“Whither Socialism? — Values in a Changing Civilisation”

Rev. John Groser

Does Socialism Need Religion?

Third in the Series of Fabian Autumn Lectures, 1950

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3. DOES SOCIALISM NEED RELIGION?
   REV. JOHN GROSER

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FOREWORD

This third Lecture of the 1950 series deals with the question of Socialism and Religion. It has been held that Socialism demands the active co-operation of the individual to a greater extent than any previous form of Society, and the question is asked, "Can this be secured without religious sanctions?"

It is my contention that the Socialist movement in this country is so closely bound up with certain traditional Christian beliefs that the discarding of these beliefs would alter radically the character of the whole movement, and destroy the possibility of a comparatively peaceful resolving of the main social problems of our day.

John Groser.
NOTE.—This pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the view of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving the publications which it issues as worthy of consideration within the Labour Movement.

February, 1951.
DOES SOCIALISM NEED RELIGION?

Rev. JOHN GROSER

OUR CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

We are to-day concerned with the problem which faces us in our contemporary situation, not with a hypothetical one, but the actual one which concerns persons now.

It is important to remember that. For in dealing with persons we must deal with them as they are and not as we would like them to be; and with the situation in which they are, and the immediate history which led up to it and is the background upon which so much of their thought and social life depend.

The Behaviour of Persons in Society

We are living in a society in which we have become accustomed to accept a certain way of life which imposes on us checks and restraints which govern to a great extent our behaviour. We may object to many of the restraints of the past, and think it right to get rid of them, and indeed in our own day we have witnessed the departure of many of the more obvious of them, but there are more subtle ones which are still performing their task of holding society together and conditioning human behaviour, though we think very little about them. Their removal would very soon cause a noticeable change in human behaviour and relationships.

Herbert Butterfield in his recent book Christianity and History says:

"The plain truth is that if you were to remove certain subtle safeguards in society, many men who had been respectable all their lives would be transformed by the discovery of the things which it was now possible to do with impunity; weak men would apparently take to crime who had previously been kept on the rails by a certain balance existing in society; and you can produce a certain condition of affairs in which people go plundering and stealing though hitherto throughout their lives it had never occurred to them even to want to steal."

If, therefore, we are to enquire what most valuable things in our own partly democratised society need to be conserved and developed as foundations for a democratic socialist way of life, it is necessary for us to include an examination of the forces which act unobtrusively in conditioning the behaviour and habits of
persons. This is not easy, for they are so interwoven into the very texture of our social life, and seem to persist in spite of so many radical social changes, that we are apt to think that they are either permanent and not likely to be altered by further more radical changes still, or that a change of pattern in society will produce the necessary substitutes without much friction.

It is also necessary for us to consider man himself. How little he changes in the course of history over a measurable distance! We see his reactions under differing circumstances: his power to acquire more knowledge of the world he lives in; his growing pride of achievement and power to control his environment; his ability to achieve a high level of culture and civilisation; and we see his hopes dashed to the ground and his world crumble round him. Something has been gained in the experiment, and future generations have been able to learn a great deal from the failure and success of previous ones. But are we better than our forefathers? Given certain conditions are there any of us who would dare to say, “I could never be guilty of that”?

The problem we have to deal with is not merely the problem of society but the problem of man himself, of man as a creature capable of a high measure of sacrifice and altruism and not incapable of utter beastliness. And, however far we go on, it does not seem likely that we shall evolve a race of men differing fundamentally from ourselves. I used to think that so many of my own temptations and sins were peculiar to me and a few people like me; I know now that they are the lot of most men. I later got to the stage of thinking that there were a few who were a sort of race apart, and who could be relied upon to behave consistently under any conditions. I know to-day that that too is a big assumption. But so far as it is true, it is invariably because their lives are rooted in something constant beyond society, beyond politics, which seems to them to be a good unaffected by the events of time and space.

The saints would admit that this is not their personal discovery but something mediated to them. So whether it be we or they, man generally is so conditioned by the pattern of life into which he is born and which he comes to accept, that any violent distortion of that pattern, or disillusionment as to its validity, is apt to produce the most unexpected results.

Man cannot be relied upon to react the way we think he should to schemes which seem so obviously to be for his good. On the one hand there are people, and they are by no means confined to intellectuals, who, though they do not seem to be much concerned about social and political changes, are apt to produce a most violent reaction to changes which affect their pursuit of a good beyond politics, beyond society. On the other hand, there are those whom
nothing will induce to exchange the freedoms they have come to cherish for the new freedoms temptingly held out to them. (That is one of the problems we have to face in the Docks to-day, where many feel that the freedoms gained by economic security have been won at the cost of freedoms they value, and which have been won only after bitter struggle.)

The reactions we have to consider, that is, are the reactions of those in pursuit of "the good" as well as the reactions of those who would welcome the disturbance of a traditional pattern of life as an occasion for licence.

We must bear in mind, not merely the good we would do, but the good that men cherish as good, as well as the pattern by which the masses live tolerably decently, and the sanctions upon which they have hitherto rested. We must beware either of decrying the real virtues of earlier societies, or of thinking too highly of human nature and expecting too much of it. No Government has the right to rely on more than average human behaviour, and they are likely to get much less than the average for a long time to come if they are instrumental in destroying the sanctions upon which hitherto that behaviour has rested. There is bound to be a very long period of chaos following such a disillusionment or change of pattern. In attempting to answer the question "Is religion necessary to Socialism?" I want first to say that there are certain forms of Socialism for which "religion" can perform its greatest service by presiding at its obsequies, and there are "religions" which would fit ill with other forms of socialism and hinder much of the good which it professes and desires to do.

FRUITS OF THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION IN BRITAIN

It is necessary in my opinion to state the question before us thus: "In this society, which is trying to give expression to the values of justice and equality and the national common management of affairs of common concern as a necessary step in a further development of community living, how far can that society, whose growth is so intertwined with Christian thought and whose ideas are so much the fruit of the Christian tradition, break with that tradition, and retain, not only its ideas and ideals, but carry into these changes of society the enthusiasm and goodwill of the masses, whose minds and outlook have been so moulded and conditioned by the Christian tradition?"

I put it this way, because we have to deal with people as they are; and in so far as we are concerned about religion in order to understand them and their situation, it is about that particular form of religion or way of life we call Christianity, because there has been
in our tradition, and is to-day, here, no effective rival accepted generally by all classes.

When Engels in 1886 quoted with approval the saying of Karl Marx that "Britain was the only country in Europe where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means," he was of course looking at the total situation—our insular position, our climate, racial characteristics, accidents of history, which led to the discovery and use of the conjunction of coal and iron and the ability to use them at a propitious moment in our history, the existence of a large and powerful middle class: and all these things must be taken into account in assessing the value of this statement. But he was not unaware of the existence of a continuous Christian, liberal, democratic tradition accepted generally by all classes of our society, which contained certain common ideas about the nature and destiny of man, and his relation to something beyond society and even beyond history. This acted as a cement in society, it created a certain temper of mind, and a tolerance which in periods of acute crisis prevented permanent and unbridgeable chasms in social relationships between classes, and made possible those social adjustments of a very radical nature, which economic circumstances demanded, with the minimum of friction.

Christopher Dawson says of this unity which transcends politics, "In the past this unity was taken for granted; it was an unconscious social fact arising out of the natural structure of society from the life of the people and the national tradition of culture."

Society as a whole in this country accepted a belief in the Fatherhood of God, the Christian valuation of men as children of God, and a belief in a benevolent purposive providence governing and judging individual and social action, as the basis of its life. However persistently these beliefs were contradicted in practice, so long as they were accepted as a standard of judgment, they served as a lever by means of which social changes were continually being made.

If I may quote from my own book, Politics and Persons: —

"Because our people generally did believe that certain things about themselves and one another were true, even when it seemed inconvenient to believe them, and because they believed in God incarnate in Christ and active in redemption, the true value and dignity of persons rested upon something outside history and yet involved in it. Hence they were convicted of sin whenever they attempted to treat individuals as mere means to an end in history.

"In such a society we witness the gradual growth of representative institutions to give expression to the need and demand
of persons for responsibility in every sphere of life. The development of such institutions was not continuous, for there is always a tension between self-interest and the rights and duties of a man’s ‘neighbour’; but so long as men held this belief they were bound in some measure to implement it in their social arrangements. Such freedom as we enjoy, democracy and democratic institutions, the vote, women’s suffrage, educational and social welfare institutions and the implementing of the principle of self-determination in our overseas relationships, witness to the recognition of the rights and duties of the individual irrespective of his perceived value to current society. Their growth has been irregular amid the conflict between economic demands and religious belief; and the history of trade unions, as well as of factory legislation and limitations on the use of child labour, has many fearful and bloody passages. Nevertheless, that history is not complete without reference to the strength which religious values gave to their protagonists, and the way in which they sapped the resistance of those who opposed them.”

and who themselves were conditioned by these same beliefs.

And again:—

“The enormous advances made in our system of the administration of justice, in our treatment of criminals, in our hospitals and social services generally, would not have been possible apart from this spur and check. In face of it, the right of the working man to organise could not for long be denied, and attempts to crush the exercise of that right were defeated by causes which were not entirely economic. Those most desperately bent on opposing it found themselves confronted by a corporate conscience which they could not in the end resist.

“Even the supporter of capitalism and imperialism was restrained from complete ruthlessness in his economic policy because of the conflict within himself, however much at times he tried to hide behind necessity. It was not merely hypocrisy which linked missionary zeal with empire building.”

THE CONTRIBUTION OF:—

1. Wesley and the Methodists.

There were periods when the antagonism between the classes reached breaking point, and that particular point during the Industrial Revolution, which witnessed the beginning of the modern working-class and trade-union movement, coincided providentially with a religious revival, which played a great part in its birth. Wesley
himself would no doubt be horrified to hear Morgan Phillips say that “The growth of the Labour Party owes more to Methodism than to Marx,” for the Wesleyans had no intention of assisting such a growth, let alone interfering with the established order of society. What Wesley did for the working-class movement was a by-product, but a natural by-product, of the preaching of eternal salvation, which developed qualities in them which made them sufficiently independent of the terrible conditions to which they were subjected, to be able to do something constructive about them. Moreover, as the Hammonds point out in *The Town Labourer*, by “inviting him to take a place in the management of the affairs of his religious society: perhaps to help in choosing a minister, to feel that he had a share in its life, responsibility for its risks and undertakings, pride in its successes and reputation,” they provided the stimulus which was needed. “As a mere exercise in self-government and social life, the Chapel occupied a central place in the affections and the thought of people who had very little to do with the government of anything else.” “Thus religion did for the working class what Greek and Roman literature did for the ruling class. Drawing aside the curtain from a remote and interesting world, seeming thus to make their own world more intelligible.”

The consequences of all this were far-reaching. It is true that the energies of many were directed from the class struggle at a time when wise energy was scarce; it is true that Methodism was greatly responsible for preventing a widespread and open revolt; but it is also true that this movement coloured the whole future development of the trade union and Labour movement, and produced many of its leaders.

2. The Christian Socialists

The carrying on of all this by a succession of Christian leaders like Ludlow, Kingsley, F. D. Maurice, Neale and others, with definite sympathy for the working class, and a preparedness to co-operate with them in a constructive programme, and identify themselves with the Chartist Movement, had this result, that to quote Cole and Postgate in *The Common People*—

“together with Radical dissenting ministers they (the Christian Socialists) were responsible for preventing that hostility between the organised working class and organised religion which became universal on the Continent. There was, henceforward, always a small percentage of persons with a genuine sympathy with Socialism and the misery of the working class, whose influence prevented the Church and the Chapels being counted wholly as enemies; similarly a strain of religiosity and pietism ran powerfully in the Labour movement
and was later to be an effective obstacle to the spread of
Marxian philosophy."

Now whether we like this or not is no matter. It is just a fact
of our history, that in one of its most critical periods no permanent
and unbridgeable chasm developed in social relationships between
classes in this country, and radical changes in our social structure
were possible without violent and bloody revolution.

3. Karl Marx

Marx made indeed a tremendous contribution to the British
working-class movement, and has continued to influence it ever
since. He gave it a deeper understanding of history, and a basis
which helped the working classes to interpret the history of their
own times and to understand themselves. They went on learning
from Marx the nature of the job they had set themselves, and some
of the tools which could be used to carry it through; but in general
they were always looking at these in the light of their general back-
ground, and developing a strategy not inconsistent with a commonly
held tradition of behaviour. This process of adaptation of new
ideas to an indigenous situation is part of our tradition. On the
whole they rejected the new theory of man and his relation to a
time-space universe. They accepted neither the crude materialism
of some nor the dialectic materialism of others, though they used
the latter as a rough guide.

In so far as they were convinced that the State was being used
as a tool by the ruling class for their own economic and social
purposes, they realised the need for its capture, but saw in it an
instrument to be used for ironing out class injustices and flagrant
inequalities, rather than as an instrument for a new class domina-
tion. They accepted the class struggle as a fact, but never class
warfare as a weapon. They rejected the conception of the dictator-
ship of the proletariat as an integral method of revolution, and put
their trust in their democratic tradition and the hope of a peaceful
transition. So they were able to carry with them a host of people
among other classes, and organise within the Trade Union Congress
middle-class groups who eventually helped them into political
power. In fact, as radical changes in the organisation of society
became imperative, the British people in general, and the working
class in particular, evolved a conception both of the nature of the
changes necessary, and the manner of making them consistent with
their traditional behaviour, and therefore able to be made with the
minimum of friction and upsetting of society.

In means and ends they differed widely from those who threw
over this tradition.

As a result of this process we are to-day committed to far-
reaching changes in our social structure. There is no contracting out of that. Masses of people to-day are aware of new possibilities of which a century ago they were unaware. They know that a richer material life is possible: that there is no necessity for dire poverty, no need for large-scale unemployment. We can never go back to the old conditions without a bloody counter-revolution.

But the very nature of this history of development commits us to far more than an increase of material goods. We are committed to move forward to a development of community life affecting the whole of society. Now real community is, I believe, only possible where the people who compose it know themselves to be more than mere units in society, dependent upon society for their value. They must be in a position to give to society a contribution which is their own by nature. This is, I believe, a religious idea. It depends on consciousness of a relationship of both man and society to something beyond either.

RELIGIOUS SANCTIONS AND NATURAL LAW

But I would go further. Eric Mascall, in Death or Dogma, tells a story of a bishop who once remarked, “That the Socialists want the Church to interfere in politics because they think that religion is a good thing for Socialism, while Conservatives want the Church to keep out of politics because they too think that religion is a good thing for Socialism, and that both are thoroughly bad reasons; the question that is worth considering being, not whether the Christian religion is a good thing for Socialism, but how far Socialism stands for the values of the Christian religion.”

Such a statement rests on the belief that not only human beings, but human institutions, are under the judgment of God, and cannot with impunity ignore the basic laws of social life, and that the Christian religion makes explicit these laws. But though they have come to be accepted in our own country as resting on religious sanctions, they are in fact of the nature of things. How far, then, does Socialism stand for those values which indeed have been made conscious to us and deepened in meaning through the Christian Gospel, but which are true whether we accept them or not?

Jacques Maritain in his Rights of Man says:

“I am taking it for granted that you admit that there is a human nature, and that this human nature is the same in all men. I am taking it for granted that you also admit that man is a being gifted with intelligence, and who, as such, acts with an understanding of what he is doing, and therefore with the power to determine for himself the ends which he pursues. On the other hand, possessed of a nature, being constituted in
a given, determinate fashion, man obviously possesses ends which correspond to his natural constitution and which are the same for all. . . . But since man is endowed with intelligence and determines his own ends, it is up to him to put himself in tune with the ends necessarily demanded by his nature. This means that there is, by virtue of human nature, an order or a disposition which human reason can discover and according to which the human will must act in order to attune itself to the necessary ends of the human being. The unwritten law, or natural law, is nothing more than that.”

Now it is not necessary to be a Christian to accept this; but, as Maritain says:

“The consciousness of the dignity of the person and of the rights of the person remained implicit in pagan antiquity, over which the law of slavery cast its shadow. It was the message of the Gospel which suddenly awakened this consciousness, in a divine and transcendent form, revealing to men that they are called upon to be the sons and heirs of God in the Kingdom of God. Under the evangelical impulse, this same awakening was little by little to spread forth, with regard to the requirements of natural law, over the realm of man’s life here on earth, and of the terrestrial city.”

and continues:

“Because they understand the real principle of this law, belief in it is firmer and more unshakable in those who believe in God than in the others. Belief in human nature and in the freedom of the human being, however, is in itself sufficient to convince us that there is an unwritten law, and to assure us that natural law is something as real in the moral realm as the laws of growth and senescence in the physical.”

This means that “the human person possesses rights because of the very fact that it is a person, a whole, master of itself and of its acts, and which consequently is not merely a means to an end, but an end, an end which must be treated as such.” The dignity of the human person “means nothing if it does not signify that by virtue of natural law the human person has a right to be respected, is the subject of rights, possesses rights. There are things which are owed to man because of the very fact that he is man.”

“The notion of right and the notion of moral obligation are correlative. They are both founded on the freedom proper to spiritual agents. If man is morally bound to the things which are necessary to the fulfilment of his destiny, obviously, then, he has the right to fulfil his destiny; and if he has the right to fulfil his destiny, he has the right to the things necessary for this purpose.”

“The political task,” therefore, “towards which all this must
tend is the good human life of the multitude, the betterment of the conditions of human life itself, the internal improvement and the progress—material, of course, but also and principally moral and spiritual—thanks to which man’s attributes are to be realised and made manifest in history; the essential and primordial objective for which men assemble within the political community is to procure the common good of the multitude, in such a manner that each concrete person, not only in a privileged class, but throughout the whole mass, may truly reach that measure of independence which is proper to civilised life and which is insured alike by the economic guarantees of work and property, political rights, civil virtues, and the cultivation of the mind.”

CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING WITH THIS TRADITION

Now this conception does not, as Maritain says, necessitate a belief in God. But in the form in which it has come to us, and in its present-day connotation, it is so bound up with a belief in God in the minds of the masses, that any widespread throwing over of that belief would produce a chaotic situation, in which men would for a long period act otherwise than in the manner we have come to rely on in our method of making social changes. We have in fact relied upon a very large number of people ready for the sacrifice and devotion in ordinary life and in society which impels them to go beyond what is required by the light of reason, and to love their fellow beings and sacrifice themselves for them and for posterity.

Moreover, our people generally have come through the Christian Gospel to accept a belief in a providence which gives them a sense of security, a feeling of purpose in life, and a realisation of rights and duties demanded of them. They have been subjected to bombardment from every quarter. The leaders of the Church, who should be expected to stand for a defence of the human person, have so often betrayed the Gospel. The smatterings of science which filtered down to them during the last two centuries tended to confuse them still further and cut at the basis of their belief and morale. Caught up in the industrial machine they felt themselves increasingly to be mere tools of an inhuman juggernaut and mere slaves of economic purposes. Political philosophies have arisen which claimed to restore their status as persons on new conditions; conditions which meant a rejection of religious sanctions and their feeling that they were meant for a purpose beyond history, and an acceptance of a status as members of a class or a state, which in return for a subservience amounting to idolatry would not only give them an historical purpose worth living for, but in their own lifetime ease some of their material
burdens and economic slavery. They have seen some of these collapse in ruin, but our problem is complicated to-day by the illusions that many of our people have about the Communist one which in the minds of many of them is "not yet proven."

They have seen their own leaders gradually breaking away from the old corpus of religious belief and many of the "conventions" which have gathered round it. But through all this the great mass of people have remained remarkably sane, and have lived in their homes and personal relationships a life which was the natural fruit of the Christian Gospel, in sufficient numbers to act as a leaven in society and prevent its disintegration. Every now and again in crises they have shown a readiness for sacrifice, a simple nobleness of character, and a closing of the ranks round simple truths held in common, which have astounded the world and perhaps saved it from collapse.

But you can place no reliance upon the continuance of this under any conditions. Already it is true, I believe, that the individual morality is higher than the social one, that men in private life live to a higher standard than in public life, that the breakdown in morals at the top is invading the masses. How far is this Socialist movement in its planning, and how far are its leaders, by their lives and actions, going to restore confidence to the people that Socialism is not just another plan based on "economic necessity" or a private idea of a few clever people, but that the thing we are pursuing is consistent with the "nature of things," is consistent with man's rights and duties as a person, and does not render still more difficult his pursuit of a good beyond society and beyond history?

It is not sufficient to have a tidy plan called socialism. We are playing with dynamic material, not the least dynamic being God Himself, who has a plan of His own, and who created persons in such a way that they are likely to upset the most careful plans of those who do things "for their good," and treat them not as persons with an end in themselves, but as isotypes. Butterfield says, "Those who came nearest to planning the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution threw up their hands with horror when they saw the things which actually took place, swearing that they had never intended to produce anything like this." For man unleashed from the bonds which restrain him is apt to react most violently in his new-found licence, until he returns to something like sanity and re-clothes himself in the restraining garments which make for freedom. And this is all the more likely when those bonds are invisible ones, and he is kidded into believing that he has been fooled and that these existed only in his imagination.

If Socialism is to be more than a convenient plan for dealing with a peculiar economic situation, it must be seen to be something which is based on the inherent nature of things, and in this country
it must be consistent with the belief that that has been illumined and given validity by the revelation of God in Christ, and that it is not destructive of man's nature and purpose beyond history. You may break with that tradition openly, as the Communist does, but if you do you must be as logical as he and realise that it means a revolution in ideas, in means and ends, and be prepared to dragoon people to your will. You may use religious fervour which you know to be "phony" as Hitler and others have done, and in the end draw down seven devils. But what you cannot do is to expect behaviour from people consistent with Christian beliefs, in order to help you build a pattern of life inconsistent with those beliefs; for the belief and the pattern are one in any true religion.

THREE TESTING POINTS

1. The Family as the Natural Unit of Society.

Man is a person, but person implies society; and man receives his first experience of society in the family, which is the natural unit through which he gains experience as he moves forward to the larger unit, political society. The family is the place where persons first develop natural relationships with a responsibility towards other persons. It is a biological fact we cannot ignore, and the initial form of man's social life. As William Temple says in his Penguin, *Christianity and the Social Order*:

"Any ordering of society which impairs or destroys the stability of the family stands condemned on that account alone."

The family is not just a convenient arrangement for bringing children into the world and regulating man's sexual instincts, but by nature the training place for persons in social living and the ends for which they were created, and therefore part of the natural order. It can only perform that function properly if it gives to persons that sense of stability necessary for full development. The moment the family is conceived of merely as a human or social convenience resting upon no sanctions beyond the whims of society itself it is in danger. A healthy family life can only be maintained by persons who recognise the permanent ends for which it exists, and are prepared for sacrifices to those ends. The stability of the family has been threatened more than once in our history. It was threatened during the Industrial Revolution, when economic demands caught up both parent and child in the maw of the machine. Even when this did not uproot the home itself, it produced conditions within it which destroyed the natural relationship, economic and social, between parent and child. And in our own time nothing, in my opinion, did more to destroy home life than the working of the Means Test, which, during the chronic unem-
ployment of the parent, made both him and the younger children dependent on the earning children, and so not only reversed the natural order of things, but produced such instability that the break-up of the home was the naturally sought remedy.

I am in general agreement with G. D. H. Cole, who in his essay in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians,* affirms that the modern growth of social security has not undermined parental responsibility and human behaviour in the home; but there are nevertheless tendencies to-day which do threaten its stability, and indeed are already slowly undermining it. Some of these are a heritage of the past, some of them are, like those of the past, due to the consideration of economic necessity as paramount, and some of them due to a breakdown in common moral standards.

I remember Julius Hecker once saying that in Russia after the Revolution it was considered necessary to take vast numbers of children away from their parents and put them under the care of the state, on the ground that parents are the worst educators of children. Very soon they had to reject this, not in the interests of the children but in the interests of the parents, because the break-up of this natural association tended to destroy social life. The family, that is, must be considered as a unit, for it is based on the unique character of man in the universe, to which this association of common parents to a succession of births who live and grow together and have a common bond even beyond puberty, seems to be of nature.

An increasing number of mothers are to-day being incited, if not forced, to seek work which requires of them time and energy, which makes a real home life very difficult. I sometimes wonder whether our whole wage structure does not need altering, so that the rate for the job is deliberately backed up by standards of family allowances such that the married man is able to maintain his family without almost inhuman sacrifices. At the moment it seems to me to be uneconomic as well as destructive of community to base it on standards which allow the adolescent and unmarried adult to cash in on a wage far beyond his necessity, and enjoy a standard of life far beyond the capacity of the married man, and to use the needs of the married man as a weapon for further increasing that standard.

Furthermore, the virtues, or if you like the incentives, necessary for a democratic society based on full employment and social security, if not cultivated in the family, are in general not likely to be present in society.

The growing tendency to premarital, or even promiscuous, intercourse on the ground that "I want it, she wants it, why not?"; the matter-of-fact distribution of contraceptives in the army which seemed to take for granted that the ordinary citizen, male and female, is a prostitute by nature and has the sanction of society for
behaving as such; the alarming increase in the number of children born out of wedlock; the queues at the divorce courts, which seem to indicate a growing regard of marriage as a convenient social arrangement to be ended as soon as a difficulty arises or another desirable object appears; these things, coupled with the increase in juvenile delinquency, which to most social workers is so closely linked to broken home life, are sufficient in themselves to cause real concern. No one can be complacent about family life in the face of such facts. But if it is true that not only any healthy social life, but in particular the virtues and spontaneity necessary in a socialist society, when so many material compulsions are done away with, depend upon a healthy family life, and the cultivation of those virtues there, the outlook is indeed serious.

Hitherto the family has rested upon religious sanctions, and men and women have disciplined their passions and controlled their habits by a belief that they had a personal responsibility to God, and a reliance on the grace of God, in sufficient numbers to maintain a social equilibrium. A great number have through this discipline found a love and a happiness in marriage and family life, which seemed at one time impossible to them and which is perhaps only found through sacrifice. They are, I believe, the salt of the earth. But most of them would admit that they were helped to pass through the naturally difficult periods by a mutual acceptance of the permanent nature of their union and the obligations that imposed on each of them.

I do not believe that any society can be stable unless it rests upon a healthy family life, and that in turn is unlikely to a people who believe that that rests upon no other sanction that social convenience or personal happiness.

2. Natural Voluntary Associations.

But though the family is of paramount importance as the real unit of society, man moves out of this into other natural associations of a voluntary kind. The health and strength of these are, I believe, integral to real democracy.

Dr. Temple says:—

"It is the common failing of revolutionary politics to ignore or attempt to destroy these lesser associations."

Human beings are never conscious of real freedom or able to develop truly as persons unless they can enter freely into these natural autonomous groupings which satisfy their social cravings, their particular needs as persons, and which are not too big for them to play a personal part.

These associations are not only necessary for the development of persons for their true ends, they are the only guarantee of true
freedom. They act as a buffer between the person and the state, and tend to prevent individualism and anarchy on the one hand, any tyranny on the other. They are highly inconvenient to the tidy planner, and unlikely to be welcomed and fostered unless they are seen as a means to an end beyond society, and only incidentally as it were giving stability to society by the fact that they constitute a permanent need of man.

3. The Duties and Limitations of the State.

This leads us to a consideration of the State. We are born into a family, a family which together with other families makes up the larger society we call the nation.

As we enter this, we become aware of obligations, not only to people now living, but to a corporate life which existed long before we were born, whose tradition, order and culture we enjoy, and which will continue long after us. We have, therefore, obligations towards those who have gone before us, to those yet unborn whose lives will be so much conditioned by our actions now, as well as to contemporary society. This society of societies called a nation is in a very real sense a compulsory association. We do not choose to belong to it, and cannot normally contract out of it. To escape by suicide is a crime, and we have had in modern times in the experience of millions, the anomaly of being stateless. Life in such a complex society would be chaotic were it not for the existence of the State, responsible for the direction and organisation necessary for social life and the prevention of anarchy. Within society the State has particular functions to perform, which are necessary for the health and preservation of the members of that society, the natural units within it such as the family, and the furtherance of the ends for which society is instituted. The State does not exist for its own sake. It is society itself, as has been said, “which is the natural reality springing spontaneously from the associative nature of man and from the biological and psychological facts of man’s human constitutions; and within society, while the natural unit is the family, the associative impulse extends in many directions, economic, cultural, recreational and religious.” The function of the State is “the harmonious correlation of these natural growths and activities which are necessary for the ends for which man was created.” These ends do not, as we have said, rest upon the decision of the State; they are of the nature of man.

It is the duty of the State to take account of the whole of the members it orders. We cannot, therefore, expect its laws and regulations to be ideal. They will represent in general only the minimum necessary for order, the maximum it is prepared to insist on to mark the general level which society at the moment has reached in its growth towards true ends, to see to it that the way
to freedom of development is kept open, and to ensure that those things to which all must have access in order to live are freely accessible to all, and not denied them by the acquisitiveness or love of power of the few. Among its functions, therefore, is that of maintaining conditions in a changing order such that its members can live and act as responsible persons. No nation or society can be healthy if the lives of its members are determined by law. It is healthy only when the individuals and groups within it are conscious of a social harmony and a direction of life which they implement naturally, not for fear of the consequences of disobedience, but because of a common spirit.

Within society people come together to perform certain necessary functions and form associations to those ends, social, economic, cultural, religious, etc. Some of these are so vital to the life of society that the success or failure of them affects every member.

This is particularly true of the economic associations, which may begin for admirable reasons, but which tend to identify the ends they seek with absolute good, condition more and more totally the lives of all the members of society as they gather into their hands the means by which all must live, and in particular enslave the masses to the production machine. In the face of this the State is bound to take notice or dissolve in anarchy, and in Britain we have witnessed the steady interference by the State in tyrannical monopoly, and an increasing concern for the welfare of all the members of Society. The implicit notion that the State has a duty to every member of society has been made explicit in our own time by the passing of social legislation, which insists that the sick, poor and needy and those who seem to be able to make little or no contribution to society are still to be treated as persons with full rights and no longer as paupers.

All through, the battle has been fought on the principle that the State is properly, not the organ of a class, nor even merely of persons now living, but of a continuous living community; to preserve and treasure what was good of the past, to be concerned for all its members now living, and to husband and develop resources for those who come after. This theory is based on the belief that the State itself is “under authority” to something beyond itself, beyond even the expressed will of a majority at any given moment. That there is a court of appeal beyond that is implicit in our tradition of an official opposition to a democratically elected Parliament. The majority is not beyond criticism.

The fact that the modern devices for electing them to seats of authority, and the great power of modern propaganda methods, may give (and sometimes in history have given) an unscrupulous group temporary power, does not carry the right to use that power for any end they may themselves conceive. The tyranny of a
majority acknowledging no authority beyond its own will is probably more bestial than the tyranny of a minority which at least knows that it has to proceed with circumspection to maintain power. Economic tyranny is no less terrible when it is exercised by the many.

Justice ceases to be justice when it becomes proletarian; when it ceases, that is, to try to conform to any external criteria other than the law passed by a majority determined to maintain its own privilege and perpetuate its own existence. It is my contention that no society can be healthy or growing healthily to true ends unless it acknowledges an authority beyond itself. The recognition of such an authority is unlikely, if not impossible, without belief in a transcendent God.

Such belief has, in this country, generally been accepted and felt to have validity because of the revelation of God in Christ, and is bound up with our Christian tradition. Hitherto, our people—even where they have rejected institutional religion—have held to this belief, and this has played a great part in the development of the Socialist movement in this country, and distinguished it from Fascism and Communism in both means and ends. Any departure from that would be disastrous, and alter radically its character. There are those who have rejected this and embraced a positive atheism which claims, as Maritain says, “that man is the sole master of his destiny... utterly independent of any final end or any eternal law imposed by any transcendent God.” Such people, in so far as they are politically minded, are bound, sooner or later, to find themselves in one or other of the secular totalitarian camps. Against these, agnosticism is insipid and powerless. It can provide no real leadership or inspiration; nor can it give any valid or convincing reason why people should behave in the manner they wish them to, let alone provide any dynamic for individual or social action. While belief in God cannot be compelled, it is, in my opinion, important that both atheists and agnostics should be aware of the social and political consequences of unbelief.

In my opinion the Socialist movement in Britain is unlikely to remain true to its aims and capable of carrying out its purposes unless there are, in every walk of life, a sufficient number of men and women whose lives and actions are grounded in a positive belief in God, which gives them confidence that the things they are doing and the discipline and sacrifice demanded are fulfilling of their nature as persons with an eternal destiny.

But however widespread this belief may be in the rank and file, it must be evident also in the leaders of the movement, and exhibited both in their planning and in the quality of their lives. Social Democracy, by its very nature, makes high demands of its leaders. There is a significance in Keir Hardie’s cloth cap; in
George Lansbury’s house in Bow; in the economic self-denying ordinance of the early Russian Communists we would do well to remember.

It is my conviction that leaders in a social democracy in this country are unlikely to retain the confidence and evoke the enthusiasm of the masses, unless they regard them as persons of eternal value; have a faith that the revolutionary plans they are carrying through to meet a particular historical situation are not inconsistent with their needs as persons; and aware that they themselves and the institutions they are instrumental in erecting are under the common judgment of a living God.

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