

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

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

ORGANIZED RELIGION AND LABOUR

BY THE REV. HENRY EDWARDS, Vicar of Gorleston.

SOME years ago I was talking to one of the largest Coal Owners in Northumberland about the attitude of the Church towards Labour. He thought it ought to be that which was adopted by the late Bishop of Durham, Dr. Westcott, when he settled the great coal strike. It should be that of getting employers and employed to see each other's point of view and to act together in the spirit of the Golden Rule. He went on to say that, if the Church did this, he thought she would regain her waning influence and be a great power for good in promoting peace and goodwill in the industrial world.

Now it seems to me, unless I entirely misread the signs of the times, that the outlook was never brighter for doing this than it is at present. Our Labour leaders for the most part acknowledge the principles of unselfish service, justice and goodwill, and are men of vision, courage and honesty of purpose. Our employers are increasingly ready to fulfil their obligations to their employees in the mutual recognition that both capital and labour are essential for the well-being of the community. The Government was never more sympathetic or willing to carry out recommendations of joint committees, and by the establishment of a National Industrial Council has shown its readiness to do all in its power to make possible a larger degree of self-government, improved conditions of employment, continuous co-operation and a higher standard of comfort in industry. Unofficial and semi-private conferences of representatives of employers and employed are being held up and down the country, which are creating an atmosphere in which it is easier to settle disputes. The Archbishops' Fifth Committee has issued its report on Christianity and Industrial Problems, wherein not only are guiding principles clearly stated, but also suggestions are made with regard to such thorny questions as shorter hours, adequate wages, co-operation, profit sharing, housing and unemployment.

Thus there are causes at work in these days for which to thank God, and which should encourage the Church to take a more active part in social life. These causes, I venture to think, would never

have been brought about had not public opinion been moulded by religious forces, and the consciousness of justice and brotherhood been awakened by those principles of the Gospel which it is the privilege of Christianity to propagate.

In such an atmosphere there is a unique opportunity for organized religion to mobilize her forces and to face the industrial situation in a spirit of adventure, that will subordinate private interests to the well-being of the whole society and boldly determine to find a permanent solution to this perennial problem.

One of the first steps in this direction, it seems to me, is for religion to hear the call of this Conference and to unite. A divided Church cannot preach peace to a warring world. Organized Christianity must work together as one to-day, in visible fellowship, if it is to make any impression on Labour. The Church's sectional antipathies have hindered her effective contribution to industry, perhaps more than anything else besides. A house divided against itself must inevitably fall, and only when each section of the community, religious, social, and political, recognizes its obligations to other parts of the community, can it possibly stand. I see very little hope of organized religion really influencing the industrial world till with one voice it speaks with the authority of a united Church, an authority that will then be recognized.

Perhaps scarcely less urgent is the necessity for religion to put her own house in order with regard to injustices, inconsistencies and inequalities in her own administration. There is needed the application of the accepted principles of Jesus Christ in the realms of His Church. Where, for instance, it is well known that highly-placed officials in parochial or Diocesan organizations are sweating labour and holding men and women in their work by ignorance or fear; where owners of disgraceful slum property and profiteers are violating the teachings of the golden rule; and—must it be again said;—where the Church's Bishops are apparently living every day in sumptuous palaces, and her priests are begging for starvelings at their doors, such must be made to reform themselves or be chased out. It seems to me organized religion will never put itself right with Labour, and indeed with its own conscience, till such things be regarded with abhorrence and be rectified. If the Church did this, it would be seen that she practised what she preached, and it would help more effectively to settle the housing and wage problems, as

well as be the pioneer in many another social reconstruction of a brighter, happier world.

Another fundamental need is honesty of motive in dealing with Labour. There is a suspicion in the minds of many workers that the interest of organized religion on behalf of Labour is inspired by the idea that it will get the men to attend a place of worship, or that when a Labour Government comes into power it will deal more sympathetically towards the privileges and the property of the Church—the way in which many religious leaders speak to-day gives cause for this suspicion and the Church loses her power and influence accordingly. It is not because of what the man in the street thinks that Christian forces must work, but because the Church is true to her gospel, that she takes an interest in all that concerns the welfare and happiness of humanity. If the Church can overcome her inertia and social distinctions, and show practical interest in all the aspirations that are ethically sound in Labour, with no other motive than the furthering of justice, she will win its respect and claim its allegiance in all her schemes for the doing of God's will on earth as it is done in heaven.

I think, too, that the position generally taken up by the Church, that it is the place of organized religion to teach principles upon which economic and political action shall be taken, without attempting to point out definitely which political or economic course of action is more righteous than another, must be modified. I know it is pointed out that Jesus Christ refused to take sides or to concern Himself with any particular theory of social reform; that He was content to lay down rules of fundamental righteousness, to teach the real value of man, of truth, and of justice, and to leave the precise application of these principles to the leaders of economic and political thought; but surely if these ideals of life mean anything, then organized Christianity can no longer acquiesce in conditions which make them impossible. The more deeply Christian principles are appropriated, the fiercer grows the anger against materialistic surroundings which prevent their realization. The indignation shown by our Lord against the evils of His day might well be more visible to-day amongst His followers in the Church. The world does not understand, in fact, it thinks it cowardice and weakness, that the Church should be considered worthy to teach great principles of life and conduct (and not to be thought inconsistent

when she takes sides, as apparently she did in the great war, or takes political action when her own interests are concerned, as she did in the campaign against the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in Wales), and yet should not be considered worthy to apply her teaching and to take sides on its behalf in social and economic life. The claims of Labour, such as for instance, the demand for leisure in which men and women shall have time to develop their intellectual, physical and moral life ; houses wherein they can live decent lives ; better conditions of work ; recognition in control ; and a share in the profits of industry ; these are claims which seem to many of us consistent with the moral principles of justice and brotherhood taught by Jesus Christ. If they are, then it becomes the Church to join in any movement that shall, in the light of religious truth, bring them about. If organized religion is to save its own soul, and perhaps what is after all equally important, the soul of Labour, then, at least it seems to me, it must come out and, if needs be, take sides in practising its social teaching in the sphere where it should work. Certainly individual clergy and local religious organizations must come out of their pulpits, their societies, and unions, into the people's lives, their homes, their work, and translate into action the truths they believe concerning brotherhood, equality of opportunity, liberty and righteousness.

Then I venture also to think that organized religion must foster the new spirit of fellowship and service that is being awakened to-day in Church and Labour, in the whole scheme of life. The spirit of the Archbishops' Committee's Report which lays down a social programme for which many of us thank God, and the spirit of co-operation, of give and take, which is increasingly manifested by employers and employed, whereby many are ready to sacrifice their individual interests to the well-being of the community, must animate the whole religious and industrial world. Much yet remains to be done before the whole Church of God will rise in her full strength to combat the social evils ; the apathy, the indifference, and even the opposition as manifested in so many quarters towards the authoritative statement of the Archbishops' Committee on Christianity and Industrial Problems, show the leeway yet to be made up before organized religion will speak with one voice to Labour. Much yet remains to be done before Labour will take full advantage of the new spirit that animates so many employers

and employees; there are reactionaries amongst capitalists and labourers who refuse peaceful persuasion or disciplined control—some men are still out for anarchy whereby they selfishly hope to derive some benefit to their own class and whereby the whole social reconstruction is endangered—and among these, in Church and Labour, organized religion must boldly venture and permeate their whole life through and through with the spirit of unselfish service. Certainly my own experience in the north of England proves that it is being increasingly realized, even where it was once dormant or opposed, that this principle of the golden rule in Capital and Labour is essential to each, and that by working together for the other's good, both will best promote the welfare of all. In this new spirit all can glory. In fellowship and service all can co-operate for the spiritual and material well-being of the whole community, and once this prevails in every section of Religion and Labour, there will be such a unity of purpose in industry as will bring about the new heavens and the new earth.

How can this unity, this service, this spirit be brought about, in which, as I think, organized religion can help Labour to realize her highest ideals and the Church to build up the Kingdom of God? We want to know what we can do here and now to bring about this desired end.

In our parishes we may all begin at once to form social study circles amongst the employers and employees. Experience in both of these proves what a valuable means these round-table talks are of eliminating suspicion between Capital and Labour and of promoting friendliness and mutual understanding. It is surprising how extensive is this feeling of suspicion even between different Trade Unions as well as between Employers' Federations, and between even different trades in an industry. Only when confidence is restored can there be any hope of a better appreciation of each other's position. The study circle is a great help towards this end, it gives the necessary personal touch and human sympathy, enables a wise chairman to put the other's point of view and to direct the discussion along lines wherein each can see the justice of the other's claims. Employers are made to see the wisdom of giving their employees every privilege, comfort and pleasure, and that in so doing they need have no fear that their rights will be interfered with. Employees are taught to realize that training, discipline and

responsibility are necessary, and that in accepting these they are proving themselves worthy of confidence and of a share in partnership. Groups of workers can be shown how wrong it is to restrict the output or to scamp their work. Manufacturers can be taught how unjustifiable it is for them to raise prices above the level of fair profits and of the power of the community to pay. Keen Churchmen can be encouraged to qualify themselves for responsible positions, either amongst the handworkers or the brainworkers, and to apply their Church's principles there, and do much to harmonize the relations of employers and employed and to foster the spirit of fellowship and service. In this way the clergy may do much, quietly and unostentatiously, in forming public opinion along the lines of individual happiness and social welfare.

In our Urban Districts and Rural Deaneries, Councils of Christian social fellowship may be formed. Representatives of all the religious denominations might combine, not so much for passing pious resolutions as for hard thinking and active work. In this larger fellowship we should gather knowledge and have courage to act; from it deputations might be sent to Employers' Associations and to Trade Unions, to civic bodies and to County Councils, in order to impress upon these authorities the necessity of applying Christian principles to the concrete affairs which touch the life of the people. Somehow, it seems to me, such a Council of Christian Fellowship might do much to promote housing, child welfare, proper conditions of labour and so forth, if it worked wisely in its local area. Certainly the neighbourhood would begin to realize that organized religion was at work and had something to say concerning the everyday, matter-of-fact life of the people, and was at last seeking a remedy for some of its ills and woes.

Such study circles and fellowship councils might be affiliated to some central organization of religion—a cabinet of Christian social experts which would co-ordinate the work of parochial and district circles and councils. Such an organization would keep in touch with manufacturers, the Employers' Federations, and the Trade Unions, in order to inculcate the mind of organized religion with regard to their Labour problems. It could provide expert lecturers, well acquainted with the business the administration and the finances of great firms, well versed in the conditions, thoughts and operations of the workers, to give courses of addresses to the

management and to the workpeople, on their respective responsibilities and privileges and on the duty of both to the community. It would also be in immediate touch with the headquarters of Capital and Labour, with Joint Committees in Parliament, with the National Industrial Council, and even with the Cabinet itself, to influence legislation along the lines of Christian thought and to carry out the Church's teaching in regard to all the affairs of national and international life. Once organized religion gets a glimpse into the divine intention for the doing of God's will on earth as it is in Heaven, it can never rest satisfied till it has taught the whole social, economic and political world to think likewise.

There is just one other way that I would venture to emphasize along which religion may influence Labour and carry out in human life the ideals of Christianity, and that is by a longer and enlarged training of her clergy. Organized religion can only champion the weak and the oppressed, can only hope to influence industry, just in proportion as it is done intelligently and with a real grasp of the problem. Knowledge, experience and sympathy are needed, and these can only come of a more adequate training in economic and social science. Men whose bent seems to be along the lines I have advocated should be encouraged to take up studies that would better equip them for their work, and then sent by the Church into districts where they would have every opportunity of applying their specialised knowledge. There seems to me to be room for a School or Order of Prophets, which shall concentrate all its care and effort on winning Capital and Labour for the kingdom of God and seeking to apply the teaching of Christ to all the problems of social and industrial life.

If organized religion is to work along these lines, which I have only very scappily indicated, for the elimination of all that is contrary to the kingdom of God in the realm of Labour, there is just one warning note I would venture to sound, and with that to bring my paper to a close. It is, that in taking this [more active interest in the social welfare of the community, we are concerned not with religion's highest ideals but with the results of these ideals in the department of labour to which they are applied. The only abiding remedy for the unrest in the world, for the moral breakdown in industry, for the evil in the hearts and wills of humanity, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Economic readjustments, poli-

tical re-arrangements, or social programmes for the betterment of labour conditions, will of themselves never touch the root causes which are embodied in the "affections of sinful men," unless they proceed from and work through repentant lives, cleansed by God and empowered by the Holy Ghost. It should never be forgotten, even for the sake of its effectual working in industry, that the primary object of the Church of God is spiritual. It is, as we have been reminded, "so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church." Only, it seems to me, as we keep this ideal in view shall we be worthy of our birthright, shall organized religion effectively solve the problems of Labour, shall we really accomplish our purpose in establishing the kingdom of righteousness throughout the whole industrial world.

HENRY EDWARDS.

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

THE SYSTEM OF CAPITALISM.

THE ECONOMIC ANTICHRIST: A STUDY IN SOCIAL POLITY. By W. Blissard, M.A., Rector of Bishopsbourne, in the Diocese of Canterbury. London: *George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.*, 6s. net.

The author of this interesting book died a few months ago at the age of eighty-two, greatly respected and deeply lamented by his parishioners and neighbours. His work bears the marks of deep thought and strong though restrained feeling rather than of wide reading of contemporary writers on economics. This gives additional weight to his conclusions as a piece of independent and original testimony to a position defended along other lines by other writers.

In the opening words of his preface he tells us "Christianity is usually judged by its power over the world. In the following pages the reasoning will be reversed, for the question is urgent: what is the power of the world over Christianity?" Reminding us that a system—known as economic—has been growing into power over human affairs, he says: "It is more than pertinent to consider how the Christian religion, which entered the world before the economic development, fares in its modern setting."

To summarize, since quotation would involve more space than is available, Mr. Blissard's contentions, in outline, amount to this:

Besides the militarism generally known as German which regards its human instruments as "cannon-fodder," there is another system, called by Mr. Blissard economic militarism, by whose directors their human instruments are regarded only as "hands," means to the ends of those who employ them. Peace has its casualties no less than war, in the form of avoidable fatal accidents, of avoidable infant mortality, and of a shortening of human life so great that in certain industries the average life is only thirty years as against sixty among the comfortable classes.

That system which socialists call "Capitalism" Mr. Blissard describes