected Blatchford's assumptions. In particular they accused him of creating a caricature of Christianity in an attempt to open up a chasm between Socialism and Christianity. In 1910, the clergyman and Anglican Christian Socialist, James Adderley, acknowledged that *God and My Neighbour* was "the most popular of anti-Christian Socialist books", but argued that Blatchford had attacked "something which may be called Christianity by a few fanatics, but which most sober Christians of the present day would repudiate" (Adderley, 1910, 27). This was not the only criticism Blatchford received from within the Socialist camp. His critical remarks about the Labour Party following the General Election of 1906, tracing a range of imputed defects to the fact that "many of the women and men in the movement have been saturated with the false and unjust philosophy of the Bible" (cited in Laurence Thompson, 182), drew criticism from more pragmatic Socialists. An exasperated Joseph Burgess accused Blatchford of letting his anti-Biblical ethical crusade blind him to political realities: "Many of our best Socialists are believers. . . . Drop it Blatchford. . . . Aim to make Socialists; not GOOD Socialists, nor BETTER Socialists. . . . And, for heaven's sake, when you find yourself 'out of touch' . . . with the movement, seriously ask yourself whether it is you or the movement that is to blame" (cited in Thompson, 1951, 183). Certainly the defeated Conservatives appreciated the electoral advantages to be gained from associating Labour candidates with Blatchford's "atheism", as Ramsay MacDonald ruefully acknowledged after Labour's defeat in a 1907 bye-election (Thompson, 1951, 188).

Socialism as Religion

This approach seeks to turn Socialism into a non-Christian secular religion. It wishes to appropriate all the various strengths of existing religion but stripped of their theological grounding. Like Militant Atheism it has roots in Victorian Secularism, but lacks Militant Atheism's root and branch hostility to anything that smacks of the religious.

The Socialist Sunday School movement is a classic example of this position.⁶ There was a wholesale importation of the trappings of Christianity, generating Socialist hymns, Socialist saints, Socialist sacraments, Socialist ritual, and even a Socialist Ten Commandments. When taxed with the charge that they were merely aping Christianity, they responded that no one religion has a monopoly on forms, and that Christianity had itself borrowed heavily from earlier faiths. The claim that they are a religion is central to their self-understanding. As their *Aims, Objects and Organisation* document puts it: "Socialism is essentially a religion, using the term in its strict sense of service and love to humanity" (National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools, 5). They also see themselves as in competition with organised Christianity, particularly for the hearts and minds of the young. Although unwilling to nail their colours to either atheism or agnosticism, they wish to critique the Christian notion of a compensatory afterlife, and instead "imbue

the young with the sentiment and imagery of a Kingdom of Love and Happiness to be set up *here* on this earth, based on just or righteous social economic conditions" (2). They add that should there indeed be a real heaven after life, Socialism will have provided the best possible training for such an eventuality!

Since Socialism is no mere theory, but a fully-fledged religion, the future society has necessarily to reflect this status. The emphasis is thus on the total transformation of existence—a new life in an earthly paradise. Inevitably the rhetorical and the general preponderates over the theoretical and the specific—the magnitude of the envisaged change dwarfs the concrete. The ethics of humanist Socialism are visible, encased in the language of religious fervour, alongside more specifically religious virtues; the journal of the movement *The Young Socialist* has as its subtitle: "A magazine of justice and love". The road to this future involves the cultivation within the individual of those intellectual and moral qualities which will form the bedrock of the new society. The editor of the journal, Lizzie Glasier, put it this way:

the gospel of Socialism is aflame with a *reasoned* idealism that flashes from soul to soul with a non-consuming fire. It glows with a vivifying and transforming influence within the mind and heart of every man, woman, and child it touches . . . Socialism contains in itself a system of ethics which when brought into operation, and practised by humanity will lead to the perfect fulfilment of that highest and holiest aspiration of all religions—The Brotherhood of Man . . . It has become as a religious faith, which no opposition or persecution is likely to weaken or dim; which no discouragement can turn its disciples aside from. (Glasier, 436–437)

The competition with Christianity is apparent in the relative paucity of specifically Christian imagery in the evocation of the future society. Jesus is acknowledged as an important moral teacher, but he is usually levelled down into the broader category of great moral teachers of the past, where he is side by side with Confucius, the Buddha, and so forth. This self-denying ordinance haunts the depiction of the future society—the absence of Christianity is palpable. Such repugnance, as a Christian Socialist critic noted, whilst misguided, was, nonetheless, an indictment of the failures of orthodox Christianity—"they are only attempting to do what we ought to have done long ago, to teach the children the principles of citizenship" (Adderley, 1910, 65).

One might also place in this category, H.G. Wells's *First and Last Things: A Confession of Faith and Rule of Life* (1908).⁷ Like Blatchford he is an agnostic, but although Wells is personally unable to relate to the Christ figure ("His sinlessness wears his incarnation like a fancy dress, all his white self unchanged" [86]), his approach to Christianity is more emollient, and he is generally much more enthusiastic about the positive dimensions of religion. He calls himself a "believer", an advocate of "religious-spirited Socialism" who has "faith", seeks "salvation" and appreciates the value of churches, prayer and public worship (85, 104, 116, 186–187). The object of

all this devotion is not, however, the Christian God, but the collective spirit of an evolving humanity. In his *credo* he speculates about a future in which humanity transcends its mundane individualistic past: “I believe in the great and growing Being of the Species from which I rise, to which I return, and which, it may be, will ultimately even transcend the limitation of the Species and grow into the Conscious Being, the eternally conscious Being of all things” (81).⁸ Amongst the many virtues displayed in the history of Christianity, Wells particularly admires the strand of universalism. He pens an encomium to the Catholic Church—an inclusive institution which had been able to develop loyalties far deeper than local states ever could—and harnesses this idea to his vision of social progress: “The true Church towards which my own thoughts tend will be the conscious illuminated expression of Catholic brotherhood” (156). He does want to demonstrate, however, that although his approach has points in common with Christianity, it is grounded on very different foundations. A number of these are singularly unattractive, notably a penchant for distinctly authoritarian forms of centralization, the hankering after a natural aristocracy, and an explicit commitment to eugenics.

Socialism and a Secular Jesus

Some Socialists wished to incorporate what they saw as the very rich heritage of Jesus into their ideology. Jesus is either deemed to be a Socialist, or his teaching is considered to be complementary with, or supplementary to, Socialism. He is also treated as an historical figure with a message dealing with earthly affairs; his divinity can be either denied, considered socially irrelevant, or secularised into a principle of progress at work in human history. These Socialists seek to decouple Jesus and institutional Christianity, claiming that the great life and work of the former has been betrayed and traduced in the forms of the latter.

Dennis Hird’s text, *Jesus the Socialist*, dates from 1896, but, as in the case of Blatchford, was referred to in the post-1906 debate. Hird, a controversially unorthodox Church of England clergyman, constructs a this-worldly Jesus whose intention was to encourage, by his words and actions, the building of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Heaven as a reward after death for the few who have assiduously worshipped him is condemned as alien to Jesus’s world view: “Some think that Jesus came to make a few people ready for heaven. I find no such teaching in His words. It is here, in this struggling world, that there is to be the kingdom of God, or there is no kingdom of God. . . . Jesus seeks imitation, not adulation. A far-away heaven, with a far-away God, enveloped in a far-away glory, is no use to this world, and certainly is no part of the teaching of Jesus” (3). Hird bases his portrayal of Jesus mainly on the first three Gospels, rejecting as distorted the Pauline contributions and all subsequent orthodox accretions. This essential or pure Jesus is then divided into a temporal/local dimension, his specific response to contextual issues, and a universal dimension, where he is treated as if he is an authoritative Socialist contemporary. Biblical texts are mar-

shalled to demonstrate the proposition that the Kingdom of Heaven was to have a Socialist cast. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" elicits "I know no definition of Socialism to equal this" (ibid.). The Lord's Prayer is given a new reading at variance with Christian orthodoxy. The opening words of "Our Father" proclaim human "brotherhood"; God's will is to be done "on earth"; the fundamental materialist need of "our daily bread" is recognised; it is not "trespasses" which Jesus wanted forgiven but "debts"; and the evil we are to be delivered from is selfishness; "Thus read, the prayer becomes the cry of the poor" (4). The Old Testament is likewise plundered to find evidence for a Jewish social heritage underpinning Jesus's teaching; Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy yield the notion of Jubilee redistribution of land, of land belonging ultimately to God not humanity, and therefore in his gift alone; attacks on usury are also cited; as "are precepts in favour of the poor which of themselves would stamp the Bible as the most wonderful book of the world" (6). The decay of modern religion is attributed to the pale and distorted Jesus offered by the churches; people have thus failed to grasp that Jesus "discovered a form of government or a religion which could heal the world" (2).

The desire to rescue Jesus from conventional Christianity is also to be found in Philip Snowden's well-known, and frequently reprinted, 1903 pamphlet *The Christ That Is To Be*. This is an ambiguous text, and Snowden was a wily politician, keen to bring as broad a constituency as possible into political Labour (see Laybourn). A number of the positions discussed elsewhere in this article find an echo in Snowden's tract, and are indicative of an early immersion in nonconformist religion. An evocation of the Christ figure is at the heart of the work. The very first line proclaims that the "life of Christ is the great example of human perfection" (1). Christ is an historical figure who discovered and articulated certain important truths which are still relevant today. Their veracity is such that religious and non-religious can both benefit from attention to his teachings. The emphasis is thus on Jesus the discoverer, not Jesus the Son of God; Jesus as subject, rather than object: "In degree, but not in kind, does Christ differ from all great teachers. . . . There is, therefore, a sense in which all, Christian, agnostic and atheist—in which they can all believe in Christ. . . . But these truths are not the laws of Christ, any more than gravitation is the law of Sir Isaac Newton" (3). The subject matter of this teaching is essentially future-oriented. Jesus discovered, and demonstrated in his own life and death, the human impulse to move from the individual to the social. The great sacrifice of Calvary is thus to be reinterpreted as a form of transcendence, the "loss" of the individual into the collective. Jesus thus prefigured the path society itself would travel in the future: "His life is the promise of the human life which is yet to be" (4). Jesus's greatness was to have apprehended the inner direction of the historical process. Now, much later in that process the signs of the ultimate destination are much clearer and can be perceived, for example, in the growth of political democracy and the concentration of industry. For Snowden, Jesus is a utopian figure in two senses: he is not just an historic prophet,

but also a symbol or metaphor for the society of the future—the Christ that is to be.⁹ The Second Coming is thus transformed from a source of theological hope into one of utopian promise: “This social ideal, the ideal of cooperation and association, in the future is to be the dominating ideal. . . . We have, by historical development, reached the stage when we are entering on a new historical era. . . . The political democracy, dominated by the social ideal, will be the coming of Christ to rule the nations in righteousness” (10). Snowden concludes his pamphlet with a brief sketch of what a future Socialist society will look like, concentrating on the manifestation of the Christ-like virtues of love, sacrifice and service. That such a society will come he has no doubts, though as Christ’s passion demonstrates, it will not necessarily be an easy road:

Is this but a vision, or is it a prophecy of a day that shall yet dawn on a world ransomed by love and sacrifice? That day will come, and whether it be soon or late depends upon us. But the only way to regain the earthly paradise is by the old, hard road to Calvary—through persecution, through poverty, through temptation, by the agony and bloody sweat, by the crown of thorns, by the agonising death. And then the resurrection to the New Humanity—purified by suffering, triumphant through Sacrifice. (12)

Although Hird’s social revolutionary Jesus is different from Snowden’s, both articulate a common desire to liberate Christ from the confines of orthodox Christianity, and to deploy him in the service of contemporary Socialism. The hostility, condescension and reticence displayed towards Jesus in the earlier approaches discussed, is here replaced with genuine enthusiasm for a towering beacon of utopian light. To atheist opponents the defence of a secular Jesus was untenable. From a Marxist position, The Socialist Party of Great Britain called the claim that Jesus was a Socialist “absurd” and “the last refuge of the confusionist and mystery-monger”, and referred to Hird’s pamphlet as “that somewhat hysterical publication” (26); whilst the militant atheist H.S. Wishart called Snowden a hypocrite, peddling religious doctrines he knew to be untrue (n.d. a., 4–5).

Indifferentism

This is the claim that Socialism is formally neutral on the question of religion. Socialism has to confine itself to work in the secular realm, and leave the religious realm to the sphere of private personal belief. Ethical relativism is avoided by arguing that each individual’s Socialism will be filtered through their specific belief system. Thus indifferentism can quite logically be combined with a Christian perspective.

This stance had obvious attractions to Socialist parties seeking to gain, and sustain, electoral support. Ramsay MacDonald’s 1907 pamphlet, *Socialism*, is keen to counter criticisms that the Labour Party is an atheistic and anti-religious party. The indifferentist case is spelled out: “Socialism has no more to do with a man’s religion than it has with the colour of his hair.

Socialism deals with secular things, not with ultimate beliefs” (101). The wide range of responses to the relationship between Socialism and Christianity is deemed to show the wisdom of the indifferentist approach, for how can such varied positions—from secular to religious—be otherwise accommodated. Individuals are left free to construe a common Socialist secular policy in terms of their own deep beliefs:

As a political and economic theory, Socialism has just as much and no more to do with religion as any other theory of the relationship between the State and the individual; whilst as a moral theory, it is neither religious nor anti-religious. He who bases his morals upon rational sanctions will explain the ethics of Socialism as a rationalist; he who bases his morals upon revelation and religion will explain the same ethics of Socialism as a Christian. (101–102)

This enables MacDonald to make a number of references in the text to the agreement between the teachings of the Gospels and Socialism.

Such an approach necessarily had an effect on the construction of the Socialist alternative. There was a strong temptation towards minimalism. The alternative had to confine itself to the secular, and could not contain elements that were repugnant to a wide range of secularist and religious opinion. Charles Drysdale’s *Socialism and Irreligion: A Reply to Tory Criticism*, written in the wake of the 1906 General Election, and published by the I.L.P, seeks to establish what are specifically Socialist goals. In a section entitled “What Socialism Means” a self-consciously minimal definition is given: “Socialism is therefore primarily a method of securing by the substitution of ‘Social’ for Individual Ownership of the means of wealth production (i.e. Land and Capital), and the organisation of Labour on a Collectivist basis” (3). Any excursion into the theological at the level of political programme is firmly rejected, since “Theology . . . is essentially the science of the world beyond, while Socialism is simply a juster and more organised form of Society here below” (4). However Drysdale, in a similar manner to MacDonald, uses the personal status of theology to make extremely positive noises about the continuing utility of religious beliefs and practices. Furthermore, since he recognises that ethics, insofar as it plays a role within theology, cannot be a matter of political indifference, he takes the opportunity to forward the claims of Jesus Christ as a moral teacher. He is thus able to conclude that a good Socialist *should be* a good Christian: “Socialism is to the Social Order what Christ is to the individual life, simply a standard of moral excellence” (9).

Needless to say this approach appeared to be rank opportunism to critics on the left. The Socialist Party of Great Britain castigated MacDonald for theoretical inconsistency and naked electioneering, and Drysdale for playing to the religious gallery. Whatever the truth of these charges, the relative thinness of the “official” alternative is very clear. Politically and methodologically unable to integrate either the rational humanist or the Christian approach they were left with a narrow, colourless programme, and had to re-import substance through the backdoor.

“New Theology” Socialism

‘New Theology’, associated above all with the congregationalist minister R.J. Campbell,¹⁰ rejected dualistic conceptions of a God and his external creation in favour of a notion of an immanent God present in all aspects of the created world. Progress and development therefore entails the perfection of this creation, and not the cultivation of an individualistic readiness for a supposed heavenly afterlife. More orthodox Christian critics saw this approach as dangerously close to a rejection of the whole basis of Christianity, whilst leftist militant atheists considered it to be the last gasp of an exhausted worldview.

Campbell maintained, in *Christianity and the Social Order* (1907), that his retreat from conventional Christian dualism had brought him close to a Socialist position even before any personal acquaintance with Socialism. His ultimate conversion to Socialism is therefore portrayed as an entirely natural development of his previous thinking: “I now regard Socialism as the practical expression of Christian ethics and the evangel of Jesus” (ix). This position is different from the “secular Jesus” of Hird and Snowden, for Campbell wishes to assert the primacy of religion. He is therefore not sympathetic to the claim that Jesus was a Socialist, for this both violates the historical reality that Socialism is a modern phenomenon, and reduces creation to mere Socialist categories. He is even less sympathetic to Robert Blatchford, whom he claims has collapsed Christianity into its orthodox forms. What these types of Socialism miss, as does orthodox Christianity, is that Socialism is but the most recent manifestation of an age-old spiritual movement within the world—“the Spirit of God . . . at work in the world” (12).

The status of Jesus is both reduced and raised. Jesus is historicised, but still placed at the cutting edge: “There is very little, if anything, which differentiates the essential teaching of Jesus from that of other teachers of His time beyond the fact that it was simple and clear, and went straight to the root of the matter in hand” (69). Like Hird, Campbell conceives of Jesus as seeking to bring paradise to earth, where the ethical impulse was his perception of the intense inequalities that obtained in his day: “But the one outstanding fact . . . is that Jesus preached an ideal social order on earth when He preached the Kingdom of God, and that he was driven to do so by His clear perception of the ills under which his countrymen suffered in a time when justice for the oppressed was seldom to be had” (85). Consequently Jesus is closer to modern day Socialism than is orthodox Christianity, or as Campbell put it: “Socialism . . . may . . . be described as the inheritor of the true Christianity” (20). Such conceptions spread Campbell’s fame far and wide. The Socialist aristocracy pondered his words: George Bernard Shaw, teasing an audience with what appeared to be a piece of conventional piety, declared solemnly that Campbell “had altered my opinion and made me believe that Jesus actually existed”, but then added that Campbell had “pointed out that Jesus, instead of being the first

Christian was practically the last” (3, 4); whilst H.G. Wells suggested that the views of Campbell, whom he describes as a “friend”, were not a defence of Christianity, but a trajectory out of it, for he had actually severed *all* links between Jesus and the Christian Christ (88). Shaw also reported that his friendly remarks on Campbell had brought forth a public rebuke from a Secularist who claimed that Shaw had thereby “crawled to the feet of Jesus” (4).

Campbell, in effect, contrasts two sorts of utopian vision. There is the earthly transformation based on social justice wished for by Jesus and his disciples, and the extra-terrestrial heaven, based upon individualism, inserted into Christianity by growing orthodoxy. Only the former represents the genuine divine presence in history, the latter is a reactionary blockage:

The all-important thing in primitive Christian preaching was its intense belief in the coming of an ideal social order in which men would no longer feel any desire to strive against or injure one another. The superstitions about the dramatic second coming, the general resurrection, and the catastrophic nature of the changes which would then take place, need not deceive us in the least. The worst of it is that these over-beliefs have been substituted in the course of time for the original Christianity; the non-essential has crushed out the essential; the other-worldism has gradually replaced the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God with which Jesus began His mission to the world. (120)

Of course this meant that Campbell was not able fully to avail himself of that rich apocalyptic utopian seam which historically has played such an important role in popular movements, and which modern writers such as Ernst Bloch have sought to reintegrate into the Socialist project. In this sense there is a clear rationalist dimension to Campbell’s approach. Also his assumption that the radical is the Christian creates an anomaly. As a Congregational clergyman Campbell considers the sacerdotalists of the Anglican church to be fundamentally mistaken, yet he is not willing to deny the Socialist credentials of Anglican Christian Socialism. Likewise Blatchford is deemed to be a legitimate Socialist. Campbell thus has to rebaptise both: “Socialism may be preached occasionally by avowed agnostics like the editor of the *Clarion*, or by convinced sacerdotalists like Father James Adderley, but in so far as their objective is what is here stated they are both Christian” (150). Adderley’s response, whilst equally inclusive, concentrated more on the Socialist than the Christian element in the equation: “Mr Campbell should recognize that just as his ‘New Theology’ helps his Socialism and Mr Blatchford’s ‘Determinism’ helps his Socialism, so my ‘Sacerdotalism’ helps mine. Our Socialism is the same Socialism assisted in different ways by our religious belief” (Adderley, 1910, 199). Blatchford, on the other hand, neatly turned Campbell’s compliment on its head in a tongue in cheek review: “I am as much a Christian as the Rev. R.J. Campbell, and the Rev. R.J. Campbell is as much an infidel as the editor of *The Clarion*” (Cited in Worrall, 1978, 346).

Church Socialism

Like the “Socialism as Religion” approach, Church Socialism is appreciative of the strengths of traditional churches, and likewise wishes to harness these advantages to Socialism. Unlike “Socialism as Religion” it is explicitly Christian, but, since it does not feel at home in any of the existing denominations, it seeks to create its own church structure. In the 1890s John Trevor established the Labour Church movement, linking an immanentist theology (not unlike Campbell’s), with an explicit Socialism, and a separate institutional existence; though by 1906 this particular movement was virtually moribund (Bevir, 50–55).¹¹

A new expression of this approach was stimulated by the British mission of the American preacher the Rev. J. Stitt Wilson in 1907. Wilson, broadly in the same theological camp as Campbell, made such a profound impression in Bradford that the establishment of a Socialist Christian Church resulted. This was much to the displeasure of the militant atheist, H.S. Wishart, who was full of scorn for the Rev. J. Stitt Wilson’s activities in Bradford: Wilson was “exploiting the Labor movement and the workers in the interests of *his* reputation. . . . Freedom for the workers is not to be won by the prophesying of any hypocritical parson, or flunkey of a slaves’ religion” (Wishart, n.d. a, 3). The leading light in the Bradford Socialist Church was D.B. Foster, who had been both a Wesleyan lay-preacher, and the President of the Labour Church Union (1902–3) (Jones, 409). In a pamphlet of 1909, *Why a Socialist Christian Church?*, Foster set out the objectives of the movement: “a Socialist Christian Church has been formed with a view to providing a fellowship and a platform for all who believe that the message of Jesus and a Gospel of Socialism should be studied and taught together” (2). Foster is attracted to the idea of church attendance because it provides an arena for the cultivation of the religious spirit. Unlike various secularist and rationalist currents, the religious spirit is considered to be in the forefront of the discovery of truth: “Religion . . . is that element in man which leads him into a persistent reconsideration of life and the re-arrangement of his ideas in reference thereto. It is that element of unrest which urges him on to a critical examination of life’s phenomena and to an amendment of his conceptions thereof” (3). Therefore the desertion of the existing churches is not an indication of the loss of a religious spirit, rather it is indicative of the revulsion of religious people confronted by the barren formulae of conventional denominations. The emphasis throughout is on the Christian tradition, rather than a mere ethical religiosity. Jesus “discovered to humanity the truth of Human Divinity” (6); and “that the discovery of truth made known by Jesus has been with us 2000 years and is still being taught and believed, is very strong evidence of its being largely true and valuable” (5).

The Socialist Christian Churches are in a sense anticipatory islands, where people can prefigure in their actions and interactions the life which all humanity will one day share. Foster believes that these churches will attract

back the religious spirit repelled by the contemporary churches: “If they could become the centres of discovery, to which all larger souls who are seeing life more clearly could gravitate and co-operate in solving life’s mysteries, never again should we hear of their being forsaken, because to them would flock the most intelligent and active section of the community” (4). One can infer the centrality of Christian spirituality to Foster’s conception of a future Socialist society from the vocabulary he employs in his description of the virtues of the Socialist Christian Church. Thus Socialists require “Inspiration, Power and Fulness”, they should cultivate a “worshipful spirit” and “develop those qualities of forgiveness and redemption which are so necessary in seeking to illuminate the evil and establish the good in human life” (3, 6, 7). Foster has a relatively open-ended and evolutionary approach to the future. Jesus was a milestone in the rise of humanity, but history cannot stand still. Although clearly believing that humanity is on a virtuous ascending path, the particular modalities of that journey cannot be anticipated with any certainty. The Socialist Christian Church can point people in the right direction, but whether the Church “will, after it has made known its new discovery to the world, become barren and useless, like the religious organisations which have preceded it, remains to be seen” (4).

Working Class Biblical Socialism

In contrast with “New Theology” this approach uses more conventional Christian language. It too, however, is suspicious of contemporary organised religion and its theological justifications, but yearns instead for a return to the clarity of Biblical truths. Its class location makes it very sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the poor, and it reads its Bible accordingly.

A classic expression of this mentality can be found in Keir Hardie’s *Can a Man be a Christian on a Pound a Week?* (first published in 1901). This is not because this highly idiosyncratic figure was “typical” of his class—he clearly wasn’t—but because of his ability to articulate the scripturally-grounded moral vocabulary of radical sections of that class. Commentators have found it difficult to pin down the precise nature of Hardie’s eclectic, even esoteric, religious beliefs; he seems to have been attracted to an immanentist conception of Christianity (coming to admire the work of Campbell), combining this with a belief in a distinct spiritual realm (which allowed of spiritualism and reincarnation) (see Morgan, 8–9, 46). He was also, like MacDonald and Snowden, a shrewd political tactician, who was capable of tailoring public statements to fit a specific political agenda. The text itself deploys a relatively orthodox religious language, and portrays its author as believing in the existence of a transcendental heaven. The work is suffused with a Biblical piety, which undoubtedly has its roots in Scottish Evangelical Protestantism (see McCabe). Humans are made “in the image of God”; Jesus is “The Great Teacher”; “God the Father” is a reality. Heartfelt Christian imagery abounds. It is above all the Sermon on the Mount which holds centre stage, with Hardie declaring at one point: “Socialism . . . is the appli-

cation to industry of the teachings contained in the Sermon on the Mount” (11). The text is highly class conscious. Vignettes of the behaviour of bourgeois Christians speak of hypocrisy, where a Sunday piety disappears before the exploitation of the rest of the week. There is a fierce identification with the poor, conceived in explicitly religious terms. After having described a typical decline into destitution by a working man, Hardie writes:

And yet, sodden it may be with drink, foul of speech, and life too unclean for even the dogs to lick his sores, I would sooner risk my chance of getting to Heaven with him than with those who, having robbed him and made him what he is, are respectable church-goers and members of good society. He has been sinned against, and not upon him will fall the punishment. Christ had no hard words for the poor erring sons and daughters of men. All his invective was kept for the Scribes and Pharisees, the hypocrites who professed a faith in God which they neither knew nor understood. (6)

There is a strong puritan tone to the work. The asceticism of early Christianity is contrasted favourably with the decadent frivolity of modern times. A Socialist Society should thus display the virtues of simplicity, moderate sufficiency, hard work, rude health, temperance, sexual continence, responsible community, and piety:

God the Father had so ordained that in response to labour the earth would yield freely enough and to spare for the supply of every human need, and if men would but follow the example of the flowers of the field and the birds of the air and hold all nature’s gifts in common, drawing from the great storehouse only what each required for the needs of the day, then life would become free, joyous, and beautiful.

It will be seen, therefore, that the man who is most simple in his tastes, whose life is lived in closest communion with nature, and is farthest removed from the pomps and vanities of worldly display approximates most clearly to the Christian ideal. Not for him the glare and glitter of the saloon or the haunts of vice; not for him the expensive adornment of gay apparel. His beauty will be that beauty of health which comes from closely following the laws which govern life. The acquisition of property he will regard as an impediment to the development of the soul which is alone immortal and worth caring for. (4)

Unlike Campbell and the “New Theology” approach, Hardie in this pamphlet speaks of two *authentic* possible paradises—the future earthly Socialist society and the heaven of individual salvation. He turns the distinction to his advantage by establishing the heavenly realm as a criterion to measure the advance of secular progress. The text “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” is to be taken literally, and is a solemn duty for all. To opponents he poses the question: will there be the exploitation of women and children in heaven, or private property in land, or a class system based on inequalities of wealth? If the answer is no, then there is no moral basis for existing conditions, and an imperative is created to overcome this state of affairs. A Socialist society thus has behind it the law and sanctions of God himself.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain dealt with Hardie under the heading of “Quackery and Confusion”. They noted his claim in an electoral address that he had first learned his Socialism in the New Testament, and commented: “This may explain some of the vagaries of Mr Hardie. It certainly shows that his creed, whatever else it may be, is not Socialism” (32).

Socialism from Above

This is a more hierarchical, even elitist, form of religious Socialism. At the very top is God and his plan for humanity. The churches and their clergy have the task of both communicating these divine purposes to the people as a whole, and fulfilling the role of a kind of General Staff in the battle for redemption.

The Baptist clergyman John Clifford (see Thompson, 1986) brought out *Socialism and the Churches* in 1908. Clifford’s pamphlet was published by that powerhouse of elitist Socialism, the Fabian Society, of which Clifford was a member. Like Hardie, Clifford had working class origins and always retained a strong commitment to that class. His own positive experience of formal education is clearly reflected in the emphasis he places on the need for a controlled rooting out of ignorance. Sound knowledge is guaranteed by a purposeful universe. Throughout history, Clifford argues, God’s guiding hand has been apparent, using appropriate forms of the day to push his great design forward. Socialism is the current cutting edge of God’s plan for humanity: “this is the plan of God. Socialism, in the soul of it, is divine. It is of God. He is behind all, and in all, and through all, working out His great redemption of mankind. God has His plan in every generation, and I cannot hesitate to believe that the plan of God in this generation connects itself with that irresistible social tide . . .” (7–8). The churches have a pre-eminent role to play in all of this. Here again the emphasis is on *leadership*. They bring the all-important spiritual dimension that legitimates their co-ordination of the insights and activities of secular leaders. This spiritual elite has the job of rousing sluggish humanity, of creating the human material required for a proper Socialist society:

the churches, made up of disciples of Christ, must give themselves to the work of what Paul calls “edification” or “man building”; they must stir and illuminate the conscience, create good and healthy opinion, turn opinion into conviction, and conviction into action, elevate ideals, stiffen will, and fire with enthusiasm, and so supply the character, freedom, and force on which the order and progress of mankind ultimately rests. (12)

The phrase “man building” earned Clifford the scorn of the Socialist Party of Great Britain who viewed it as a particularly egregious form of voluntaristic idealism—churches cannot simply create socialists, only the inherent contradictions of capitalism can do this (21). Clifford himself clearly does not view elitism as a permanent phenomenon; as is the case in other forms of elitist Socialism, the ultimate goal is a society without elites. Like Campbell and Hardie, he returns to early Christianity for anticipatory images of Socialism:

in the Church of the New Testament we see existent, in principle and in germ, what we expect to enjoy in a perfectly constructed social state. The Church of God in the Acts and Epistles knows nothing of class distinctions—has neither laymen nor clerics. The apostle and the prophet, the teacher, the evangelist and helper are one; all distinctions within the body disappear in the one sacred distinction of being within the circle of the people of God. (13)

So convinced is Clifford of the awesome nature of God's design that he is not prepared to argue that Socialism is the ultimate terminus of human endeavour on earth. Since God has in the past brought about a succession of more perfect social forms to further his plan, it would be foolish to believe that Socialism necessarily exhausted the divine creativity. The possibility of even more perfect forms should be seriously entertained. All that can be said with certainty is that Socialism is the next step in humanity's journey:

I do not say that this movement is the *final* form of human society. We do not know, we cannot tell. Finality is a word we cannot place on anything. It does not belong to our vocabulary. 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. (8)

The conventional cast of his theology is revealed in his emphatic retention of the secular divine distinction, refusing to collapse the two in an immanentist manner. The sweetest fruit of social emancipation is the basis it provides for personal redemption.

Socialist critics argued that Clifford's nonconformism led him astray politically. The Socialist Anglican priest, Conrad Noel, aligned Clifford with a non-conformist propensity to middle-class liberalism, and suggested that Clifford's support for a Liberal candidate in the 1906 election was indicative of his true beliefs, whilst his subsequent endorsement of Labour was mere opportunism (104–105). Certainly the Labour politician George Lansbury blamed Clifford for his failure to win a parliamentary seat in the first General Election of 1910. Lansbury had made positive noises about Anglican education, and this, he claimed, led Clifford publicly to repudiate his candidature, bringing the nonconformist vote with him (Lansbury, 113).

Anglican Christian Socialism

This position self-consciously saw itself as part of a tradition initiated by the original "Christian Socialists" (notably Maurice and Kingsley) in the mid nineteenth century. It clearly has a different theological basis to the various forms of non-conformist Socialism, though it shares many aspects of the latter's critique of capitalism. It brings to the articulation of its Socialism the liturgical and sacramental traditions of the Established Church. Its proponents were associated with a number of Anglican organisations: Stewart Headlam's Guild of St. Matthew, the Christian Social Union (a more gen-

teel grouping enjoying a measure of episcopal favour),¹² and the Church Socialist League (formed in response to the 1906 election¹³).

1907 saw both the fifth reprint of the Reverend Stewart Headlam's 1892 Fabian Tract *Christian Socialism* and a new edition of another Fabian text *Socialism and Christianity* by the Reverend Percy Dearmer, first written in 1897.¹⁴ Both begin their pamphlets by linking themselves to the Victorian Christian Socialists: Headlam, biographically, says he learnt the principles of Christian Socialism from Maurice and Kingsley as a student in Cambridge, whilst Dearmer prefaces his text with a quotation from Maurice. This need to stress the Anglican pedigree of Christian Socialism is further expressed in Dearmer's hard words against the "selfish individualism" of "Calvinist heresies" (21).¹⁵ The use as sources of episcopal encyclicals, the *Magnificat* of the Virgin Mary, and the Catechism of the Church of England further reinforce the fact that we have left the world of nonconformity far behind. Both writers find in the sacraments of Baptism and Communion an expression of Socialist principles. In Baptism, equality is asserted as both a fact and a right; it is simultaneously critique and norm. Likewise the very name of Communion suggests a coming together, a community of all. The true meaning of these sacraments has become lost, and its recovery is felt as a threat. Dearmer notes: "This is just what so shocked people when Mr Stewart Headlam said that those who come to Holy Communion must be holy communists" (21).

Equally lost has been the earthly element in Jesus's teachings. Headlam finds in the parables a radical, terrestrial message: "If by the Kingdom of Heaven . . . is meant a place up in the clouds, or merely a state in which people will be after death, then I challenge you to get any kind of meaning out of them whatever. But if by the Kingdom of Heaven is meant (as it is clear from other parts of Christ's teaching is the case), the righteous society to be established upon earth, then they all have a plain and beautiful meaning . . ." (3). Dearmer embraces the idealism entailed by this view, for if society falls short of fundamental Christian values then it is society which must change. It is the extraordinarily high aspirations of the Sermon on the Mount which makes it to this day so far ahead of its time. Thus the terms "utopian" and "utopia" hold no fear for Dearmer. Since perfection is clearly God's intention, the utopian mode is essential for all responsible Christians:

God's evolution of the world is towards perfection. Therefore Socialists are right in believing in Utopia; and as Christians we are bound to be Utopians. People often object that we are dreamy, unpractical people, because we are idealists. But everyone who says the Lord's Prayer definitely proclaims himself a fellow-worker with God for a perfect social state; he prays for a heaven on earth, for God's will to be as perfectly done here as it is in heaven, for men to be as perfect as the angels, and for this divine evolution to take a social form in the "Kingdom of God." He is *bound* then, to believe that all our struggles for social and moral reform are leading us to a Utopia. (11–12)

Dearmer offers a stages theory of utopia. Ultimate perfection requires the preparation of humanity via less perfect forms; thus collectivism will estab-

lish the basis for communism, which in turn makes a genuinely anarchist society possible. However, this ultimate stage has to be there as a norm; otherwise humans would not have sufficiently improved themselves to even achieve the initial collectivist level. The sheer audacity of the divine vision of the Kingdom is consciously intended to stretch humanity.

True Socialism is a much larger thing than Collectivism, which is but the means for realizing it under present conditions. When humanity has established Collectivism, it might very possibly pass on to Communism; and after some centuries of Communism, humanity might become pure enough to live without laws at all, which would really be Anarchism. Christ taught for all time; and, if He had insisted on Collectivism, men would never have become unselfish enough to attain it; if they had, His teaching would have grown out of date. But His teaching and His example are always in advance of us, and thus we are able to develop. (13)

In 1907 the Reverend James Adderley (Campbell's "sacerdotalist") published a utopian novel, *Behold the Days Come: A Fancy in Christian Politics*,¹⁶ dedicated to Stewart Headlam, which embodied many of the themes of Anglican Christian Socialism. It begins in the aftermath of the 1906 General Election and concludes two parliaments later with the election of a Labour government, besides which "the surprises of 1906 were as nothing" (222). The theme is the power of Anglican Christian Socialism, grounded in a restored Christianity, to so change hearts and minds that it is possible to usher in a peaceful road to a thoroughly Christian Socialism. It is possible to hear echoes of a left-wing Victorian medievalism (espoused most notably by William Morris), which had a particular resonance for these Anglican advocates of a renewed "Catholic" church in England. In fact Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* is a quite specific influence. One of the principal characters of Adderley's novel is an Anglican priest called John Ball who "had taken as his motto the famous expression of his fourteenth-century namesake, the parson leader of the Peasants' Revolt, 'Fellowship is heaven: lack of fellowship is hell' [which is actually a quote from Morris's text]" (90). The championing of "ritualism", the warm endorsement of religious orders and communities, and the praise lavished on Francis of Assisi also evoke medieval Christendom. Like Morris there is an attempt to conceive of the future as combining the best of the past with the authentic achievements of the modern. Adderley's heroes do not find anything incongruous in their speculation that "the bishops of the House of Lords might be the Labour Party of the second Chamber" (178).

Catholicism and Socialism

Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* established the terrain upon which Catholic Socialism was to contend. The encyclical condemned Socialism outright, making no distinctions between types or forms. On the other hand Leo's whole purpose in the encyclical was to address what he took to be the legitimate aspirations of working people in a modern economy. Active

concern for the condition of the poor was considered a duty imposed upon all Catholics. Catholic Socialists could thus use this latter imperative to help cope with the Papal condemnation of Socialism. A degree of space had been left (unintentionally) for a Catholic Socialism (see Gunnin; and Purdie).

It was never going to be easy however. The predominant clerical view was to observe the letter of the encyclical and either fiercely oppose or at least not assist Socialism in any of its manifestations. The counter position was confined to a few beleaguered laity and clergy. The first of a number of Catholic Socialist Societies was established in Glasgow in 1906, largely in response to a renewed Catholic onslaught on Socialism following the General Election. The Society had a formidable leading light in John Wheatley (see Wood; Howell), a future Labour Minister of Health, and also published a number of recognisably Catholic Socialist texts. The discipline and morality of the Catholic Church deeply impinges upon Catholic Socialism. The Glasgow Society in its literature made clear that membership was confined to practising Catholics; Wheatley in his 1909 pamphlet *The Catholic Workingman* deploys Catholic sources throughout to make his case, peppering his texts with quotes from Cardinal Manning, Archbishop Maguire, Hilaire Belloc, the Catholic Truth Society and sundry Jesuits and Dominicans; all to bolster his support for “the right of a loyal Catholic to be a Socialist” (27). Henry Somerville, the youthful founder of a short-lived Leeds Catholic Socialist Society, declared later that he was “actuated purely by zeal for the Church, not Socialism” (105), arguing that since he had then believed that Socialism was inevitable, the Church would have to learn to live with it; therefore: “Such a Society would . . . show Socialists that not all Catholics were opposed to them, it would permeate the general body of Socialists with Catholic ideas and it would provide a Catholic atmosphere for Catholic recruits to Socialism so that their Faith would not be in danger” (ibid.). Somerville did not get the opportunity to put his grand strategy into action. The local Bishop condemned the Society; Somerville dutifully resigned, and shortly after renounced his belief that Catholicism was compatible with Socialism; but it was Socialism that had to go.

The Catholic Socialists sought to distinguish their own conception of Socialism from that condemned by the Pope. Wheatley cites a letter to *The Tablet* by the Irish Dominican Vincent McNabb, in which the cleric argues that since Socialists don’t deny the right to property the encyclical cannot be used against them (25–26). The English Fabian and Catholic, Hubert Bland, in a 1910 pamphlet published by the Glasgow Socialist Society, *Socialism and the Catholic Faith*, critiques Leo’s methodology. *Rerum Novarum* he argues takes a number of atypical opinions by particular Socialist thinkers and constructs an essential Socialism from them. These Socialists tend to come from the early days of the Socialist movement, and are drawn from “Continental” Socialism. Bland is thus able to counterpose a mature, native tradition of Socialism which does not fall foul of papal strictures. In fact the critique and alternative offered by this Socialism represents the best chance of achieving the spirit of the encyclical. Leo had asserted that the products

of labour should belong to the person who had done the labour, yet a capitalist society prevents this happening; Socialism, however, enables the worker to obtain a just share of production. Likewise the claim that Socialism will destroy the family and religious faith is counter-intuitive. Why, in a future Socialist society, where the necessities of life are provided should people suddenly abandon their existing moral and religious beliefs? On the contrary, improved conditions will strengthen existing moral patterns not undermine them. Bland concludes his pamphlet with an invitation to his readers to engage in a piece of utopian thinking:

If anyone is inclined to believe that Socialism is incompatible with Orthodoxy, I would ask him to do just this: to make an effort of imagination, to imagine that he has been commissioned from on High to make—no not to make, to arrange, a New World—a world in which human nature shall not have been transformed, but shall be pretty much as we know it to-day It is his then, so to re-arrange the political and economic mechanism that, so far as the mechanism is concerned, it shall be a world in which it will be comparatively easy to be a Christian, to practice the Christian virtues; as easy . . . as it is now confessedly difficult . . . in a sentence, a world in which Christianity shall have a fair chance Well, when he has so arranged that world: when he has made of it something that he can present to God and man, as, on the whole, a worthy piece of work, I venture to predict that it will be a world identical in more respects than he now imagines, with the world which Socialists . . . are striving to bring about (22–23)

This is not a specifically Catholic vision. In this sense the term “Catholic Socialism” is a misnomer. There is nothing here of Somerville’s claim that Catholics could add something distinctive to Socialism. Its Catholicism lies in its relationship to a condemnatory orthodoxy. The whole approach is defensive, using the terms set by the Pontiff. It sees as an achievement the simple assertion of the right of Catholics to be Socialists. In Wheatley’s case his Irishness imports a dimension absent from the two English writers. Wheatley makes much of the fact that an overwhelming percentage of Catholics in Britain are Irish, and that this constituency has distinct needs and aspirations, notably radical social measures to overcome their position as the lowest of the low in British working class life, and a non-capitalist British government which would have no economic interests in keeping Ireland as a subordinate territory. Like Bland, however, his image is of Catholics taking part in a common struggle for Socialism, and not a Catholic Socialism. Looking back to the Jesuit Cathrein/Gettelman’s unflattering assessment of the British Socialist movement in 1904, he conveys the transformation which had occurred since 1906, and the possibilities that lie ahead: “Only five years have passed since this was written, but in that time the Socialist movement has swept over Britain like a hurricane, capturing in its course men of every class and every creed. The millionaire and the labourer, Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Agnostics, have met on a common platform, and walked shoulder to shoulder ‘neath the Socialist standard” (2).

Conclusion

A utopian focus has a particular appropriateness in an examination of the Socialism of this period, given the great optimism surrounding the future of Socialism. To the friends of Socialism (and to many of its foes) the Labour leap forward in the 1906 election appeared to mark merely the beginning of even greater triumphs to come. Optimistic, perfectionist perspectives dominate the various contributions to the Socialism/Christianity debate. For secularism the triumph of Enlightenment rationalism was in sight; superstition in the form of religion was making its last stand, frantically attempting to co-opt its nemesis—secular Socialism. Marxism saw an increasingly self-confident working class ready, it believed, to carry out its historic mission; in the coming communism not only the state would wither away but also Christian morality and all other forms of prehistoric ethics. Christians were able to insert Socialism into the hopes and promises of their faith; the ascent of Socialism partook of the divine.

The overtly Christian conceptions of a future Socialist society were able to draw on a number of internal resources. Christianity, for example, provided a language and symbolism for exploring social possibility. The motif of “the Kingdom” (of God, of Heaven) was a particularly rich vein for such speculation, carrying with it the resonances of radical otherness, transcendence, fulfilment, joy and power. As in all effective utopian devices the intellectual and the emotional were combined: the Kingdom was both a vehicle for social analysis and a repository of the deepest feelings of two millennia.

A further utopian virtue of this Christian Socialism was its capacity to unite the concrete and the normative. The most powerful utopias have been able to harness the particular concreteness of description to the universal abstractness of prescription: a specific society, but a good one. Christianity, which from its inception had fed a religious utopianism, could replenish its familiar narrative of the heavenly city with the new Socialist agenda.

The central figure of Jesus provided further advantages. Jesus provided historical evidence for utopian possibility. Early Christianity seemed to show that in far from ideal conditions an ethical community had been established. This could be viewed variously as indicating the possibility of the ingression of the miraculous into the mundane, or of the immense latent capacities of humanity. Time and again this earliest phase of Christianity functions as a kind of Golden Age, lost through a range of malign influences, but due to return in even greater glory. Furthermore, Jesus’s incarnation into a carpenter’s family sanctified both the material world and the poor. That Jesus was made flesh, and in such a lowly class, indicated that the Socialist concern with the material interests of the lower classes was clearly in the spirit of Christianity’s great founder.

Even to those who were highly sceptical of Christianity, the resources of this religion were attractive. Its historical effectiveness indicated that it had developed or adapted extremely powerful human contrivances. Rejection of important aspects of Christian endeavour need not therefore entail a

blindness to the strengths of that endeavour. Hence the tightrope walk of appropriating Christian assets without plunging into the void of theological Christianity. Socialism as a religion, and elements of the project to construct a secular Jesus, are thus attempts to manufacture an improved locomotive for the historical process, but one in which its historical antecedents are very evident.

The Socialist opponents of Christianity see no such advantages. Christianity belongs to the old world, and will have no role in the new. For Humanists the Bible at best expresses nostrums propounded better elsewhere and at worst preaches a life-denying morality. Nothing is thus lost, yet much gained by jettisoning this tradition—subtraction becomes addition. To Marxists the ethics of Christianity is but one manifestation of the ideological defences of class society, and cannot therefore be deployed in the overcoming of that society. The Socialist use of Christianity must therefore be a mixture of ignorance and an electoral opportunism itself playing to a wider residual social ignorance. Militant atheists see a great historical battle between the forces of reason and those of superstitious ignorance. Religion has been in the vanguard of the legions of darkness, resisting all attempts to usher in science, reason and knowledge. The absence of religion will thus be the prime indicator of the triumph of secular Socialism.

The stance on Christianity was not without cost. Opponents effectively debarred themselves from using the rich utopian resources of the Christian tradition, and had to rely on what was left amongst secular traditions. A certain thinness of vision was the result. On the other hand Christian Socialists encountered theological and denominational problems. An explicitly “divine” perspective ran the danger of alienating non-religious Socialists, whilst the denominational nature of Christianity threatened to (and in fact did) divide and exclude fellow Christians.

The hopes and fears stimulated by the 1906 General Election began to dissipate as the Labour Party proceeded very much as the junior partner of the Liberals. The two General Elections of 1910 produced no further breakthroughs. “The Plight of the Labour Party,” ran a *Daily Herald* headline in January 1914, “It has absolutely no influence on the Political Thought of the Country” (Quoted in Douglas, 124). The emergence of Guild Socialism in 1912/13 can be seen as emblematic of a change of mood; with Christian and non-Christian Socialists shifting their focus from the unfulfilled promises of state power to the supposed potential contained in more fundamental productive communities. The perfectionist optimism underlying the various approaches hit the buffers with the outbreak of the World War in 1914. Maurice Reckitt, an Anglican Guild Socialist in the immediate pre-War period, looking back in 1946 penned an epitaph for the Christian assurance of this era which has a wider resonance:

The complete failure of Christian idealists before 1914 to envisage the possibility of war and to face its implications is a measure of the inadequacy alike of their theology and of their sociology. . . . The Church . . . did not understand all this in 1914; she did not see that we in western Europe had come, as Nicholas Berdyaev was to say some ten years later, to “the end of our time. . . .” (156–158)¹⁷

Socialism and Christianity both emerged changed by the experience. As in so many other areas the terms of debate were irrevocably altered. New social and political dynamics came into play. Socialism and Christianity continued to interact; partisans from this period continued to polemicise, and new champions emerged; the epochal debate was, however, over.

NOTES

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1. Foucault makes a distinction between "reflection on history" and "reflection in history", where the former is an inevitably remote and distorted engagement with history via secondary sources, whilst the latter generates new theoretical material by direct work on primary historical materials (413). An English translation of the relevant passage can be found in *Eribon* (274).
2. Two books still worth reading on the nineteenth-century background are Pierson and Pelling; see also Yeo's article.
3. As there had been earlier in the century in the wake of the first wave of Socialism.
4. As Kenneth Brown has noted of the opponents of Socialism in this period: "One of the minor mysteries of the Edwardian age, never satisfactorily explained, is why some contemporaries reacted so strongly to the emergence of a very small Labour Party" (257). Thomas Kirkup, in his 1906 *History of Socialism* wrote that at the General Election of 1906, Labour "had a great success, and produced an impression even greater on the national mind" (333). For conservatives anxieties about the supposed "Socialist assault" see *The Case Against Socialism* brought out by the London Municipal Society in 1908 (168). Pelling and Reid nicely distinguish the rhetoric from the reality of this event: Labour's result "created a sensation at the time, and Balfour, the defeated Unionist leader, went so far as to suggest that the new Liberal prime minister, Campbell-Bannerman, was a 'mere cork' on the socialist tide. In reality, as even a few socialists including Bernard Shaw pointed out at the time, it was largely the other way about: [Labour] was a cork on the Liberal tide" (15).
5. In this respect it is in revolt against what Stefan Collini has called "the primacy of morality" in Victorian culture (63).
6. For a brief history of this movement see (Reid, 1966). Reid shows that there existed a minority view mainly based in Lancashire which was critical of the religiosity of the movement and advocated a more hard-nosed class-conscious socialism.
7. I would like to thank one of the anonymous referees of *Utopian Studies* for drawing my attention to this work.
8. There are some points of resemblance between this conception and George Bernard Shaw's "Creative Evolutionism". Shaw in this period combined a Fabian Socialism with a Bergsonian belief in the "Life Force". The religious person, atheist or theist, was one who perceived the pattern and direction of the universe, and worked towards its further evolution: "And what is to be the end of it all? There need be no end. There is no reason why the process should ever

stop, since it has proceeded so far. But it must achieve on its infinite way the production of some Being, some Person if you like, who will be strong and wise, with a mind capable of comprehending the whole universe and with powers capable of executing its entire will: in other word, an omnipotent and benevolent God" (Shaw, 11), or as he put it elsewhere at this time—"We are all experiments in the direction of making God" (Cited in Holroyd, 372).

9. Snowden obtained the phrase from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

10. For Campbell see Worrall; for protestant Christian Socialism in general see Jones; another more recent survey is provided by Bryant; for the Nonconformist churches see Smith.

11. The Socialist Sunday Schools also had historical links with the Labour Church movement. The "theology" of the Labour Church was so ambiguous and unorthodox that both secular and religious could associate with it.

12. The extent to which Socialist ideas had entered the Anglican agenda in this period can be gauged by the various papers on the topic presented to the 1908 Pan-Anglican Congress. See also Wilkinson, Chapters 2 and 3.

13. On the fillip given to the Anglican/Socialist dialogue by the 1906 General Election see Binyon ("Following on the General Election of 1906, there was, all over the country, something approximating to a brief revival of the spirit of the 'eighties" [190].)

14. For Headlam see Norman, also Bettany.

15. There is also a disagreeable element of casual anti-semitism to be found in the writings of these Anglican Christian Socialists.

16. I would like to thank Lyman Tower Sargent for drawing my attention to this text.

17. In 1919 a committee of churchmen brought out a volume dealing with the state of religion after the war, and noted that "for good or evil, the old social and international world is going to pieces. It has been shaken and strained until it is near to foundering". They further reflected that "if our statesman and politicians are going to assume that the men who return are in effect just the same as they were before they went away they are likely to be gravely surprised. They will in all probability simply be eliminated by events. The same is true of those who lead our Churches" (Cairns, xxiv, 4).

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