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# The Church and Social Righteousness.

BY THE REV. F. J. TAYLOR, M.A.

THE average Englishman has a profound dislike for politics in the pulpit, considering that the accredited representatives of the Church in their public ministry should confine themselves to those spiritual interests in which alone they can claim a competence worthy of respect. Perhaps this prejudice is an unconscious survival from his earlier anti-clerical days when the development of English life, secular and ecclesiastical, was furthered by driving the clergy out of those offices which had previously given them a commanding position in national life. It may also bear a somewhat confused witness to the Gospel principle that the Kingdom of Heaven is not of this world, lest any attempt to bring religion into politics should finish by making religion an optional part of the political rough and tumble. Here is an obscure but definable feeling that the Christian message is "above" the secular necessities of life, from which men seek a temporary release when they go into the sanctuary of God. Only in this way, it is argued, can the rhythm of Christian life be maintained, if periods of activity in administration or industry are balanced by moments of withdrawal when men are confronted by spiritual realities.

It is obvious, if this analysis does represent the truth, at least in part, that there are warnings to be heeded in all these objections. But it is equally obvious that if the phrase 'no politics in the pulpit' is to be taken seriously as implying that Christianity and politics have no real relationship one to another, or that the Gospel has no word of guidance to speak to those engaged in political and social tasks, then not only is the modern evangelical turning his back upon a constant tradition of Church history, but also he is denying the Gospel itself. For the Gospel does not deal with one part of man called his spiritual nature, leaving the rest to be ordered in accordance with natural laws; neither does it consist in the reformation of parts of his life, but in a radical renewal of the whole of his nature expressed in the categories of death to an old moralism and resurrection to a common life in the Spirit. This is expressed historically in the existence of a Christian community wherein is embodied the Gospel, even as the Word was made flesh. No doubt this is the humiliation of the Gospel inasmuch as the Church is the great scandal of faith. But it is the way in which God has worked redemptively in the world from the beginnings of sacred history until now. The Community of the Faithful, the People of God, Israel, the saints, the elect, the Church, use what scriptural title you will for the body of believers and you are still left with the fact that though redemption is personal, it is always in terms of community. Christianity is in its essence social and can only continue to exist socially.<sup>1</sup> This fact seems to be as deeply involved in the postulates of faith as in the nature of man. At this point the order of grace confirms and fulfils the order of nature.

The Gospel brings news of a God whom we know as Father, Son and Spirit, the pattern of true harmony in fellowship. The one undoubted command (mandatum) of the Gospel is the command to love one another,<sup>2</sup> as the Incarnate Lord loved us and gave Himself for us. A community which owes its origin to God and not to man, yet which must be visible in the order of history and live in the world, is part of the foundation of our religion. It is also recognised by most non-Christian thinkers that sociality is part of the truth about man as man, that only in fellowship can he become truly human.<sup>3</sup> It is not good for man to be alone.<sup>4</sup> If it were possible the result would be not a man but a monster.

Now this fact of the Christian community as central in the whole development of Christianity, involves Christians in the social struggle, inasmuch as the Church is a visible embodiment of the Gospel. Supernatural in origin and destiny though it be, the Church is also firmly built into the historical order so that it is in direct relationship with the prevailing social structure at any given moment of its history. "The Christian Church cannot find an escape from history"<sup>5</sup> and therefore it is deeply involved in questions of historic justice and social righteousness even though its anxiety to preserve unsullied its spiritual message and function may sometimes blind its members to the fact that this theological issue can hide an evasion from social decisions. Inevitably therefore because it can only be discerned in a community, Christianity has social consequences which cannot be ignored. It has actually exercised a great and formative influence upon society.<sup>6</sup>

This becomes clearer when it is remembered that there is a very close connection between the missionary experience of the Church and its social consequences: between the epochs of revival and social progress. The triumphant expansion of early Christianity not only demonstrated the power and significance of fellowship in its own life but also had important social results in the structure of fourth century life. The evangelisation of Northern and Eastern Europe in the eighth and ninth centuries disciplined the barbarity of the Teutonic peoples and brought them within the range of Christian civilization and under the influence of the idea of a common life in Christendom. Thus was the stage set for the great attempt to work out in detail the meaning of Christendom in the thirteenth century. The failure of society in the latter years of the Middle Ages coincided with that decline of religion which made the history of the Reformation inevitable. Religious revival in the sixteenth century led to great changes in the social order and to the reformed emphasis on a man's secular calling as the sphere where he was to discover the will of God for his life and perform it. The eighteenth century missionary movement not only provided the spiritual foundation for much of what is best in contemporary English society, but also led to far reaching social results in relatively primitive societies in many parts of the world. Indeed the quickened social conscience of modern Christians with its emphasis on justice is largely due to the extensive Christian activity of the last century and a half which for sheer vitality can only be compared with the first two centuries of the Christian era.<sup>7</sup>

It is possible to distinguish three social attitudes which have emerged

in the course of Christian history and which with many modifications and changing emphases persist until this day. All of them can claim that they are based upon the New Testament and give expression to fundamental Christian insights, but in isolation they distort the truth and discredit their version of Christianity. The first in point of time, if not in importance, is the eschatological outlook which understands that "the fashion of this world is passing away."<sup>8</sup> The deep-rooted and persistent effects of sin and evil are faced realistically and since 'the whole world lieth in the evil one,' to dream of a permanent improvement in the moral structure of the historical order is to become the victim of an illusion. This present world order is so corrupt that it is idle to think of it in terms of reformation or reconstruction. Only the irruption of the Eternal into history, a *παρουσια* of the Son of God can overthrow the embattled forces of evil and rescue anything that is worth saving from the wreck. It was natural that this should have been the dominant outlook in the early ages of the Church when Christians were confronted by a totalitarian empire whose moral assumptions were non-Christian or anti-Christian and which frequently used its power to persecute the faithful. Only an eschatological hope firmly rooted in the Bible could have enabled the Church to withstand such an unremitting pressure. But this strain of thinking has endured in all subsequent ages, particularly in periods of social distress or political upheaval. Alongside the dominant world-affirming outlook of the medieval church, this world-denying temper persisted (as a protest against the secularisation of the Church and its thinking), in such movements as the Waldensians, the Spiritual Franciscans and the Brethren of the Common Life. It has been well said that Puritanism had a high ancestry in the medieval church<sup>9</sup> and was in part the continuance of these strains which were so influential in medieval Christianity. In modern times this outlook may be seen in the Pietist movement and in a good deal of English evangelicalism such as is represented in the Keswick movement.

A second attitude, which could only become explicit after the Church had conquered the Roman empire, is to be found in the attempt to give meaning here and now to the lordship of Jesus in the world. It seeks to claim the whole range of human life as His rightful inheritance and to impose upon the world the laws of His kingdom. The history of the fourth century illustrates the stages in this process as Christianity becomes first a tolerated, then an established and finally the exclusive religion of Rome. The social functions of Christianity between the fifth and the tenth centuries were discharged in the preservation of something of the old civilization of Greece and Rome and in the reduction of the northern invaders to a nominal allegiance to the Gospel and a measure of social order. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries the great attempt to Christianise Europe was worked out theologically and politically. In the eyes of the men of those times the key to the whole situation lay in an effective Papacy. Pronouncements aimed at the moral control of rulers or of turbulent peoples were of little use unless they were backed by sufficient executive power to secure their observance. Hence the outward story of these centuries seems to be little more than an account of the

squalid disputes between Pope and Emperor and the shameful abuse of spiritual authority to obtain secular advantages. But behind the facade of events a great argument was being conducted on the question of Christian influence and how that influence could be made effective in the world of affairs. Could the Christian voice be respected and obeyed without, at any rate in reserve, the sanction of executive power behind it? Such a question is not so simple as it appears, nor can it be hastily answered.

Nevertheless it is important to observe some of the consequences involved in such an outlook which commands a great deal of sympathy at the present time. It is simple wisdom to recollect that earlier Christian generations have grappled with these problems, even though their circumstances were different from ours. Those who most vehemently repudiate Calvin and all his works are often most ready to demand for their particular solution of the social dilemma, the unqualified support of Christian people, and expect the secular authority to act, as it was required to act in Geneva in the sixteenth century, at the behests of a spiritual leadership. This can be an attempt to evade the problem of power by exercising it indirectly. The Roman church has been consistent in its demand for temporal power on the real ground that if it is to speak effectively to a social or political situation it must be able to speak as one sovereign to another. There is, moreover, another danger concealed in this approach to the social problem, and it is present in every situation where the eschatological framework of Christian living is ignored and the Kingdom of God is identified with an order which can be established here on earth. The practical identification of the Kingdom with an historical order, however carefully planned, involves us in the desperate expedient of giving absolute value to a human contrivance which can only have a relative importance. The next step is to declare that a particular programme is Christian and to excommunicate all who are unable or unwilling to subscribe to its demands. This is to ignore the fact that sin persists in every re-ordering of human affairs and to prepare for a situation in the future when the church being identified with a corrupt or decaying social order once called Christian, must be attacked without mercy as a means of dealing with the social problem. Examples of this may be found in pre-revolutionary France and Russia. The temptation to give an absolute Christian sanction to some new order continually faces men who are aware of the need of social action, but it ignores the inner dynamic alike of social development and of Christian faith.

The third attitude to the social question is perhaps most congenial to the Anglo-Saxon mind as it represents something of a compromise between the first two suggested above. Its tendency is to accept the present social order whatever form that may take and to do all that is possible to mitigate the evil effects incidental to any state of society. It will suggest that the root of the trouble is in the hearts of men and that the social structure as such is comparatively unimportant. If there are enough men of goodwill and Christian integrity the machine can be made to work in such a way that the greatest benefits will result for the largest possible number of people. Meantime the victims of society will be cared for by voluntary institutions

founded and supported by Christian philanthropy. In some quarters this task is apt to be dismissed, somewhat contemptuously, as mere "ambulance work" but the care of the sick, the poor and the helpless has been a constant Christian obligation from the beginning. The Dominical precept 'He that would be first among you let him be your servant even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many' has sunk deeply into the Christian conscience.<sup>10</sup> What is required of individual Christians in society, whether they occupy influential positions or very subordinate posts, is the exercise of qualities such as honesty, justice and fair dealing dominated by the concept of service. From time to time some great social issue emerges, such as Anti-Slavery, the state of the prisons or Factory legislation in nineteenth century England and a small group of Christians begins the long crusade, eventually to be joined by large numbers of the faithful. There is however, rarely, if ever, any exercise of discipline within the Christian community to secure massed Christian support for such a crusade; largely because Christian opinion, at any rate in the early stages, is usually deeply divided on the issue and support or opposition is regarded as a question to be decided by the individual conscience. Further, it is to be remembered that modern society possesses an extremely complex structure and that proposals for change must very largely depend upon technical judgments<sup>11</sup> for which Christians as such, except the few who are technically accomplished, have no special aptitude.

Now if we turn to consider our contemporary situation, almost overwhelming in the multiplicity of problems it thrusts upon our attention and all of them requiring decisions to be taken which may have far reaching effects, there is one point of agreement amongst the vast bulk of Christian people. With few exceptions, all are agreed that the future of humanity depends upon the influence which Christianity may exert on the people who will be directly responsible for taking such decisions in the coming years. Disagreement begins when we attempt to define in what particular ways the Gospel can speak imperatively to a bewildered generation and how its voice is to be made effective. It is only to be expected that if there is such a thing as Evangelical Christianity, it should have a word to speak to modern man which is different in some vital respects from the word of Catholic Christianity. It is also true that Evangelical Christians have not given very much attention to fundamental social questions in recent years, as compared with the work that has been done by Catholic Christians so that there is not a body of authoritative guidance in England for evangelical thinkers grappling with this problem.

The Church is a body charged with the responsibility of bearing a distinctive witness in the world, which if it is not given by the Christian body will not be given at all. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."<sup>12</sup> It is a witness to Jesus Christ which is thus given, as the centre and meaning alike of history and of every individual existence. He is the true centre and destiny of every social grouping. Consequently there must be no confusion of the mission of the Church

with the aims and ends of any secular society even when Christians in the fulfilment of their Christian duty feel themselves obliged to support the policy of a particular state or party. Therefore, because the Church is the bearer of that Divine Word by which it lives and which all mankind is bound to hear, if life is ever to be more than a miserable tragedy, it will have a distinctive word to speak to our social confusion; a word which if it is not spoken by the Church will not be spoken by any other body. Most emphatically it is not called upon to endorse the programmes of political parties or to throw a protective cloak over the secular nostrums, many of which are now set before us as Christian schemes. No doubt there are many places where the social action of the politically-conscious Christian will coincide with the action of the secular politician. But that is only an illustration of the fact that in a corrupt society the Christian is obliged to choose the best line of action under the circumstances, which may well be very far from his confessed ideal. Nevertheless the dimensions of his thinking, the motives and hopes of his actions will be different from those of his secular contemporaries. The Christian, and particularly the Evangelical Christian has a distinctive word to speak to the present situation. It will not be an easy or a simple word such as "my people love to hear" but it will be a word that must be heard if the nations are not to perish. The Church dare not, whatever individual Christians may be able to do, in loyalty to her Lord compromise herself by a definite political attitude. For the Church is the only place where all the citizens who are drawn into opposite camps by their political or social conflicts, can escape from the obsession of these difficult problems in their public life. It is the one place of reconciliation where together all may invoke 'Our Father' and ask Him, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us': and where together all may sit down at the table of the Lord and share in the same Body and Blood.

If it is asked what are the notes of this distinctive Christian witness in the social sphere, we may begin by pointing out that 'People Matter' and matter supremely. This insight comes from the Biblical understanding of man created in the image of God—a responsible moral agent possessed of a real measure of self determination and accountable to God. Further the Bible shows clearly from the opening chapters of Genesis onwards, that true humanity is only possible in the context of personal relationship, in the family and in the wider community. The Fall, despite its radical consequences, has not entirely obliterated these fundamental truths about man which are given meaning at a deeper level in the redemption wrought by Christ. "The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me" is the Christian confession of true personality and is always accompanied by the recognition of the brother for whom Christ died."<sup>13</sup> Much of this has been recognised in recent thought with its emphasis on the doctrine derived from Martin Buber, that 'real life is meeting.' It is clear that if people matter in this sense, that if the testimony of the Bible both in the order of creation and in the order of redemption points to the primacy of personality then Christianity has a word of judgment to speak against "the vast spectacle of ugliness and tyranny which is the modern notion of civilisation."<sup>14</sup> For the unprecedented

mechanical expansion of the last century and a half has led to a great depersonalization of large areas of human life and suppressed much that is truly personal. The day of the individual craftsman or the small domestic industry (where indeed there was plenty of opportunity for exploitation) has passed and the drift towards ever larger industrial units is continually being accelerated. In these conditions it is difficult to see how a man can take a real interest in his work or express his personality through what he does.<sup>15</sup> A recent correspondence in the *Spectator* pointed out some of the disastrous personal effects of the narrowness of factory life and the consequent loss of personal initiative. Clergy and social workers in industrial areas will be all too familiar with the spiritual and mental inertia which descends like a blight on the majority of people whose working hours are spent as a cog in a machine. Under such conditions human labour is inevitably treated as the same sort of commodity as the work achieved by a machine. The relationship between the worker, as a person who should find deep satisfaction for his whole nature in his work, and the job he is given to do is ignored. It is hard to see how this fundamental issue is affected by any re-ordering of the economic or political structure of the country. Indeed the nationalisation of heavy industries in the interests of real economic efficiency might only intensify the impersonal element. A good many years ago, in his essay on the Russian Revolution, Berdyaev pointed out that one of the tragic things about the Russian revolutionaries (and this applied to most of the adherents of socialist parties elsewhere) was that they had taken over most of the assumptions and values of the bourgeois civilisation which they were pledged to destroy.<sup>16</sup> It is not now possible for the world (despite Mr. Ghandi) to go back to a pre-industrial society since there are far too many mouths to feed. But a good deal of Christian thinking and effort will be needed at this point in our economic life. Evangelicals have maintained the Reformation insight that vocation is not confined to the cloister but must be followed in the world,—in the home and in business. Nevertheless they have failed to appreciate the changes in the social order which have made it almost impossible for the worker to serve God and fulfil his own personality in daily work. How can a man, set to accomplish some automatic task requiring very little physical or mental effort in co-operation with a machine for eight or nine hours a day, discover and serve any real sense of divine vocation? There is no easy solution to this human problem but a constant Christian witness that 'people matter' is needed whether the economic structure be individualist or socialist.

A second way in which Christians can render great service at the present time is by an unflinching witness to the primacy in all life of the spiritual order and of man's eternal destiny. "A religion which is perfectly at home in the world, has no counsel for it which the world could not gain by an easier method."<sup>17</sup> The Christian is a citizen of two commonwealths, living here below as in a colonial outpost, the life of heaven above. This will require from the Christian a greater measure of self discipline and a resolute acceptance of higher standards than are observed elsewhere. "It seems to me that we are at a moment when the primary Christian duty is one, I will not say



of detachment, for that word has a stoic flavour, but rather of conscientious recollection of the absolute primacy of the spiritual and of determination to live here and now in the light of that recollection."<sup>18</sup> We say, and mean it sincerely, that 'a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth,' that it is possible to be a Christian in the most adverse social environment. We recollect that early Christianity was practised by slaves and others who were in a worse economic and social position than anyone is to-day. But what is needed is a demonstration that Christians mean what they say when they profess comparative indifference to worldly possessions. In the first few centuries of their existence monks and hermits gave this testimony in an unmistakable form. It has been repeated again and again in times of revival, among the early Franciscans, the Moravians or the Methodists. Nowadays Christian practice and assumptions on the question of property and possessions are little distinguishable from any other views.

One of the effects of industrialization and the social thinking it has stimulated, has been to infect the majority of people with a materialistic outlook. A good job, a house, a car, the gadgets and amenities of a technical civilisation and above all, material security, have become the professed objectives of large numbers of people. To obtain these ends is the dominating purpose of their waking hours and applied science now seems to hold out the possibility that a majority of people can have these things if vested interests in the present scarcity are removed. To the Christian, the personal life of the Spirit in obedience to the Word of God and in fellowship with others, is the most important thing in life and the material equipment which God has provided in the form of raw materials is of secondary importance and must be used to assist the development of Christian life. In an age which thinks in terms of material security and estimates the value of the Church in terms of its social and economic effectiveness, it may well be that Christians are being called to a more heroic mode of life, a kind of monasticism in the world which by its outward form will bear witness that Christian people regard these things with comparative indifference.<sup>19</sup> In any discussion, or in the promotion of practical measures Christians ought to make quite plain that their motives and expectations are different from those with whom they may be co-operating as fellow citizens. "The Christian . . . will wish to adjust the conditions of this vale of tears so as to procure a relative but very real earthly happiness for the assembled multitude ; a polity in which all can find a good and decent living, a state of justice, of amity and prosperity, making possible for each the fulfilment of his destiny. He claims that the terrestrial city should be so directed as effectively to recognize the right of each of its members to live, to work and to grow in their life as persons."<sup>20</sup> The key words in this passage from the writings of Jacques Maritain are 'a relative happiness' 'fulfilment of his destiny' 'to grow as persons.' The Christian is concerned with the ordering of the material order, in which he must live the life of the Spirit, so that it may demonstrate the destiny of man in the eternal order and that true happiness can never be found in things material by themselves. He will therefore be continuously aware that an improvement in social conditions may

effectively prevent men from hearing the Word of the Gospel, breeding the illusion that they can save themselves by technical means. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>21</sup>

A third aspect of Christian witness most needed at the present time is one which springs historically from the Reformation and its renewed understanding of the meaning of grace. To put it quite simply, the Christian testifies that no re-ordering of the social and economic structure removes the problem of sin. The Reformation "was the historical locus where the Christian conscience became most fully aware of the persistence of Sin in the life of the redeemed."<sup>22</sup> The justified man is always a justified sinner and can never presume on perfection. As Calvin put it "there still remains in a regenerate man a fountain of evil, continually producing irregular desires . . . for sin always exists in the saints till they are divested of their mortal bodies."<sup>23</sup> It was at this point that Reformation theology separated decisively from Catholic theology which defined sin as the privation of an original perfection rather than as a positive and radical corruption. Consequently the Catholic doctrine of grace seeks for a place in history "where sin is transcended and only finiteness remains."<sup>24</sup> This tendency to overestimate the sinlessness of the redeemed finds its most striking expression in the virtual identification of the Church with the Kingdom of God, with the consequent claim that it is a 'societas perfecta.' This identification of the Church with a particular social order of which it is the directive principle is not only spiritually dangerous, but ultimately historically disastrous. It ignores the dynamic of history, thus making the Church the ally and the defender of an *ancien régime* which must be either transformed or destroyed owing to changed circumstances. Further it ignores the persistence of sin in the human will to power so that for instance in the medieval attempt to order society in obedience to the law of Christ, the Spirit of Christ and the genius of Caesar were tragically compounded in the activity of the greatest popes. The sanctions thus given by religion to the feudal structure of society meant that the injustice of the feudal order could not be changed without challenging the religious authority which supported it. This is always the result which follows upon the sinful sanctification of relative standards of knowledge or action.

Sin persists. Every new situation provides new opportunities for evil as well as good. Such testimony to a dynamic in fallen nature which must be matched by a dynamic of grace is especially necessary at this moment in human history. The hope of a new order after the war, which shall somehow have shed all the iniquities and frustrations of this present order, is very widespread. An acute criticism of present wrongs is combined with a credulous belief that if vested interests are thwarted and the welfare of the common man erected into a principle which is genuinely observed, then an order of justice and prosperity will be established in which every one will have what he wants. This optimistic expectation, which for its fulfilment would require the greatest miracle ever known in human history, is typical of the easy conscience of modern man which seems to regard war and its accompanying evils as a temporary breakdown which can easily be repaired. "No cumulation of contradictory

evidence seems to disturb modern man's opinion of himself."<sup>25</sup> At best he deals with the problem of sin by diagnosing its presence in those whom for some reason, he believes to be opposed to him. The method of seeking a scapegoat to explain the breakdown of human relationships has been pursued by most groups in the last few decades. The Jews, capitalists, appeasers, Fascists, revolutionaries and conservatives have been among the victims designated as responsible for our present disorder. The deliberate attempt to discredit opposition in advance by speaking of vested interests as the sole obstacle to the attainment of a desired end has inflamed passions and substituted prejudice for reason in the development of policy.

The Gospel has a word to speak to just such a tangled human situation. It is a word of judgment and a summons to repentance. It throws a searchlight on the actual facts of the existing situation, reveals the consequences of present forms of economic or social behaviour and lays bear the obstacles to justice in the human heart. This searchlight of the Word illuminates impartially the sinfulness of those within the Church as well as those outside, of the capitalist as well as the proletariat. This is only possible, humanly speaking, if it is clear that those who endeavour to speak the Word have no axe to grind, no personal interest to defend and therefore nothing to lose. They will make plain that they are members of a church which is always under the Cross, that they understand themselves to stand under the judgment of the Gospel, before they give utterance to any word. "Every Christian should become aware of the factors which determine his judgment, should suspect his own motives, because he knows that sin is natural to him, should put the burden of proof on those social judgments which harmonize with the economic interests of his group."<sup>26</sup> There is little doubt that such testimony is urgently needed at the present time, to save us from the disasters of the persistent illusion of human perfectibility and also that it is a most costly witness to give. Only a genuinely penitent church can give it.

Another important factor in Christian witness to the social order is testimony to the Eternal Kingdom of God. Christian thought must always work within an eschatological framework, for the destiny of man and of the historic order is to be consummated in the eternal order. History does not explain itself nor does human life find its meaning in itself. Moreover this particular problem of meaningfulness will become more acute just in so far as there is a genuine improvement in the relative justice of any new social order. When drudgery and exploitation have been reduced to the minimum point in human life, then the problem of the destiny of man and the reason for his existence will become more insistent for our minds. Christian eschatology speaks of judgment, of heaven and hell; it reckons seriously with death, that final No! spoken to all the aspirations of man. It is not possible for man to evade the problem of death any more than he can escape from dying. It is this important fact together with the knowledge that sin persists in every situation which prevents the Christian from indulging in any Utopian expectations for the future. These he understands to be but illusions—the rationalisation of the hopes of men. Fulfilment of the hopes of men in terms of the destruction of evil and injustice cannot be achieved in history but can only come from beyond

history. The dynamic of sinfulness which is an integral part of the historic process can only be overcome by a greater dynamic from without. Hence the Christian looks for an *eschaton* which shall be the great redeeming act of God. His present existence is a life which is lived 'between the times', between the coming of Jesus Christ into history which was the earnest of final redemption and His return which will be the consummation of redemption.

This eschatological understanding of history which prevents us from adopting any Utopian illusions about the future of society, and insists that Christianity is an end and not a means, must not lead us into complacency over present social tasks. Niebuhr has pointed out with an impressive weight of argument that the understanding of the ultimate problem of historical existence in terms of divine mercy which was the great insight of the Reformation, seems to have precluded any understanding of all the proximate problems<sup>27</sup>. This moral complacency or social defeatism has been characteristic of a good deal of reformed theology particularly among the pietistic sects. A doctrine of the world has been formulated in rather narrow eschatological terms and Christian duty has been interpreted as a necessary separation from this world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"<sup>28</sup>. Sometimes this has been worked out so that a perfectionist private ethic has been placed in juxtaposition to a realistic or cynical public ethic. The world as represented by industry or commerce has not been a forbidden arena for the Christian warrior, though he has been warned of the personal dangers confronting him in such a sphere. An eschatology which leads to moral complacency in the social order—things must get worse since Scripture indicates this as a prelude to the parousia and therefore it is not our duty to seek to arrest this decline—not only discredits eschatological dimensions of thought but also denies equally fundamental insights of the Gospel such as the responsibilities of Christian love and obedience to the will of God as the Lord of history. We are obliged by the circumstances of our lives and the dynamic of the Gospel to struggle for such a relative measure of justice and security as is possible at this present time, for it is here in the world as it is that we have been set to accomplish the will of God.

The responsibility of the Christian for the public life of the world is involved in the fact that God is the Creator and the Lord of history. This truth is most effectively proclaimed by the prophets of the Old Dispensation; but the New Testament is the fulfilment and not the denial of the Old Testament. Christianity is not a religion of escape from the world but of obedience to God in the world. The medieval monasticism which was so heavily criticised by the Reformers, has had its revenge in the perverted doctrines of other worldliness current in much modern evangelicalism, where a kind of individualistic monasticism is practised. This is not to deny that any authentic Christianity will manifest a strain of asceticism, but it is to declare that the traditional doctrines of separation and worldliness need a radical re-thinking in the light of the politico-social situation of the present day. The fact is that, just as the individual justified Christian recognises imperfection and sin persisting in him and yet the complementary duty of striving by grace towards perfection, so in the social sphere the Christian has

to recognise the persistence of sin in any social order and the fundamental otherworldliness of any true Christianity and at the same time strive for obedience to the will of God as the Lord of history in the social sphere. In fulfilling this latter obligation he will not be content with corporate action aimed at particular evils and undertaken as occasion serves but will work for a radical re-ordering of the basis and motives of an acquisitive society, remembering that the religious community of which he is a member, is intended by its founder to counteract corruption in the body politic by being mixed in it and also by standing forth distinct from it as a burning and a shining light. This twofold function is fulfilled when the Church preaches and lives by the Word of God. All that has been said above is comprehended in living by the Word of God and testifying to it. This is all that the Church can do for a better order of the world. This alone is her mission but if she does it faithfully by the grace of God, it may please Him that His Word and Spirit will lay hold of those responsible for the new order that must come in the world.

- 1 'The Gospel and Human Needs', J. N. Figgis, p. 141.
- 2 'New Testament Ethics', C. A. Anderson Scott, p. 11.
- 3 'The Christian Understanding of Man': Church, Community and State Series, Austin Farrer, p. 202.
- 4 Genesis ii. 18.
- 5 'Malvern, 1941', Report of the Conference, D. M. Mackinnon, p. 111.
- 6 This can be examined in such a book as 'The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches' by Troeltsch.
- 7 'Church and Community': Church, Community and State Series, K. S. Latourette, p. 14.
- 8 I Corinthians vii. 31.
- 9 'The Medieval Village' G. G. Coulton, pp. 509, 559; 'Medieval Panorama' G. G. Coulton, pp. 120, 180-81.
- 10 St. Matthew xx. 28. Galatians vi. 2. I Peter iii. 8.
- 11 'Christian Realism', J. C. Bennett, pp. 103-4.
- 12 I Peter ii. 9.
- 13 Galatians ii. 20. Romans xiv. 15.
- 14 Figgis *op. cit.* p. 127.
- 15 'Christianity and Economics', A. D. Lindsay, pp. 79-84, 119-122.
- 16 See the comment by Bertrand Russell; "The Bolsheviks love everything in modern industry except the excessive rewards of Capitalism," quoted in Lindsay *op. cit.* p. 119.
- 17 'Does Civilization Need Religion?': Reinhold Niebuhr, p. 177. *cf.* "If we have learnt the Gospel message, we shall at least escape the error of imagining that universal comfort and the Kingdom of God are synonymous." F. C. Burkitt, "Cambridge Biblical Essays," p. 209.
- 18 D. M. Mackinnon in 'Malvern, 1941', p. 101.
- 19 'The Relevance of Christianity', F. R. Barry, p. 248.
- 20 'True Humanism', J. Maritain, p. 131.
- 21 St. Luke xviii. 24.
- 22 'The Nature and Destiny of Man' (Gifford Lectures), Reinhold Niebuhr, Vol. II, p. 191.
- 23 Inst. III. iii. 10.
- 24 Niebuhr *op. cit.* Vol. II. p. 148.
- 25 Niebuhr *ibid.* Vol. I. p. 100.
- 26 Bennett *op. cit.* p. 100.
- 27 Niebuhr *op. cit.* Vol. II. pp. 194-212.
- 28 I John ii. 15.