

CHRISTIAN LEFT MEETING January 18, 1936

David Cass - 1935

David: short review

- (i) Finance Crisis
- (ii) SCM Rel. "
- (iii) Crisis for ourselves and our own position.

John MacMurray

Both sides in Aux and SCM think of politics and religion separately.

- so that you give (a) Christian basis
- (b) ask for political implication.

∴ For both seems a double problem

This division not true.

There is one problem, of which there is a political aspect and a religious aspect. When solved, you have ipso facto, political solutions.

Older crowd will think this statement neither political nor religious.

I Problem is a religious revolution is needed first
 ∴ Join issue on the religious side. Don't discuss political situations - even from the point of view of tactics.

II A real and dividing issue, turning people into religious right or left.
 Econom : stresses political religious only in appearance. Really the opposite.

Distinguish between religion and theology
 For the left theology is both important
 and unimportant

In Christianity theology is a late growth and came out of problems of organization - heresy etc. Religion is prior: theology is an effort to express what you stand for after a struggle in religion has begun.

And the religious field is only possible in behaviour; where well-meaning only expresses an attitude, religion is a way in which people live [People who live alike are religiously "together"]

And this has only meaning in terms of actual and environmental problems

∴ a religious movement is a way of dealing with a present set of problems.

and the centre of the religious issue is community

∴ fundamentally personal - personal relations to personal world - i.e. to God.

Two main forms: (of behaviour)

- (a) Positive } both religions
 (b) Negative }

(a) Determined by love, an attempt to create and maintain community in face of a given situation. May be judged by creativeness. Not on defensive. Sees a situation as a possibility to extend community.

(b) sees a situation as a threat to community already achieved, and fear of losing it.

[A denial of religion is merely a mistake in theory.]

∴ Fundamental issue is for Christians

(Positive) "Christianity turned the world upside down before"

and we Christians must do it again" — and not (Negative) "politics will turn the world upside down, and we must help it." This is wrong.

The initiative in this case would appear to have passed into the hands of non-Christians — Then you begin to say we must defend Christian religion!

Therefore there are 2 religious attitudes between which we must choose.

(a) Love-determined religion.

(b) Fear

Both, rightly, talk in religious terms.

"Positive" movements are anti-religious in theory, but that is a red-herring.

Where does theology come in? Unnecessary until the carrying through of living religious drive becomes impossible without it. It is reflective and intellectual, in order to clear obstacles.

At this moment important.

The normal relationship between theology and religion is the systematic expression of religious experience. But it must be a fully positive religious impulse.

If the religious attitude has become negative it will represent itself as positive in order not to make clear that it is a defence. One of the ways of doing this is putting into theology what you think you ought to do as a way of not doing it. i.e. Positive Theology is a defence mechanism.

of a negative religion.

Also a new positive religion may use old terms and thus misinterpret itself. If you try to make over old theology you will get caught. Old used by defensive attitude may be unavoidable.

Theology. All Christian theology has been also necessarily a borrowing of formal structure from secular philosophy. Therefore a very close relationship between Christian statements, and current and dominating systems in non-Christian world.

Traditional Christian theology - patristic and medieval ^{has} taken its apparatus from pagan sources. Therefore certain characteristics of Greek philosophy appear in Christian theology. Of these the most important are

Pagan forms { (a) Absolutism
(b) Formalism (i.e. opposite of empiricism) speculation - not on facts
(c) Static

On the other hand Christianity has made an enormous difference to thought. 3 elements in thought which are the product of Christianity

Christianity { (1) Empiricism
(2) Naturalism
(3) Dynamic and progressive character

Idea of progress e.g. historically derived from Christianity, though partly from the Old Testament.

e.g. Marxian and Christian anthropology in strong ^{contrast} ~~contrast~~ ^{with} to Greek thought

Negative attitude

Defensive attitude in religion draws strong contrast between

Christian also secular thought. The latter [i.e. secular thought] ignores Christian revelation, which contains fundamental truths Christianity on a plane by itself. Therefore practical struggle is Christianity threatened by non-religious efforts. Therefore Christianity on the defensive.

But this is a fundamental denial of Christianity. Its function is to absolve Christians from taking part in determining what happens now. This is fundamental characteristic of Barthianism.

The contrast made easy because secular thought is prebunch determined by Christianity whereas Christian theology in strongly pagan forms. (i.e. secular definitely in historical stream.)

of Jews with Christian thought, and it is precisely the contrast between secular and religious thought. "My time is not yet come" ... idea of progress and movement.

Real religious issues. 2 of them.

1. Doctrine of incarnation

2. " " " history.

1. is the reconciliation of God and man which asserts the actualisation of the expression of God in history. Jesus being God is nonetheless man. "Bringing God down" from transcendence to immanence. Divine reality is incarnated in facts of human life.

Cannot separate transcendence and immanence - they are correlative. Only the transcendent cannot be immanent and vice-versa.

Therefore defense mechanism will produce transcendence theory and breaks the relation of supernatural and natural

In Protestantism: throws stress on immanence of God as if God immanent only in spiritual aspect — therefore talk of transcendent world as world of immanence.

Holy Spirit doctrine of Church calls Church immanent in world and transcendent of it. Then the immanence (function in history) will get lost. Therefore say Christian revelation throws no light on practical problems.

Therefore left theology must insist on immanence of one transcendent God. If there are forces outside human will determining humans, these forces are also immanent i.e. all that happens is of God. If a Church denies its immanence that doesn't make it not immanent, nor remove it from its (influential) place in historical development.

2. There is a historical process of redemption, beginning with Jesus and bearing historical results, — an objective process, and not the same as individuals accepting it.

Christianity is immanent in the world, as well as transcendent.

i.e. (i) historical Christian thought
 (ii) secular thought deeply imbued with Christianity, within limitations imposed by this influence being unconscious

i.e. Modern naturalism and empiricism right, but limited Modern secular thought when dealing with human life is never empirical and naturalistic — it treats it only by analogy from its concepts in physical and natural science and they don't fit.

"Man is an animal" is not empirical — it is the opposite

Personal aspects of human life ^{to} has never been empirically studied.

An attempt to be clear about all this will raise old doctrines.

We need intellectual (theological) forms more adequate to the experience. Therefore Marxian criticism of theology of Christianity is true, because it is static.

Karl Polanyi: Karli

Link up with gospel. Immanence of transcendent
Will of God
Kingdom of God
Fitness of Time

John MacMurray: John

The theology we want is an expresses the
religious experience that our job as Christians is to turn
the world upside down

Trevor

The theology we want does not rest primarily on community but on individual integrity.

J(ohn)?

Integration of individual is not separable from the integration of individuals with one another.

John

"Freedom" - It is the will of God that things should sometimes not happen according to the will of God.

Trevor Barthes: "Separation of God". Why? Answer: Sin

Irene Grant Irene Oughtn't we to tackle this sin question? Lack of community = sin.

Trevor Community is not the only necessity. Individual integrity also is important.

John There is a problem of sin, and religion is about it - it is a fact. Sin is that which isolates men from God requires a reconciliation. Sin is that which isolates men from man and makes community impossible. The answer is "Forgiveness" - both by man and God. Christianity is the answer to the "problem" - sin is a fact and a Christian act of forgiveness is required as an answer.

Forgiveness is love dealing with sin.

Sin is not only a matter of the will. The Christian concept is that it is often not a matter of the will. Sin and ignorance coupled together by Jesus. Christian doctrine says "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" and "I believe in forgiving sins" - i.e. a programme of living (and its good psychology). Because it is a continual overcoming of isolation. But - it is forgiveness among equals and involves restoration of equality. Therefore forgiveness, immanence and transcendence cannot be discussed except in substantial terms. An individual alone in the universe couldn't do wrong. What he did would be right.

NB
(me)

Karli We must relate immanence - transcendence idea to "How is the will of God related to society?"

John Answer: Define sin as that which destroys community

then you go beyond conscious wrong — going to structure of society, [that] which makes community impossible.

Karli But what kinds of communities?

John Not choice of communities. It is being "in community". Community must be universal.

Karli Yes, but there is a close community — a small one. Not every community — but that which has the essence of giving community to the world.

Irene Answer to Fascist "other sheep I have".

John If a group turns defensive it has ceased to be a community.

Karli The thing is about "the giving of itself away" — dialectical nature. Transcendence and immanence is about this.

John The Christian position, being personal, assumes this equality and universality. Nature is doing one thing, and the Christian community is that which is conscious that nature is doing it (Immanence of God in nature) i.e. in much more than human society.

Karli But I am only interested in the achievement of this personal of happy living.

Marx had no sociology — only an anthropology.

John All century thought gets mixed by not having

distinguished between mind and life. Sometimes life is considered in association with matter and sometimes in association with mind.

Marx in the same way ~~uses~~^{uses} society in the sense of community and life.

THE C.L. NEWS SHEET.

Nov. 1939.

In common with most organizations the result of being precipitated into a war situation has caused a dislocation of our plans. meetings and other activities which should have taken place have been rendered impossible owing to the difficulties of travelling, the black-out and other causes. We need therefore perhaps make no apology for the delay in sending any previous notification to our friends as to future plans. This issue of the News Sheet will serve we hope to enable us once more to get into touch with one another as far as present circumstances permit. It is mainly a report of C.L. activities during the summer and since the war broke out. But there are also certain notices to which special attention is drawn and which therefore shall have first mention.

A meeting of the various C.L. Committees was held at Birmingham on October 21-22. At this meeting it was decided to hold if war conditions permit, a New Year's gathering on the week-end of Dec. 30-31. The possible places of meeting are Birmingham, London, Northampton and St. Albans. A reply card is enclosed which should be returned at once by every member and Associate stating (a) whether he would probably be able to come; and (b) if so, which, if any, of these four places would be so difficult for him to reach that he could not attend if the week-end were held there (c) the approx. fare which would be incurred by travelling to each of the possible places of meeting. It is proposed that travelling and all other expenses should be pooled. When one of these places has been decided upon, arrangements will be made for catering and sleeping on the Saturday and Sunday. It is intended that the gathering shall be mainly social, but its agenda will include (a) the Annual General meeting, with a strict minimum of the necessary business arising therefrom and (b) discussions on two subjects, the nature of which is described on a later page. The reply cards are to be sent to Miss Janet Jordan, 172, Russell Court, London, W.C.1. as early as ever possible.

Secondly, members and Associates are asked to send as soon as conveniently possible any subscriptions due from them. These should be sent to Miss K.Saw, 99, Cranbrook Road, Handsworth, Birmingham 21. Cheques should be made payable to her personally, WITHOUT INCLUDING THE NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION.

Changes of address, temporary or otherwise, should be sent at once to Dr Alice Lloyd Williams, 85, Windmill Hill, Enfield, Middlesex.

In all these notifications and payments, etc. the envelopes should be addressed to the persons concerned, without mention of the organization.

WE ASK ALL OUR READERS TO BEAR THESE NOTIFICATIONS CAREFULLY IN MIND.

WAR MEETINGS.

An informal conference was held at Wembley Park on September 30-Oct. 1st. It was impossible, under the circumstances, to send out any notification of this except to a limited number of friends who were living in the London district. The discussions were concerned mainly with the war situation, and at first it was intended to issue a short report of the views expressed. Ultimately, however, it was decided that in view of the probably rapid change of conditions such a report might become too out of date to warrant publication. This proved only too true.

As already stated, a meeting of the Committees was held on October 21-22. Plans as previously announced were drawn up for holding a New Year's party with the proviso that if the War situation subsequently makes the holding of this impracticable notice of such cancellation will be sent out to all who have agreed to come. The meeting also considered plans regarding the Cottage at Marlow. It was decided to continue to pay the 10/- a week rent until the end of the year, when the Annual meeting will be asked to decide to abandon or retain it. At present it was felt that it might prove to be useful to any members or friends/for any reasons may need a temporary home. A few members undertook to guarantee the payment of 1/0- a week towards the rent. Any other offers to subscribe this amount to the end of the year will be welcomed, and should be sent to Mr. A. Cannon 47, Bishopric Court, Horsham, Sussex.

Kenneth Ingram had been asked to interview Dr. Sharman before his return to the U.S.A. and invite his opinions and criticisms as to the C.L. The report of this interview is given on another page, and its importance will be realized by all our readers. This report will form one of the subjects for discussion at the New Year gathering.

The meeting also decided to arrange for the drafting of a pamphlet explaining more fully the C.L. position as developed by the war crisis, and defining its message in reference to the world upheaval which has been and will be produced by the war and its outcome. As this pamphlet may prove to be of great importance, the draft will be ready for the New Year's conference, and will provide the other subject for discussion. Its publication will be delayed until this free discussion upon it has taken place.

Lastly the meeting considered the contemporary situation, and one member presented his views as to what should be the immediate policy to be advocated. This consisted of four propositions 1) to urge that the Government should at once propose the holding of a world-conference, including U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. to consider a constructive programme for world settlement, and should offer, in the event of Germany agreeing to take part in such a conference, an Armistice 2) in the event of the Government declining to adopt such a policy, that the Labour opposition should be urged to adopt it; 3) in the event of the Government declining to issue any such invitation, that the policy of prosecuting the war should not be supported: and 4) that in the event of the invitation being issued, but of Germany refusing to co-operate or of

opposing the decisions of the conference, the continued prosecution of the war should be supported.

Agreement as to these propositions was not reached, however, and it was therefore not found possible or desirable to issue any statement on behalf of the Committee as to a short term policy.

SUMMER ACTIVITIES.

The conferences which have been held during the summer seem already to belong to a different period of history. Whilst any full report of them accordingly might appear irrelevant, a brief mention of them should be recorded. Four week-end conferences were held: two in June and two in July - all except the first taking place at the Marlow Cottage, and most of them being attended in as large numbers as facilities for hospitality would permit. The first of these was devoted to the subject of education. The discussion was opened by Vivian Ogilvie. At the second conference Kenneth Ingram and Alfred Cannon opened discussions on the International situation.

A conference open to members only was addressed by Karl Polanyi on "The Significance of Russia in the existing situation". At the last of these conferences, Donald Grant spoke on "The situation on the Far East". A quarterly general meeting was held at the second conference.

The Marlow Cottage proved to be an excellent rendezvous. Some of those attending camped outside, but the majority were accommodated in the rooms. The cottage although very limited in size, proved adequate for the meetings and the meals. During some of the summer weeks and since it has been possible to use it as a home for one or two refugee friends of members.

It was decided to hold a camp this year, although this was not attempted on a large scale in view of the Sharman seminar, which commenced the following week. The camp was held in the New Forest during the last week in July, and some 20 attended, among them two Basque children. The discussions were informal but none the less valuable for that reason. Criticisms were invited from visitors as to the C.L. and resulted in the useful discipline of attempting to explain the C.L. position in simple language, particularly as to its religious basis.

The seminar was held from August 5th to 25th at Temple Dinsley, near Hitchin. The house garden and grounds proved to be an ideal setting, and after the rain of the first week the weather was perfect and provided full facilities for bathing, tennis, golf and various excursions. The numbers attending were about 50, of which a considerable proportion was made up of C.L. members and Associates.

Dr. Sharman who has come specially from America to conduct this seminar, led

the studies in the Records of Jesus, with the same technique which he employs at his annual seminars in Canada. Perhaps the chief value of this experience for us was the light which it threw on the meaning of Jesus' teaching, and the manner in which this helped to clarify the C.L. position; in spite of the fact that the membership of the Seminar represented a variety of standpoints. The comparative unanimity which was reached was remarkable. Hardly less valuable was the psychological education which most members gained by observing how Dr. Sharman guided the group discussions. Several extra-Seminar meetings were held during this three weeks, and at one of them the C.L. position was explained, and a large number of questions asked in regard to it. The closing days of the Seminar were harkened by the lengthening shadow of war, but there was just time to hold the concluding session before the storm broke.

DR. SHARMAN AND THE C.L.

Kenneth Ingram was asked to discuss the C.L. with Dr. Sharman, and to obtain from him any advice he might be willing to offer as regards its future. Kenneth Ingram managed to see Dr. Sharman and his wife on the day before they left for America. The following is a report of the interview.

"I talked with Dr. Sharman about the C.L. and invited his suggestions and criticisms. He asked me a number of questions as to its political implications, and said that he thought its socialist aims should be a sufficiently concise basis to serve as a rallying point for the unity of the movement. But I told him 1) that I did not feel that there was anything in the socialist aims taken by themselves which was distinctive from the aims of socialist political parties 2) that I believed the present upheaval would be too likely to accentuate and develop political issues that the situation would eventually demand re-casting of political definitions and 3) that in any case criticism of the C.L. position was directed much more effectually against its theological than its political standpoint, the reason for this being that its political position was comparatively clear, whilst its theological attitude was at present immature.

"We therefore turned to the theological aspect, and here Dr. Sharman suggested that the weakest point in what he had seen of C.L. statements was the C.L. concept of God. He instances a statement in the Basis that God was virtually to be identified in the terms of Community. In that case, he felt, that in regard to the two commandments which Jesus accepted as forming the basis of his own message, the second - love of neighbours as oneself - would be sufficient, and the first - love of God - would be a superfluity. The crucial question was if there were any ethical obligations which were not comprised or which would not arise out of man's relation to his fellows. We agreed that there were such obligations, and further, that a vast and, indeed, infinite sphere of morality stretched beyond the confines of man's human relationships, and that man is aware only of the fringe of this reality. That admission, Dr. Sharman said, introduced a cleaner concept of God. I asked Dr. Sharman whether he would consider that this admission suggested that God was an unknown God. But he pointed out that the

personal-communal experience was so direct a part of this reality that God could not be considered to be unknown but, rather, as not wholly known.

Dr. Sharman referred to one of John Macmurray's addresses at the St. Asaph conference, where he had insisted that to be a Christian means to adopt as one's own the intention of Jesus and where he ultimately defines that intention as the (verification of man's intention with God's. Here Dr. Sharman pointed out the concept of God was clearly beyond the terms of community: it was linking community with something further. *

Dr. Sharman emphasized that this implication of John Macmurray's was vitally important and should be developed in the C.L. position - namely that History has a purpose, that it is fulfilling an end and that Man must either co-operate in fulfilling this (God's) purpose, or destroy himself. Dr. Sharman said that he did not believe that any criticism should be relevant as against C.L. regarding its failure to define alleged attributes of God, e.g. whether it was believed that he was personal, super-personal, etc. The important point was to discover Jesus' concept of God. The fact that Jesus addressed God as "Father" did not in Dr. Sharman's view imply any new and startling revelations, or suggest that Jesus insisted on a "personal" concept. The symbol of "Father" and the intimacy of Jesus' prayers were rather an expression of his complete communion with God, the one-ness of himself with the Divine Purpose, the scheme of reality. !!!

I raised as another criticism, sometimes brought by theologians against the C.L. the question as to what should be its reply when asked: "Do you accept or deny the Divinity of Christ". That, Dr. Sharman said, was a question that need not be answered. It should not be relevant if the C.L. could show that it was adopting Jesus' own conception of God as the Universal Reality, with which one can attain complete communion. Dr. Sharman, later on amplified this statement by saying that, if pressed, the answer to theologians should be that, inasmuch as Jesus realized in his own life this complete one-ness with God, there was a sense in which a real Divinity in him could be acknowledged.

I asked Dr. Sharman whether he considered that the absence of any form of worship in the C.L. was a serious defect in a body claiming to be religious. He did not feel it was a defect, and pointed out the danger of the C.L. becoming merely a sect. On the other hand if, as he felt would be desirable, the C.L. contemplated a revolution in Christianity, he agreed that worship, naturally and not artificially evolved, would become a necessary development, and that some elements from the old traditional forms might be adapted to the revolutionary beliefs as released from their existing associations.

Dr. Sharman said in answer to another question, that in his view, it would be interesting and valuable to keep in touch with any parallel movements in the Churches, and to continue to make no sort of condition that C.L. candidates should necessarily

* These letters were X'd over by typist in the original. The meaning suggests 'verification', not 'verification'.

desert the Church in order to become members.

Dr. Sharman asked whether the C.L. would consider itself to be an activist or theorist body. I told him that politically it was activist, since it required the members to take their share in political work: I was not sure that it could be described as activist on the specifically religious side. Dr. Sharman then emphasized that the question whether the C.L. was a religious movement or not was really tested by whether the fact of joining and belonging to the C.L. transformed the whole personality and outlook of its members. That should be its distinctive feature, as compared with purely political movement, and that you would confirm its justification to consider itself a religious movement.

Dr. Sharman said more than once that he considered the name of the C.L. was an arresting and extremely valuable title. (Members and Associates of the C.L. are asked to read the above report carefully, and to bring it with them to the New Year meeting when it will be discussed. Those who will not be able to come are invited to send by letter any suggestions which they may have to make as to its bearing on the C.L. position. Such letters should be sent before Dec. 30th to Miss Jordan whose address has been given on the first page.

PERSONAL

Many of our readers will know already that David and Barbara Cass ^Begggs with their little daughter Rosemary, were on board s.s. ATHENIA. After a terrible experience - they were separated from Rosemary, and feared for some days that she had been drowned - they were landed at Galway. They are now in Canada and Rosemary has joined them.

We hope to welcome them back to England next year, when perhaps conditions on the seas and at home will have become more normal.

Two marriages took place in September - Marjorie Young and Joe Reid and Jeannie McConnoll and Alfred Cannon.
