

The Fundamentals

A Testimony to the Truth

Volume XII

Compliments of
Two Christian Laymen

TESTIMONY PUBLISHING COMPANY
(Not Inc.)
808 North La Salle Street
Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

(See change of address in Publishers' Notice, page 6.)

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH AND SOCIALISM

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The *sudden rise of Socialism* is the most surprising and significant movement of the age. A few years ago the term suggested a dream of fanatics; today it embodies the creed and the hope of intelligent millions. For example, in America the Socialistic vote increased from 20,000, in 1892, to 900,000 in 1912. In France this vote numbers 1,104,000, and in Germany more than 3,000,000; and in these and other lands multitudes who are not openly allied with political Socialism are imbued with Socialistic principles and are advocates of Socialistic theories.

With this great movement *the Christian Church* is deeply concerned; first, because of the endeavor which many are making to identify Socialism with Christianity; and, secondly, because, on the other extreme, popular Socialism is suggested as a substitute for religion and is antagonistic to Christianity; and, thirdly, because the strength of Socialism consists largely in its protest against existing social wrongs to which the Church is likewise opposed but which can be finally righted only by the universal rule of Christ.

I. *Socialism*, strictly defined, is *an economic theory* which proposes the abolition of private capital and the substitution of collective ownership in carrying on the industrial work of the world. This collective ownership is to extend to all the material instruments of production; these are to be publicly operated, and the products to be equitably distributed. The government is to be wholly in the hands of the people, and it

is to assign to each individual his task and to determine his wage. Every citizen is to be actually a government employee.

It is evident that Socialism is to be distinguished from *Communism* with which it is often confused. The latter advocates a collective ownership of all wealth. Socialism does not deny the right of private property, but of private capital. In a Socialistic state one might own a house, but he could not rent it to increase his income. He might own a yacht, but he could not use it to carry passengers for pay. Under Communism there would be no private ownership, but it would be literally true that "no man could call aught that he possessed his own."

Socialism is still more easily distinguished from *Anarchism*. The latter seeks the abolition of all government; but Socialism advocates the extension of the functions of government to regulate the life and labor of every individual and even in the most minute details. Anarchy means no government; Socialism proposes more government than any nation has ever known.

Quite as obviously Socialism should never be confused with that extreme form of Anarchy known as *Nihilism*. The latter advocates the violent abolition of all existing institutions, social and political. It is true that Socialists often propose revolution and violence; but an ever increasing number believe their ends will be attained by a gradual process of social evolution moving toward the goal of a collective ownership of capital. It is not right therefore to identify Socialism with assassination, lawlessness and outrage.

Most important of all is the distinction between Socialism and *Christianity*. This might seem to be self-evident. Christianity is a religion; Socialism an economic theory, or a political proposal, and with such theories and proposals Christianity and the Church have nothing to do. At the present time, however, there is a strong endeavor and an evident tendency to identify Socialism and the Christian Church.

Some are insisting that Jesus Christ was a Socialist and that the early Church was established on Socialistic principles. Others declare that Socialism is merely the application of Christianity to industrial problems, and that it is the duty of a Christian minister to preach Socialism, and the supreme function of the Christian Church to introduce and support Socialism as the one cure for all existing social evils.

As to Jesus Christ, it is impossible to identify Him with any social theory or political party. His teachings are of universal application and eternal validity; but they do not deal with the questions of political economy any more than with those of physical science. That He insisted upon justice, and brotherhood, and love, and self-sacrifice is evident; but to suggest that these virtues are the monopoly of any one political or economic party is presumptuous, and to prove that Christ advocated "collective ownership of property" is impossible. The fundamental economic problem relates to the division of wealth; and as to that Christ refused to speak. He rebuked social sins and injustice and selfishness, but when requested to divide a possession on a certain occasion He asked, "Who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" and that question has wide implications for the present day.

When we read the story of *the early Church* there are statements which suggest Socialism or even Communism, as for instance when we read that "they had all things common," but a fuller investigation shows their Communism was *local, voluntary, occasional, temporary*. It was practiced only in Jerusalem, no one was compelled to divide or sell his property; not all adopted the practice, but many like Mary the mother of Mark kept their homes in the city. Furthermore, this Communism was only practiced for a time. It was prompted by love and designed to meet a special crisis, but never admitted or established as an abiding principle of Church life.

As to *the Church of today*, it would be gross injustice to its members should it be identified with Socialism. While

Socialists may adopt many of the Christian principles and feel impelled by Christian motives, they must remember that Christianity is something other than a social propaganda and far more than an economic theory. On the other hand, the Church recognizes that it has no right to ally itself with any political party, or to commit itself to any one form of social or industrial organization. The Church leaves its members free to adopt or reject Socialism as they may deem wise. A man may be an ardent Socialist and a sincere Christian, or he may be a true Christian and a determined opponent of Socialism.

Most Christians admit the wisdom of many Socialistic proposals, but feel that they are at liberty to act without the interference of the Church. In America, for example, the public school system and post office department of the government are instances of the application of Socialistic principles. Government ownership might be extended to the railroads, mines, public utilities, factories; this would not involve questions of religion, but of expediency and political wisdom, with which problems the Church has nothing to do.

On the other hand many Christians are persuaded that there are fallacies and weaknesses in the Socialistic scheme. They believe, for instance, that Socialists are mistaken in assuming that labor is the sole factor in producing wealth, and that capital is the result or embodiment of robbery; they do not believe the formation and government of a completely organized Socialistic state would be practical or possible; they are convinced that Socialism, if realized, would involve a tyranny and slavery which would be incredible and intolerable. These are their sincere convictions and men who hold them should not be denied a place in the Church nor rebuked by the Church as though they were lacking in intelligence or in Christian sympathy and love. It should be recognized that the Church is not to invade the field of political economy, nor is it allied with any political or social order or propaganda.

It is in this connection that the movement called "*Christian Socialism*" should be criticised. To say the least, the name it has adopted is unfortunate, for it implies, whether intentionally or not, that other Socialists are not Christians, and that other Christians should be Socialists. One might as well speak of Christian Democrats, or Christian Republicans, or Christian Suffragists. The implications would be much the same.

"Christian Socialism," however, is not only an imperfect name; it is in most of its forms an unfortunate thing. In some cases, it is true, it is merely the expression of a benevolent desire that a spirit of justice and brotherhood should be shown by men in their social and industrial relations. This is innocent enough; but as presented by the great mass of its advocates, "Christian Socialism" is neither Christian nor Socialism. It is disappointing to Christians and irritating to Socialists. It minimizes or denies such Christian truths as the incarnation, the virgin birth, the atonement, the resurrection, justification by faith, the work of the Holy Spirit, the second coming of Christ, and insofar it ceases to be true Christianity. On the other hand, it is not real Socialism. Few of its adherents deny the right of private capital, or insist upon the "collective ownership of the instruments of production." In the effort to unite Christianity and Socialism justice is done to neither. Such a union should never be attempted. From Socialism as a strict economic theory, Christianity is absolutely distinct, and as a political proposal Socialism has no relation to the Church.

II. *Popular Socialism*, however, is something quite different from a scientific economic theory. It is a social creed, offered as a substitute for religion, promising material benefits to all mankind, and bitterly opposed to Christianity and the Church. Much of this hatred is due to ignorance and prejudice. Great multitudes who call themselves Socialists have vague conceptions of the problems of political science or of the serious difficulties involved in the establishment of

a Socialistic state, but they are vividly conscious of their hatred against existing institutions which they hold responsible for the present social inequalities and wrongs. Christian teachers, therefore, do well to meet fairly and generously the attacks which Socialists are making upon the Church, and they should explain to Socialists their misconceptions and the obvious defects of their creed.

1. Popular Socialism is mistaken in *identifying the Christian Church with "capital,"* and in regarding the Church as responsible for the present social order. It is commonly asserted that the Church is the "rich man's club"; that Christian ministers are controlled by men of wealth and afraid to rebuke social evils, that the Gospel is preached with the purpose of making poor men content with their present conditions and of preventing them from rising to assert their rights. As a matter of fact the Church is committed to no one social order. It has flourished under imperial rule as it has in great republics, but it is opposed to the wrongs and injustice of every system. Instead of being "the rich man's club" the great proportion of its members are wage earners, and a very small proportion are rich. For instance, of the 36,000,000 Church members in the United States only a few could be classed as capitalists. On the other hand, very many capitalists, unfortunately, are not professed Christians nor actively interested in the Church.

As to the ministry, it is rarely recruited from the ranks of the wealthy, and its representatives are usually fearless in their rebuke of social sins. It is the glory of the Church that it welcomes to its services and blesses by its offices both rich and poor alike, and does more to obliterate class distinctions than any other agency in the world.

2. Popular Socialism unjustly *places all capitalists under suspicion* of dishonesty and selfishness. It is true that the more intelligent advocates of Socialism, as an economic proposal, discriminate between the responsibilities of individuals

and the defects of a system. They even sympathize with capitalists who are compelled to act under conditions and laws which are beyond their control, and they attack no one class in a community, but seek for new institutions which, without violence or injustice, will secure a truer equality of opportunity and condition. But "popular Socialism" regards all men of wealth with enmity. Its outcries against the rich are engendering the bitterest class hatred and arousing passions which, unless controlled, will result in violence and anarchy and universal disaster. There can be no doubt that capital is often cruel, that at times it depends upon injustice and tyranny, and frequently exploits the helpless, and produces misery and distress; but these abuses are not universal. Where they exist they can be corrected by law; and it is merely begging the question to assert that they can be removed only by abolishing capital and substituting collective ownership. On the other hand, it must be remembered that large numbers of capitalists are scrupulously honest in their dealings and are devoted to the welfare of their employees. So far, however, has "popular Socialism" poisoned the public mind that these last statements would be received in many quarters with ridicule and incredulity. Yet it is undoubtedly true that many employers are conducting large business enterprises with a deep sense of their personal responsibility and in a spirit of sympathy and helpfulness. It should be noticed further that the very principles of industry, fidelity and honesty, taught by Christianity, enable men to increase their power and wealth, and this should be true under any form of social organization. The mere fact that one is possessed of wealth should not be regarded as evidence that he has been guilty of robbery and greed.

3. Popular Socialism *fails to recognize* that the principles of justice, fraternity and charity, by which its leaders claim to be animated, are *Christian principles*, and have been expressed by the Church as by no other society of men. It is

hardly rational for Socialists to contend, as they do, that all the hospitals and orphanages and benevolent institutions in Christian and pagan lands, established and conducted by the Church, are mere weak endeavors to bolster up a false and decadent social system. They are rather the expression of the spirit of Christ, without which no social system can ever attain perfection or can long endure.

4. Popular Socialism is vitally defective in that it *places the physical above the spiritual* needs of mankind. It is, as a philosophy, definitely materialistic. It insists that better social conditions will produce better men; Christianity teaches that better men are needed to produce better conditions. Socialism endeavors to elevate individuals by elevating society; Christianity contends that society can be elevated only by the regeneration of individuals. To secure such regeneration is the supreme effort and function of the Church, and its chief message to Socialism is that the "life is more than meat and the body than raiment." To those who are crying for equality and opportunity and improved material conditions and fondly dreaming of a new age of universal plenty and comfort and happiness, the Church repeats the divine message, "Ye must be born again." If Socialism is ever to succeed as an economic theory, it can only be by the aid of the Church; for of all conceivable social systems, none would be more dependent upon high character and exalted principles than a socialistic state; and the production of such character and enforcement of such principles are the proved function of the Christian Church.

III. *Socialism* is, however, something else than a scientific economic theory, or a popular materialistic philosophy; it is *a serious protest against the social wrongs and cruelties* of the age, against the defects of the present economic system, against special privilege and entrenched injustice, against prevalent poverty, and hunger, and despair. It is not always an intelligent protest. Its cry is sometimes inarticulate and wild; but it voices the social unrest, the sullen discontent, the

bitter envy and sorrow of thousands who are attracted to Socialism merely by its protest against the present social order and its prophecies of a better age to come.

1. This protest of Socialism is a call to the Church to *proclaim* more insistently *the social principles of Christ*. This does not mean the adoption of a so-called "social gospel" which discards the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and substitutes a religion of good works; but a true Gospel of grace is inseparable from a Gospel of good works. Christian doctrines and Christian duties cannot be divorced. The New Testament no more clearly defines the relation of the believer to Christ than to the members of one's family, to his neighbors in society, and to his fellow-citizens in the state. These social teachings of the Gospel need a new emphasis today by those who accept the whole Gospel, and should not be left to be interpreted and applied by those alone who deny essential Christianity or substitute for religion some modern social creed.

The Church must emphasize anew the teachings of Christ and His apostles relative to *marriage* and the family. Upon this sacred institution many professed Socialists are making a deadly assault. Socialism is not necessarily related to any one theory of marriage, but unfortunately it is too frequently allied with lax theories of divorce and proposals of free love which are destructive to the family and subversive of society.

The Church must proclaim anew the teaching of her Lord relative to *the stewardship of wealth*. Many a man who believes himself to be an orthodox Christian becomes restless and declares he wishes to hear only "the simple Gospel" when his pastor begins to expound the Scriptural principles relative to Christian stewardship. It must be insisted that one is as responsible for the methods by which his power and position and property are acquired as for the way in which these are used; and that every man must render an account to the Lord not only for his use of one-tenth of his income, but for every

fraction he selfishly retains or spends. Christians must be reminded that an infallible test of being a child of God is the treatment shown to one's neighbor who is in need.

There must be a similar emphasis on the Scriptural principles relating to *masters and servants*, to employers and employees. If, on the one hand, there is an insistence upon justice and sympathy, so there must be on the other, upon absolute loyalty and fidelity. The conflict between capital and labor could be avoided without a reorganization of society should both parties be controlled by the plain teachings of the Gospel of Christ.

There must be a new insistence upon the sacredness of *the state* and the truth that government is a divine institution. This means a new emphasis upon the duties of Christian citizenship. Every expression of anarchy and lawlessness should be severely reprov'd and speedily repressed; and every Christian citizen should seek by patient endeavor to solve the complex problems of modern social and industrial life, and to aid in the establishment of better customs and of juster laws. Socialism would lose much of its power if the Church were more careful to proclaim the explicit social doctrines which form an integral part of the Gospel of Christ.

2. This protest of Socialism demands of the Church a *more consistent practice*, on the part of her members, of the social teachings of Christ. It is easy to bring false charges against Christians; it is even customary today to hold the Church up to ridicule and scorn as a society of hypocrites untrue to their professions and their Lord. It is not necessary to even consider these accusations which spring from ignorance or prejudice or spite. The great masses of Christians are striving to be faithful and seeking to live well-pleasing to their Master. However, it is true that there are some in the Church who are consciously guilty of sins against society, and others who, because of the difficulty of the questions involved, excuse themselves on the ground that their wrong practices

are necessitated by the industrial system of the age. Some are quite comfortable under what they regard as orthodox preaching, even though they know their wealth has come from the watering of stocks and from wrecking railroads, and from grinding the faces of the poor. The supposed orthodoxy of such preaching is probably defective in its statements of the social teachings of the Gospels. One might be a social bandit and buccaneer and yet believe in the virgin birth and in the resurrection of Christ; but one cannot be a Christian unless he believes "that if One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again;" and to live for Christ means to live for Him in every sphere and relationship of life, whether employer or employee, capitalist or laborer, stock-holder or wage-earner.

We must all admit the grave complexity of modern life, and the delicacy and difficulty of the problems involved, yet we must not be content to countenance practices which are unjust or unchristian. To be absolutely true to conscience and to Christ will mean sacrifice and loss of money and social prestige. It is never easy to take up the cross daily and to follow Christ; but there is a new call for heroism, for martyrdom. Absolute loyalty to Christ in the business and social world today often means crucifixion, pain, death, but "it is the way the Master went; must not the servant tread it still?"

3. The protest of Socialism is a distinct call to the Church to define anew to herself her function, and to interpret anew *the prophecies of her Lord*. There are many who, in the name of Christianity, have been promising a new social order, a kingdom of God, which they declare the Church will introduce. The long continued failure to realize these promises has led to criticisms of the Church, and has done not a little to increase the bitterness of socialistic attacks upon her. The Church is now being held responsible for social sins and injustice, for the wrongs and grievances of the age; and for this unfor-

fortunate position she must largely blame herself. She has arrogated functions which are not her own; she has made promises for which there is no written word of Scripture. It should be remembered, for instance, that the state is quite as purely a divine institution as is the Church. It is for the state to secure social reconstruction when necessary; it is for the state to punish offenders, and to secure by legal enactments and legislative processes the abolition of abuses, and the establishment of justice. When the Church assumes functions belonging to the state, she involves herself in needless difficulties and places herself in a false position before the world. More important still it is to ask what predictions of Scripture support the assertion that the Church is herself to introduce the kingdom of God. She is certainly to promise the coming of that kingdom; she is even now to insist that her members shall obey its laws, but it is impossible for her to compel Christless men to accept the principles of her Lord. Her supreme function is to secure, on the part of individuals, whole-hearted devotion and allegiance to Christ. It is for her to increase as rapidly as possible her membership and to extend in every legitimate sphere her benevolent influence; but the real blessedness of the Church and of the world awaits the personal return of Christ. The hope of the world is not in a new social order instituted by unregenerate men; not a millennium made by man; not a commonwealth of humanity organized as a Socialistic state; but a kingdom established by Christ which will fill the earth with glory at the coming of the King.