
A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

JOHN CLIFFORD'S SOCIAL GOSPEL

There are two reasons which led to the choice of this topic for the 1985 Annual Lecture. One is that it seemed appropriate when the Assembly was meeting in Nottingham to speak of one of the most distinguished Baptist ministers to come from this part of the world: for John Clifford was born at Sawley, near Long Eaton, on 16 October 1836, moved to Beeston where he was baptized on 16 June 1851, and trained for the ministry at the Academy of the New Connexion of General Baptists, first in Leicester from 1855 to 1856 and then in Nottingham from 1857 to 1858. The second reason is that the relationship between Christianity and the world of social and political questions is a topic of compelling contemporary interest. The term 'social gospel' is frequently used either almost contemptuously as a term of abuse or at best as representing a rather faded and ineffective liberal theology: whilst Christian socialism is regarded either as a contradiction or a paradox. Yet the last ten years have witnessed an increasing tendency for fundamentalist Christians, particularly in the USA, to identify themselves actively with strong, if not extreme, right-wing politics.

In such a situation one contribution the historian can make is to offer a reminder that such developments are not entirely new, though it is of course a mistake to suppose that circumstances ever repeat themselves completely. John Clifford's career and writings may serve as an appropriate focus for such reflections. In him there is a nexus of nonconformity and Liberal and Labour politics. My father tells me that my grandfather who was more or less a contemporary of Clifford had three busts on his desk, Gladstone, Blatchford and Clifford, so the combination was perhaps not untypical. He also embodies some of the questions which need to be asked in this discussion. There have, for example, been diverging views on whether he was a socialist. Peter d'A. Jones, in his book *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914,* describes Clifford without qualification as 'an active Fabian socialist', whilst Paul Thompson in his book *Socialists, Liberals and Labour* says that 'most of those [nonconformist ministers] who supported social reform, even if they called themselves socialists, William Lax of Poplar, Scott Lidgett of the Bermondsey Settlement, Dr John Clifford of Paddington, remained firmly attached to the Liberal party'.(1) Clifford is also one of the first to use the term 'social gospel' in a public address, although the social gospel has been described by one of its foremost historians as an 'indigenous and typically American movement', indeed 'America's most unique contribution to the great ongoing stream of Christianity'.(2)

Clifford's career also raises the question of whether there is a distinctive nonconformist contribution in this area. Peter Jones makes a conventional distinction in characterising the theological emphasis of Anglican Christian Socialists as incarnational and that of nonconformists as immanentist and continues

> Nonconformist socialists, however, lacking an ideological or dogmatic core of beliefs were often indistinguishable in their writings and speeches from the generality of British socialists,

> who happened to adopt, chameleon-like, the residual religiosity of rhetoric and expression common to the late Victorian age.(3)

This point has been extended to all the Churches by Edward Norman in his influential book, *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970,* the main thesis of which is

> that the social attitudes of the Church have derived from the surrounding intellectual and political culture and not, as churchmen themselves always seem to assume, from theological learning.(4)

I cannot accept the dichotomy which Dr Norman sees; I think the relationship between theological and political beliefs is more subtle and complex than he asserts; and I do not believe that nonconformists were less influenced by theology than Anglicans.

It is, however, easy to see why this kind of analysis is so attractive. Historians of the Churches' response to social problems have generally agreed that the 1880s mark a watershed. The publication in 1883 of *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* - an exposure of the appalling housing conditions in London - made the question of housing central to the discussion of social questions in the years which followed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Anthony Wohl have shown how housing became a major context for the discussion of socialism in these years, and churchmen were inevitably involved in those discussions. David Bebbington has argued that for nonconformists the housing question gained urgency as a continuation of the social purity crusade, with attention concentrated on links between poor housing, poverty, incest and prostitution.(5) In 1888-89 several industrial disputes, of which the London Match Girls' Strike and the London Dockers' Strike are the best known, again brought the Churches' attention back to social questions, and were partly responsible for the formation of the (Anglican) Christian Social Union in 1889. It is easy therefore to see the Churches' reaction as a response to secular events and the nature of that response as determined by the secular issues involved. But the fact that the Churches were prompted to turn their attention to social questions by secular events does not of itself show or even suggest, that the way in which they responded was more influenced by secular than theological considerations. Indeed there are two good reasons for believing the opposite. I suggest two: first, the events of the 1880s did not actually change what nonconformists said about social questions, but they did mean that some notice was taken of it; secondly, an examination of what was said, particularly in relation to the understanding of God and Christ, the role of law and the relation of the individual to the environment shows the effect of theological as much as secular influences. In such an examination, Clifford is a particularly useful subject, though his writings suffer from two disadvantages - the general lack of references to sources and the rhetorical style of his preaching, since most of his material consists of sermons. But the significance of the Victorial pulpit as a medium of communication may compensate in some measure for the fact that Clifford was not that most favourite target of Edward Norman's criticism - an academic.(6)

John Clifford's early life is an important clue to his later beliefs. He was born into the atmosphere of East Midlands Chartism, nurtured in the uncertainties of the outwork hosiery system. His later remarks on this are familiar:

> I began life in a factory [he wrote in his first scrap of autobiography] and I have never forgotten the cruel impressions I received there of men and work. Ebenezer Elliott's prayer was on our lips daily — 'When wilt Thou save the People?'(7)

One of his earliest heroes was the Leicester Chartist, Thomas Cooper, who later in life became a General Baptist preacher. He visited him in 1889 when Cooper was 85, and though weak and drowsy at first, he roused at a reference to Kingsley and Carlyle and 'entered with the utmost heartiness into a long conversation'. Then Clifford prayed with him and Cooper responded, 'Yes! Amen! etc'. After Cooper's death, Clifford spoke of him as one in fellowship with whom 'young men and maidens facing the social and spiritual problems of this coming century may find courage and obtain light'.(8) What is interesting about Clifford's reflection on Chartism is the emphasis he gives to the individual.

> I started life with a keen desire to see men imbued with the spirit of the Gospel, responsible to the call of Christ, delivered from their oppressive surroundings. Free to live the lives of men and not merely of animals ... The rise of the idea of the value of the individual had been suppressed by Industrialism. He was a serf, a tool, not a soul, not a spirit of the eternal: not a son of God.

Or again

> The Chartist activities were all directed toward securing opportunity for the development of the individual and specially of the weakest and most wronged individual. They aimed at securing a fine and free life for each one. And that I wanted.(9)

These comments, it should be noted, come from reflections at the end of his life: and though Marchant may have selected them to emphasise his individualism - Jones comments that Marchant's biography 'either ignored or deliberately suppressed the story of Clifford's Fabianism'(10) - they must stand as evidence of his continuing beliefs after his espousal of socialist ideas.

Another of the intellectual influences on Clifford was Emerson. One of his Sunday-school teachers gave him a copy of Emerson's *Essays* and he spoke of Emerson as 'one of the most potent forces in shaping my life': the book was in his hands the week he died.(11) Emerson is not, I suspect, much read these days, so it may be worth while describing some of the themes in those essays which most influenced Clifford, 'Self-Reliance', 'Spiritual Laws' and 'The Over Soul'. Self-Reliance emphasises the importance of having the courage of one's convictions.

> To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men - that is genius.

And there is also a radical suspicion of the tendency of society to require conformity:

> Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion ... Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.(12)

This is a kind of radical individualism, certainly not simply equated with the virtues of *laissez-faire* capitalism: and historians of ideas in the nineteenth century seem to have difficulty in doing justice to its radical potential. Emerson also is attracted to great men: 'an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man', he says, citing Luther, Fox, Wesley and Clarkson as examples: and it is easy here to see the similarity to Thomas Carlyle's emphasis on heroes and great men, including another of Clifford's favourites, Oliver Cromwell. Finally, Emerson regards 'the reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it', as the want of self-reliance.(13) Thus it is not a surprise to find Clifford saying in his Angus Lectures for 1906, *The Ultimate Problems of Christianity*, that Jesus created 'a new consciousness of self, of a larger, nobler self' and that

> Lifted to those ranges, Ruskin, the prophet of the beautiful, describes man as capable of an infinite height of strange and marvellous developments; and Emerson cries aloud, 'Trust thyself, exert thyself; follow thine own soul; be true to it, and all will be well'; and both are echoing the great words of the Christian Religion.(14)

Is Clifford reading the New Testament in the light of Emerson, or Emerson in the light of the New Testament? The answer to such a question is not simple, but since no-one could claim that Clifford was a unitarian transcendentalist in the way that Emerson was, one cannot regard Clifford's debt to and use of his writings as a slavish following of intellectual fashion. That in any case would hardly be in keeping with the particular teaching in question - the need to follow one's own convictions and prove truth for oneself.

When Clifford took up his first and only pastorate, at Praed Street, later Westbourne Park Baptist Church, London, he rapidly made it clear that he envisaged the church as having a public ministry. In his first church report he said

> We exist as a church and congregation, not only for our spiritual improvement, but also and specially for saving the souls and bodies of the people in the neighbourhood in which

> we are located. We have a private object - the consolation and help of each other in the endeavours after spiritual manhood. We have a public object, in the decrease of the evils of society, and the increase of individual and social good by the dissemination of the Gospel of Christ.(15)

This was in 1859.

Praed Street was one of the first 'institutional' churches in London. In 1861 Clifford established the Mutual Economical Benefit Society, followed by the Mutual Improvement Society with free lectures and a weekly study class, out of which the Westbourne Park Institute described by Marchant as 'a people's university' eventually grew in 1885. Later in life Clifford recalled that in his early years questions of biblical interpretation seemed to concern his callers most, but that later social problems came to the fore. In 1885 when the Institute began, the first class studied Ruskin - *The Crown of Wild Olive, Unto this Last* and *Munera Pulveris.* It was this class which studied such questions as:

> 1. Can the excesses of competition be adequately restrained by Government interference, or by any authority external to the industrial organisation itself?
>
> 2. Criticize the statement, 'It is futile to attempt to raise wages by artificial means'.
>
> 3. Can co-operation be regarded as a permanent cure for the evils of competition?
>
> 4. Is co-operation opposed to the principles of hired labour?
>
> 5. Must there always be a large class of society dependent for maintenance on the more common forms of physical labour, and constituting what we know as a 'labouring class'.

The Institute grew to include literary and scientific lectures, classes in Modern Languages, mathematics and practical skills like shorthand, building construction and dress making; there was a choral association and a reading room. Eventually there were seventy classes a week and a membership of 1300, and the Institute received government and London County Council grants; but from 1900 a process of transfer of classes began to the Paddington Technical Institute.(16) In such ways Clifford gave practical expression to the advice he was giving to a student in 1885 when he wrote

> Social problems are in the ascendant, and the preacher who has no clear and intelligent message about them will fail in doing all he ought. I therefore want him to go in for political economy, the study of Socialism and the like. He has taken a class in Hebrew at University College, and I hope will take the other classes by and by...(17)

It was in essence what he had done himself when he first came to London and as a student at University College took the degrees of

B.A., B.Sc., M.A. and LL.B. with first class honours in several papers.

Richard Mudie Smith, who was one of Clifford's 'boys', described his ministry as having two ruling ideas. One was that the church was a society of men and women who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Master and Teacher, with the consequent obligation to realise the mutual responsibilities and obligations of their filial relationship to God as one great family. In this context Clifford's own motto for his ministry was, 'I am in the midst of you as he that serveth'. The second was 'the recognition of God's claim to sovereignty over the whole realm of man's activities'. So the distinction between sacred and secular, consecrated and profane, was denied.(18)

Hence it was natural that the church should develop the range of activities represented in the Institute; so also when in September 1885 the church meeting appointed a committee on social questions, one of its first activities was to take up W. T. Stead's Purity Crusade and open a home to provide accommodation for young girls attracted to London who found themselves in difficulties.(19) This illustrates Dr Bebbington's point about the link between the concerns over prostitution and housing referred to earlier.

Undoubtedly in the 1880s Clifford's own commitment to social questions increased with the spirit of the time. Two quotations from his diary in 1888 when he was working in the British Museum on his autumn address as President of the Baptist Union are illuminating. On 30 August he wrote

> What perishes in the general struggle which throbs through all history is the limitation of the individual and the limitation of the nation... An ideal, far in advance of practicability though it may be, is always needful for right guidance.

Again on 16 September he wrote

> This day has deeply impressed me (1) with the need for more attention to the social problems of the day. Churches should have social missionaries attached to them, should also become organizations for the promotion of the social welfare of the people. Workers should be trained who should not be *theological*. The Church has made too much of theology. 'Ethical Culture' is a reaction against extravagances and follies of the theological party. (2) The need for work to attract the young people from the pavement. Sunday Schools must look to their work. The churches and the young people.(20)

The address he gave at the Huddersfield Assembly on 3 October 1888 was entitled 'The new City of God; or the Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel'; and nearly a year later Clifford thought he saw the 'first fruits of the social Gospel' in the sympathy for dockers in the London Dock Strike of 1889.(21) Twenty years later Keir Hardie remembered that he had first heard Clifford speak of political and social action at this time.(22) Bateman noted that Clifford's sympathy for the dockers extended to the miners' struggle for a living wage and to the strike of the Bethesda quarrymen. He also said that Clifford

was always a friend of working men and they appreciated him for it, giving as an example nearly a thousand men in the Midlands listening attentively to a gospel message at their breakfast hour. Perhaps he was more at home in the Midlands since George Bernard Shaw recalled a Fabian Society meeting in the early 1880s when some working men tauntingly asked Clifford what he knew of hard work, seeing he was a parson, and he told them of his experiences of child labour before the Factory Acts.(23)

In 1894 Clifford became the first president of the predominantly nonconformist Christian Socialist League, which began in a Ministers' Union also under his leadership, declaring that

> This country cannot accurately be called Christian so long as people in their collective capacity, by their social, industrial and commerical arrangements, practically deny the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.(24)

The League held public meetings in London and formed several branches outside the capital in 1894 and 1895; but it never published a journal. In 1898 it was replaced by the Christian Social Brotherhood, of which Clifford was also President. Though that lasted into the new century, it was never very large, having a mainly ministerial membership and from 1902 Clifford's energies were mainly directed to the battle over the Education Act.(25)

Politically, as Paul Thompson rightly observed, Clifford remained a supporter of the Liberal party, especially at the national level. In London politics he supported the Progressive Alliance of Liberals and Labour, urging the young men of Westbourne Park in 1898

> to make every church a source of civic enlightenment and a fount of civic enthusiasm; to cultivate a sense of civic duty, of civic responsibility and privilege, and to get rid of that fearfullest of all diseases - the atrophy of the social conscience, the social heart, and the social will. Rouse yourselves, young men! Stand by your County Council. Secure a decisive majority of Progressives at the forthcoming election.(26)

In 1900, when because of his opposition to the Boer War, Westbourne Park had to be protected by the police for three nights, he wrote a letter looking forward to a political realignment which would 'create a party if we can, composed of the most level-headed of the Socialists and the most radical of the Radicals'. He argued that Liberalism had always advanced by shedding its 'wealthier and more "aristocratic" members ... and by going to a "lower" stratum of the social world and working with it and by it for the good of the nation and the world'. He took encouragement from the fact that Morley was overcoming his aversion to co-operation with the socialists, but he noted that the Independent Labour wing had been equally averse to co-operation with Liberals. 'We have to come together, and work together', he said. 'Our ideas are the same. Our principles are the same'.(27)

The success of the Progressives depended on the elimination of

Independent Labour representation, and in the first decade of the twentieth century that was to be reversed, forshadowing the more fundamental change in national politics after the first World War. The fact that Clifford's ideal of a progressive alliance was not realised nationally, at least in the form he envisaged, does not seem to me to invalidate it as a genuine commitment to what was practicable at the time. But it is perhaps easier to locate the nature of his political convictions by reference to a comment of Bateman's:

> He sees the civic pride in Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool and Leeds, and longs for the time when the Londoner will breathe a similar spirit, when the monopolist and vestry-monger will be completely disestablished, and instead of the spoils being divided amongst the few, that a collectivist policy will be more generally adopted.(28)

Clifford was a nonconformist who shared the belief in a 'civic gospel', characteristic of many of his contemporaries. But he lived in a city where nonconformity was relatively weaker than in the industrial towns of the midlands and north, and where local pride was peculiarly difficult to inspire at the metropolitan level. London society was too large for the nonconformist minister and congregation to achieve a church-related civic esteem, and the world of democratic and non-deferential politics proved too rough for them.

John Clifford's view of the Church's role in social and political affairs may be seen in a series of addresses stretching from 1872 until 1911. When he was President of the Assembly of the New Connexion of General Baptists at Nottingham in 1872, he took as his subject 'Jesus Christ and Modern Social Life'. In 1888 he was President of the Baptist Union at the time of the Down Grade controversy: his spring address was on 'The Great Forty Years' - an exposition of the theology of the primitive church, but his autumn address on 'The New City of God' was concerned to explore the practical outworking of that early Christian faith. In 1891, he was again President of the New Connexion of General Baptists in the year of their union with the Baptist Union, and spoke on 'The Coming Theology'; and in the same year he spoke at the autumn assembly of the Baptist Union on 'The Christian Conception of Society'. In 1897 he addressed the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches on 'The Present Aims of the Free Churches', with a strong social reference. That was also the year in which an address he had given in 1895 at the Annual Meeting of the Christian Socialist League, was published as Fabian Tract, no.78, 'Socialism and the Teaching of Christ'. Another Fabian Tract, no.139, 'Socialism and the Churches' was published in 1908, and this was originally an address to the London Baptist Association. Finally he referred to the social gospel when speaking at the Baptist World Alliance meeting at Philadelphia in 1911. There are, of course, incidental references to this theme in many other sermons and addresses but these constitute the most obvious core of his teaching.

The influences on Clifford's thought are varied. The significance of his Chartist ancestry and of Emerson have already been noted. Similarly he was indebted to Carlyle and Ruskin for their critique of mid-nineteenth century society. Like William Temple later, he drew

inspiration from the poetry of Robert Browning and also Elizabeth Barrett Browning. He was familiar with Anglican social thought as represented by Maurice and Kingsley. W. H. Fremantle, who was a near neighbour of Clifford's at St Mary's, Bryanston Square, attended the jubilee celebrations of Westbourne Park in 1886. This was the year following the publication of his 1883 Bampton Lectures, *The World as the Subject of Redemption,* a book which attracted little attention in England outside the *Pall Mall Gazette* but aroused great interest in America.(29) In 1882 Fremantle also published nine sermons preached in Oxford, mainly in 1879-81, under the title *The Gospel of the Secular Life,* and these were also along lines congenial to Clifford. 1886 was also the year when Brooke Foss Westcott preached his sermons at Westminster Abbey, later published as *Social Aspects of Christianity.* It is here that the phrase 'social gospel' is coined in a sermon on 'The Kingdom of God' preached on Advent Sunday, when Westcott described the Gospel of the Kingdom as 'the social Gospel'. In the preface to the book, he said that he thought that 'of all places in the world "the Abbey" proclaims the social Gospel of Christ with the most touching eloquence'.(30) Clifford acknowledged his indebtedness to Westcott in his 1891 address to the Baptist Union, and it is striking that Westcott quotes the same lines from Browning's *A Death in the Desert* (31) in the preface to *Social Aspects of Christianity,* that Clifford quoted at Huddersfield in October 1888 - the difference being that Clifford said he was quoting Browning, whilst Westcott did not; on the other hand, Clifford's passage follows the lines of Westcott's closely.

Interestingly the early Americans whom Clifford refers to are also Anglicans, Richard T. Ely, a layman who was Professor of Political Economy at Johns Hopkins University and wrote the introduction to the American edition of Fremantle's Bampton Lectures, and W. D. P. Bliss, Secretary of the American Christian Social Union, who used the phrase 'social gospel' on the front page of the first issue of his magazine, *The Dawn,* in 1889, and edited *The Encyclopaedia of Social Reform* in 1908.(32)

It will be apparent from the list of Clifford's addresses that I have given that there is a peak in the late 1880s and early 1890s. What is most interesting, however, is the extent to which the note he strikes in these addresses is essentially the same as that in his address of 1872. Indeed, the *Baptist Magazine* for April 1888, looking forward to Clifford's year as President of the Union, said that

> his presidential address at Nottingham, in 1872, on 'Jesus Christ and Modern Social Life' was a masterly exposition, and it reads now like a prophecy of 'the things that would shortly come to pass' in regard to the specific work of the Christian Union.(33)

Obviously the contents and arguments of Clifford's 1872 Address cannot be explained by reference to the events of the 1880s, and in so far as his emphases in 1888 were similar to those of 1872 it is reasonable to claim that though the events of the 1880s may have been the occasion of a return to social questions, they did not determine the way in which these questions were handled. Clifford's 1872 address

aroused little comment at the time. As he was editor of the *General Baptist Magazine*, he edited out all references to himself in the reports of the Assembly. *The Nonconformist* newspaper was preoccupied with Edward Miall's disestablishment motion in the House of Commons and the Ballot Act, and the other periodicals seem to have paid no attention.

In his address, Clifford argued that Christianity was successfully meeting the challenge of scientific and ethical criticism, but there was still a question about how far Christianity had penetrated the everyday social life of the world. After pinpointing pauperism (or poverty), industry, and ignorance as the key social problems, he considered Communism (mainly American and French), Positivism and what he called 'State Mechanism' (or government intervention) as possible solutions. All three were rejected (though none totally) as being useless without the influence of Christianity. Things in society would only be made new as men were made new creatures in Christ. So it was not sufficient to consider that poverty was solved by the distribution of poor-relief: 'our work is not merely to feed and clothe, but to mend the marred man, make him thrifty and provident'. And he quoted Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem 'Aurora Leigh'

> It takes a soul
> To move a body: it takes a high-souled man
> To move the masses ... and your Fouriers failed,
> Because not poets enough to understand
> That life develops from within.(34)

So what is needed, says Clifford, is better organisation of charity, a moralising of the relations between masters and men in the world of commerce and industry, higher wages, better education, preaching of the Gospel and fellowship with Christ.

Again in his 1888 address he states categorically early on that 'all social problems are spiritual at heart': the reason that the gospel is needed for social as well as individual salvation is that society without Christianity is lacking in heart forces. So 'in all the social crises of life as well as for individual salvation "we preach Christ and Christ crucified"'. The mistake of many who seek the reconstruction of society is their failure to take man as a living whole. Hence he criticises 'State Socialists' (i.e. those who put their trust in state intervention) for their 'beggarly account of man'. 'The industrial system is not man: man was here before it, and he will be here when it has gone'. The idea of woman also needs to undergo a change. 'Both the solidarity of humanity and the freedom of the individual are vital principles. 'Divinity is seen in service: service of the lowliest', he says, echoing the motto of his ministry, and his conclusion illustrates the delicate tightrope he trod between individual and collective action:

> The difficult problem of poverty is to be solved and poverty abolished by the moral quickening and improvement of the citizen - for indolence is anti-social and anti-Christian - but also by restricting the area and extinguishing the evils of competition; aiding co-operation in all legitimate trade, and by a wider adoption of the system of profit-sharing which has

> thrived in France... This carries us to the conclusion that we ought to employ all the available organs for advancing the kingdom of heaven. The Christian Church is the first but not the only divine instrument for establishing the rule of God here and now.(35)

Clifford's address clearly worried some hearers and readers who felt that the primacy of individual salvation was being challenged: but the *General Baptist Magazine* commented

> ...when the sons and daughters of God begin to care for the sins and sorrows of those about them and take measures to improve their condition Christianity *is* working from within outwards. There is no contradiction between the doctrine that the Gospel is the great remedy for the evils that afflict mankind, and the abolition by law of West Indian slavery, or the passing of wholesome factory acts, or the improvement of the dwellings of the poor, or any other wise measure for the amelioration of our social condition.(36)

In other words, a line of continuity is clearly drawn between Clifford and the great evangelical tradition rooted in the Anti-Slavery campaign of William Wilberforce and Fowell Buxton.

At the heart of the discussion of what could be achieved by state intervention lay the question of the nature of law, and indirectly the nature of the state. A crucial ambiguity emerged which enabled Clifford, and also his friend, Hugh Price Hughes, minister of the Wesleyan West London Mission, to call for certain kinds of state intervention despite its limited effectiveness. This ambiguity was not just secular: it is rooted in the biblical understanding of law and its relation to grace. Law is both necessary and inadequate. Both Clifford and Hughes referred to a book published in 1883 entitled *Social Wreckage: A Review of the Laws of England as they affect the Poor.*

The author of this book was Francis Peek (1834-99), an Anglican London tea merchant who was a friend of leading dissenters, a member of the London School Board, Chairman of the Howard League for Penal Reform and also keenly involved in the Charity Organisation Society, which tried to ensure that help was given to the needy who would make the best use of it: thus he was critical of socialist analyses of the problems of poverty and socialist remedies.

The first chapter of *Social Wreckage* is entitled, significantly, 'The influence of a nation's laws on its moral character'.(37) In relation to poverty Peek's position is entirely traditional and he joined the chorus of those who criticised the Poor Law because of its continuing tendency 'to foster pauperism and discourage providence'. His cast of mind is illustrated by the fact that the two articles he wrote for the *Contemporary Review* in January and February 1888 on the London unemployed were subsequently reprinted under the title 'The Workless, the Thriftless and the Worthless' - a characteristic categorisation for the period. But in other respects he could be regarded as 'progressive'. For example, he criticised the Licensing Laws for indulging drunkenness, he argued that the Criminal Law

taught that 'a man's person is far less sacred than his property' and that the laws relating to women were 'both immoral and unjust'.(38) Peek's book is used by both Clifford and Hughes, first as a fund of examples, and secondly, to justify the view that Christians should press for changes in the law to improve society and to bring it more into line with Christian principles. Clifford argued in 1888 that it was necessary to change character as much as conditions and as in 1872 quoted 'Aurora Leigh' - 'it takes a soul to move a body'. He made the same point in reverse in a sermon on 'Jesus Christ: His Person and His Plan' when he said that 'theories of brotherhood, the direct offspring of Christianity, prove their powerlessness in heartrending facts, when without Christ'.(39)

In speaking of 'The Coming Theology' in 1891, Clifford attempted a similar balance, and the following extracts illustrate as clearly as anything the two principles of his ministry as expounded by Richard Mudie Smith earlier in this paper.

> Through Christ man has realized himself in some degree as an individual; it remains for him to accomplish *the greater task of realizing himself as humanity*. [An echo of Seeley's *Ecce Homo*?] ... The Ideal Church is the Ideal of Society. The training in social duties within the genial atmosphere of the Christian community is intended to prepare for the realisation of the brotherhood of man in the more stormy and tumultuous life of the world. Sociology is a branch of New Testament ecclesiology. The life of self-sacrificing love in Christ is the life for the Church and for the whole world. He must make all social and political things new. [Words which one might have expected to find in the report of the World Council of Churches' Assembly at Uppsala in 1968.]

The coming theology, said Clifford,

> will not lose sight of the individual, but it will strongly assert the solid oneness of all nations and races, the brotherhood of all men. Politics will be religious. The 'secular' will be banished by being spiritualised. [Compare Fremantle's *Gospel of the Secular Life*.] Women and children will have their rights restored. Men will be taught to look upon the 'necessities' of the world as a common stock in which they are partners, and the work of the world as their privilege.(40)

Is this simply confused rhetoric? Certainly it is rhetorical and that is important. But to say that Clifford is confused because he wants to balance individual effort with state action is to prejudge the question. In the English context it is a particular characteristic of nonconformist social attitudes that they wanted both just laws and a limitation on what was expected of the state. Having so successfully attacked and weakened one kind of state establishment - the Church of England - nonconformists did not wish to create other secular establishments, in education for example. Though they might speak of collectivism, a full state collectivism in the modern sense was virtually inconceivable.

So Clifford can speak apparently with two voices. On the one

hand he can write to a brother minister who deplores his involvement in the political arena as follows:

> If the prevalent conception of the State is debased and worldly, Christian men must heighten and purify it; for 'the powers that be are ordained of God'. Government is His will. The State is as really a divine creation as the Church; and if men are blind to its divinity, and treat it as though it were the offspring of Satan and the fit tool for his work, then it is our business as sons of God to witness for Him and His ideals in the corporate life of man, and work at and in the State until it is made the effective organ for the establishment of His kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost upon the earth. Therefore, the New Testament Christian will go to the polling-booth as he goes to the prayer-meeting, and work in the election room in the same spirit of subordination to the will of God as he teaches in the Sunday School or directs Church affairs in the diaconate...

This explains Clifford's admiration for Gladstone as the typical Christian statesman, because he had a 'conception of the essentially ethical character of the State' and a 'dominating sense of a divine "call" to serve God and man through the State'. On the other hand, when conducting the Passive Resistance Campaign with all the knowledge his LL.B. had brought him, he was prepared to argue for the right of resistance to unjust laws on grounds of conscience.

> Is it a false analogy [he asked] to cite the Conventicle Act, the Five Mile Act, the Test Acts, and similar instruments of ecclesiastical tyranny resisted to the extent of going to prison by our illustrious predecessors? Those Acts were 'legally valid', and they were bravely resisted, to the eternal advantage of British freedom, British peace, and British progress.(41)

Again the rhetoric is clear. But the ability to hold both positions, though precarious, is probably still an important nonconformist contribution in this area.

Clifford's Fabian tracts, in which his socialist commitment is most apparent, have to be read therefore in the light of the foregoing. Both were addresses given to Baptist congregations rather than conceived as political writings. In both, socialism was defined in terms of 'the collective ownership of the means of production by the community'. But Clifford is anxious to avoid misunderstanding.

> Let there be no mistake as to what this Collectivism is. It does not advocate the absorption of the individual by the State, or the suppression of the family, or the direction of literature, and art and religion by the collective wisdom of the community; it does not involve the sudden overthrow of the machinery of industrial life; but in the light of the historical development of industry, it seeks to accelerate the evolution of the industrial life, so that it shall free itself from the defects and evils that now belong to it and shall fulfil its Divine

mission in the enrichment of the whole life of mankind.(42)

Nevertheless, it is interesting and revealing that in the 1908 address, Clifford describes the Postal Service as 'the Socialistic idea in operation'.

> First, we note a large number of our fellow citizens enrolled as servants of the whole community. As children, most of them have been trained in State schools, and at the expense of the State. Then they have passed their examinations and been assigned their posts according to their qualifications. They do their appointed work without seeking to amass great riches. They are fairly content with their wages. They have a moderate measure of comfort. They are not anxious about old age. They have a sense of security; nor do they dread the workhouse for pensions are secured to them. In London they have their Sundays free for mental and spiritual culture, and if they desire it, for work for the world. Clearly they are animated not by the spirit of greed but by the Socialistic spirit of service. They own nothing. The buildings in which they labour are not their own: the red pillar-boxes which they empty do not belong to them. There is no private ownership and yet they do not 'dawdle'; they do not waste their time. They are honest and industrious. Our letters come with regularity, and on the stroke of the clock all through the day; and they find their reward in the moderate wage they receive, and the sense that they discharge their duty.
>
> Their home life is their own. The relations between husband and wife and children are sweetened by the removal of all uncertainty and anxiety as to income; and in all other respects the postman is as much master of his home and of his life as any citizen of the land. At present he pays rent to a private person for his home. In a fuller Socialism that rent will go to the whole community; and in all probability his hours of toil will be fewer, his freedom wider, and his life richer in the things of mind and spirit.(43)

Clifford's punch-line is that 'the Post Office is a constructed State effort'. It did not just happen: it was planned, and it works.

Today it is impossible to read those words of Clifford without a smile. To a large extent that smile is the result of experience of the modern British postal service which nearly eighty years later does not operate as efficiently as in 1908. But the smile is also due to a recognition first, that some of the features Clifford ascribes to socialism are purely coincidental - the picture of postmen as the products of a state educational system, for example - and secondly to the fact that in choosing the postal service as his illustration Clifford evaded the crucial question in a modern industrial society - will socialism, or collectivism, or co-operation work as alternative ways of organising *industrial* production? In the context, however, what is really most strking is that Clifford himself says later in the address that 'Men are not yet "moralized" up to the point where a co-operative community is possible'(44) and that therefore the Church must care for

the spiritual element of Socialism. By making this assertion purely descriptive i.e. a statment of things as they now are (or then were), Clifford leaves open the question of whether the time will come when men are sufficiently moralized to make a co-operative community possible without the aid of the Church, or whether the Church will always be necessary to care for the spiritual element of socialism. So long as that question remains open, it is not clear whether Christianity is a constituent part of Socialism or a temporary extra that will one day be superseded. For this reason his socialism remains ambiguous: his language in 1908 seems more collectivist than in 1872, but in other ways the substance of what he says seems little changed. If this be so, then one must be cautious about hailing the use of socialist language and ideas as a breakthrough in the Christian thought of the 1880s. The fact that Clifford could entitle a sermon following Lord Shaftesbury's death 'A Typical Christian Socialist' acts as a warning here. Although written in 1904, Bateman's verdict that 'in Dr Westcott's sense Dr Clifford is a Socialist' seems sound.(45) Hence the significance of his conversation with C. W. Vick four days before his death when he noted

> the question of personal responsibility and personal conduct receding into the background, and the modern man and woman being more inclined to throw the blame for personal failure on society and environment, and to seek in the attempt to change these, rather than in the effort at self-discipline and control, and above all, in surrender to the will of God, the remedy for the present distress.(46)

'Socialism is not a class movement', says Clifford's 1908 Fabian tract,(47) so his understanding clearly has to be distinguished from that of many at that time and since.

It is therefore necessary, in conclusion, to return to Clifford's theology in order to make sense of his socialism. Clifford was known to be receptive to biblical and scientific criticism, and he welcomed these as means to express the Gospel more clearly without sacrificing the essence of saving truth. One of the rare indications of his reputation in the USA is a letter he received in November 1887 from an American friend who wrote, 'your election to the vice-presidency of the Baptist Union... is regarded as a sure indication of the number and power of the New Theology men in England among the Baptists'.(48) Clifford makes scarcely any reference to what would have been understood in America as the 'New Theology', so it is difficult to judge the flow of influence here. As is well known, the mutual respect between himself and Spurgeon was of assistance in the handling of the Down Grade controversy, and Clifford was not one of the ministers Spurgeon had in mind in making his criticisms. Interestingly, one of those who may have been, J. G. Greenhough of Leicester, was later involved in the resistance of socialism in the 1890s.(49)

Clifford's theology may conveniently be followed by using the argument he set out in his most systematic theological treatise, his Angus Lectures of 1906 on *The Ultimate Problems of Christianity*. Significantly that argument begins with a discussion of Jesus - his ideas as illuminated by recent Gospel criticism, the impression he made

on the men of his age, and his understanding of himself - proceeds to the doctrine of God and then comes to the understanding of man. The key to Jesus's teaching is seen in the idea of the Kingdom of God - that which was for Westcott the social gospel. 'The Social Order is the burden of His teaching', Clifford told the Baptist Union in 1891. 'It is first, always first, and never second. He begins and ends with "The Kingdom".' Similarly he could speak to the Free Church Council in 1897 of Christ as 'an exhaustless source of Social Reform'.(50)

But more than teaching was involved. 'The relation of Christ to Society... is only fully interpreted by his Incarnation', Clifford said in 1888, a year before the publication of *Lux Mundi*. 'Christ is the Son of Man. That is the name He elects to be known by'.(51) That sounds too simple to us today, but that was the kind of argument current in the leading theological circles of the time, seen perhaps most clearly in Westcott. This incidentally makes nonsense of Jones's distinction between Anglican incarnationalism and nonconformist immanentism. In 1891 Clifford links the two:

> Christ is immanent in the life of the world with unprecedented fulness today. The Incarnation is seen in its man-wide sweep embracing and illumining every human mode of communion and cooperation, of conflict and service; as in the earlier times it was apprehended in its mysterious inwardness.(52)

Certainly Clifford's approach is not patristic, but it is biblical; and he interprets immanence not in the kind of transcendental mode that his admiration of Emerson might lead one to expect, but more in terms of ever-present judgement - a very different note. This is how the Incarnation is tied to the understanding of Christ as Redeemer and King.(53) It is also interesting that like Westcott and Hughes, he emphasises the Johannine material, notwithstanding a Kingdom-centred theology that one would more naturally today associate with the Synoptics; but in that he was not unusual and it is probably the most significant difference between the ways of understanding a Kingdom theology then and now.(54)

From Jesus, Clifford moves to God as Jesus understood Him; and here, of course, the heart of the matter is his teaching concerning the Fatherhood of God, first of all as his Father, and then as the Father of everyone. Here too Clifford refers to one of his favourite psalms, Psalm 103, which is also used as a text for his sermon on 'The Gospel of the Humanity of God' in *The Gospel of Gladness* (1912). Moreover, following Forsyth, there is an emphasis on God as holy Father, with its implications for the doctrine of redemption.(55) That note is generally weaker in his Anglican contemporaries, with the possible exception of Gore.

In turn, this leads to the understanding of man: only when man is seen as a child of God and redeemed by Christ can one have any sense of his ultimate calling and potential. 'The Holy Fatherhood involves and implies the sonship and the brotherhood'.(56) This is the clue to why Clifford can claim in one of his Fabian tracts that 'socialism, in the soul of it, is divine. It is of God'.(57) It is also the clue to his words at the Baptist World Alliance meeting at Philadelphia.

in 1911:

> We have not only to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and forming the old gospel, and for the pure gospel... we must also advocate and work for the social gospel... The deliverance of the poor out of the hand of the evildoers becomes a primary duty when you once really accept Christ's estimate of the worth of man. Poverty must be dealt with in its causes. Charity must not be accepted as a substitute for justice. (58)

No liberation theologian has spoken more trenchantly.

Jones writes of Clifford

> One might logically have expected him to discover the 'socialist' message implicit in Christianity much earlier. His denomination, on the other hand, was extremely conservative in political and social matters and Clifford had much to contend with quite apart from the fact that his own theology remained throughout his life surprisingly individualistic and evangelical. (59)

But Clifford did discover the 'socialist' message before the 1880s; and his difficulties did not derive from Baptist conservatism in political and social matters (though Dr Bebbington has taught us not to exaggerate the exclusiveness of an attachment to Liberal politics). To suppose that Clifford's theology is *surprisingly* individualistic is to fit him into a false dichotomy between individualism and socialism. His emphasis on personal evangelism was typical of most socially concerned nonconformists in his day, and fits into the link Timothy Smith has drawn between revivalist perfectionism and social reform in America. (60) I do not claim that Clifford's theology was as original and powerful as Forsyth's, but I do believe that the caricature of Clifford as a political dissenter has had too long a life. If he had ever accepted a call away from Westbourne Park it would have been to one of the colleges, and he had a theological as well as a social influence on a whole generation of Baptist ministers. Clifford's theology cannot be 'edited out' from an understanding of his social concern: like many of his contemporaries he was more than a chameleon, and a study of him shows that the social gospel was perhaps not as uniquely and indigenously American as has sometimes been supposed.

NOTES

1 P. d'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914*, Princeton 1968, 330; P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour*, London 1967, 23-4.

2 C. H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism 1865-1915*, New Haven 1940, 3.

3 Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, 390.

4 E. R. Norman, *Church and Society in England, 1770-1979*, Oxford 1976, 10.

5 G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, Oxford 1971, 215-30, 281-314; A. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum*, London 1977, 200-49; D. W. Bebbington, *The*

Nonconformist Conscience, London 1982, 35-44.
6 Norman, *Church and Society*, 235
7 Sir J. Marchant, *Dr John Clifford C.H.*, London 1924, 1.
8 Marchant, *Clifford*, 84,3.
9 Ibid., 4,6.
10 Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, 343n.
11 Marchant, *Clifford*, 12.
12 J. Slater, A. R. Ferguson & J. F. Carr, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ii, Cambridge, Mass. 1979, 27,29.
13 Ibid., 35-36, 47-50.
14 J. Clifford, *The Ultimate Problems of Christianity*, London 1906, 291, 292.
15 Marchant, *Clifford*, 40.
16 Ibid., 42, 62-3, 280. Marchant's claim that Praed Street was the first institutional church in London does not seem plausible.
17 C. T. Bateman, *John Clifford*, London 1904, 128-9.
18 Ibid., 85-6.
19 Marchant, *Clifford*, 63-4.
20 Ibid., 81-2.
21 *Christian World*, 19 Sept. 1889, 721; quoted Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 80.
22 Marchant, *Clifford*, 130.
23 Bateman, *Clifford*, 181-2; Marchant, *Clifford*, 78-9.
24 Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, 331.
25 Ibid., 330-48; Bateman, *Clifford*, 179-80.
26 Marchant, *Clifford*, 97.
27 Ibid., 147.
28 Bateman, *Clifford*, 202.
29 Marchant, *Clifford*, 48; W. H. Fremantle, *The World as the Subject of Redemption*, 2nd ed., London 1895, ix.
30 B. F. Westcott, *Social Aspects of Christianity*, London 1887, 96, v.
31 Life with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is.
Poetical Works of Robert Browning, ed. A. Birrell, London 1915, i, 587.
32 R. T. Handy, *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920*, New York 1966, 178-9; C. H. Hopkins, *Rise of Social Gospel*, 173-9; R. C. White jr & C. H. Hopkins, *The Social Gospel*, Philadelphia 1976, 167-8.
33 *Baptist Magazine*, lxxx, April 1888, 149.
34 J. Clifford, *Jesus Christ and Social Life*, Leicester 1872, 35, 36.
35 J. Clifford, 'The New City of God', *Baptist Handbook*, 1889, 68,78,82,86,92.
36 *General Baptist Magazine*, November 1888, 430.
37 The chapter is extensively plagiarised in Sermon IV of Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity*, London 1888, 53-63.
38 F. Peek, *Social Wreckage*, London 1883, vi, vii.
39 J. Clifford, *The Christian Certainties*, London 1894, 198.
40 Ibid., 304, 306.
41 Bateman, *Clifford*, 187-8, 282-3; G. W. Byrt, *John Clifford*, London 1947, 127-8.

42 J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Teaching of Christ*, London 1897, 5.
43 J. Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, London 1908, 4.
44 Ibid., 12.
45 Marchant, *Clifford*, 61; Bateman, *Clifford*, 199.
46 Marchant, *Clifford*, 280-1.
47 Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, 6
48 E. A. Payne, 'The Down Grade Controversy', unpublished ms., 9.
49 E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union : a short history*, London 1958, 129-30, 133; Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, 392.
50 J. Clifford, *The Christian Conception of Society*, London 1891, 6; Bateman, *Clifford*, 225-6.
51 *Baptist Handbook*, 1889, 78.
52 Clifford, *Christian Conception of Society*, 3.
53 Clifford, *Ultimate Problems*, 199-214.
54 Hughes, *Social Christianity*, 74; Westcott, *Social Aspects*, vi-viii, 197.
55 Clifford, *Ultimate Problems*, 228-62.
56 Ibid., 281 and generally 266-98.
57 Clifford, *Socialism and the Churches*, 7.
58 Byrt, *Clifford*, 151.
59 Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, 434.
60 T. L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, New York 1965, especially 135-47.

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