

CHRISTIANS ON THE LEFT.



WELCOME TO COTL BASICS:

A 5 WEEK INTRODUCTORY COURSE ON THE VALUES OF CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM

FOREWORD



One of the biggest frustrations for Christians engaged in campaigning for justice and peace in our world today is the ease with which the interface between politics and the churches can become dominated by issues of immediate concern to the faith communities themselves:

faith schools, equality legislation, assisted dying etc.

It's as if we've conceded that Christianity is merely one aspect of how a minority of people live their lives and to make any more significant contribution to political life would be undemocratic.

But the Christian Socialist tradition has always proposed a "big picture" of how the Gospel might be lived out in the political and economic structures of society. And Christian Socialism offers that big picture, not in order to defend some Christian privilege in an increasingly secular or multi-faith society, but as its gift to the wider conversation about how all people can come together to tackle the problems of poverty and inequality, violence and climate change that plague our society.

This short course considers five aspects of that big picture through the exploration of scripture, our historic heroes, and other political and social thinkers. Inevitably it will raise many unanswered questions. But in our somewhat stagnant political culture, in which politicians of all colours are struggling to address the financial, ecological and social problems that affect us all, perhaps raising difficult questions is another part of our gift to the conversation. And perhaps some of you who are meeting together to discuss these questions will be motivated to find some answers and, in so doing, renew the Christian Socialist contribution to political debate in the twenty-first century.

Rev'd Dr James Walters

COTL DIRECTOR'S NOTE



As you'll learn in this course, campaigning for justice is not something that the church has just thought of in the last ten years. For many, many years Christians on the left have been "speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves".

This prophetic witness has not always been popular, but it traces its roots to a biblical understanding of the innate dignity of humanity, yet the reality of human nature. The precedent of laws like Jubilee show the need for economic systems that protect us from ourselves. We stand in this tradition of not being satisfied with mere charity, but instead doing the harder work of seeking justice. I hope and pray that this course could be a way for you to join us on our journey as we seek to provide support, resource and fellowship for those who are engaging politically.

Andy Flanagan, Director of COTL

CONTENTS

Week 1 – Living Equally	p.2
<i>Galations 3: 23-end; The Levellers</i>	
Week 2 – Living Responsibly	p.4
<i>Matthew 25: 31-40; Dorothy Day</i>	
Week 3 – Living Co-operatively	p.6
<i>1 Corinthians 12: 20-27; John Bellers</i>	
Week 4 – Living Peacefully	p.8
<i>Matthew 5: 38-42; Martin Luther King</i>	
Week 5 – Living Sustainably	p.10
<i>1 Corinthians 10: 16-17; R.H. Tawney</i>	
Resources	p.12

"If you want to deepen both your Christianity and your Socialism – and your sense of how they connect – then this course is a really good place to start. You'll find bible, history and challenging thoughts here, and be enriched by the mixture." Bishop Peter Selby



WEEK ONE: LIVING EQUALLY

Christianity sees human equality in the notion that we are all created in the image of God, an image restored in all people by Jesus Christ.

The American Declaration of Independence is among the most important documents in modern political history and it begins by holding it to be "self evident that all men are created equal". Yet looking beyond those bold words we soon discover that the founding fathers of America did not consider women to be created equal and they did not consider black men and women even to be created free, let alone equal. It would take another two centuries for black people to achieve that equality and many would still argue that the disparities in education and health care in that country today do little justice to such a strong statement of human equality.

The principle of equality is often bandied around. No politician could possibly question it. But what might it mean in concrete terms? Can we really just say that it is self-evident? Experience would seem to suggest that the privileges and preferences of tribal and class allegiances are difficult to erode in even the most developed societies. In our own country a private education for which you pay is still more likely to provide opportunities in life than an education provided by the state. Members of minority ethnic communities are still less likely to hold public office or senior positions in industry. In relation to equality between men and women we still see a gender pay gap of 13% in the UK. And all this is before we even begin to look at the staggering differences in standards of living experienced by people across the globe.

Perhaps the problem is that we don't really know what our language of human equality is founded upon. We talk in terms of human rights and entitlements. But again we assume that these rights are self-evident when experience suggests that prejudice and self-interest can so easily override them. What might serve as a real basis for the notion that all human beings are equal?

BIBLE READING: GALATIANS 3: 23-END

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

In this passage from his letter to the church in Galatia, St Paul finds his principle of equality by seeing human beings in terms of their relationship to Jesus Christ. Mediterranean societies at this time were riven with different kinds of hierarchy and division: ethnic and religious factions, layers of social status from Emperor to slave, and a stark division in the roles to be taken by men and women. It would be impossible to imagine that Paul alone could overcome all those inequalities. But he does already undermine them with his understanding of "faith". In his mercy, God has given all people the



means of becoming his children by accepting the reconciliation of God in Jesus as the gift given freely to all. No one can take this for granted through privilege of birth or achievement in life; it is simply the gift bestowed without merit that renews in each human being the image in which they were created – that is the image of God’s own self (Genesis 1.26).

So for St Paul and all Christians, human beings have an equality because they have all been put in a renewed relationship with God through the one human being who has completely connected God and humanity. As such all human beings are much more than meets the eye. Some of the early Christians put it like this: God became human so that we might become divine. What stronger principle of human equality could there be than that?

HISTORICAL CASE STUDY: THE LEVELLERS

The Levellers were a radically democratic movement motivated by their Christian faith at the time of the English Civil War. They aspired to “level” social hierarchies and inequalities of property, even gender. The Levellers believed that equality among human beings was ordained by God and is displayed in God’s creation. This is an equality of authority – to seek and speak the truth of God as the people of God. This belief enabled the Levellers to assert their radical vision of political society in the face of an arrogant and corrupt king, an unresponsive Parliament and corrupt magistrates. One of their leaders John Lilburne wrote:

every particular man and woman that ever breathed in the world since [Adam and Eve]; who are, and were by nature all equal and alike in power, dignity, authority and majesty – none of them having (by nature) any authority, dominion or magisterial power, one over or above another.

This radical view of human equality resulted in one of the first political manifestos lobbied for legitimately within the English Parliamentary system. Its reforms sought to bring sovereignty to the people so that governance could be truly representative. Their agenda focused on the execution of law: an end to imprisonment for debt, better prison conditions, the introduction of jury trials in the localities, restriction on capital punishment and the translation of legal procedure into English. In trade, they called for the dissolution of market monopolies.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What might be the limitations of our popular human rights language?
- What other passages in the Gospels or in the New Testament letters do you find helpful (or difficult!) in understanding human equality in Christian terms?
- What do you think it really means for humans to be created "in the image of God"?
- How do we reconcile the principal of human equality with the reality that people are in many ways different?
- Where do you think human equality needs to be achieved today?



WEEK TWO: LIVING RESPONSIBLY

Jesus identifies himself with those in need and places demands on those of us who are more fortunate.

Even those who are largely unfamiliar with the life and teaching of Jesus will probably have some sense that supporting the disadvantaged is “the Christian thing to do”. The moral of Charles Dickens’ *Christmas Carol* is that Christians should, in the words of Scrooge’s nephew, “consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.” The unsung history of the Church is innumerable acts of charity in the provision of care, education and housing. Many of the services we take for granted today, (schools, hospitals, even the Probation Service) were initially the vision of Christian activists and benefactors. These great achievements reflected the common public ethic of Christian societies that wealth and success brought responsibilities and the poor were to be supported.

For some time, however, an opposing idea has been sinking into public consciousness. This is that the poor are not "unfortunate" and deserving of charity. But rather they are undeserving failures through their own corruption or stupidity. Society has become increasingly competitive and we have absorbed the idea that some people do better because they *are better people* and those who are dependent on the charity of others are inferior. But added to this has been an economic ideology that has sought to make the accumulation of wealth acceptable, even virtuous. In his great work the *Wealth of the Nations* (1776), Adam Smith argued that the mechanisms of the market could turn the vices of the rich into social virtue:

In spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity... the rich divide with the poor produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessities of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus, without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interests of society.

Since the 18th Century, many politicians around the world have won elections on their own version of this ethical doublethink: “being selfish is the best way to help others”. In our own country this kind of self-interested individualism has very much taken root in the last three decades. But is this faithful to the teaching of Jesus about moral responsibility?

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 25: 31-40

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a

stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.””

Obviously this disarming passage from Matthew's Gospel poses a serious challenge to any self-centred ignoring of those in need. But it may even be challenging to some forms of Christian philanthropy. The danger is that we judge ourselves to be worthy of some moral or spiritual pride after helping out someone in need. We pat ourselves on the back for “doing as Jesus would do”. Yet we have no right to do so since Jesus does more than simply endorse charity; he turns the relationship between philanthropist and recipient of charity on its head. He does not identify himself with the one who gives charity, but the one *who receives it*. It is in the poor that we see Christ.

This has led Christian Socialists to the view that making the poor the object of our charity (without real solidarity) is not enough. This lacks the kind of self-identification with the poor that Jesus makes in this parable and throughout his ministry. More must be done to raise the poor out of the condition of need rather than merely sustain them in it. Some may see this as unfaithful to the Christian tradition of charity. As the Brazilian Bishop Helder Camara complained “When I feed the poor they call me a saint; when I ask why the poor have no food they call me a communist”. Nonetheless Christian Socialists feel that Jesus' total identification with the poor requires us not merely to help those in need, but to change the structures of society in order to do everything we can to overcome the rich/poor divide. Only then will Christ be truly honoured.

HISTORICAL CASE STUDY: DOROTHY DAY

Dorothy Day began her adult life as a Communist but was baptised at the age of 30 in 1927 after recognising her ideals of social justice in the Christian faith. “Communism and religion may seem mismatched, but how good a match are capitalism and religion?” she asked. “The scandal of businesslike priests, of collective wealth, the lack of a sense of responsibility for the poor, the worker... There was plenty of charity but too little justice.”

Dorothy Day wrote for many left-wing publications and took up many causes including the brutal treatment of women suffragists in jail. She founded the left-wing newspaper *The Catholic Worker* and opened a "House of Hospitality" to work with the poorest residents of New York's slums.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the benefits and disadvantages of philanthropy versus state organisation of welfare? Is it possible to have the best of both in public policy?
- Is it fair to make a distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor?
- Do you agree with Dorothy Day that there is “plenty of charity but too little justice”?
- Day also criticises priests for being “businesslike”. What do you think she means and can politicians and policymakers be guilty of the same fault?



WEEK THREE: LIVING CO-OPERATIVELY

Our society has become structured around the principle of competition but this contrasts with the Kingdom of God that is built on mutual dependence.

Religion is sometimes associated with the idea of “myth” – stories or narratives which may not be historically or scientifically verifiable, but which provide communities with meaning and identity. For example, few Christians today would view Adam and Eve as real historical figures, yet the story of their fall in the Garden of Eden continues to communicate real and profound truths for Christians about the human condition and our need for God's grace.

Politics and economics are generally thought to be more scientific, based on objective facts and processes. Yet politics and economics have their own myths too, their own ideas and narratives that give meaning and are rarely questioned. One of the most widespread is the principle that competitive relations are the best way to bring about improvement in society. Starting out as the logic of private commerce (where it usually operates with much success), competition has now permeated all areas of the public sector through an increased scrutiny of individual performance and the introduction of many corporate management practices. Some would even argue that the “myth” of living competitively has sunk deep into the Western mindset, causing us to measure our own success against the failure of others in every area of our lives, from educational attainment to the size and location of our homes. The academic and activist Noam Chomsky has described the competitiveness of exams and league tables in education as “a training in extremely antisocial behaviour”, turning young people into “the kind of people who do not enjoy the achievements of others but want to see others beaten down and suppressed”.

It is perhaps ironic in our modern age that many who would scorn the teaching of religion and the promotion of faith in schools are more often than not blind to the entirely unsubstantiated myth we are teaching our children: that to live well is to live at the expense of others.

BIBLE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 12: 20-27

‘As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’, nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

This passage from his first letter to the Corinthians shows us that St Paul had an entirely different view of how society ought to function from the competitive model. He does not make the mistake of

thinking that all people are the same, with the same needs and aspirations. He compares them to the parts of the human body. They have different functions, even different levels of importance. But like a human body, we cannot say that any part is indispensable. In fact he turns the competitive ethic on its head to say that those members of the body who seem less honourable or strong of those who should be most valued. We cannot dissociate ourselves from those who are weak and suffering because, fundamentally, we share a common life: if one suffers, all suffer, if one is honoured, everyone has a cause for celebration.

In recent years, some thinkers on the political Left have overcome their anti-religious instincts to see something very powerful in St Paul's political vision. A number of political philosophers (e.g. Zizek, Badiou, Negri) have suggested that St Paul's writing offers a means of freeing ourselves from the competitive logic of consumerism. Perhaps this suggests that in our age when Communism and State Socialism have failed, Christian thinking and biblical teaching can provide fresh resources for political thinking. That includes how we might create a society that does not buy into the myth that our own well-being is entirely unrelated to the flourishing of those around us.

HISTORICAL CASE STUDY: JOHN BELLERS

The co-operative movement really took off in the 19th century with Robert Owen's implementation of co-operative principles among the mill workers of New Lanark. Owen aroused suspicion among Christians, not least with his publication *Denunciation of all Religions* (1817) where he particularly attacks the Church's attitude to the poor. But Owen's ideas were anticipated over a century earlier by the Quaker John Bellers. In 1695 Bellers wrote an essay entitled *Proposals for Raising a College of Industry of All Useful Trades and Husbandry* which advocated a communal colony for the working classes where value would be measured in units of labour time instead of money. He also argued for a progressive programme of education and welfare provision within the co-operative, such that Karl Marx refers to him in *Das Kapital* as "a phenomenal figure in the history of political economy". As well as influencing the thinking of Owen and Marx, Bellers provided the inspiration behind the cooperative associations founded by the Victorian Christian Socialists.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Are there contexts in which competition is a good thing for society?
- Do you think that competition has had a negative impact on society, public services or family life?
- Anti-social behaviour is a major issue in today's public policy. But Chomsky suggests that our very education system actually promotes it. Is this a fair accusation?
- In St Paul's language, who might be the weaker members of the body today? How much we appreciate their contribution and give them greater honour?
- What are your experiences of co-operative enterprises? What were the benefits of them and what are the pressures?



WEEK FOUR: LIVING PEACEFULLY

While we may reject outright pacifism, the Christian faith always views violence and aggression as destructive in themselves and unable to bring about real peace.

Political disagreements often become quickly polarised. People are categorised as either libertarian or authoritarian, as nationalists or privatisers, as being pro-life or pro-choice. Pragmatic middle positions are more difficult to engage with and don't present well to the media. That seems to be particularly true with big emotive issues like war where you are either a “dove” or a “hawk”. You are either “with our troops” or against them.

Some Christians do adopt clear, unequivocal positions with regard to war and violence. One of the founders of the Christian Socialist Movement in its present form, the Methodist Minister Donald Soper, was a conscientious objector in the Second World War on the grounds of his Christian faith. “I could not conscientiously refuse to fight,” he said, “if I did not believe that this is God's world and that Jesus is the way.” Controversially, he argued that Hitler only began to massacre the Jews after the Allies had launched their attack on Germany and that the whole war had, therefore, been a mistake.

Many Christian thinkers have disagreed with him and see the Holocaust as one of the primary arguments justifying a violent defence of the weak by Christians. They would see this and other wars as fulfilling the traditional criteria of a “just war”, which include the requirement that all other means of attempting to resolve the injustice have been exhausted. A just war must also be proportionate and founded on legitimate authority. This just war framework is used by many Christians for discerning a Christian response to violence.

Alternatively, we may choose to reject fixed principles in these matters altogether. The American Anglican theologian William Stringfellow took this pragmatic position in his support of the Christians who had joined in the plot to kill Hitler (doesn't the Bible say “Thou shalt not kill”?). He argued that Christians have to seek to discern God's will in the particular circumstances in which they find themselves and that the Bible provides no blueprint for this: “biblical politics do not implement ‘right’ or ‘ultimate’ answers. In this world, the judgement of God remains God's own secret. No creature is privy to it, and the task of social ethics is not to second-guess the judgement of God.”

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 5: 38-42

‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.’

Whatever position we take on the question of war and violence, we have to give an account of the fact that Jesus' own words and actions – particularly his ultimate action of self-sacrifice – resist the

notion that we should be aggressively adversarial. This passage from the Sermon on the Mount suggests that the way in which we overcome our enemies is by refusing to be their opponents. Their evil comes to an end when we permit it to pass over us, without resistance. Conversely, it is when we meet aggression with aggression that conflicts escalate. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

However we seek to apply this passage of Scripture, whether through principle or pragmatism, this ethic should perhaps be the Christian’s guiding instinct. Non-retaliation and nonaggression need to be our default position even if, reflecting on circumstances, we feel that it needs to be compromised. This is all the more important in an era when combat is in danger of becoming a permanent default position for Western governments. The “War on Terror” is an ongoing conflict that looks, for the moment at least, irresolvable. It is a generalised state of warfare and if we're not careful we will be in danger of believing that public security and other social goods can only be sustained if they are aggressively defended against those who threaten them. In fact, Christians need to hold to the tradition that there is “no peace without justice” and that we arrive at justice through listening to our enemies, even overcoming them with love.

HISTORICAL CASE STUDY: MARTIN LUTHER KING

Martin Luther King is one of the greatest examples of “faith in action” in Twentieth Century. His lectures and dialogues stirred the concern of a generation on the issues of race and violence. The movements and marches he led brought significant changes in the fabric of American life, not least through the Civil Rights act of 1964 ending segregation in public facilities and accommodation and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 providing federal assistance to black voters in a number of southern states.

However, his crusade went beyond rights for ethnic minorities. He took a firm stance against the war in Vietnam and he spearheaded a Poor People's Campaign to draw national attention to the living conditions of America's poor. He was adamant that nonviolence was the only way to achieve these objectives and that his supporters should never despise their enemies: “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. That is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.” His own death is testimony to his willingness to follow Jesus along that road.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Which of the positions on nonviolence to you find most persuasive, pacifism, just war theory or Christian pragmatism?
- Do you think Donald Soper was defending an indefensible position with regard to the Second World War?
- Do you feel that non-retaliation is the instinct in your own life?
- In what areas might we follow Martin Luther King's stance of non-violent resistance today?



WEEK FIVE: LIVING SUSTAINABLY

Unbridled consumer capitalism leads to catastrophic environmental degradation. We need a new of relating to one another and the Earth.

It used to be that the archetypal image of the religious idiot was the man on the street corner holding a sign that read "The end is nigh". He seemed to be the emblem of a kind of religious ignorance that flies in the face of modern reason and scientific optimism. But we live in strange and frightening times because the idea that our way of life in its present form might in fact *have no future* is being argued, not by the religious idiots, but by the scientists. Take the American Professor of Physiology, Jared Diamond, who identifies twelve areas of crisis in ecological sustainability, from the accelerated destruction of natural habitats to the escalating global population. Each one, he argues, is "like a time bomb with a fuse of less than 50 years." It seems that the scientists have become the prophets of doom.

Christianity may well be seen as having contributed to this. Didn't God instruct Adam and Eve to "fill the earth and subdue it?" But the second creation story in Genesis also tells us how God created the world as a beautiful garden for humans to live in which has gone wrong because of humanity's own greed. The serpent tempts Eve to take more than God allowed and so the origin of humanity's fall from the Garden of Paradise was acquisitiveness.

Jared Diamond's work shows how this acquisitiveness is leading to environmental crisis through the relentless plundering of the world's resources (through mining, logging, oil drilling, and so on) to meet the consumer demand of the world's fast developing economies. Somehow we have come to view the natural world, not as something to be respected because it is God's gift to us, but simply as a resource to be exploited for our own immediate gain. Future generations will pay a terrible price and many people around the world are already suffering from the catastrophic effects of climate change on their own livelihoods. We urgently need a new way or relating to the natural world and to one another.

BIBLE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 10: 16-17

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

This passage from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians may not at first seem to be very relevant to the issues we are considering. Of course it's an early reference to the service we now call Holy Communion, the Eucharist or the Mass, the sign of God's Kingdom that Jesus instructed his disciples to do in remembrance of him. But if we think about what is actually going on in this service, we see something very challenging to our culture of acquisition and exploitation. These verses show how, in the sharing of this symbolic meal, the three dimensions of humanity, God and the natural world are brought together. In sharing the bread and the wine, the fruits of the earth and vine, human beings are brought together in God and consequently drawn closer to one another. Our relationship with

CHRISTIANS ON THE LEFT.



the fruits of creation in this service is one of mutual responsibility to one another because it is a participation in Christ, who himself entered into our material, natural world. So the Eucharist shows us that natural resources are not to be exploited for our own ends but shared with other people in a way that draws us into God. In challenging the environmental degradation that is tearing our world apart, Christians need to learn from their worship to discover a non-acquisitive relationship with God's creation.

HISTORICAL CASE STUDY: R.H. TAWNEY

Richard Henry Tawney is one of the heroes of the Christian Socialist Movement and we have an annual lecture or dialogue in his memory. Tawney had a great influence on progressive political thought in the early twentieth century. After graduating from Oxford in 1903 he spent some time with his friend William Beveridge at Toynbee Hall in London's East End, a centre of Christian social engagement. It was this experience that led him to believe in the necessity of structural political change to bring about a fairer world.

Tawney wrote several influential books including "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism" (1926) and "Equality" (1931). Of course, environmental issues had yet to come to the fore at this time, but his book "The Acquisitive Society" (1926) already considers the problems of an economic system geared towards self-service consumption:

"Such societies may be called Acquisitive Societies, because their whole tendency and interest and preoccupation is to promote the acquisition of wealth". Tawney believed this concept has "laid the whole modern world under its spell."

"It assures men that there are no ends other than their ends, no law other than their desires, no limit other than that which they think advisable. Thus it makes the individual at the centre of his own universe, and dissolves the moral principles into a choice of expediencies. And it immensely simplifies the problems of social life in complex communities."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Do you think Christianity has a good track record in encouraging people to look after the environment?
- Poorer countries are exploiting their natural resources in order to develop in the way that richer countries have. How can we discourage them from doing this while also being fair?
- Do you think the service of Holy Communion has implications for our treatment of the planet? Have you thought of it in this way before?
- Tawney says that an acquisitive society has "no limit other than that which [people] think advisable". How can we find acceptable limits for our level of consumption as individuals, as a nation, and globally?



RESOURCES SECTION

The values, objects and aims of Christians On The Left

Our values

- We believe that Christian teaching should be reflected in laws and institutions and that the Kingdom of God finds its political expression in democratic socialist policies.
- We believe that all people are created in the image of God. We all have equal worth and deserve equal opportunities to fulfil our God-given potential whilst exercising personal responsibility.
- We believe in personal freedom, exercised in community with others and embracing civil, social and economic freedom.
- We believe in social justice and that the institutional causes of poverty in, and between, rich and poor countries should be abolished.
- We believe all people are called to common stewardship of the Earth, including its natural resources.

Objects

Christians On The Left members pledge themselves to work in prayer and through political action for the following objectives:

- A greater understanding between people of different faiths
- The unity of all Christian people
- Peace and reconciliation between nations and peoples and cultures together with worldwide nuclear and general disarmament
- Social justice, equality of opportunity and redistribution economically to close the gap between the rich and the poor, and between rich and poor nations
- A classless society based on equal worth and without discrimination
- The sustainable use of the Earth's resources for the benefit of all people, both current and future generations
- Co-operation, including the creation of cooperative organisations

Christians On The Left will:

- Promote Christian Socialist values in politics
- Encourage Christians to engage in political action to work for a society reflecting our values and objectives
- Provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and policies to develop Christian Socialism
- Campaign vigorously against all forms of oppression, prejudice and abuse of power
- In all our transactions seek to create and sustain a spirit of Christian fellowship and seek the Kingdom of God through deepening knowledge of God.