

## *Foreword*

SOME WILL WONDER IF I should be writing this foreword to commend Philip Turner's book on the English Christian Socialist tradition. I am after all a card-carrying critic of establishment Christianity, and no Christianity is more established than that church called the Church of England. As Turner makes clear, moreover, it is hard to imagine the Christian Socialist tradition, a tradition that may be quite morally impressive, without the presumption that the Church of England was and is the soul of a nation.

I have no reason to deny that there is not some tension between my understanding of church and world and that of the Christian Socialists. Yet those people Turner seeks to recover have always been for me people I deeply admire. To be sure, as Turner acknowledges, many of the Christian Socialists sought a "return to Christendom." In particular Westcott and Tawney thought they were continuing in the legacy of F. D. Maurice, who sought to renew the Christian vision of society by instilling in the English people a long-lost piety. That ambition may strike us as unrealistic, but given these men's desire to make the church an alternative to capitalism their strategies were not without reason.

Turner first and foremost has written this book hoping it will help us not forget these extraordinary Christians. While his book can serve as a good historical introduction to the major figures in the Christian Socialist movement, Turner does not mean for the book to be a history of that movement. Rather, by reminding us of these remarkable Christians and their attempt to forge an alternative to capitalism, Turner seeks to enrich our imaginations. Nothing is more important because our imaginations are now held captive by the presumption there is no alternative to the market. We are consumers, and the only thing we have not chosen is to be consumers.

One of the great attractions of Turner's portrayal of the Christian Socialists is how he puts them in conversation with contemporary thinkers such as Oliver O'Donovan, Rowan Williams, and John Milbank. In particular he calls attention to the Christian Socialist understanding of social cooperation that has influenced Milbank. Milbank and the Christian Socialists provide an account of social cooperation that makes possible the creation of social bonds through many levels of social exchange. To be sure the development of such bonds can result in hierarchies that tempt one to a top-down social strategy, but it can equally make possible a pluralism that can act as a check on nationalism.

In his magisterial *Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy*, Luke Bretherton, in the chapter on Anglican political theory, characterizes the "method" of Anglican moral theology as entailing a "providential reading of history." Such a reading, Bretherton suggests, is always tempted to make nation or church rather than Jesus Christ the center and subject of history. The alternative is to give priority to the voice of those on the underside of history. Bretherton judges that the Christian Socialists put the incarnation at the center, but unfortunately, that did not lead them to draw on the actual experience of poor people.

No doubt Bretherton is right that the Christian Socialists sometimes failed to appreciate the actual lives of those for whom they labored. But Turner's portrayal of these men (and it was primarily a masculine movement) reminds us that they were priests who served everyday people. They were socialists, but they were also Christians. Turner makes clear that the word *Christian* makes all the difference. We are, therefore, in Turner's debt for reminding us of the difference we can make as Christians in our confusing world.

—Stanley Hauerwas