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The Working Classes and the Christian Ethic

by David G. Kibble

Mr. Kibble, a teacher in Lawnswood School, Leeds, has addressed himself in several articles to the problems of the church and the working classes. In this article he enquires into the ethical attitudes of the working classes and discusses the implications for the teaching of Christian ethics.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORKING CLASSES

It is one of the facts of life that the working classes are absent from our churches in Britain; they figure less prominently in our congregations than any other social group. In industrial towns and on new housing estates Sunday attendance figures are low when compared with the number of inhabitants; and not only are the figures for Sunday attendance low, but the figures for those who 'never go' to church are high. In David Martin's study, published in 1967, it was calculated that in the working class area of Dagenham the figure for those who 'never go' to church was as high as 83 per cent. The study claimed that small working class towns averaged a church attendance of 7.8 per cent each week, whilst in the more middle class areas, such as Woodford Green, it was reckoned that as many as 34 per cent of the population attended from time to time.¹ More recently, what is probably a more realistic set of figures has been given by David Sheppard. He calculated, from electoral role figures in the diocese of Woolwich, that whereas some of the more middle class areas might have 9 per cent of their populace on the electoral role, the average working class area had only 0.9 per cent.² He concludes: "It is not, I think, an exaggeration to suggest that, on average, half the congregation in a working class parish would either not think of themselves as belonging to the main stream of working class life, or travel to church from the suburbs. If that is right the figure for reasonably occasional adult church-going in Inner London and the large council estates is not more than 0.5 per cent."³

A case has been made out that although the working classes are less involved in church life, they are more ready to assent to the major propositions of Christian belief than are the other social classes. Thus Richard Hoggart, writing in 1957, revealed that the working classes were staunch believers in the purposiveness of life, were more prepared to believe in an afterlife and thought that the Christian ethic was the best

¹ D. Martin, *A Sociology of English Religion* (Heinemann, London, 1967), 46.

² D. Sheppard, *Built as a City* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1974), 45. For an important recent Scottish survey producing the same conclusions see P. L. Sissons, *The Social Significance of Church Membership in the Burgh of Falkirk* (Church of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1972).

³ *Op. cit.*, 46.

moral system.⁴ He writes: 'Working-class people, when they insist on a church wedding or funeral, are drawing upon beliefs which, though rarely considered, are still in most cases firmly there. These beliefs, some of the basic Christian doctrines, they hold but do not examine. Nor do they often think that they have much relevance to the day-to-day business of living.'⁵ An American study by N. J. Demarath, published in 1965, advanced similar findings. In particular, he propounded that whilst the cognitive and cultic aspects of religiosity were found to be higher among the more middle classes, the creedal and devotional aspects were higher amongst the working classes.⁶ Whether such a picture is correct for Britain today, however, is open to doubt. Hoggart's study is now twenty years old, whilst Demarath's findings, although only ten years old, may be criticised on the grounds that many of his figures were obtained from sampling actual church members. A more recent British study, the Independent Television Authority report published in 1970, shows that there is no evidence of religious belief or attitude differing in any consistent way between middle class people and working class people.⁷ Another recent informal study showed that the working class attitude to religion in Luton was one of total apathy.⁸ This latter study probably presents the truer picture. It may well be the case that the working classes were more ready to assent to the major tenets of the Christian faith twenty years ago: whether this is still true today must remain in doubt. It is highly probable that working class beliefs have, partly perhaps through the media, caught up with their middle class counterparts.

Why then, we must ask, is this the case? Why is it that our churches appear to be making so little headway amongst the working classes? One reason, in my opinion, is the 'verbal' nature of much in protestantism.⁹ Protestant churches have always laid a heavy emphasis on the word of God, both in its written form in the Scriptures and in its preached form from the pulpit. The seeds of this 'verbalism' were planted during the Reformation. The more zealous followers of the Reformation movement

⁴ R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1959), 112-119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 115-116.

⁶ N. J. Demerath, 'Religion and Social Class in America', in R. Robertson (ed), *Sociology of Religion* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967).

⁷ *Religion in Britain and Northern Ireland* (I.T.A., London, 1970), 14 and 26-27.

⁸ Cambridge Theological Colleges' Certificate in Pastoral Theology; *Work, Family and Community in Luton* (Cambridge, 1975). (Privately circulated).

⁹ I. have argued this out fully in 'The Protestant Liturgy and the Working Classes', in *Liturgical Review*, 6, 1976. Cf. also G. Reid, *The Gaggling of God* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1969).

did away with much of the visual and auditory splendour in the liturgy that had appealed to the less literate man: images were smashed, paintings on the walls painted over, colourful vestments replaced by drab academic robes, glittering chalices and patens reduced to plain wooden cups and platters, stained glass windows were often smashed, and much beautiful music was left unplayed and unsung. In England worship according to the Prayer Book must have seemed artistically dull to many in the congregation, for all visual aids had been done away with. In place of a beautiful liturgy, a liturgy that spoke its message both through its words and its ritual, was substituted a 'word'-centred service. In an attempt to teach the Christian the true nature of his faith all communication was by word of mouth to the mind of the believer. The Reformation's reliance on the word, with its stress on cognitive ability, and hence its appeal to the more verbalised and literary minded middle classes, is totally antithetical to the working man, used now to 'instant-tell' media, to 'cool' means of communication as McLuhan has labelled it. Of course, the alienation of the working classes did not take immediate effect at the time of the Reformation itself: it did not become manifest until the Industrial Revolution, when the industrialised worker, uprooted from his traditional environment and placed in the city, was 'free' to absent himself from the church. The Industrial Revolution saw the reaping of the seeds sown at the Reformation. Today there are many churches who are still sowing the seeds of verbalism in their liturgy and in their church life; it should not come as a surprise to find that the sowing of such seed in working class areas will produce little or no fruit. It is rather like planting a date palm in the centre of Aberdeen and then watching for it to grow!

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I am not, of course, suggesting that this is the only reason why the working classes are absent from our churches, that it is the sole cause of their alienation. I do, nevertheless, believe it to be an important reason, and one which has not received the attention it might. Yet there are other reasons: our Christian ministers are themselves middle class, and sometimes find identification with the working classes difficult; the working classes may be more attracted to the 'here and now' solutions of politics rather than the 'hereafter' ones of religion;¹⁰ the tendency of protestantism to be individualistic (individual salvation), in contrast to the

¹⁰ R. Stark, 'Class, Radicalism, and Religious Involvement in Great Britain', in *The American Sociological Review*, 29, 1964. It is interesting, in the light of this, to see the current interest in the area of the church and politics, and perhaps even more interesting to note that the general trend in 'theological politics' is towards the left.

more group and family centredness of the working classes;¹¹ the failure of the church to move with the times, and so on. No doubt other reasons could be advanced to explain the absence of the steelworker, the bus driver, the production line worker, the apprentice and the bricklayer from church life, but taken all in all, it is for good reasons, in a sense, that he is.¹² The church is reaping the fruits which it itself has sown. If we only plant middle-class bulbs, then we can only expect middle-class flowers.

WORKING CLASS THINKING

Different people think in different ways, and sociologists who have studied the ways in which people think have found that different social classes do have different modes of thinking; working class people sometimes think in a different way from more middle class people. Firstly, we may note that they do not always think in a rational and logical way, they do not always think in a linear and sequential fashion. Let me make my point by offering an example. A few months ago I taped a sixteen-year-old boy giving his opinions about education, and despite the fact that his argument was blatantly illogical, he refused to retract his original statement:

D.K. What do you think makes a good teacher?

T.F. One who lets you do what you like.

D.K. But then you'll get no work done, will you?

T.F. No.

D.K. Well, why do we educate people?

T.F. To get them a good job.

D.K. But if the teacher doesn't teach, and you don't do any work, then you won't get any qualifications and won't get a job, will you?

T.F. No.

D.K. So a teacher who lets you do what you like isn't really any good?

T.F. No; a good teacher lets you do what you want.

¹¹ For a picture of the older type of working class family and its attachments cf. R. Hoggart, *op. cit.*; also M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1962). For a more modern picture, with an increasing tendency towards privatisation cf. T. Parsons 'The Family in Urban Industrial America, 1', and B. N. Adams, 'The Social Significance of Kinship, 2', in M. Anderson (ed), *Sociology of the Family* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971); also Cambridge Theological Colleges, *op. cit.*

¹² For a very interesting and understanding treatment of the problems surrounding the working class adolescent and religion see J. Benington, *Culture, Class and Christian Beliefs* (Scripture Union, London, 1973).

I had tried to show the boy the stupidity of his statement by a process of logical, reasoned argument, and whilst he agreed with the logical progression he refused to allow the process of reasoning to affect his original statement. To him, my process of logic was no more than a means of proving that I was more clever in argument than he was — the actual idea of logically reasoning through a problem and submitting to the reasoned conclusion appeared foreign to him.

The whole idea of giving reasons for one's actions is less common among the working classes than among the middle classes. An imperative is often given without reason, or where a reason is given it will often be what Bernstein has called a 'positional' one. A positional reason is one where, for example, a parent will justify telling a child to do something by saying, 'because I say so,' or, 'because I'm your father.' The reason for doing something is the authority of the person commanding the action: '... the authority or legitimacy for the statement will reside in the form of the social relationship which is non-verbally present (*e.g.* by a parent to a child; the lower ranks of a chain of command in an army hierarchy; by a leader to a gang member), rather than in reasoned principles.¹³ Bernstein presents a simple social class contrast: he imagines a mother-child situation on a bus; the first are working class, the second middle class:

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- (1) *Mother.* Hold on tight.
Child. Why?
Mother. Hold on tight.
Child. Why?
Mother. I told you to hold on tight, didn't I?

- (2) *Mother.* Hold on tightly, darling.
Child. Why?
Mother. If you don't you'll be thrown forwards and then you'll fall.

The middle class mother gives reasons for her command, the working class mother does not; implicit behind the latter's argument is that 'I'm your mother and you'll do what I tell you because I am your mother.' The command is justified by the position of the person giving it.¹⁴ Again, this seems to show that the logical process of reasoning is somewhat foreign to the working classes.

¹³ Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (Paladin, St. Albans, 1973), 66; *cf.* also ch. 8.

¹⁴ *Cf.* W. Kay, *Moral Education* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1975), 111-113.

Conjoined with the difficulty experienced by the working classes in thinking in a logical, rational and sequential way, goes their difficulty in thinking in purely abstract terms. Again, another example may help to make the point; the dialogue is with a sixteen-year-old school leaver:

D.K. Can you give me two sentences with the word 'show' in?

C.C. He showed us his car. He showed us his bike.

D.K. And now two with the word 'demonstrate'.

C.C. He demonstrated how the car worked. He demonstrated how the TV worked.

D.K. Can you tell me the difference in meaning between the word 'show' and the word 'demonstrate'?

C.C. Haven't a clue.

D.K. Now can you give me one sentence with the word 'teach' in.

C.C. He taught us English.

D.K. And with the word 'instruct'.

C.C. He instructed us how to climb.

D.K. Can you tell me the difference then, between the word 'teach' and the word 'instruct'?

C.C. You've got to teach us, but you pay someone to instruct you.

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In each case the boy had to think out his answer before it was committed to tape, so there was no question of him saying something hurriedly without thinking. In the first set of words he was well able to correctly use the words 'show' and 'demonstrate', but when it came to abstractly defining the difference in meaning between the two, he was unable to answer. In the second set, again he was able to use the words 'teach' and 'instruct', but when asked to define the difference in meaning between the two was unable to do so correctly. We would say then, that the boy knew the meanings of the words, and knew the difference between them, but that he was incapable of thinking in sufficiently abstract terms to define this difference precisely. Working class thought finds difficulty in dealing with abstractions, and so prefers instead to deal with the concrete and the particular.¹⁵ Such difficulty accounts for the irrelevance, in the light of many working class minds, of acting on principle; this process necessitates, by its very nature, abstract thinking, to which the working class mind is not tuned. 'Acting on principle' is a more middle class concept: to many in the working classes it is an irrelevant 'non-principle.'

In sum then, working class thinking may be said to be characterised

¹⁵ R. Hoggart, *op. cit.*, 102 ff; D. Lawton, *Social Class, Language and Education* (R.K.P., London, 1970), 117ff.

by (1) a difficulty in thinking in a logical, sequential and linear fashion and by (2) an inability to think in abstract terms, hence the reluctance to accept the idea of acting on principle. It is in part due to these very difficulties in handling verbal concepts that the working classes have become alienated from the church, as I pointed out in the first section above. Protestantism has valued and encouraged logical and abstract thinking in its believers; there is nothing wrong with this, of course, but if the working classes cannot completely cope with it then we should not be surprised if they choose to part company with the middle classes which predominate in our churches.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE WORKING CLASS MORAL LIFE STYLE

Because the working classes find it harder to use the tools of language than do the middle classes, because they are therefore less able to express their feelings, sometimes even to themselves, they are more likely to express themselves when under pressure by means of violence, either through violent language or through physical aggression. Thus, whereas the middle classes are able to verbally express their emotions and feelings when angry, the working classes are not, and may therefore swear to compensate for this inability. Some are even unable to reach this level, and thus resort to other means of expression such as violent emotional outbursts.

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Physical aggression occurs alongside verbal aggression as another means of self expression, so natural, in a sense, to 'action-orientated' people. William Kay makes the following comment: 'Aggressive men are invariably frustrated, and since the experiences of economically-deprived low-status men are of necessity frustrating, one would expect to find them more aggressive. Then to this must be added the recently confirmed fact that aggression is also correlated with anxiety, and the working class life style is known to be conducive to both anxiety and stress.'¹⁶ In the working class school then, the 'appropriate' reward for a rude remark about one's girl friend is a black eye; an argument is settled not by rational means but by a fight in the playground.

The working classes are more likely to condone marginally criminal activity. A number of reasons lie behind this fact: firstly, as I have already pointed out above, they do not consider as particularly moral the idea of acting on principle; thus, to steal something from the factory is seen not in terms of the abstract principle that stealing is wrong, but in terms of the practical principle that stealing in small amounts doesn't really harm anyone. Secondly, and this is particularly true amongst

¹⁶ W. Kay, *op. cit.*, 33.

adolescents, physical prowess is respected, and part and parcel of such prowess is small scale crime. In what is in some senses a male orientated society, the working classes may respect the adolescent who has crossed the path of the law, the leader of the gang, the man who can hold his beer, the neighbourhood boxer, and so on. Such stress on physical prowess obviously encourages marginally criminal activity. Thirdly, such activity may be condoned on the grounds that it is often done against the more middle classes, *i.e.* those who are often seen to be supposedly exploiting them. Thus it is that the crime rate is higher amongst working class families than among the more middle class ones.¹⁷

172 In addition, there are class differences in what one might call the border areas of morality, areas which really relate to social custom rather than to morality proper. For example, working class drinking habits differ from middle class ones. The working class man, when he does drink, is likely to drink more than his middle class counterpart. The middle class man rarely drinks to excess, and even if he does become drunk, social class usually determines the way in which he will conduct himself. Again, the reasons for this are manifold: the working class prowess given to someone who can 'hold his beer', drink as a means of escape from a boring routine at work, general social environment, and so on. A further feature is that the working class person, unable to talk the middle class 'small talk', will appear more friendly and honest, more his real self on first acquaintance than the middle class person. Consider the virtually cartoon character of the middle class civil servant on his commuter train to London, sitting in the same seat day after day, but too reluctant to say any more to the others in his compartment than the inconsequential 'Good morning'. Two working class women on the top deck of a bus in Manchester present quite a different picture — they quickly engage in conversation, with both sides being their real selves as opposed to the middle classes who, at first at any rate, are usually unwilling to reveal themselves to a stranger. This tendency to 'be one's normal self', however, has an obverse side to it: talk amongst the working classes is far more likely to become sexually orientated, particularly with the men. Only this afternoon I witnessed a coach full of sailors stuck in a traffic jam, the occupants joyfully whistling and cheering at every young female who passed by! A coach filled with civil servants would be unlikely to exhibit a similar behaviour!

The working class moral life style then, differs from that of the middle classes. Does this mean that we are to draw the conclusion that they are therefore less moral? Indeed not: such a conclusion only reveals a total

¹⁷ Cf. D. J. West, *The Young Offender* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967), ch.3.

lack of understanding of the social determinants of morality. William Kay writes as follows: 'This does not mean that the middle classes are moral and the working classes are not. Both have rigid standards whereby crime and immorality are judged. These are relative phenomena and must be assessed with reference to the morality of the specific group.'¹⁸ Being moral is dependent upon whether one acts in accordance with the moral standards in which one has been nurtured and which one accepts; that one person does something which another believes to be 'not quite right' does not mean that one is moral and the other immoral. By their own standards they may both be doing what they believe to be right, and are both therefore acting in a moral manner. The moral nature of an action is not determined by the act itself, but by the beliefs of the person doing it.¹⁹

THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC AND WORKING CLASS THINKING

It will be my purpose in this section to demonstrate that, in distinction from certain ethical systems which emphasise the place of rationality in moral thinking, the Christian ethic is admirably suited to the working classes. John Wilson, a leading writer in the field of moral education, is, to my mind, one of those who have laid too heavy a stress on a rational procedure in ethics.²⁰ According to Wilson, to be good at morality does not mean that one holds the right moral views, but that one answers moral questions by the correct method. This correct method, the rational method, consists in (1) treating others as equals, (2) being aware of one's own and of others emotions, (3) being aware of the hard facts relevant to the making of moral decisions, and (4) bringing (1), (2), and (3) to bear on particular situations, so as to decide and act in accordance with them. The procedure to be adopted in (4) is as follows:

- (a) one should stick to the laws of logic,
- (b) one should use language correctly,
- (c) one should attend closely to the facts.²¹

¹⁸ W. Kay, *op. cit.*, 38.

¹⁹ I am not saying that the *rightness* of an action depends on the person doing it: its *morality*, however, does. I would say that an Indian headhunter might be morally virtuous in killing a man from an opposing tribe, even though I believed it to be utterly wrong.

²⁰ J. Wilson, *Reason and Morals* (C.U.P., London, 1961); B. Sugarman, N. Williams and J. Wilson, *Introduction to Moral Education* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967); J. Wilson, *A Teacher's Guide to Moral Education* (Chapman, London and Dublin, 1973).

²¹ J. Wilson, *A Teacher's Guide to Moral Education*, chaps. 1 and 2; B. Sugarman, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, ch.2.

Such an ethical system may be fine for the middle class, verbal orientated person, but for one to whom abstract thinking and a logical, linear and sequential approach to thought is extremely difficult, it is unlikely to be of much practical success. I am not saying, of course, that we should not help working class people to think rationally and deeply — we must; but to rely on such a purely rational procedure alone is doomed to failure.²²

174 The Christian system of ethics, as I see it, offers two useful approaches to morality. Firstly, it affirms that there is a 'tacit' element to morality. It is Michael Polanyi who has given us an in-depth account of tacit knowledge: here, I will just run over his main thesis.²³ I will start with an example. When we are walking along a street and we meet someone we know, how is it that we recognise them? Is it their hair, their height, the way they walk, the way they smile, or what? The answer is that it is all of these and much more besides. We recognise a person through a whole host of clues, many of which we cannot even specify or articulate. We may say that we recognise him on account of two or three different features, but if we were to think about it we would realise that many other people possess these very same features. It is through the tacit clues, the clues which we cannot even specify, that we recognise another person. Tacit knowledge then, occurs when we know something but cannot directly specify the reasons as to why we know it. Such knowledge is gained from experience, and as such is a skill. Now St. Paul, writing to the Christians in Rome, points out that man possesses a tacit morality, *i.e.* a morality that 'comes naturally' to him, a morality for which he cannot specify any reasons for accepting. In Romans 1:19:20 he writes that certain truths about God can be learnt through nature: 'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse . . .'. Thus, Paul contends, it is quite possible for those without the Law to do what the Law requires (Romans 2:14-15), because they have a tacit knowledge of God's Law built in to them from an experience of living in human communities. Such people may not be able to specify God's Law, may not be able to specify why it is right to do certain actions and wrong to do others, and may be unable to say why they should even be moral at all.²⁴ But their

²² My argument in this paragraph is expanded in 'Moral Education in an Inner City Comprehensive: Rationality is Not Enough', in *Learning for Living*, 16, 1976.

²³ M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (R.K.P., London, 1958).

²⁴ S. Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (C.U.P., London, 1950), quite correctly, in my opinion, points out that from a secular vantage point morality itself cannot be

experience of living as human beings amongst other human beings gives them a tacit morality; certain rules, courses of action and attitudes have been learnt to be right, quite subconsciously. A tacit morality is learnt by practical living.²⁵

Secondly, the Christian ethic itself is primarily a relationship between persons. Paul describes the nature of the Christian life in starkly simple, personal terms: 'I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' (Gal. 2:20) Identification with and a personal relationship with a living Lord is the cornerstone of the Christian life, and it is on this and this alone that the Christian ethic must be based. The Christian ethic is not a system of laws, it is primarily a personal relationship with a living Lord; *within* this relationship use may be made of rules.²⁶ Thus, Paul in his letter to the Colossians, puts his commands plainly *within* the context of a personal relationship: '*If then you have been raised with Christ . . . put to death . . . immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire . . .*' (Col. 3:1ff.) The imperative is preceded by the condition that one is 'in Christ': if one is not 'in Christ' then the imperative becomes irrelevant and unworkable, even meaningless. Dietrich Bonhoeffer paints a superb theological picture of this starting point for Christian morality in his *Ethics*.²⁷ He writes: 'Whoever wishes to take up the problem of a Christian Ethic must be confronted at once with a demand which is quite without parallel. He must from the outset discard as irrelevant the two questions which alone impel him to concern himself with the problem of ethics, "How can I be good?" and "How can I do good?", and instead of these must ask the utterly and totally different question "What is the will of God?" . . . The point of departure for Christian Ethics is . . . the reality of God as He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ.'²⁸ Commitment is prior to the ethical:

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justified. Cf. also T. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (O.U.P., London, 1970), 143f.

²⁵ Prof. R. S. Peters seems to be near to making the same point when he says that, 'To ask . . . (a person) . . . whether persons ought to be respected is rather like asking a man whether he ought to be afraid of a dangerous situation; for the concept of respect is necessary to explicate what is meant by a person. *If he has the concept of person and understands it fully from the "inside"* . . . then he must also have the notion that it matters that individuals represent distinct assertive points of view.' *Ethics and Education* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1970), 213 (my italics). Understanding the concept of person would seem to necessitate a tacit learning through experience.

²⁶ For a similar view cf. P. Ramsey, *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (S.J.T. Occasional Papers, no. 11, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London, 1965); also E. L. Long, Jr., *A Survey of Christian Ethics* (O.U.P., London, 1967), esp. chaps. 19 and 20.

²⁷ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* Fontana, London, 1964). Unfortunately, Bonhoeffer fails to recognise the need for rules at all, and along with K. Barth thinks (wrongly, in my view) that the relationship is the *sole* requisite for a Christian ethic.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 188, 189-190.

formation in Christ is prior to the command of God: being a Christian is prior to being a doer of the Christian ethic. In Christian ethics the base starting point is a life 'in Christ', a personal relationship with a living Lord.²⁹

If then, the Christian faith argues that (1) man has a tacit knowledge of a 'natural law', at least in part, and that (2) the Christian ethic is grounded in a personal relationship, it would seem that such descriptions fit in well with the sociological observations outlined above. In particular, the Christian ethic, based as it is on a personal relationship, is an ethic admirably suited to all social classes, including, of course, the working classes. (If we believe in God then this should not come as too much of a surprise!)

CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions can we draw from our study? The first conclusion has already been outlined above, namely that the Christian ethic is well fitted to the working classes. Its basis in a personal relationship secures this.

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Second, the Christian church must acknowledge the fact that different social classes have different standards of morality: what may be acceptable to one class may not be acceptable to another. This will mean, in practical terms, that what is often acceptable to the working classes may not be acceptable to the middle classes: hence, what is acceptable amongst some of the working classes may not generally be acceptable in our churches. If, however, we are truly a loving community, we will have to accept other moral standards from those of a different social background. This is not to say, of course, that we may not wish to see some change in the moral life style of a person who joins our church, but any such change will have to be a long-term process. We must constantly ask ourselves, where we do hope for some change in a person's moral life style, whether in fact we only want to change customs that have no moral content at all; if we do, then we must put such a desire for change behind ourselves, and instead willingly admit the irrelevance of the custom in question. If a person in our church is a perpetual gambler who constantly drinks to excess, obviously we will expect

²⁹ I cannot agree with Paul Hirst's statement that "It is part of the genius of the Christian teaching that it is in moral matters intensely rational" (P. Hirst, *Moral Education in a Secular Society*, Univ. of London, London, 1974, 53). Hirst advocates that a purely rational ethic justifiable on its own logical basis can and ought to be built up independent from Christian belief and living. He claims that such a stance is inherent to Christian belief itself.

change. If however, we find ourselves wanting a new church member to *e.g.* wear a jacket in church, not to wear a pair of jeans when reading the lesson, not to smoke and not to drink, then we should be looking for a change within ourselves: a change that helps us to recognise the different mores of different social classes. John Benington, in his study of the working class adolescent and the churches, writes that the adolescents he encountered in church work felt that they were '... surrounded in the Christian group by a cluster of expectations about how a Christian behaves, what he does and doesn't do, which was being offered as part and parcel of the Christian style of life, but which they gradually came to feel was not only legalistic and restrictive, but quite foreign to what Jesus himself stood for.'³⁰

Thirdly, if the working classes play down the logical and abstract elements in thought, but instead stress a more practical attitude to life, this means that the church must be a 'doing' church. The working class man is not much interested in metaphysics, but he may well be much interested in practical Christianity. This means that if the Christian church is to be seen as relevant it must be a church that involves itself in moral action: practically helping the third world, practically helping the local community, living the life of Christ in Leeds, Portsmouth, Edinburgh, or wherever. Christ was not a metaphysical proposition: he was an incarnational reality who went about doing things as well as saying things.³¹ From a different angle, we must also conclude that the church must learn how to teach the working man how to apply the Christian life style to his own family and work life. At present, this is a field which has been virtually ignored in many of our churches; we must think urgently on this matter if we want to make any impression on working class life.

³⁰ J. Benington, *op. cit.*, 27.

³¹ For a correct approach see, *e.g.*, C. Sugden, *Social Gospel or No Gospel?* (Grove Books, Bramcote, 1975).