

Themes in the Rise of Christian Ethics

I. INTRODUCTION

The aims of this paper are twofold; firstly to present something of the scope and range of Christian involvement in economic science in one country over a particular period, bringing out the major themes and trends and setting it in its historical context. The second aim is to highlight some of the pitfalls that have been evident in past Christian involvement in economic science and to suggest some ideas for future advance. The rationale for this is simple; there are few things worse in the current debates on economics than Christians rehashing old arguments and taking up old debates unaware that they have been either resolved or relegated to obscurity, while their own particular schools of thought parallel those which history — with good reasons — has long since buried.

The past two decades have seen a marked increase in evangelical writings on various social science subjects such as history, anthropology, social work, sociology and of course economics. All this may well be due to the revival of evangelicalism in the United States and to the growth in North America of Christian Liberal Arts Colleges; and world-wide, of numerous evangelical Institutes for Advanced Christian Studies, Shaftsbury projects, Zadok Centres, and so on. However, although it is clear that Christian critiques have often been weak in many of these fields, in the past this has never been true for economics.

For Great Britain the period 1890-1940 was a time of suffering and some considerable soul searching. The period covers two World Wars, the Great Depression, long years of high unemployment, doubts and divisions over the South African War, and other various imperial adventures. This half-century was a most productive time however in three major areas. Firstly in economic theory, it covers the period from Alfred Marshall at the beginning, to John Maynard Keynes at the end, and with such important theoretical work in economics carried on in between that it is often termed

the "years of high theory". Secondly, it was a significant time for Christian social ethics; with the founding of the Christian Social Union and the publication of *Lux Mundi* in 1889, with thinkers such as Henry Scott Holland and Charles Gore at the beginning of this period and William Temple and Richard Henry Tawney toward the end. In the middle we find an active array of Christian thought in sociology and social relations, highlighted by important Church investigations into industrial questions and conferences such as COPEC, (the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship in 1924), and various ecumenical social concern ventures. Thirdly, it was an important time for Christian writings in economics with the founding of the Christian Social Union's *Economic Review* (1890), men like Wilfred Richmond, William Cunningham and W.J. Ashley writing on Christian economics at the beginning and A.D. Lindsay and Josiah Stamp at the end and a whole host of Christian thinkers joining the economic debates during the interval.

2. THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC DEBATES

Let me begin at the end and quote Alan Gill in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1984.

In response to a call from an Argentine evangelist, Dr. Luis Palau . . . two thousand people, part of an audience of about seventy thousand, walked meekly forward "surrendering themselves to Christ". For all of June and the first two weeks of July, Palau had been conducting a crusade at the Queens Park Rangers Football Stadium, London. About half a million people have attended the meetings so far. The crusade got off to an uncertain start with noisy demonstrations by Punks. Posters of Palau were dubbed "We love Luis" followed by a swastika. On a more serious note, professors and clergy representing Kings College London, the Church of England Mission and Unity Board, St James Church Picadilly and others claimed on a popular London television programme that evangelists such as Palau and Billy Graham lack concern for social needs and mass evangelism makes no contribution to solving the world's problems. "That is such superficial shallow thinking that I am embarrassed for them", commented Palau to an audience of thousands at the Park Rangers stadium. The complaints are dumb. Slavery in Britain was abolished by a group of men who were converted to Christ in the mass evangelistic campaigns of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield. The evangelist pointed to a recovered alcoholic in the stadium audience. "He is a friend of mine who was converted in a crusade last autumn. I don't know how many thousands of pounds the British Social Service had to pay for him because of his alcoholism. He never worked. Now he is a decent, clean, a godly man serving the Lord."

Edward Norman in his *Church and Society in England*² notes that a significant part of the history of social thought in both the Anglican and Non-conformist churches revolves around this tension in social theology — the conversion of the individual as against the transformation and uplift of the social environment. Economic science has played a large part in the progress of this debate and has often even had the final say.

1. *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 4, 1984.

2. Edward Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

amelioration. Of Arnold Toynbee it was written:³

For the sake of religion, he had become a social reformer.
For the sake of social reform, he became an economist.

Down through the ages, there appear to be two major motives for this Christian concern for social uplift. Firstly, poverty in itself was naturally seen as evil, and secondly, *that* poverty was seen to hinder evangelism. Although Britain in the nineteenth century considered itself a Christian country, the Church had the greatest of difficulties in the conversion of the poorer classes. This difficulty is the subject of Ken Inglis' book, *Churches and The Working Class in Victorian England*, (1963).⁴ We make the first preliminary point then, that Christian discussion on economics is inseparable from the social uplift and relief debates. Although, with few exceptions the concern of the Church remained primarily the conversion of the individual, this concern was tempered by the extent of the evils wrought by the industrial system and urban misery which hindered the victims in the effective exercise of their Christian belief. The debates⁵ in social amelioration however are themselves set in a particular ideological context which again cannot be ignored. For Christians, this concerned the debates on the nature of the Church throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For not only was there a cleavage between Non-conformists and Anglicans on what the Church ought to be, but within Anglicanism itself competing groups vied among each other for the acceptance or exclusion of various doctrinal schemes. This struggle was at once intense, desperate and of over-riding concern. The Anglican Church has never really decided whether it is a reformed Catholic Church or a re-formed church with Catholic emphasis. The latter part of the nineteenth century, then, is marked by the rise of Anglo-Catholicism within the Anglican Church, bringing with it a deep antagonism to traditional evangelical views. It follows then that Christian discussions on economics are inseparable from general doctrinal discussions. It should therefore come as no surprise that halfway through reading a book of the period with the phrase "Christian Economics" in a title, that one discovers to in fact be reading a primer for sacramentalist theology!

3. 1890-1940 — THE CHURCH STEPS LEFT

What then characterises the Church in the period 1890-1940? What was it doing about the social situation and what sort of economics was it producing? The standard histories' concur that this period was one of a sharp step to the Left for not only the Anglican but the other denominations as well. This period is feted as the Church's great leap into Christian socialism. The

3. Alfred Milner, *Arnold Toynbee: A Memoir*, p.39.

4. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963.

5. Monographs such as Peter d'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914*, Princeton, 1968, Maurice B. Réckitt, *Maurice to Temple, A Century of the Social Movement in the Church of England*, London, 1947, Stephen Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement*, London, 1967, Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England 1900-1965*, London, 1966, Kathleen Woodroffe, *From Charity to Social Work in England and the United States*, London, 1962, Ken Inglis, *op. cit.* and especially John Oliver, *The Church and Social Order*, Mowbray, London, 1968 must all be balanced in the light of Edward Norman *op. cit.*

consciousness of the Church and in involving the laity in social reform. The period saw the formation of a plethora of organizations within the Churches. The decade or so before 1890 saw the beginnings of the Christian Socialist revival with the founding of the Guild of St. Matthew in 1877, followed by the Christian Social Union (CSU) in 1889. The Christian Fellowship League comes along in 1897, while the Church Socialist League (1906) becomes the League of the Kingdom of God in 1923. 1918 sees the formation of a more radical socialist group in the Catholic wing of the Anglican Church called the Catholic Crusade; the 1930's, the Christendom Group with its annual Summer Schools of Sociology gets going, and so on. The formation of these societies was not limited to the Anglican Church, (such as all of those mentioned above) but were found in the leading Non-conformist denominations as well. The Methodists had their "Forward Movement", there was the Christian Socialist Society, the Christian Socialist League — basically a Baptist organization — and there were socialist societies in the Unitarian, Swedenborgian and Quaker sects. The movement even spurred a new denomination, the (doctrinally dubious) Labour Churches.

The period saw a wide number of journals appearing such as *Christian Socialist*, *Church Socialist*, *Commonwealth*, *Pilgrim*, *Brotherhood*, *Labour Church Record*, *Church Socialist Quarterly* and the *Economic Review*. There were numerous tracts, pamphlets and exposes aimed at consciousness raising. Following on the heels of *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, (1883), comes William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* in 1890 and Charles Booth's in-depth and extensive studies of the London poor, published as his massive *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1899-1903). There were numerous manuals on Socialism and the Church such as Kirtlan's *Socialism for Christians* (Pioneer Pamphlet Number 1, 1907). There was Adderley's *A Little Primer of Christian Socialism*; the same author even published a book on Psalm 15, subtitled *A Meditation for Christian Socialists*, (1903). In response there were numerous books and pamphlets antagonistic to the movement. We may mention Molesworth's *The Dangers of "Christian" Socialism*, (1913) or the various Anti-Socialist Unions "speaker's handbooks", or their *Socialism Exposed* in 1914, or K.D. Best's *Why No Good Catholic Can Be a Socialist*, (1890). There was hefty discussion on the relationship of the Church to socialism, and its responsibilities to those disadvantaged by the industrial system. Debates throughout the period can be found in the Church Convocations of both Canterbury and York, the Lambeth Conferences, the Annual Church Congress Papers and the various episcopal charges given by bishops to their dioceses. Conferences and committees abounded. The Congregationalist Church in 1895 even had a sort of "day seminar" on Christian economics. In 1907 the convocation of Canterbury produced the *Moral Witness of the Church on Economic Subjects*. In 1918 the Archbishop's Committee met to consider the church and state in industrial relations.⁶ In 1924, the COPEC Conference: its work through regional councils continued for a number of years afterwards culminating in 1929, in the formation of the Christian Social Council. In 1930, the Industrial Christian Fellowship undertook a study entitled

6. *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, the report of the Archbishops' Fifth Committee of Enquiry, SPCK, London, 1918.

Unemployment and the Subsistence Level; while in 1938 they finally published their study, *The Fact of Malnutrition*. These discussions continued at the large inter-denominational Church Assemblies at Oxford in 1937 and Malvern in 1941. The published literature as can be imagined for that period is quite extensive. One could also make mention of the string of writings on the Kingdom of God noting how the interparty theological debates again affected the economic content. And finally, much also turns up in the writings of Christian political theory. During the 1930's, the period of greatest economic distress, the published work becomes, surprisingly, not much more intense, but the economic content is less innovative and less helpful. Christian economic thought by World War II however, was basically bankrupt. In the literature it is possible to distinguish across this half century four separate, though interlocking themes which legitimately cover the use of the term "Christian Economics".

4. FOUR STREAMS IN CHRISTIAN ECONOMICS

The first one could be termed "Moral force economics". Ramsey comments in his *From Gore to Temple*:

Gore like Holland accompanied [his] creed by passionate outbursts against the injustice of sweating, low wages, bad housing, exploitation and the complacent luxury of the rich. His attacks on injustice were less the expression of a social theory than of the spirit of the Hebrew prophets.

Its strength was its Church-based component, its Christian micro-economics. It emphasised the appeal to the conscience: many Christians in organisations such as the CSU believed it was possible to appeal to rich Christians to use their wealth as good stewards in a terribly fallen and broken world. Thus we find calls for lifestyles which emphasise spiritual renewal and moderating of expenditure. But of course it went further than this. The Christian Social Union was well organized with 6,000 or so members throughout the Anglican Church in Britain. They were famous for their "White Lists" in which firms which had complied with reasonable wage and work conditions for their employees were placed on a circulated list which Christian folk could favour for purchases and business dealings. One of the most important programmes organised in the decades just before and after the turn of the century concerns the university settlements. The settlements were missions usually founded in the slum areas of London and some of the other great cities and provided opportunities for University students to become involved with the working classes. Settlements engaged in a variety of activities from education to legislation, in some cases, taking local utilities to court on behalf of slum residents when their contracts were unfulfilled. Toynbee Hall, the first of these settlements had a strong educational programme with at one stage 130 classes a week. The macro-economic component of moral force economics however, was a sad history of Christians grasping at any and every economic panacea most of which later proved to be inadequate or patently false. These are best illustrated by the Christendom Group in the 1930's who were morbidly suspicious of the power of international finance, warned against inter-national economic interdependency policies, were unreasonably anti-technological and anti-industrial and finally grasped at the Major C.H. Douglas social credit scheme.

The second area of writings and activities concerned with Christian economics could be called the "critique of political economy" strand. Many Christians were highly suspicious of both Classical and Neo-classical political economy. For it appeared (though in fact it was not altogether true) that the conclusions of nineteenth-century English economics supported the historical inevitability and irreversibility of industrialisation, urban poverty, and perpetual low wages. "Historical economics" was not only a reaction to political economy, but was set up in opposition to the deductive and marginalist economic principles of Alfred Marshall and others. From the beginning, it had strong and unashamed reformist aims, especially in relating to Irish agricultural problems and emphasising the need for balanced economies: it saw the development of industrialised slums as a threat to social stability. The historical economists can be seen as the forerunners to those modern schools of economic thought which stress the social costs of economic growth and industrialization. Arnold Toynbee, for example, directed powerful attacks on Ricardo's 'economic man'. Not all of those who belonged to this school had a Christian basis for their work and in fact they were a rag-bag of anti-utilitarians, positivists and liberalists. Even those who carried the name "Christian" such as Toynbee, Ashley and Cunningham, were to some extent associated with the heterodox Balliol College broad churchmanship, which today may not even pass the most liberal definition of the word. Nevertheless, it seems that the Christian milieu of this school facilitated an interchange of thoughts and ideas within the church in general thus fostering productive alternatives to political economy, and in the long run, complementing aspects of Marshallian mathematical economics which otherwise might have been missed.

The third stream of writings on Christian economics concerns the "critique of capitalism". There was, of course, an earlier period of Christian socialism centring around F.D. Maurice, J.M. Ludlow and Charles Kingsley.⁸ Maurice's socialism, like indeed that of the latter period, was derived from the Frenchmen Buchez and Lamennais, and of course was not state socialism in the Marxian term. Christian socialism, wrote Maurice:⁹

is to my mind the assertion of God's order. Every attempt to hide it under a great machinery, call it organization of labour, central board, or whatever you like, I must protest against as hindering the gradual development of what I regard as divine purpose. As an attempt to create a new constitution of society when what we want is that the old constitution should exhibit its true functions and energies.

The first president of the Christian Social Union was Bishop Westcott. For him¹⁰

socialism seeks such an organisation of life as shall secure for everyone the most complete development of his powers: individualism seeks primarily the satisfaction of the particular wants of each one in the hope that the pursuit of private interest will in the end secure public welfare.

8. cf. Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism 1848-54*, Universitetsforlaget, Aarhus, 1962.

9. F. Maurice, *The Life of Fredrick Denison Maurice*, 1884 Vol II, p.44.

This interpretation of socialism fits in well with what Ashley meant by it, which to him was:¹¹

an orderly capitalist society with a state served as the arbitrator between large scale business and labour organizations.

The Christian Social Union in a sense was hardly radical and rather remotely socialist. Edward Norman writes of them:¹²

They formulated social problems in a manner and with a rhetoric that suggested political solutions to the ills of society yet very few actually ever contemplated political action.

When the Christian Socialists used expressions such as "Christianity and socialism are almost interchangeable terms", this has very often been interpreted as proof of how far their understanding of Christianity had changed. In actual fact, it is evidence of how far they changed the meaning of socialism. Nevertheless within the Christian socialist societies there were those who were full economic socialists. Men like Percy Dearmer, C.L. Marson, F.L. Donaldson, James Adderley and Conrad Noel eventually revolted against these early French expressions of socialism in favour of the more Marxian state ownership of productive means and distribution. It is true to say that the Christian Social Union was really looking only for a more orderly and fairer version of capitalism and had clearly not gone far enough in its appropriation of socialist thought. Although people like Samuel Keeble were reading Marx seriously in the nineteenth century (*Capital*, though demonstrating "the immorality, the barbarism and the unscrupulousness of modern masters and men in trade" yet contained "huge fallacies") it was not until the 1930's that Christians pondered Communist-Christian hybrid ideologies: by then however, it was too late — the broad social excitement with socialist schemes had largely dissipated within the churches.

There were at least two main schools of Christian critiques of capitalism. The first one was the economic "socialism" embodied in the League of the Kingdom of God and the later Christendom Group in the 1930's. This group however had unreal ideas of just how "Christian" England was and just how possible it was to bring English citizenry back into the Church. The main emphasis of the Christendom Group however was not so much in the political shape of socialism. Anti-capitalistic, anti-statist (i.e. pro-political decentralisation), and enamoured of "Guild Socialism" these radical Catholic Anglicans were more interested in a re-arrangement of social relationships based on a perceived and overly idealised structure which they believed existed in the Middle Ages, in Christendom.

The second school possessed a far more sophisticated analysis of capitalism and its historical origins and development and is associated with the name of R.H. Tawney.

The fourth stream of writings belongs to the category of "Evangelical Economics". It is dominated by the leading Methodist layman Josiah Stamp. Stamp was born in 1880 and was very well known in his day, probably better than Tawney. His life was cut short in 1941 when he, his wife and elder son were killed in the German bombing of London.¹³ Stamp was the most respected taxation authority of his day and worked on various reparations committees between the wars. His three relevant books to do with evangelical economics are: *The Christian Ethic as an Economic Factor*, (the Social Service Lecture, 1926), the *Motive and Method in a Christian Order*, (the Fernley-Hartley Lectures, 1936) and *Christianity and Economics*, (1939).

We may see about three areas in Stamp's views on Christian economics which are worth exploring. Firstly, there was a penetrating critique of Christian socialism. He took to task the Christian socialists and their bad economics and here he had plenty of examples of choose from. Of them he wrote:¹⁴

there are hundreds of people of the finest possible spirit and interest, genuine warm-hearted enthusiasts who cherish the most hopeless fallacies and wrong ideas on economic subjects and are just as great a hindrance to real progress.

Stamp had done extensive work in calculating the national income in Britain and its distribution. His favourite analogy was that the majestic Alps, which if you levelled over Europe, would only raise the whole continent a few inches. The same, he said, was true of income distribution in Britain. The only way for people to get more of the pie was to make a bigger pie, facilitated through productivity increase. But this increase is something that comes from character and he theorised about the possibility of Christians who may for the common good work harder, and more efficiently, or have a standard of conduct that will promote less absenteeism and so on so that the vicious circle of inefficiency, low productivity and low wages would be broken. Secondly and related to this, Stamp was above all an evangelical who stressed the importance in his scheme of social uplift of conversion to Christian faith. This was a program which began with the change in the individual and went on to education, especially moral education and the teaching of better thinking.¹⁵

The real task is the conversion and elevation of the human motive on such a scale that new organism may become possible, inspiration for the tasks of life as well as the destinies of death. Men ought to get from their religion a 'sense of how high and worthy a vocation politics and social administration may be'. (sic)

In other works, it is education for citizenship.

A third area, and another shot at Christian socialists: Stamp was against their "static programmes".¹⁶

13. On Stamp see J. Harry Jones, *Josiah Stamp Public Servant*, Pitman, London, 1964.

14. Josiah Stamp, *The Christian Ethic as an Economic Factor*, The Epworth Press, London, 1926, p.19.

15. Josiah Stamp, *Motive and Method in a Christian Order*, The Epworth Press, London, 1936 p.196; The last piece of this citation is from A.D. Lindsay, *Christianity and Economics* Macmillan, London, 1933, p.139.

16. Stamp, *Motive and Method* p.48.

39 11. Gerard M. Koot, "English Historical Economics and the Emergence of Economic History in England" *History of Political Economy* 12 (2), 1980 pp174-205.

12. Norman *op. cit.* p.222.

I am also old fashioned enough to believe that, however well the world evolves, there will always be new problems created by human relationships, which Christianity at any given moment will have no 'clear programme'... (sic)

In this Stamp believed in the ongoing and sustained application of the Christian intellect to various socio-economic puzzles. In this respect Stamp was not unlike the "historical economics" school (in fact he had a high opinion of William Cunningham mentioned above) envisaging changing policy circumstances depending upon the stage economic society happened to be at a given time. While, after 1923, we find Stamp supporting John Maynard Keynes in large-public spending prescriptions, he would of course not necessarily be arguing the same case outside a depression situation.

5. THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN ECONOMICS

In this final section I want to address those of us who are just discovering Christian economics, and with the knowledge that worldwide, evangelicals are still finding their feet with regard to their contact and involvement in economic thought. My argument is, that there exists a fertile and innovative tradition of Christian economic thought in the general period 1890-1940 which it would be foolish to overlook. In its context of social amelioration, those Christians of the period made many mistakes, but laid indispensable foundations: let me mention five general pointers which we, in the latest generation of Christian economists, may find useful as we plan our own way.

1. There is a lot of good work going on presently in recalling Christians to their social responsibilities and challenging them about their spending patterns. "Social responsibility" perhaps is not the appropriate term to define a Christian attitude: Jesus' warnings to those not tending, healing, clothing, feeding or visiting ("as if you were doing it unto me") are just as appropriately to be taken as an "end-pattern"¹⁷ by which believers can be assured that they are "living in the Spirit", the life to which they are fundamentally called. That is, they are to do these things naturally. For in the long run Christian service is bound to be more dedicated, and generosity more consistent, if that service arises from grace rather than guilt or duty. The current work in consciousness raising is mixed with no little guilt manipulation,¹⁸ and this generally takes the form that firstly Christians are not involved enough in social justice, and secondly that evangelicals have seemingly never been involved in social matters. A myth has grown up that the Lausanne Conference (1974) marked some sort of watershed in evangelical consciousness for social reform.

Edward Norman admirably exposes the misuse Christians have made of the past by fudging or ignoring it. Scott Holland, Westcott and Illingworth¹⁹

All came to believe that the Church was neglecting social and economic teaching... (Westcott) was assisting the creation of a quasi-mythical interpretation of the social attitudes of the nineteenth-century Church which later became generally accepted as true.

17. cf. J.K. Williams, *Justice, Equality and Market Capitalism: A Christian Perspective*, Zadok/ITIM, Canberra, 1984.

18. cf. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators: A Biblical Response to Ronald J. Sider*, Institute for Christian Economics, Tylor, 1984.

19. Norman, op. cit. p. 102-103.

and Gore's constant reminding of the Church's guilt in "failing the poor",²⁰

... considerably influenced twentieth century attitudes to the Church's past record.

Tawney and Temple did little to correct this myth and so it emerged as a major conclusion of the 1924 COPEC Conference. "There must indeed have been something rather second-rate" comments Norman dryly "about the minds of those given to such repetitive exercises".²¹

On a micro or deductive level, evangelicalism, imbued as it always has been with the significance and authority of scripture could not fail to notice the stern social injunctions contained within it. On an historical and empirical level, it turns out that once you actually investigate those groups who are traditionally infamous for their neglect of social care — be it the German Pietists, seventeenth century Puritans, Victorian evangelicals, or American Fundamentalists, the charges are rarely true and where they appear to be so the occasions are eminently defensible.²²

Is it true today? I'm sure many are in need of Scriptural reminders. But it is equally true that the growth and comprehensiveness of our welfare state does absolve us of particular financial burdens for the poor within our Western capitalist democracies. But what is clear from the early British experience, is that these Christian thinkers came — the hard way — to appreciate the enormous complexity of social and economic distress. Toward the end of the interwar period, they retained their moral fervour about the evils of poverty, but noticeably back-tracked in their confidence to effect workable solutions. This is true to some extent of Scott-Holland and of R.J. Campbell, but more clearly so of the great Archbishop William Temple. Bill Dumbrell makes the point in a much longer historical perspective:²³

... within the Reformation period itself great controversy was generated as to how, and at what points, or in what form Christian social or political contact should be made. Nothing much on these issues has changed. The general commitment which the Reformation reaffirmed, the difficulties in social action which it saw, the disillusion in Christian circles that seemingly fruitless social action prompted are still characteristic of the Church scene today.

Therefore there will always be limits to technical solutions, and there will be room for wide-ranging Christian political economy. We ought not throw the nineteenth century evangelical baby out with the bathwater of its restrained views on the State's role. Economic chaos and poverty will be alleviated by the witness of a Gospel preaching, educating, caring Church. In fact the Christian Socialist movement is better interpreted as a mass training exercise to mobilise the individual parishes into effective caring units operative at all levels, political — both national and local — through to the community, the family, the individual. One may not agree with the theological package

20. *Ibid* p.185.

21. *Ibid* p.284.

22. cf. Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Paternoster Press, Exeter 1979 ch.12.

23. W.J. Dumbrell, "The Biblical Basis for Social Judgements", *Interchange* (27), 1980, p.17.

ANGLO-CATHOLICISM — around which it was enveloped: but the product was surely biblically and sociologically sound.

2. We must take up further the evangelical reluctance to accept economic redistributionist legislation as an answer to poverty, (which they saw as an essentially "spiritual" problem). An analogy here concerns one of my Christian brethren who, battling years of an often debilitating schizophrenia could not banish his many fears when he attempted to lay his whole-hearted trust in Christ. He had no difficulty however, when he remembered to take his medication. In terms of the Biblical revelation, it has always been difficult for evangelicals to conceive of the possibility of technical solutions to spiritual problems. I think however we will find better solutions to this problem if we look back to the seventeenth century Puritans and their immediate Reformational forebears. There we find a relationship — still in a sense not fully understood or expounded — between the Christian exercise of faith and the Christian exercise of intelligence which is a component of that faith. For Puritan innovation, technological advance unlocking the secrets of Creation, would tame the restore his God-given and God-directed dominion over nature and thus overcome some of the physical ravages of the Fall. Thus we find in the centre of Francis Bacon's utopia the "New Atlantis" (which is his community of Christian faith of forgiven and restored relationships) an institution which he called "Salomon's House", or his experimental research laboratories. For Francis Bacon, and perhaps more so for the Puritans who resurrected him, their scientific curiosity, their program to "let knowledge increase" (Dan 12:4), would usher in the Millennium as they exercised "experimental" faith.²⁴

The change of attitude toward the state by evangelicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cannot be dismissed as either due to the rise of the "social gospel", nor of clever manoeuvring at church congresses by Anglo-Catholics or modernists (who were nevertheless both numerous and influential in these anyway). The change came from within evangelicalism itself, as indeed it came within Tractarians and Mauricians who shared evangelical distrust in the competency of the state to involve itself, economically in society, or in fact in any such wild utopian schemes. From the 1880's Anglican and non-conformist forums often heard complaints of how impossible it was for working-class converts, particularly the unemployed, to live religious lives when on the brink of starvation; or sustain even the rudiments of morality when several families were crammed in one room together in industrial hovels. The classical change in attitude is demonstrated by the Salvation Army. William Booth was the archetypal evangelist who "knew nothing but Christ crucified" to his poverty-stricken circuit. By the middle of the 1880's however, the *War-Cry* after phenomenal growth saw a substantial decline in sales. There was discontent among some

of Booth's associates on the barrier of such poverty upon evangelistic response, and the²⁵

chorus of hostility was increased by the voices of evangelists and philanthropists who denied Booth's claim to have made a serious impression already in the slums.

In 1890, the Salvo's established their "Social Reform Wing" thus officially initiating the work for which the Army is now rightly proud and famous, and General Booth published his memorable *In Darkest England and the Way Out* complete with utopian city, farm and overseas colonies. Booth had not changed his commitment to win souls. In the preface he writes,²⁶

I am only making it easy where it is now difficult, and possible where it is now impossible, for men and women to find their way to the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There can be no apology for the fact that although generations of dedicated godly Christian folk laboured over the gigantic proportions of social misery caused by unemployment, the answer, at least for the interwar situation was largely the solution to a technical economic puzzle which an unbeliever, exercising his own substantial intellect, managed to crack. John Maynard Keynes and his prescriptions, were supported by a number of Christians, notably Josiah Stamp, who himself had always stressed the role of clear thinking in Christian faith.

Bad and broken relationships *do* cause poverty and economic misery, but they also lead to the instituting of wrong structures and powerful world views, even perverted Christian world views, which perpetuate that misery. Conversion will certainly foster a range of good and restored relationships, but the technical work which established unjust social, political or legal structures will require an equal technical competence to dismantle or ameliorate them. There is a definite and important role therefore for Christian involvement in positive economics. Had it been published earlier Samuelson's *Economics* would surely have been found in Salomon's House.

3. The literature of the period was full of references to the value of Christian belief upon the better functioning of the economic system. This is perhaps a self-evident deduction since mission stories abound with testimonies of tribes doubling their wealth and wellbeing once their conversion created hope and joy in life, and banished the need for (for example) opium expenditure. And modern countries both East and West are painfully aware of the social and economic incapacity of alcoholism.

In an age of declining faith however, (i.e. post-1880) that literature is more suggestive of an apologetic application of Christian economics. For Josiah Stamp, Christian conversion ought naturally to lead to a better motive for work. The effect of mass conversions then would be to break the vicious circle of low-productivity — low wages — low aggregate demand etc. Thus

24. On Bacon see Benjamin Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, Liverpool University Press, 1984; on his followers see Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England*, Cambridge University Press, 1981 and Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-60*, Duckworth, London, 1975

25. Inglis *op. cit.* p.207.

26. William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, London, 1890.

...these most substantial. The industrial revolution, and the rise of unbelief positively destroyed them.

The attraction of medieval socio-economic relationships was irresistible to the Anglo-catholics of Christian socialism. Bishop Gore and others particularly relished the chance for the church to again exercise its disciplinary potential upon those who sinned economically.

Unfortunately, and as Tawney himself pointed out, times had changed. Our role is now as Christian minorities who more often than not presently occupy leading and key positions in government and education and other professions. This is true not only in the West, but notably in third world countries, and even in liberal Marxist regimes (eg: Nicaragua). Our role is therefore "Danielic" or "Josephic", and would appear to be mainly to foster order in whatever empires we find ourselves, so that the Gospel can be preached in peace. If Tawney is right, then we are not entitled to see our present capitalism as God-given or as an "order of creation". As Christian economists we are fully justified to innovate new legal or political modifications to the capitalistic order if this is in the interests of a juster, fairer or more stable social order. The demand for a wholesale dismantling of that order by various Christians in the West is not only impracticable but sure to lead to chaos in the process. While we should bear in mind the threat of reduced investment once we tamper with the system, capitalism is not sacrosanct; neither is it of itself evil or good, but rather, *amoral*, dependant upon the nature and character of fundamental social relationships.

5. Finally we cannot help noticing the role of particular theological ideologies within Christian economics. The Bible itself is an "positive" as it is "normative". We should reject the view that it is a mystical revelation stated in vague ambiguities. It is not a hodge podge of ideas that can be used to support an infinity of worldviews, (otherwise known as supermarket theology). Patient and careful scholarship is one reason why Roman Catholic and Reformed theologies are far closer in our day than in Luther's. It is axiomatic then that good economics (in the widest sense) proceeds from good theology. There is a lesson to be learned from many of the Christian socialist groups who so exalted their social theology that they were forced to admit of and proffer the most monstrous of economic fallacies. To be fair, there is a fine line between "ideology" and "working hypothesis", and it is not surprising that Thomas Kuhn,³⁰ the sociologist of science believed that only something with the magnitude of a conversion is needed to alter a scientist's paradigm. But God is surely not honoured if we can come to respectable evangelical conclusions in our economics utilising questionable methodologies. Very recently, we have seen many sad examples of pamphleteering in Christian economics utilising poor theology to arrive at planned or comfortable conclusions. This was true with Christian socialist economics in the 1930's, and it appears to be notorious with both the American Christian Far Right and the loose thinking of the radical Evangelical Left.³¹

29. cf. Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977.

30. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd Edn, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

31. See for example contributions by Gary North and Art Gish in Robert G. Clouse, (Ed) *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics*, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, 1984.

we find Protestants lauding their own child (Capitalism) and its work ethic as the Christian answer to the problem of production. Today, with increasing technology, production is hardly a problem in the West, and most would be aware that even in lean times there are few countries which do not produce or grow enough for the needs of their populations. In fact God has not been niggardly in the gross provisions for those who live on planet Earth, hence the more recent Christian Economic literature on the "myth of overpopulation". Economics ought not be so much the science occasioned by abundant wants in a world of scarce resources as it is reasonable satisfactions constrained and frustrated by unreasonable selfishness and fear.

The problem is clearly one of distribution; who gets what and the criteria of this location. The Marxian solution with its attendant social and intellectual and political restrictions may well have been better than the horrors of life for the worker in the Industrial Revolution; the democratic socialism of many Western countries may be fairer and freer than either, but could it ever match the level of distributive justice found within Church communities: it certainly could not match the quality of relationships found there. What would be helpful, is an empirical science of Christian economic history whose goal it is to trace the economic redistributive effects of evangelical conversion throughout history. The results of such work will have no place in commending Christian panaceas to economic summits: their true value is apologetic, and their adoption is more suited to the work of the Church, and as promoting for example a more scriptural basis for Christian social justice in the third world as an alternative to Liberation Theology.

4. We must take note of the use made of the various critiques (especially Christian critiques) of capitalism. Foremost here is the work of R.H. Tawney²⁷ picking up on foundations laid by the Europeans Werner Sombart and Max Weber. For English Protestants it was something of a shock to be told firstly, and powerfully as a result of Keynes' work, that capitalism was inherently unstable and needed regulatory intervention by governments to stabilise it and fine-tune it. Secondly, it was a shock to discover that capitalism wasn't always what it used to be. It had a development, a history: it was actually different in the past. Tawney's exposition of this, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, was so notable, that two chapters were serialised in the American magazine the *New Republic*.²⁸ Tawney, in tracing the secularisation of political and economic theory in European history highlights the development of a widening gap between private and business morality. In the village situation there were at least two constraints on economic activity, and especially fraud. Firstly, the chances were that everyone in the village was related. It was unlikely that the village blacksmith was going to diddle you if the village blacksmith was Uncle Jack. Secondly, the Church had much greater power, and economic sins could be punished by exclusion from communion until restitution was made. Excommunication would not only affect social relationships, but fairly surely opportunities for business dealings as well. The growth of towns and the possibilities of pluralism within Christendom

27. On Tawney see Ross Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and His Times: Socialism as Fellowship*, Andre Deutsch, 1974.

45 28. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, John Murray, London 1926; *New Republic*, May 12 and May 19, 1926.