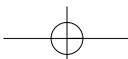
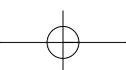
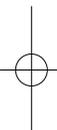
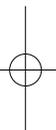


# SOCIALISM, THE CHURCH AND THE POOR





# SOCIALISM, THE CHURCH AND THE POOR

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**P. T. FORSYTH, M.A., D.D.  
HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LONDON MCMVIII**

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I

## PART I

## THE CHURCH AND SOCIALISM

## I.

THE social side of the Church is one that at the present moment receives an absorbing amount of attention. There are thousands and thousands of people who believe they are Christians, and who are yet little concerned about either the truth of Christianity or its experience, in comparison with their interest in the social work, or the social genius, of the Church. It need hardly be said that were that type to become dominant it would mean the demise of Christianity, and of the Church by consequence.

Of this class of people there are two sections, or rather three—two of them much more serious than the other in spirit and purpose. There are those who give themselves to the mere socialities of the

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Church; those who devote themselves to its social philanthropies; and those who prize Christianity and the Church as the great agents of a social reconstruction. I do not propose to say much here and now about the second class, beyond this, that the philanthropy of all the Churches during the last century has been among the most precious things the Church ever achieved. And it has stood between us and a very unpleasant revolution in a way that the future historian will note. I must add, however,

what I have often said elsewhere, that it becomes inadequate to social need as we pass into a new phase of things.

We are left, therefore, with the other two classes. They make two extremes—one very serious, the other far less so. We have in the latter category those who are drawn to the Church either by its socialities or its social advantages, and in the former those who are attracted to the Socialism that they find both in the Church idea and in the Gospel.

Now, I will not dwell on a thing so ignoble as the use so freely made of certain forms of the Church for the purposes of social *entrée* and promotion. But the socialities of the Church are courted mainly by the young people, and among them largely by those who court each other. It is all very well, I suppose. The Church in this regard has been described as the greatest matrimonial

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agency in existence. Well, the young people must meet, and the difficulty of homeless young people meeting in a safe and honourable way is much greater than the comfortable classes realise. It is better that the sexes should meet each other under the ægis of religion than by chance acquaintance on the street. But it is not, of course, for this that the Church exists. It is entirely a by-product of the Church. And when these socialities become a mere opportunity for exhibiting vain talent, musical or other, they are a very gratuitous and somewhat trying adjunct to Church life. I never knew of a dramatic society, for instance (and I have known several), that was not what Saturday bridge-parties are—a frost and a bane to all for which the Church stands. And all this side of things is a plague and intrusion on the minister's time, and a vexation mostly to his spirit.

#### **The Real Social Centre of the Church.**

On this topic I may venture to say one or two brief things before I go on to deal with the other wing and its more earnest spirits. If every evening in the life of a Church is devoted to social purposes, that is a long way too much, and it can only bring spiritual dissipation and peril. Again, if, short of that, the socialities of the Church do anything to destroy or arrest the faith that the real social centre of the Church is the Communion-

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table, then they are doing radical mischief, and the Church is lamed in so far as such a heresy spreads. Or, again, if they make you say, 'I don't care how sound, deep, and powerful a gospel the minister preaches, if he

have not social ways with him. He may preach like a saint, but I have little interest in him if he can't laugh like a sinner. But if he act quite jolly he may talk pure folly'—I say if the passion for sociality make you speak thus, like the person whom Mr Chesterton calls 'the ordinary, jolly, silly man', then your sociality is killing your faith, intelligence, and soul. If you cultivate only social tastes, and do not learn social principles, you waste the time of a Church. Or if your social impulses lead you to think less of the man who does not wish to join you, and wants to be somewhat let alone, then it does damage to freedom. There is a social tyranny, as Stuart Mill says, which can be a more subtle and ubiquitous enemy to liberty than political despotism. And I might add here a remark made to me quite lately by a very well-known author, a Nonconformist: 'I went to such and such a church this morning' (naming a well-filled Established Church), 'and it was a great joy. I really worshipped as I have not done for long. Nobody knew me, nobody spoke to me, I was not distracted by the many acquaintanceships and personal interests

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that at my own church interfere with my devotion.'

Or, to go a step farther, if you come to think that Christianity is to be measured entirely by its social results instead of by the nature of its Gospel, and what it does for the soul, then your social sympathies mislead you. Or if you are led to believe that all moral progress must wait for economic reform, then your social idea is wrong. There is much to be done, with the right Christian soul, in present society, as neighbours, citizens, and earnest members of your Church.

2.

And this brings me to the more congenial part of my task. I come to the class who are interested in Christianity and the Church because they are immensely interested in one or more of the various Socialisms of the day.

The question of the relation of Christianity, or of religion generally, to Socialism is one that will grow much hotter before it grows cooler. And it will divide the Socialists themselves down the middle. But, even if the Socialists accepted religion in general, and Christianity in particular,

there would still be the question, What is the position and duty of the Church in the matter—especially while the Church is divided in opinion on the economic question? I should like to express a few thoughts on these heads. I am not laying down a policy, but making a few suggestions as they occur to me.

### **The Brotherhood of Faith.**

Christianity is not bound up with any particular scheme, dream, or programme of social order. Its essence is redemption as forgiveness or eternal life, and the kingdom of God as flowing from these. And the eternal life can be led under almost any form of society. 'But is the essence of Christianity not brotherhood?' Yes, the brotherhood of faith. But as the word 'brotherhood' is freely used, in the sense of natural fraternity, the essence of Christianity is not brotherhood; it is sonship. Christianity did not come to reveal man's natural brotherhood, but to create a spiritual. Some form of brotherhood is not the principle of Christianity, but only one of its expressions. And it should be clear that any social programme to which Christianity may seem to point more than to another always has for its postulate the Christian faith and the Christian love, distinctly and positively understood; understood as something more deep, permanent, and powerful than any fraternal

sympathies of a natural and human kind. But let us begin by recognising that under most forms of civilised society you can still point men to the spirits goal, you can show them the living way for the peace of their conscience and the conquest of their egoism, and you can convey to them the power to keep that way. As you give men these things, new moral needs and ideals will not only dawn on them, but become urgent, and great social and even Socialist changes must come. A Christian Socialism always begins there, and is only workable on the supposition that men are changed men. The Sermon on the Mount presupposes such men as the Cross alone can make. And it is this Cross, not the Sermon on the Mount, that is fundamental Christianity.

Remember in the next place that the soundest, surest method of social change is the English one, the experimental. One step at a time, and test

it. Secure one foot before you put forward the other. The future into which we move is a quaking bog, and the path has to be picked even by the guides. There are no stepping-stones that you can skip along like a schoolboy. Simple and easy solutions betray the incurable dabbler. Political

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change is slow enough, but social is much slower—social and economic. The social system is much more closely intertwined than the political, with all that region of human nature where its permanent conservatism lies, with individual, family, and class interests.

### **The Slowness of Moral Progress.**

Bear this in mind also, that the moral and the economic life of a society are not only closely bound up together, but are in constant interaction and alternate ascent. We climb first with one foot, then with the other: we do not go by leaps and bounds. The race is ambulatory, after all, and not marsupial. We are not kangaroos. We walk erect, we do not crouch, we do not spring. Each interest affects each in turn—the moral and the economic. The standard of life, for instance, affects the demand for wage; the wage affects the standard of life. Now, all thinking people recognise the slowness of moral progress. It would be worth much less, it would descend to the level of mere industrial progress, if it could move fast. In the making of character, which is our most precious product, you cannot force the pace. And you have no room here for the ready-made trade. Even God could not create a perfect character by a fiat. In proportion to the sinless perfectness of Christ was he increate. And even he had to be made perfect by suffering. So

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also, slow, but not so slow, is economic progress. The economic machine is a very delicate and complex organism now; and a jar at one corner of the financial world vibrates through the whole. More and more it becomes true that it moveth altogether if it move at all. Its earthquakes shake its world. The more we realise that we are members one of another the more we must be prepared for the slow movement which carries all along, and does not develop or aggrandise sections at the cost of the rest. That is why the justice of God is so slow. It is on the scale of the whole, and it forgets none at last. It is as sure, and comprehensive, and imperturbable as death.

Does it not follow from this vital interaction of the moral and the economic that no final scheme is possible, no scheme good for all time?

Many of the Socialisms of the hour are laying hold of people like those movements known in religious history as the Chiliastic. They are the modern and economic forms of the Fifth Monarchy men and the preachers of the millennium. They stand for the distortion of our modern social apocalypse, as the Fifth Monarchists represented a distortion, now outgrown, of the canonical Apocalypse. Now, at last, we are tempted to think, we are upon the threshold of the true millennium. But there has never been

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an expectation of a speedy millennium which has not been refuted by events. There is no millennium possible for the sons of God, except what flows from our moral rest in God. That is to say, the social order must reflect a prior moral attainment, and that stands on a spiritual peace of conscience. All liberty at last rests on the liberty of God and our redeemed freedom in him. And all sound order stands upon our part in the restoration of the deranged moral order by Christ.

Therefore we must be prepared for slow action if we know anything of the key to human nature in our own hearts. Do you find it quick and easy work to get over your natural egoism? Be as strenuous as you may and should be, yet it is patience that has the perfect work. You will not, after all, wait so long, or pay so much, for a renewed world as God has done. Apply and press your ideal moral principles as the conditions of each age allow. Press hard. But it is not ideals that you have first to consider in dealing practically with the social order; it is realities; it is things as they are; it is the extent to which ideals have already been translated into moral character. You have to deal with men and society as you find them, with an eye to the future. You owe much to the future. Well, is it not part of that debt not to hamper aspirations and efforts like your

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own in the next generation? It is your duty so to move as not to imperil the next advance. I will use Schiller's image. It is the cannon-ball that goes to its mark, swift and direct, carrying devastation; but it is the winding river that moves massive to the final sea, broadening as it goes, spreading the smile of prosperity on its shores, and carrying many men and cities on its stately course. If a Socialist nationalisation of production took place next year, next decade, it would give such a shock to confidence that progress would be thrown back for generations. It would be too violent. It would be in the nature of war. War, and the victories of mere war, always do that. Indeed, such a step prematurely taken under the mere

pressure of misery, a programme, or an idea, might mean civil war, though civil war in its modern form—a form in which, even more than in the old, the innocent and the helpless suffer most; and from which we might issue with a dictatorship no less than in the old. I repeat to myself and others often the great and wise words of a public man, too morally wise for many today, William Penn:—

Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them. Governments rather depend on men than men on governments. Let men be good and the government cannot be bad. If it be ill they

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will cure it. But if men be bad, let the government be never so good they will endeavour to warp and spoil it to their turn. Though good laws do well, good men do better. For good laws may lack good men and be abolished or invaded by ill men. But good men will never lack good laws, nor suffer evil ones.

#### **Force versus Consent.**

Yes, even good laws are bad if the people be not ready, if they do not rest on consent. Why was the Puritan Commonwealth a political failure? No one admires Cromwell more than I do, but as a practical statesman I would rather be guided by Burke. Cromwell's method was that of Palmerston and the Jingo. It was too much in the nature of a British fleet with an ultimatum in the cannon's mouth. And why was the Commonwealth as an institution politically so sterile for its principles? Because it came by force instead of consent, because it was (and had to be) military and violent; because it was imposed by an army—even though it was the godliest army the world ever saw. What lives by the sword shall perish by the sword, unless it change to the ploughshare. We speak of the river of life, and truly. Life as it grows in volume and quality, as it becomes the life of a community, is a blessed river, it is not a lava stream. It is a rising sun, it is not a baleful meteor. And, if I may take

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another illustration nearer home, it is true we hold India by the sword. That necessity is the nemesis upon us from those who took it by the sword. But the responsibility has been created, and we must work off that curse. And we should not be working it off, we should be simply plunging, if we were at once to inflict constitutional government on India. We should be sending, not peace but a sword. We should be carrying a naked sword instead of a sheathed. We should be far more really taking

the sword than we are now. Our duty to the India of today is not emancipation but education. By which I do not mean schools and colleges alone, or chiefly, but such practical, social, political education as is on the whole going on there, under the greatest example of statesmanship towards the inferior races that the world has ever known. It would go on faster if all Anglo-Indians were as wise and worthy as some.

You can apply moral ideals to economics with safety only if you remember that the economic world is as yet but at a stage; that it is deeply under the conditions of Nature and Nature's egoism rather than conscience; that you must take practical account of those conditions; that your ethic must change the situation by permeation, by education, rather than by revolution; that though the effect may be revolutionary the methods must not; that to

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agitate social ideals without any attention to history is to get over difficulties as a bull gets you over a hedge. It is to drop explosives from a balloon, like the arm-chair Socialists. You need to know both worlds—the moral and the economic. Do get to know the subject. Anybody can orate and rhapsodise. Beware of quacks. Be very critical of the preacher with an economic hobby. Prophets under modern conditions are apt to be poor politicians, and they may be great wreckers.

4.

### **Man more than Money.**

We are doubtless moving to another great social advance—not prancing, I hope, as fools, but marching as wise. And a principle underlies that movement, a principle that must establish itself through whatever changes in the existing order. That order is not sacrosanct. It has no inherent inviolability. And it has too many awful things in its wake to permit us to treat it as final. At the least possible cost to the existing order we must secure effect everywhere for the great, the only moral, the only Christian, principle of society, that man is more than property. 'How much more is a man than a sheep.' 'The sheep of my pasture are men, saith the Lord.' Any economic system where

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wealth accumulates and men decay has its doom written, if the moral order is still in power behind all. The decay of men may mean the

debasement of the plutocracy; or it may mean the depopulation of the country, as in the Highlands, and the displacement of cottars for game; or it may mean the conversion of men into machines tending machines in the interest of material production alone; or it may mean the demoralisation of the clientèle that wait upon the plutocracy's will and pleasure. To spend a life merely ministering to pleasure-hunters is demoralising. I know a case where an otherwise excellent servant, in receipt of a standard wage, left a place of responsibility, where he was trusted and respected, to take another place where his receipts would be more but his self-respect less, because the difference was created by the pauperising system of tips from people who employed him and his life for their pleasure and not for their work. No class is fit for Socialism or even democracy that is more keen for tips than for honest wage. Yet no economic system like the present, which has an entail of consequences like these, can be permanent. It has the kingdom of God against its permanency. But also no millennium is possible for men, high or low, who are the victims of money before manhood.

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### **The bias to Socialism.**

It was said by Sir William Harcourt, long ago, 'We are all Socialists now'. What he meant was that even then the action of this principle had set in, and made itself felt in public life. The great issue is not capital and labour, but capital and manhood—free moral manhood. Labour might be as acquisitive, as egoistic, as tyrannical, in its own interests as capital—and, indeed (speaking loosely), it is but another form of capital; it is the poor man's capital. And labourism might be as capitalist in spirit as capitalism. All collectivism, all social machinery, all public organisation, must at last be in the interest of free moral manhood. It must tend to secure the freedom which is not, indeed, itself manhood, but is a necessary condition of manhood. It must give the individual access to such a share of the social assets as may form the material basis of moral progress. And how much has been done; how fast things have been going in this direction! A father does not teach his children at home now, any more than he weaves his own cloth; he sends them to public institutions, where skilled instruction can be had and collective resources supplied. He does not walk to do business from London to Bristol, nor get out his cob; he puts himself in the hands of huge collective agencies, who carry him there comfortably and fast, with plenty of

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time and energy left for his work when he gets there. In certain countries this is even a business of the State. There are State railways, besides forests and mines; and it may be that the capitalists shall force a situation of that kind among ourselves. We do have in many places municipal tramways. We have the cities taking into their own hands the provision of water; it is wasteful for each man to sink a well in his back garden. The village pump is even a distributor of death; as is the private midden, now displaced by a civic system of sewage. No man calls the maid to light his lantern as he has to walk several streets at night to call on a friend; he walks in the light of the public lamp. Or he installs an electric light, provided by joint enterprise in which he may have shares. In America he need not boil his own shaving water; it is laid on boiling to the house. He need not light his own fire, or have to jump up in the middle of an intractable sentence to feed a hungry grate, which clamours in the freezing of his toes; steam is taken through the streets in pipes and laid on to radiators in his house. And he can buy driving power from a common source in the same way. To pay his bills he does not carry bars of precious metal, with shears and scales, and clip off the amount he owes; he uses a State mint and coinage. The State will insure his

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life; and some propose State banking. To rise to higher regions, research is carried on not only by each savant in his private laboratory, but by organising it in great institutes and universities, with laboratory and mechanical aid such as few private men could afford. And we may further note, among innumerable instances to the same effect, that the government of peoples is less and less a monopoly of individuals, families, or dynasties, and more and more everywhere a matter of public right and constitutional monarchy.

I am quoting these things to illustrate the truism that we have long been moving to a more collective idea of society in the interest of that moral manhood which is only possible in a community. This last feature remains the essential thing in our survey. The great task of the future is the reorganisation of society in the interest, not of enjoyment but of moral manhood. No man can come to himself or his own except in a society of men. He cannot come to freedom except in a society which limits freedom. Socialism is as alien to extreme Individualism as it is to extreme Communism. It certainly does not aim at Communism, at the

pooling of all property, any more than it would restore to our tables the common dish and the separate spoon or fork. No more does it aim at the long spoon, with all the elaborate table for its prey, and a vis-à-vis of

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like mind only longer in the arm. There are many varieties of Socialist programme. But the worthiest all rest, whatever you think of the schemes, on the two principles (which are really one) of moral manhood, and the slow reorganisation of society in the interest of the whole, and not of a single class or individual. That is the generic feature of any practicable Socialism, whatever tactics bring it about. It refuses to believe that the best can be done for the whole by simply leaving each individual perfectly free to do the best he can for himself. Nobody who starts life with that for his supreme ambition is worthy of the social name. Do not the publicans likewise? Society must accommodate such people of course; it would not be wise to hang them, but it has to be saved from them. And it is the other kind of people that save it; or it is the same people in so far as they are false to their ambition and true to a better ideal. These of the public mind are the people that make the cement of society, and avert anarchy. It is the egoists that are the anarchists. And you will never avert anarchy by any selfishness, however enlightened. Satan cannot cast Satan out. The great ideal is not equality. Everybody is not equal—except of course in the eye of the law. The grand ideal is not everybody equal, but everybody helping. There may be many levels of wealth,

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as there are many of faculty. But there should be no gulfs. There should be flights of steps, easily accessible, from level to level, or occasionally lifts. (I put that in for the comfort of those who hope to inherit legacies, or to marry money.) It is not the differences in level that make the real trouble, it is the gulfs between them, the absence of bridges or stairs.

5.

### **What is wanted.**

Now in order to carry forward what we have already wisely and safely done, what do we still want in a Christian and social ideal? Among other things these:—

(i.) We need to *organise work* (both labour and its control) and wealth (both material and mental), so as to increase production. Man is here to produce, and to produce the most he can continue to produce while putting his whole soul and conscience into it. And the policy of 'ca' canny' is only one of the mean and dishonest dodges which we are too familiar with in other hostilities as stratagems of war.

(ii.) We need to *increase production* in such a way that every worker shall have the best average conditions for moral development. He must have a living wage, a wage on which he can live with his family

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like truly human beings, according to the standard of his land and time. He must have a living wage and a decent accessible house.

(iii.) We need further that, besides these average conditions, there shall be open *the best opportunities for the development of special gifts and aptitudes*, particularly in work; so that there shall be an end to the old, and still vivid, antipathy of democracy to genius, and an end of the public worship of mediocrity because it does not make us feel uncomfortable or inferior. How the democracy does hate a man who is a rebuke to it because he takes pains, and is a lover of efficiency, perfection, and production at its finest best! And it loves the genial casual person of the Walt Whitman stamp, in his shirtsleeves and slouch hat, his amorphous sentiment and loafing ethic. It calls him homely, but it really means that it is happy with him because he makes no demand, and may be as shallow as he is blandly simple. Left to itself democracy gravitates to mediocrity.

(iv.) We need to develop in individuals the sense that they are *members one of another*. They must come to care more for equal duties than equal rights. They must be free *from* all men only that they may be free *for* all men. And I may here remind you that Christianity has far more to say to people who are struggling to do their duty than to those who are

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only clamouring for their rights. It is the worst feature of much recent Socialism that it has too much to say about rights and sympathies compared with what it has to say about duties, or the devotion it presses in doing them.

(v.) We need to improve the condition of employer and employed.

### **The Employers.**

(a) Of the employers. One part of them needs an ethical conversion. There are 'road hogs' in the highways of commerce, who have no idea

but of monopolising public facilities for their own aggrandisement and pleasure, and of overriding all who stand in their brutal way. But the other part of them are not so much in need of conversion as of help. They do not always act as egoists out of greed, but often under the pressure of economic necessity, of which they are as much the victims as those who complain of them. Men are mostly driven to be hard not because they are hard, but because, if they are not as hard as the laws of present business, they must go under. It is not always a choice of making more or less, but often of making something or nothing, with the risk of losing all.

(b) Of the employed. Think of their moral difficulties in the present state of things.

### **The Employed.**

(α) They enter the market of supply and demand

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with labour to sell. That is to say, they offer themselves as forces or machines, not as persons; they are not in personal relations with the employer (who is often a company, using another machine as manager).

(β) They are not free, because, labour being their only wealth, they must often dispose of it under demoralising conditions in order to live. The absence of personal relations with its buyer makes these conditions more demoralising. So that the partial and nominal freedom of the present state lacks some of the humanising, and even ethicising, elements of the feudal state of things. Rousseau said he aimed at a time when no man should be so rich that he could buy men or so poor as to have to sell himself.

(γ) They have to pursue for too many hours a monotonous and exhausting form of work, which crushes individuality, and disposes them to coarse and debasing uses of leisure. I have often stood beside beautiful machines, which were turning out huge quantities of articles perfect for their purpose, and as I watched the motions, momentarily repeated, of the man or woman in charge, I have been filled with compassion for people who have to give the flower of their days' strength to movements which are but another part of the machine, quite automatic, and meaning nothing

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for the brain or soul behind. They need put, could put, none of themselves into their work. I could not wonder that an accident should happen from inattention in that monotone. I could not wonder that the reaction when

work was over was intense. I could only wonder that it did not break out into forms far more violent and mischievous than we find. I wonder, with many, not at the restlessness, but at the patience, of the poor.

(δ) They have no security of work, no fixity of tenure. It is not easy for some to imagine the moral effect of the constant feeling (where it is not blunted into mere indifference past feeling) that the family supplies may stop any week through no fault of the worker, and from causes that nothing he may do can control, either from sickness or the employer's failure. No wonder if the frequent effect is either stupidity or levity. The wonder is it is not oftener so.

(ε) They have the disheartening and demoralising sense of an unduly small share in what they make and what they contribute to society, both materially and morally. They give their life, which is all that the most prosperous can give when the accounts are made up; but there is no such equality in what they receive.

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### **Moral Conditions.**

In the face of such observations it is quite impossible that things can stay as they are. It is morally impossible even if it were possible economically.

But what is the chief condition of beneficent change? Is that not moral? I go on to ask, Does all that is meant by the Socialist ideal not mean a change of heart? Is there not a whole moral world of difference between the person who says, 'What's mine is mine' and the person who says, 'What's mine is man's'? Within Socialism itself is there not a moral world between the man who says, 'In the name of social justice all yours is mine' and the man who says, 'In the name of Christ all mine is yours'? Is there not a moral revolution to be gone through between these two points? Don't they mean a changed man, a converted man, a new man? And is there any influence that can effect that change but religion? And is there any religion that can do it but the religion of Jesus Christ? Is there any other influence you know that can so change a man's moral centre of gravity as to turn him from an eager getter to a cheerful giver? The permanent condition of reconstruction is redemption.

I do not know of any Socialist programme that

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does not make far greater demands on the moral power of the community than the systems that have gone before. There is not one programme worth notice which does not make this increased moral demand, which does not postulate an increased amount of willingness to serve the community at personal cost and loss. And if so, there is an inevitable question to be put to each Socialist apostle: Do your proposals include some machinery for the production of this moral power, this moral change? We have not as much moral power now as we need for the best working of the present system, for making the most of that. For instance, it is in the power of the publicans and the police, now, under present laws, to prevent drunkenness if an entire willingness were there. Prostitution would almost vanish if so many respectable people did not settle down to the belief that it is necessary—a necessary evil. Now, if we have not moral force enough to work the existing system to more good, where are we to get the amount of moral force that we should need for another system that makes moral demands so much greater? And what is the result when a social system is introduced, either by force of arms or by force of a majority, which is long ahead of the moral preparation of the community? It is collapse, civil war, dictatorship, reaction, and the throw-back of everything.

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The first requisite for Socialism is a moral power new to the world. And that means not an unheard-of religion, nor a striking version of the old, but just the old taken in earnest, a real religion that overcomes the world. And, however it may be with Christians, that is what Christ has done for good and all. Therefore there are no truer apostles of Socialism, in any solid sense of the word, than those who are toiling to spread the moral power of Christ and his Cross among the public. They may do it in Christ's name, or they may do it without his name, by preaching the principles to which he alone can give effect. But any social change which is to give greater scope to humanity must go with a growth in the moral power of humanity, else it is neither safe nor stable. And the great lever for this purpose is positive personal religion. But some religionists daily with Socialism in despair of personal faith, or at the cost of it, or in destruction of the faith of others. Socialism becomes in time their religion; and the foreign and thoroughgoing Socialisms, if they are not atheistic, yet declare in their programme that religion is an entirely private matter,

and mostly indifferent—a luxury of the individual. Whereas of all systems a Socialist system is that which makes most call upon moral power as a necessary and not a luxury—a necessary that religion

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alone can give, and one that can only be given on a public scale by a faith so universal as that of Christ. No Socialism can kill or convert by legislation the egoism of human nature. Are you trusting that human nature, if we only leave it free, will provide its own social law as well as impulse? Why, what human nature produces when left to itself is the very thing, the very state of things, the very state of war which Socialism is called in to redress. Human Nature is a good fellow enough—when you don't cross him, or meddle with his bone. Then he is less divine than canine.

But is it enough to say 'Make every man a true Christian and the social question will be solved. Therefore let us be satisfied to preach conversion and promote missions, and philanthropies, and institutional churches'?

No. We cannot, indeed, do without these; but to stop there shows some lack of insight into the complex nature of a great public problem. It would show that the speaker had not realised how dependent the single soul is on the moral state of the public mind, how impossible it is for any man to be at his best except in a society looking toward its best.

Let nobody say, 'To depend on new legislation is to fall back from trust in grace to trust in law'. Laws themselves have a moral and educative effect. They

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can be agents of grace, as they may flow from the action of grace—like the Factory Acts. Where would these have been but for the Christianity of Lord Shaftesbury? Laws can forward the kingdom of God, and thus serve in their own way the cause of Redemption. Christianity believes that the kingdom of God is the moral goal of the world. But if it is the moral end it must come by moral means—not by violence, even the violence of a temporary majority. The new heaven and earth comes in no such way. The economic forces can be made to develop the kingdom, and have been so made; and so can the laws of a land that cares for the kingdom, and not merely for having a good time.

### **The Supreme Interest of Christianity.**

It is not wonderful that many should see the exit from our dreadful anomalies in the transfer to the State of the means of production, and should try to show that it is possible without economic collapse. What has Christianity to say about such a proposal? Well, such Socialism is no more necessarily anti-Christian than any other economic programme in itself. Christianity is no more wedded to present competitive industrialism than it was to the previous feudalism. There is but one interest supreme for

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all religion tends to that has not its centre and its footing fixed in the moral world and its slow principles. The whole history of Christianity, especially at its beginning, registers the conquest of these hasty apocalyptic methods, and their fantastic Messiahs, by the slow but mighty ethical principles which alone can set up an everlasting kingdom. But, fourth, Christianity asks Socialism to show that, in any system which will include all, the moral motive will not be destroyed but increased. It asks Socialism to show that the liberty of moral manhood will not die when we are all public officials and all dependent on some kind of Board. It asks Socialism to show that it has at its command a moral power which shall be a greater impulse than the hope and right of private property for the production both of wealth and of character in the best kinds. The right, the hope, and the security of private property have produced very great ethical results for that stage. The notion that all property is robbery will not bear the light of social and moral evolution. And you can form no just judgment on the social question till you treat it evolutionally. It is quite true that the right of property has produced some grievous, some intolerable, results, which are either non-ethical or anti-ethical. But so has every stage in the developing history of society. So it would be with the Socialist stage. Have you ever

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tried to forecast what its anti-ethical by-products would be? The moral value of private property is the economic basis that it gives the possessors for service really free. People want to be rich chiefly to be independent of other people. And the moral danger there is the suppression of the idea of service by that of freedom, which then becomes freedom only to hold, control, and enjoy. The moral value of Socialism, on the other hand, is its idea of mutuality and service. And its moral peril is that the

service should cease to be free, being prescribed by a social authority which would make the machine more ubiquitous and detailed than ever in its pressure on the soul, and more fatal to originality and initiative, whether in the matter of love or of invention. The whole Christian right of property, private or collective, rests on the extent of the contribution each is calculated to make to freedom and service. And it rests with Socialism not only to strive to abolish present ills, but to show that it can do so in a way both to promote and to guarantee social development, in a way that does not kill the goose that lays the eggs which are to be better shared. It must show that it has a power to abolish the bad by strengthening the good, and by fructifying the genius, or the soul. It must convince us that it has, ready to take the place of egoism, a motive

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which is greater in effect while it is higher in quality. Is there any source of such a power outside the love that converts and constrains the natural egotist? And is there any source of such love upon the public scale but the cross of Jesus Christ? It seems to me all Socialism which really grasps the actual moral situation of man must pre-suppose the prevalence of Christian faith and love. There is no fraternity with power to be a going concern which does not rest upon sonship, and a redeemed sonship at last.

Discuss Socialism by all means on its economic side. Let Christian people descend from their impatient idealism, and harness their resentful pity to discuss the economics of the position more and more. But do not forget that Christianity has the right of moral criticism on every scheme of economics or fraternity, because it represents the greatest moral, fraternal, and international force that has entered history as yet. Fraternity means the unity of the race, and the race is one only in God and in His Christ. The Church is not committed to any theories or classes of society which do not rest on that. And it is not to be sneered at if it refuse to place itself wholly on one side or the other of a mere economic, social, or political question, and stake its Lord's fortunes there. It is bad for a

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Church, and it might be fatal, to be only on one side in a civil war.

### **The Need of Patience.**

Remember, as I have said, that we grow by stages. You cannot put an old head on young shoulders. You cannot at once plant a final and ideal social order on an early social stage, either by the way of rasing that stage to the ground, or by way of smothering it with a new order where it stands. Fire-eaters are but jugglers after all. Do not lash out wildly about the competitive stage. We grow into it (as I have pointed out) and we must grow out of it. As well abuse your own childhood and youth, with the inevitable egoism you have had to unlearn there—if you have unlearned it. But, you say, 'the suffering makes one frantic and revolutionary'. Well, what do you hope by that? Let me illustrate. Our railway system, as a whole, I suppose is a great social blessing. 'But think of the accidents—the killed, wounded, maimed.' Well, a few weeks ago I passed a spot where a bad accident had taken place thirty-six hours before. Two engines and many coaches lay in an 'omelette'. The driver had been pinned under one of the engines, and it took an hour or two's work to

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release him, and then, of course, it was no release from his sufferings. The breakdown gang laboured as men only can in such circumstances, but it took that time. What would you have suggested? Blowing up the engine with a cartridge of dynamite? Would that have mended matters for anybody concerned? Well, society is a very elaborate and massive machine, and explosive methods to repair its wreckage are much worse than useless. They may be disastrous. Patience is worth much more than powder. Patience, of the active, sleepless, and wary kind has more promise for us and our wounded than sheer reckless pressure. If you press, press for social reform. Take a step at a time. Ask at each step if it is going to make for more liberty, more initiative, more sense of responsibility. Press for the social reform which is practicable, and which makes the next step so. Take that which hinders out of the way. The way to that which lies beyond is through that which lies near. Society has to march. Flying machines are not yet of use, and when they are they will not carry a nation into its future. We begin by thinking we can mount up with wings as eagles. Experience teaches us to be thankful if we can run without being weary. And when experience has had its perfect work we are happy if we can walk and not faint—so long as we go on.

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one of method. And the historic and successful method of this country is that of Social Reform. Hurry its pace by all means, but do not desert its method. Do not study ideals less, but do study history more. Ideals without historic wisdom are Will-o'-the-wisps. To do things on a great scale you must understand what has been done, and how it was done. Human society has not been made up of fools, or guided by fools, up to this wondrous age. A crowd is more foolish than the sum of its members, but a nation in its history is less. The wise political habit of this country, then, is reform and not revolution. It works by experiment, and not by programmes. Progress is a perpetual compromise; but it is a rising scale of compromises. Feed on your ideals, indeed, especially in your own soul. Go on to state your principles fully and freely. But as soon as you come to act with others who have the same right, it is a matter of bargain, of negotiation. Press what you want, but take what you can get. Otherwise the whole body politic is dissolved into a shoal of major and minor prophets, all impracticable, and prophesying all at once, like the talk at a noisy dinner; or walking each one straight forward like the shades in Sheol (Isaiah 57:2), with hectic eyes, regardless of the rest, as the patients do in an asylum. And you have then a state of things political

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corresponding to the chaotic Babel in the Church as described in 1 Corinthians 14, which that great Church statesman, St. Paul, had to take in hand with his glowing wisdom, and reduce to ordered shape and growth. Remember that our institutions exist for two purposes—first, to secure order and bridle the brute; second, to promote development and release the soul. And public wisdom means our skill in securing both these ends at neither's expense.

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### **The Appeal of Labour to the Church.**

As to the appeal to the Church to come over bodily to the Socialist programme let me illustrate the position from a recent event. During the late railway agitation (1907) I received a letter from the minister of a church composed chiefly of working men, and largely of railway men, pressing on me what one at my time of life, unless he were a hasty dabbler, must have taken into account long ago, namely, the contention that the

men's side must be the Christian side, first, because they were badly paid; and, second, because Christ Himself took sides, and took that side. He said this was the ardent view of the men he represented, who were not merely labourists, but also Christians who read and

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refused to take a side in a judicial quarrel. 'Oh, but,' you say, 'that was an individual case, but this is a social issue, and one concerning the poor, and He was always on the side of the poor as a class.' Well, is that so, as we interpret the word 'poor'?\* The story of the alabaster box comes to mind. It comes to mind that for Christ history was, above all, the Lord's controversy. The dispute about it was a religious and not a social issue; he faced an issue with God on one side and man on the other, in which issue he was always on the side of God and God's claim on man, rich or poor. It comes to mind, further, that his nation in his day was obsessed with one grand public passion—the passion of political emancipation, the passion of national liberty; and yet it was a passion which not only did not interest him, but in so far as it was forced on his notice he threw cold water on it. He told them to pay their old tribute to Cæsar and a new tribute to God. He took the line of his greatest predecessor, Jeremiah, who told the forward and patriotic party of his day that their doom was written and the national end was inevitable. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ*. The whole question of Christ's relation to the poor demands revision as soon as you pass from the region of philanthropy to the region of class

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\* See the closing part of this book. 7

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conflict, economic redistribution, and political reform.

## II.

### **The Question of Church and Labour.**

But what struck me most in the letter I allude to was this—and it strikes me in every demand that the Church shall go over to the side of labour: Here is a body of men, the railway servants, as represented by their Christian spokesman. In the name of Christ they approach the Church and the Bible as they understand them. They demand that the Church—which, recollect, has other members as well as the workmen, and other and wider interests as well as the labour interest—should throw, not only

its whole moral weight but its political pressure upon the labour side. In a class war they come to a society like the Church, which includes all classes, and they ask that its organised moral force should do for the men something I will describe immediately, which the men are refusing to do for themselves. Is that not a survival of the beggarly, petitionary frame of mind which the Church has only done too much already to produce by its system of doles, patronage, and protection? Is it not so? What is the self-reliant course, the course of self-help in the circumstances? What is it that

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has raised the condition of the working class in other trades and given them the power to talk on equal terms with their opponents in the gate? Is it not combination, the self-help of organisation, the trades-union principle? Is there any hope for the labour cause apart from the self-help that takes that form? But if labour refuse to help its own cause in that way, if it will not solidly organise, and if it appeal instead to a vast organisation like the Church to put all its moral and social resources at its service, is that a worthy position for labour to take? Do the people, the Church members, her preachers, who make this demand really represent labour? What did we have in the recent juncture? We had a demand made on the Church, on behalf of a vast body of men possessing an ably led and managed union, but men of whom only a poor minority is organised into that union. That is, we had a demand on the Church for help to a body of men who cannot be persuaded to help themselves or each other by every man of them joining their own union. There must surely be a considerable number, perhaps a majority, of the railway servants who have not yet got rid of the English peasant's hereditary habit of looking for help from squire and parson, instead of organising their own class salvation. And so I say to the Christian advocates of the men's side in such cases,

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just because my main sympathies are with that side, I say to them: 'Turn round the other way. Go to the men. Take the Church to them. Welcome them to the Church. But tell them not to come to the Church for help that the spirit of the Church, a Christian independence, puts in their own hands. Tell those who do not think it worth while to join their union that the public will not believe that they believe in their own case till they do.' Then they will not need to exploit the Church for purposes

which are less its objects than theirs, less public than sectional, and less for the whole than for a class. All the democratic principles of Christianity make for them. All the trend of society under the spreading influence of those principles is in their favour. But that is quite a different thing from saying that the Church which promotes these principles is committed to champion their cause in a particular economic issue, when their own combination could effect much more, and be backed by far more intimate knowledge of her position than the Church could have. Had the men no union it would be different. I remember giving offence by preaching on the men's side in the dockers' strike because they were helpless. They had no union, were only struggling on to their feet, were receiving so much less than a living wage, and had not developed the leadership

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that the unions now have with so much strategic skill.

And what here applies to Trades Unionism applies to Socialism, different as they are. It is not entitled to exploit, for a certain economic programme, a Church whose fundamental principle of conversion it either ignores or scorns. The Church does not rest, for its moral principle, on that confidence in human nature and its possibilities when left to itself which forms the basis of Socialism, and even of some of its religious forms. Human nature left to itself means egoism and the fierce competition which is becoming so intolerable to a Christian ethic. It means the very thing which is breeding by reaction the eager Socialisms, and which a Socialism without a moral authority or a spiritual dynamic would in the end only aggravate into Anarchy.

12.

### **The Failure of the Communistic Idea in Scripture.**

But perhaps some keen Socialist, who wants to exploit the Church for his ideal, wishes to remind me of the communistic step to which Christianity inevitably gravitated in the first few years of its life at Jerusalem. That, he says, shows you how Christianity would go if it were allowed to follow its own genius. I

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am sure I hope not. For socially that was a total and calamitous failure. It was a generous blunder. Let me point out to you several things about that episode. First, it was quite voluntary; it rested on giving; it did not

work by enactment, but by impulse. Each man was free to give or not as he was moved. It was not Socialism but Communism. Second, it was inspired, not only by a fine Christian brotherliness, but by a fallacious expectation that the sudden end of the world and all its social order might come any day or night, and was bound to come very shortly with her miraculous return of Christ. It was a policy prescribed, not by reform, or even revolution, but by catastrophe. They reckoned they had enough in the pooled fund to keep them all going for an interval so brief. Third, it destroyed the influence of the Jerusalem Church, and made it a burden on the other churches, instead of a help. St Paul, you remember, was always collecting from the struggling young churches elsewhere for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Did you ever ask the cause of their poverty? It was the fiasco of which you speak. And it was a fiasco because it tried to realise not an idea, but half an idea; and to do it without regard to conditions, historic or economic. If ideas are to enter history they must be insinuated among its conditions. They must go up the drive to the door, and not be shot in from a cannon.

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### **What Is the Kingdom of God?**

But as the kingdom of God has been quoted I have something more to say. What do you mean by it? Amid the many vague ideas which heat men's heads in a time like this nothing is more needful for practical purposes than that we should ask and know exactly where we are. What does the New Testament mean by the kingdom of God? What it has usually been supposed to mean is a polity, a social order immensely in advance, morally, of every other the world shows, but still a polity like the rest—still a system, corresponding socially to what the theologies were intellectually, a system in competition with the rest, and destined to swallow them up. It was a social programme which might be filled out differently in different ages, except that the Roman Church claims to have got it as a present at the start in a complete polity for all time. The current notion of the kingdom is not a policy but a polity, a type of society, a mode of organisation, like the other historic types, only moved by better principles, and principles better realised.

But we are coming to see, our scholars are teaching us to see, that this is not Christ's meaning of the kingdom, nor indeed the meaning of the prophets. We

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get the true idea by substituting for the word 'kingdom' the word 'sovereignty', or lordship. This is really an immense change. It has great practical consequences. We cease to think of an order of society giving effect to certain principles which we feel to be divine, or worthy of a God if there were one, and we come to think of a state of things, whatever the polity, in which God actually, and consciously, and experimentally rules in each soul. The particular social organisation is a secondary affair, and comes almost of itself—just as I often say the intellectual organisation, the theology, would do, if our faith were right and strong. The gift of God was not a truth, which we must hold, but an act of grace, performed in the person of Jesus Christ, and practically changing human destiny, an act which is met by our living faith; and then the true theology comes to the Church of itself when the faith is real. So the kingdom of God rising socially from this act of love is not a matter of organisation. It is not a matter primarily of social readjustment. It is a matter of spiritual re-creation. It is primarily a matter of changing our centre, as I have already said, from self to God, from egoism to obedience, from more natural freedom to service. When Christ came to bring the kingdom of God, he did not come to make a society God could live in, but to bring a

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God that society could live in, to make God the real King, shaping his own society from within. Christ did found a society, but he never gave it a Constitution. The society grew, as it grows still, out of the power and life of God set up in the soul, and in actual control of it. And the society Christ founded grew out of the moral principle which Paul, with his eagle eye, saw was the real core of the kingdom of God—living faith answering saving grace. The kingdom of God is not the redistribution of social wealth, but it is the rule of God in the soul, and all that must flow from that for human brotherhood. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but love, and joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost. No conception of the kingdom of God is thorough, it is terribly old-fashioned, which does not go the whole length of that—to the reconstruction of a man's soul, and the changing of his centre from self to Christ. And no conception

of the kingdom is anything but shallow at first and hollow at last which does not realise its essential other-worldliness, its vastness so great that its consummation can only be beyond earthly history. We can do most for the kingdom of God in this world when we are rooted in a kingdom not of this world. So the problem is threefold: How are we to translate humanity into sonship? That is justification. How are we to translate sonship into

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enable them to destroy its faith and substitute for Christian honour a Socialist honesty of that dubious stamp; but they are not ready to use their Socialism entirely for the faith and service of Christ. They welcome the Church for the re-creation of society according to their ideas, but they do not welcome that re-creation of the soul which the Church must put first as the base of all. As the Gospel brings an emancipation, so it makes a demand that no idealism does. For a man need not part with himself in an apostolate of ideas or truths; but he must in the apostolate of the Gospel. He must, if need be, become the slave of Christ. An idealist may slave in the service of his idea; but he may be very vain and self-assertive in doing it. For it is his idea, as our mere views are our views, as a kind of property, and not in the sense in which we are ourselves the property of our Redeemer. It debases personality to make it the slave of an impersonal idea, but not to make it, as Paul did, the slave of a liberating person like Christ.

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### **The Church's Difficulty.**

This, then, is the difficulty which the Church feels in contact with most of the Socialists of the day—with many, indeed, of the working men, even when

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they are not Socialists. They are ruled by certain social ideals, which are concerned, especially, though not exclusively, with the exaltation of their own class. These ideals practically become their religion. They will listen readily to anything the minister of Christ has to say which serves or promotes these ideals. They will willingly utilise the Church in this way. They will listen to the tale of a Christ who sympathises with these aspirations and contributes to them. But when the Church or its minister

claims a hearing for a message which every man and every society must absolutely obey and serve; when we preach a Christ who not only serves man, but by right of that service claims the total surrender and service of every man and race; when we pass, as we must, from the gift of Christ to the demand of Christ, the responsibility to Christ, the total, humiliated, unconditional, worshipful, triumphant surrender of self to Christ, then the social idealists have no use for us. They talk angry claptrap about the Church's lust of dominion, the aloofness of the preachers, their hanging back, their cowardice, self-seeking pietism, and all the rest of it. But it is not a question of the Church's dominion—far less, with us Free Churchmen, of the minister's. It is a question of the rule of Christ, of the

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sovereignty of God in him, of the submission of every ideal and interest to his Gospel, of a new humanity in the Cross, its repentance and its faith. It is a question, not of the kingdom of God as a social programme, but of the rule of God in our will, in our spiritual, personal allegiance. The Church is only there to serve its message, to preach a Gospel which judges the whole world as profoundly as it saves it, which judges and condemns it in the very act that saves it. But, as that message is not merely, or primarily, a social evangel, how can the Church consent to be exploited, message and all, in the interest of such an evangel alone? If you were to listen to me when I spoke of Christ as the champion of the poor, but moved away as soon as I spoke of Christ the Saviour of poor and rich, and the King and the Judge of them all by virtue of his very salvation, how could I be of use to you except by being silent about the one thing which is my business, and the Church's charge, above all? If you should listen while I spoke to you of Christ your Brother, and gave me up as soon as I spoke of Christ your King and your Redeemer, a Christ who humiliates you in repentance on the way to making men of you by faith and love—I say if that is the relation between us it makes a great difficulty. I must not hide from you that my faith in such a Christ and his message takes with me the

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same place that your social ideals take with you, only far more searchingly. You say everything, even Christ and his Church, must be made to serve the great social ideal. I say everything, every social ideal, must be made to serve Jesus Christ, his Cross, his gospel, his meaning of the kingdom of God. You are not enthusiastic about me because I do not bring my

gospel to serve yours. And can any enthusiasm on my part please you when I am enthusiastic about your gospel serving the purposes of mine? You have one gospel, I have another. Yours is ideal Humanity with Christ as its champion and servant. Mine is the Christ of God with Humanity as his witness and servant. I can do much to serve your ideal. You can do much to serve my Lord. But how can I do much for your ideal if you turn away impatient the moment I really claim that he is Lord, your Lord, and Lord of the race, and not merely the champion of a cause, the King, and not the representative of the race? Of course, it is not really a case between you and me, between you and the Church. You don't want to aggrandise yourself. I don't. You contend for your ideas, I for your Lord. It is between you and him, you and the gospel, on the one hand, you and your egoist conscience on the other, that the issue lies.

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I have been speaking latterly as if I were in front of a company of Socialists, not ill-disposed to religion, but impatient of the absolute claim of God in Christ. And I have been speaking frankly as one who tries to go to the bottom of the situation, and to discover how we really stand to each other. What is the use of my keeping my real faith up my sleeve, and talking only of that part of it, that effect of it, which is agreeable to you, with the idea of coaxing you, of bribing you, to take the Church's side? I am willing—nay, bound—to give all the personal help I can to social reform towards some phase of your ideal. It is part of my religion. Your social ideals are not the principle of my religion, but they are among its fruits. But what I find often is that Socialism becomes the whole religion. And my whole religion is not Socialism, but Christ. Of course, I might be a Socialist, with all the programme, while believing in Christ, or even because I believed in Christ. But it would be because I believed in him and his Gospel as my suzerain, and not simply in human nature. And that makes all the difference. But I should also have to admit that many who oppose Socialism strongly are, equally with me, believers in Christ, experts of his Gospel, and, likely enough, better

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trophies of his Gospel, even while we differed about the manner of its social application. But you will never capture the whole moral resources

of the gospel to drive what is mainly an economic programme. The redistribution of the race's wealth and comfort can never engross a gospel whose task and victory is the regeneration of the race's soul. Christianity does not make man's happiness its first concern, but God's glory, in which alone man finds himself and his joy. Society, we all feel, must be slowly reorganised so as to provide scope for moral manhood. But we need something more than that. Society cannot create moral manhood, cannot provide the dynamic which demands the scope. And it is my religion that Christ can, and that Christ alone can. And I would like to close on this note this part of what I have to say. I would like to say that the true Church of Christ is worth more than any scheme of social order. And there is in the Gospel of Christ that which must produce such a change in society as will leave the Socialist programme far behind and far below, and bring to pass, even in history, things that it has not entered the heart of man to conceive.

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## PART II

## CHRIST AND THE POOR

## I.

**The Limitation of Christ's Purpose.**

It is not possible with due knowledge of the New Testament to hold that Jesus was above all things a social reformer. That is the naïve note of a democracy which has only just discovered his sympathy, promptly appropriates him, and proceeds to exploit him for a Socialist, as the French revolutionaries made him a *sansculotte*. It is a state of mind that has never faced the New Testament with historic and critical seriousness, but only with amateur prepossession, and is more eager to capture him than to confess him. Jesus had no interest in social ethics, in our modern and economic sense of the phrase. His kingdom of God was ethical, but it was not economic. He had no programme for it—only a principle and a power. He was no kind of statesman. He claimed his kingship in a theocratic sense, and not in a constitutional at all. He contemplated a Church with the directest contact between the Monarch and the multitude. And he was King in a sense that gave him a special sympathy with the poor—meaning by that term what I

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shall shortly explain. He discarded a piety like Judaism, which had become one of the professions, and which must be a religion for the well-to-do, because it was so expensive to keep up, owing to the amount of alms, observances, and attention it required. He had no sympathy with wealth

which was not inwardly rich toward God. A plutocracy would find nothing in him; and it finds him now a tutelary God only by editing and perverting him. Riches were to him no sign of God's favour. God did not exist to secure property, the existing order, and the county families. And 'between modern comfort and the comfort of the gospel there is little in common but the name'. He despised wealth that was secured to the conscience of its possessor by a doctrine of 'ransom'; wealth which was settled by God absolutely on its owner in tail, on condition of a tax paid out of it for alms; wealth which was entirely a man's own except the portion earmarked as a toll to God in philanthropic uses. He held no terms with property consecrated to a man's selfish use by a bargain with God on the basis of a fraction devoted to religious or charitable purposes. Of his whole wealth a man was but steward. She who gave all she had gave more than all the large benefactions. That was the class of poor that caught Christ's eye and moved his speech. On the other hand, his blessing on poverty was not on

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poverty as such, but only because of the facilities poverty offered in his day for the true wealth of the kingdom. If Christ had said blessed are the merely poor, then the poorer the more blessed; and the paupers would be either saints in being or saints in the making. But with a poor democracy, set upon soup and circuses, beer and football, he could have no more in common than with a plutocracy whose tastes are at heart the same.

2.

### **Christ's Sifting Action.**

The call of Christ was not to a proletariat, or even a public, but to an elect. He must always act on the world through a Church when it is a question of saving society. His whole action and teaching was of the sifting and not the effusive kind. It had a stringency which has almost quite vanished from many favourite forms of his religion. His parables winnowed out those fit to hear, his course of action selected those worthy to follow. And it all ended in his being left quite alone. He could not lead or keep a mass movement. A highly, swiftly popular gospel may imperil his word. True, his glory was that to the poor the gospel was preached. But it was to an ethical poor, not to the literal, the economic, poor. The gospel did not make

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its chief appeal to the crowd of those who lived from hand to mouth. For the Judaism he challenged did not ignore these. Almsgiving in Judaism was even more of a sacrament than it is in Catholicism, and the Pharisee did anything but neglect the doles. What John was invited to regard as distinctive in Jesus was not a millennium for the very poor. As mere poor, moreover, they had little appetite for Christ's real message. It was not a gospel to them. What the common people heard so gladly (as the context of the passage shows) was his discomfiture of the consequential Pharisees. And today still the mass of the public will listen with far more delight to strictures on the prominent than to the gospel of the Eternal. These same common people failed Christ as soon as his demands came home to them. His poor were the poor in spirit, the devout. Luke's words were probably correct, but intended in Matthew's sense. The blessed poor were those who had a real hunger of the soul, and a real faith in God and his purpose. They had a real thirst for the kingdom and a real sense of its moral note. His appeal was to a spiritual remnant, wherever found. But they had no technical knowledge of the law, and no interest in those who had.

The law had become a most elaborate thing, and religion had become a matter of law. The eminently religious were canonists. The Bible had grown into

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a codex. And the vital distinction was not between faith and unfaith, nor even between those who were versed or unversed in their Bible, but between those who were learned or unlearned in the law. 'These people that know not the law are cursed.' It is the authentic note of caste everywhere, whether it be in the set of culture, of property, or of religion.

In these conditions Christ took a side; but it was neither social nor political. He placed himself on the side of the devout and unrabbinical laity, the quiet godly ones, who either could not or would not give the best of life to the study of religious casuistry, or to the performance of rites that consumed the day. Such people were often, perhaps mostly, poor, because (as I have said) only the well-to-do could afford the time, thought, or money to be religious in the popular sense. These washings, fastings, sacrifices, alms, formed a line of life in themselves. But the people who were in Christ's mind were not necessarily poor. And many who were not poor felt his call and rose to meet it. The poor were not for

that reason of poverty the prepared for Christ's call; only, the prepared, the spiritually religious, the patient waiters for the consolation of Israel, were more likely to be among the poor. Their poverty did not make them sensitive to the spirit so much as their sensibility was likely to make them poor. The precious

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thing in them for Jesus was a type of soul and of faith that could be developed in poverty, that had even facilities there, and that found nothing in the heavy yoke of ritual scrupulosity, benevolent energy, or rational religion.

3.

### **The Poor in Christ's Sense.**

Thus both in the semi-barbarism of Old Testament society, and in the society of the Gospels, the word rich should be often treated as equivalent to wicked, while poor meant pious. 'He made his grave with *the wicked* and with *the rich* in his death'—where the parallelism shows the identical meaning. We must also remember that some would be made poor by their efforts to meet the exactions of an expensive religion like Judaism in such a way as to win the praise and patronage of the religious and social *élite*. We see the same thing at work today where people ruin themselves in trying to keep up with a smart set whose religion is expenditure. We see it in countries where a devout peasantry are drained by the levies of the priests that the money may be put into the most extravagant buildings. Or we see it in countries like Russia, where the extraordinary number of saint days, precluding work, and covering, in some cases, nearly half the year, lay a perpetual tax upon industry, bleed

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prosperity, and encourage laziness and thriftlessness in the name of God. And wherever it is taught that alms save, that benefactions expiate, that donations ransom the right of doing with the rest what a man likes as if it were his absolute own—then the poor are demoralised. It becomes, then, the interest of the rich to keep a poor class, else they would be without the means of securing themselves in their rights to the residue of their estate by parting with an eleemosynary tax on it, a sort of divine income-tax. Some must be kept poor to be patronised, and to provide a dumping ground for the ransom written off as a subsidy to God.

Naturally many of the poor in Israel resented being used in this way. They might be poor but would not be beggars; they would not have their very poverty exploited in the name of helping it. So they went outside the law, and the patronage of its pillars. They lived without the law, but not without faith in the God of the law and the promise. They were without the law to men, but under law to God. They were therefore by the legalists held sinners. And it was to these that Christ moved as he found the public leaders hopeless—to these, but not to the crowd. He had help for the crowd, indeed, and precious boons fell like dew on them from his healing hands; but his kingdom called to an elect. In them he found much kindred

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good and readiness for good, a hungry response, and an absence of such vested interests as shut out the good news of the kingdom. Thus his gospel to the poor was not to poverty, but to a class of souls that he found freely, but not wholly, amid comparative poverty. He appealed to the vital godliness, the moral seriousness, the soul hunger, the spontaneity of heart, the lack of pretentiousness, the sense of unworthiness, the readiness to faith on the one side and to repentance on the other, all which he found not necessarily in poverty, but most freely among the poor. His *milieu* was neither among the cultured of the upper class, nor in the genteelness of the middle class, but among the type of piety which, then at least, thrived best in the levels below. The gospel to the poor was a gospel to sinners—not only to those so reputed, not to the outsiders as such, but to those among them to whom self-assertion gave way to self-distrust and a hope in God, to those who were not proud of their God but penitent in his sight. Christ was not simply a Lord of the little people and a champion of moral mediocrity, but the finder of secret and genuine godliness, the discoverer of a new righteousness, and the divine exploiter of vital faith. It was to the longing peasant saint, deep in the Scriptures, to the choice country people, that he turned; not to ‘the people’ in our sense, but to their spiritual *élite*, the kind

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of people of whom he was one. ‘I too am of the meek and lowly, *i.e.*, of the humbly godly, the obscure and neglected’, he said, as the public fell away from him; ‘I am of that inner Israel of heart, conscience, and faith’, he said, not praising himself but classifying himself, not parading humility, but joining the humble. He did not break with the law and turn to them

(for he always remained true to the Jewish Church and its law rightly interpreted); it was turning to them that led to his breach with the law, or rather with the lawyers, the religionists of the day. It was not law he denounced, nor an organised Church, it was legalism—as a modern might quarrel with orthodoxy not from iconoclasm but out of love and reverence for the Church. It was not Jesus that broke with the Law but the Cross. It was the Cross, and not the teaching, that made Christianity universal.

It is upon these lines, I have said, that we must adjust Luke to Matthew. Christ probably did say, as in Luke, 'blessed are the poor', and not, with Matthew, 'the poor in spirit'. For an evangelist would be far more likely to add an explanatory word than drop one. Christ said the poor; and he meant, and made himself understood to mean, the spiritually poor, in the sense that has been explained. If he had been a communist the fiasco of the Jerusalem Church would have been

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the rule, and not the exception, in the first communities. And if he had worked as an apostle or tribune of the poor as a class, then Christianity would have spread like wildfire over the world, only to go out as swiftly when it was found an illusion. Every peasant war has turned out a disastrous and reactionary illusion. Whereas the progress of the Church for centuries was very slow, and must be slow (as I have said), not merely from its unfaith, but from the very nature of its faith.

It should further be remembered that Christ's estimate of wealth, like much of his teaching, was not so much a verdict for all time as a judgment expressed upon what he saw about him. As a matter of fact, in an Oriental society of that land and time, the rich were, generally speaking, the bloodsuckers of the poor. There was no sanctified wealth in our modern Christian sense—in the sense which refuses to consecrate absolute monopoly by fractional charity, but holds all wealth under the stewardship which the faith of Christ has made a spiritual habit. But, for Christ and his experience and insight, wealth was then (not necessarily must be), more dangerous than blessed to the soul. The few rich he had close intercourse with he sought in spite of their wealth. The rich publican was interesting to him as a sinner, the family of Bethany as saints. If a rich man entered heaven

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it was a thing impossible to men—it was contrary to human nature, to the natural, pagan, egoist man—but it was not impossible to God, *i.e.*,

to grace; as in some he found, and as, in his own Church, it has been plentifully shown to be. Jesus, it has been noted, never asked for surrender of property from those of whose devotion he was otherwise assured—as, for instance, the family at Bethany. Peter kept his house in Capernaum. And in Acts 12:12 the Church met in the house of John Mark's mother.

4.

### **Christ's Method not Preceptual but Evangelical.**

It is imperative that we get rid of the habit of simply and directly carrying over Christ's words on such subjects, without historic tact, from his circumstances to ours. Some, at least, of his utterances were but interim instructions for a period that was expected soon to end in his return in glory. Some fitted only Oriental and ancient conditions of industry. And some were only pastorally adjusted to the moral conditions of an individual. Such was the requirement from the young ruler to sell all he had and give it away. That could not be a universal precept. For if all were sellers of all none could buy. And, as some one long ago asked, Was the command to sacrifice Isaac a general duty?

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There can be no doubt about our duty to obey Christ as soon as his true meaning is clear. But our whole relation to the preceptual side of his teaching is undergoing revision—to say nothing of the fact that it is not in the teaching of Jesus that we find him speaking his last and luminous word. There is a word of his which is the light and commentary for all his words.

The Christian relation to property and to everything else must be determined, in the last resort, not directly by the precepts of Jesus, but by the principle of his gospel, which must settle the place and sense of his precepts. This principle, indeed, is the central foundation of Christian ethics. The gospel is not preceptual, but creative. Such was the method of St Paul, at least, who did not fall back on the precepts of Christ, as he must have done had he or the Church regarded them as acts of legislation for the Christian society. But he made his own precepts to his Churches, basing them on the Cross, and developing them afresh from the principles given in Christ's person and work in that gospel. The most striking case of this is in the famous passage of Philippians 2, about the self-emptying of Christ in his premundane life; which is introduced, not for dogmatic

reasons, but in order to urge by the sublimest motive the lowliest practice. Why did he not quote Christ's precept

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about becoming as little children, or about the greatest being the servant of all?

The passion of humanity is not the essence of the gospel; it is a fruit of the gospel. It is a secondary experience, which cannot but flow from the whole heart's capture by Christ's love, and the enlarged soul's rich, softening, and humanising experience of his redeeming grace. Christianity is not brotherhood, but sonship, with that sense of brotherhood which flows from such faith of Fatherhood as the Cross alone has power to bring to pass. The first, and ever prime, form of Christian socialism is the society of the Church, which grew, and grows, directly from Christian faith to leaven all society with the Kingdom of God. This, however, is not to say that the Church's philanthropy is the only solution of the social question which Christianity has to offer. On the contrary, it reduces philanthropy, as the love of man and brother, to its true place; and its place is to be tributary to that reconstruction of society which flows from its regeneration in the Spirit, rests on moral maturity, and is the kingdom of God and not of man. In any kingdom of God, as Christ meant it, God is first and not man. It was to God's holy honour and glory first that Christ offered himself in founding the Kingdom, and not to man—to man only for God's sake. And man finds his true freedom and glory in seeking first the glory

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and honour of God, not in using God, in exploiting God and 'making him to serve' human possibilities and resources for natural comfort or power.

The precepts, and even the example, of Christ practically mean little, on the whole, except with those who have become his by his saving grace, whose nature is tuned by his love, (so far beyond his pity,) to a new love of their kind. Christ's pity for the public and his love of his own, his compassion for the 'neighbour' and his love for the 'brother' were distinct things; and each had its root in his love of the Father. And it is this love of the Father, as it is created by faith in the Redeemer, that is the permanent root in us of that sympathy and service which pities the plight of men because it loves their souls. The Christian love of man is an evangelical product. It is one of the 'gracious affections'. So we

cannot deal, in a Christian or final way, with our personal property till our person is really the property of Christ. It is the new man that in the long run can do most to renew men, and so to renovate society. Nothing but the righteousness in Christ's cross through faith can so work upon the righteous passion of mankind as to give it power to re-create society for the righteousness of Christ's kingdom of God. The Church has not to solve the social problem, but to provide the men, the principles, and the public that can.

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Well do I know with what contempt such words will be met by many of the social enthusiasts of the day. As sure am I that their contempt is the measure of their final futility. For it is contempt of the righteousness of the kingdom at its only source in the Cross. The Cross is equal to human nature; they are not. Thank God for every life devoted, in belief or unbelief, to the ardent, righteous, or tender service of man. But thank God still more that the poor must always owe more to their Saviour than to their champions. For a champion might conceivably exploit them in the pharisaic way of atonement, and find in some of the Socialisms his opportunity. But the Saviour never. And if ever the Church do so, it is by being false to the Saviour. It is not easy to say which is the more unworthy in the Church—the courting of the rich and cultured or the exploiting of the poor and rude. The Saviour did neither. He cared nothing for their opinion, their vote, because He cared infinitely for their souls. And it is in their soul that their social future lies—which is not *their* social future alone, but the haven and millennium of us all. The social ideal can only be realised by the Church's word. And the Kingdom of God has no religious meaning except as the Sovereignty of Jesus the Saviour of souls.