A. Historical Change and Establishment

Most people are only dimly, if at all, aware of a tradition of social, political, economic, and moral thought known as Christian Socialism. In the nineteenth century it appeared in various forms not only in England but also in America and on the continent of Europe. The focus of the following chapters will be on Christian Socialism in England, but with the purpose of showing as well the promise this tradition holds in a time of crisis for the churches in North America. In England, as an organized movement, Christian Socialism lasted for only a short time; but its influence was extensive and continues, though in a weakened form, to this day. Its supporters published several journals, started schools for working-class people, and, in a more practical vein, founded cooperatives through which artisans could share in the production and distribution of goods and services and in the profits of such enterprise. They also formed societies (the left-leaning Guild of St. Matthew and the more centrist Christian Social Union) whose purpose was both education and advocacy. Through these efforts its supporters gained a wide following. Without question the movement had an influence on the Labor Government that came to power after the end of the Second World War. Indeed, at one point, a significant number of the new bishops within the Church of England were in some way or another associated with the movement. It numbered among its advocates such clerical luminaries as F. D. Maurice and bishops Westcott, Gore, and Temple, and among its lay members people of the caliber of John Ludlow and R. H. Tawney. Though influential, followers of this tradition were not of one mind in respect to the sort of socialism they espoused. It is certainly the case that its exponents in England held views different from their American cousins. Nonetheless, its English supporters shared a set of ideas of sufficient similarity to generate a tradition. The chapters that follow do not

contain a comprehensive narrative of either their life and thought or of the institutions they founded. It is rather an interpretive essay intended to identify the theological foundations and major themes of the English version of this tradition and to highlight its value as an account of the social mission of the churches. This assessment will reveal a tradition that elicits hope because it is full of promise and, at times, pathos because its failures draw from us sympathy rather than disdain.

A critical account of Christian Socialism in England recommends itself for a number of reasons. First, the similarities between the present age and the one in which this tradition had its origins are striking. The Industrial Revolution, which came to full flower in the nineteenth century, uprooted significant numbers of people and, in so doing, presented English society with social, economic, political, and moral questions for which there were no ready answers. In like manner, today people are living through what might be called a "digital revolution." As in the case of its predecessor, the digital revolution has brought with it dramatic social changes. These changes have presented populations throughout the world with social, economic, political, and moral questions of even greater complexity. Once again there are no ready answers to the questions these social changes present. Once again, social change and inequality have brought with them social and political conflicts that threaten the stability of society and its institutions. Once again, the churches find themselves divided, and once again they are being forced by circumstance to reexamine their relation to the societies of which they are a part.

A second reason, particularly for Americans, to focus on the English version of Christian Socialism is that, in contradistinction to the American version, its exponents, in responding to their circumstances, tended to be cautious in respect to policy advocacy and institutional reform. Instead of structural change they sought to convey to the British public a normative view of life in society. Their aim was to educate the public conscience through the articulation of a "Christian Sociology," a view of life together shaped by what at times they called "ideals" and at others "Christian principles." As Maurice Reckitt points out, the Christian Socialists in England believed that the church had a high calling, namely, to save their civilization by becoming disentangled from the basic assumptions of the "progressive" forces of the day.[1] In place of these assumptions the Christian Socialists sought to provide English society not with

1. Reckitt, *Maurice to Temple*, 11.

a political program of reform but with a view of its social conditions in light of the eternal purposes of God. It is precisely this understanding of the calling of the Church of England that poses a question to the Protestant churches of America. There is no established church in America, but its churches have nonetheless, until recently, been charged with providing a religious and moral foundation for the nation.[2] Is this still the case? Even if it is, one is forced to ask if the focus of America's churches on public policy and institutional reform is the right way to fulfill this charge. To frame the question in an even wider context, establishment or no establishment, does a focus on ideals have a necessary place in any account of Christian social thought, or does talk of ideals, Christian or otherwise, within a political and economic order do no real work? These were questions presented to the Christian Socialists in their era, and they remain questions posed to Christian citizens at the present time.

So a third and fourth reason for an examination of Christian Socialist thought lies first of all in its call to consider the relevance of ideals within an economic and political order and second of all in its assessment of what ought to be the aim of Christian witness within society. There is, finally, a fifth reason for giving attention to this tradition. In making their defense of Christian ideals, the Christian Socialists in England had important things to say about the basic moral vocabulary we use to think about and promote what ought to be the political, economic, and social goals of life in society. So, for example, they argued that duties should be given priority over rights, the common good over individual interests, and public over private responsibility for addressing social problems.

For the Christian Socialists in England, the answer to these questions and others lay in a very distinctive understanding of socialism. To understand and assess the matters of importance to them one must begin with what they understood socialism to be when viewed from a Christian perspective. In his introduction to a collection of essays by Christian Socialists entitled *The Return of Christendom*, Bishop Charles Gore made clear the difference between the views of "Christian Socialists" and those of "Socialists" who wished government to address economic inequality by nationalizing the means of production. Speaking of Christian Socialists he wrote,

> These are all Socialists in a general sense, that is to say, they are all at one in believing *that no stable or healthy industrial or social*

2. See, e.g., Heclo, *Christianity and American Democracy*.

> *fabric can be built upon the principle of Individualism, or is consistent with the assertion of an almost unrestricted Right of Private Property*. Accordingly, they hold that our present industrial society rests upon a rotten foundation; and that what is needed to remedy the manifest "sickness" of our "Acquisitive Society," is something much more than particular social reforms. There is needed the substitution of a true ideal or principle of Society—that is of Socialism in some sense—for false. What they ask for is such a peaceful and gradual revolution as can only come about if men's minds come to be so fully possessed with a certain set of ideas, which are now in the air, as that they shall gain compelling or driving power in practical affairs.[3]

The concerns that led to this quest for "ideals" or "principles of society" that might provide an alternative to the "rotten foundation" of English society arose within a set of moral, social, economic, and political conditions easily recognizable in the present age. Social and economic change had forced large numbers of people off the land and crowded them into urban slums. Social dislocation was accompanied not only by grinding poverty but also by a high incidence of social insecurity and disorder. The depressed condition of these displaced urban dwellers stood in marked contrast to the huge concentrations of wealth that resulted from inheritance and the profits generated by the age of the machine. As is now the case with the arrival of a digital economy (perhaps the ultimate expression of the machine age), so the arrival of an industrial economy brought with it social disruption and a degree of economic inequality that threatened social stability. It was also accompanied by a form of competitive individualism that stood in marked contrast to the sense of commonality that had heretofore been characteristic of English society. It was this ideal that the Church of England (as the established church) supported, and upon it rested its moral responsibilities.

As previously noted, the response of the Christian Socialists in England was, with marked exceptions, unlike that of the Fabians in England, the Marxists in Europe, or the socialist followers of Walter Rauschenbusch in America. They sought no social or political revolution. Rather, in accord with the romantic idealism common in their age, they sought a "return of Christendom." Their aim was to reestablish a society whose foundation rested in Christian belief and practice—a society of ideals

3. Gore, introduction to A Group of Churchmen, *Return of Christendom*, xv–xvi; emphasis added.

that could be offered as a response to the holiness of God made known to the world in and through the incarnation of God in Christ.

It is important to note that, in pursuing this goal, they were not pursuing a social end discordant with the moral temper of English society of the day. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has pointed out, there was in England at that time moral agreement among the general populace that "those who were blessed not with poverty but with riches had a sacred duty of charity, the obligation to sustain the holy poor and to relieve the misery of the unholy."[4] Also, as Himmelfarb notes, the concern of most people was not industrialism and capitalism; they were concerned that society itself had deteriorated. They were troubled by what she calls "the complex of ideas, attitudes, values, and practices epitomized by a dismal philosophy that dehumanized human beings and the dismal science that demoralized social relations."[5] She refers here to "political economy," the notion that economies work by laws internal to their operation and not in relation to moral norms. John Ruskin, whose work *Unto This Last* had, for several generations, a huge influence on Christian Socialists, described this dismal philosophy in the following manner:

> Among the delusions which at different periods have possessed themselves of the minds of large masses of the human race, perhaps the most curious—certainly the least creditable—is the modern *soi-disant* science of political economy, based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection.
>
> Of course, as in the instances of alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, and other such popular creeds, political economy has a plausible idea at the root of it. "The social affections," says the economist, "are accidental and disturbing elements in human nature; but avarice and the desire of progress are constant elements. Let us eliminate the inconstants, and, considering the human being merely as a covetous machine, examine by what laws of labor, purchase, and sale, the greatest accumulative result in wealth is obtainable. Those laws once determined, it will be for each individual afterwards to introduce as much of the disturbing affectionate element as he chooses, and to determine for himself the result on the new conditions supposed."[6]

4. Himmelfarb, *Idea of Poverty*, 4.
5. Himmelfarb, *Idea of Poverty*, 528.
6. Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, loc. 30 of 534, Kindle.

Ruskin concludes, "This would be a perfectly logical and successful method of analysis, if the accidentals afterwards to be introduced were of the same nature as the powers first examined."[7]

The Christian Socialists in England were concerned first of all with the view of economic relations Ruskin here describes—a view that excluded moral considerations and allowed only for the mechanisms of the market driven by a desire for profit. Ruskin illustrates the fact that in opposing opinions such as this one, Christian Socialists were not swimming against a stream of popular opinion. Indeed, they shared a general concern within the British populace for the moral state of the nation and its class divisions. This moral concern was widespread and socially powerful. The moral earnestness of Victorians was remarkable. By 1869 there were some seven hundred philanthropic organizations, and these organizations spent seven million pounds per year on poor relief. Further, the Charity Organization Society (a society meant to coordinate charitable initiatives) urged home visiting as a means of overcoming class divisions.[8]

Despite this pervasive social concern the Christian Socialists felt a particular responsibility to address the condition of the poor and through the poor the moral state of the nation. They shared a belief that, because it was established, the Church of England had a particular responsibility to address the moral challenges before the nation. This is not to say that they were concerned only for the role and status of the Church of England. They were motivated as well by a genuine sympathy for the plight of the poor. As Edward Norman has noted, what the Christian Socialists valued in F. D. Maurice (a man generally considered to be the father of Christian Socialism in England) was not a social and political principle but sympathy for humanity.[9] For example, after beginning his work as a lawyer, and under the influence of F. D. Maurice, John Ludlow, a leading voice among Christian Socialists, undertook the practice of visiting poor people in their homes. He describes one such visit in this way:

> In a large house on the north side of the street, on the ground floor, I found a married couple, the wife dying of consumption, in a simple closet off the hall, formerly no doubt, when the house was better inhabited, a housemaid's closet, with no light but from a pane in the door, and absolutely no communication with the outer air, no ventilation except through the door

7. Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, loc. 30 of 534, Kindle.
8. See Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 186, 199.
9. Norman, *Victorian Christian Socialists*, 24.

> leading into the hall. When I asked the man how he could possibly have taken such a room, his plea was that it was cheap . . . How the surgeon attending the poor woman could have allowed her to remain in this dark closet, where she never could get a breath of fresh air, I could not understand. But the poor creature was too far-gone to make it worthwhile or even possible to move her. She died between two of my visits. I cannot recall the place to my mind without horror.[10]

What Henry Mayhew called "the riot, the struggle and the scramble for a living" that surrounded this poor woman genuinely moved the Christian Socialists.[11] In *The Great World of London* Mayhew gave this picture of industrial London in the early morning: "As the streets grow blue with the coming light, and the church spires and roof-tops stand out against the clear sky with a sharpness of outline that is seen only in London before its million chimneys cover the town with their smoke—then come sauntering forth the unwashed poor; some with greasy wallets on their backs to hunt over each dust-heap, and eke out life by seeking refuse bones, or stray rags and pieces of old iron . . ."[12]

These two pictures of London's poor call immediately to mind the terrible human waste that was characteristic of the slums of London, but it in no way does justice to the extent of the threat they posed to human life. In 1849 no fewer than thirteen thousand people died of cholera within three months. On September 10 of that year there were 432 deaths in a single day.[13] These accounts of the London poor provide a graphic picture of the conditions that so troubled the Christian Socialists. Nevertheless, troubled though they were, they did not address in adequate fashion a question these graphic descriptions left in the minds of Mayhew's readers. Was the character of "the poor" fixed by birth and moral state or by social circumstance? As will become clear, this question remained without a satisfactory answer throughout the course of their history, and so it remains to this day.

10. Murray, *John Ludlow*, 105–6.

11. Quoted by Douglas-Fairhurst in his introduction to Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, xv.

12. Quoted by Douglas-Fairhurst in his introduction to Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, xiv.

13. Douglas-Fairhurst, introduction to Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, xviii–xix.

The moralistic and impractical character of the Christian Socialists' response has been frequently alleged.[14] Nevertheless, that charge, though in some ways merited, in no way nullifies the sincerity of their reaction, and I hope to show that it is in important ways unfair. What is not in doubt, however, is the pain England's social and economic conditions caused them. As the passage previously quoted from Ludlow's diary plainly illustrates, their concern for the state of the poor was profound. It was not, however, the face of human suffering or the corruption of social institutions that served as the primary motive for their response. Neither was it a program of social reform that would address this suffering. Their chief concern was to fulfill the mission of the Church of England and in so doing provide a moral vision that would prick the conscience of the English people by calling to mind a group of social ideals the Christian Socialists believed would lead the nation to a renewed and markedly Christian vision of its common life.

All agreed that provision of a set of social ideals was central to the mission of an established church. Nevertheless, the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath brought about and served to expose an inability on the part of the Church of England to fulfill this very mission. As Owen Chadwick notes, "Between 1780 and 1860 a large number of Englishmen, whose families worked upon the land since families existed, moved into towns and cities. Whether or not the father attended the country church, the son was not likely to attend the city church. So far as the churches or chapels possessed the allegiance of the working class of England and Wales, they lost that allegiance when the country laborer became a town laborer."[15] He goes on to point out that the diminished social position and growing incapacity of the Church of England did not become obvious until the third quarter of the nineteenth century. In the industrial cities, by that time, there was "no squire, no parson, no tradition, no community. Instead there was a proletariat. Ten millions were added to the population between 1801 and 1851. Most of the increase lived in large cities. In 1851 more than half the population of London aged 20 and over had not been born in London."[16]

It was simply a fact that nothing in the cities, neither municipal government nor housing, sanitation nor public services, were up to such

14. See, e.g., Preston, *Church and Society in the Late Twentieth Century*, 33.
15. Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, 325.
16. Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, 325.

a challenge. It is to the credit of the Christian Socialists that they recognized that the Church of England was making a thoroughly inadequate response to rapidly changing social conditions. It is especially to their credit that they woke the Church of England to the serious nature of the state of the poor and the inadequacy of the church's response. Both the state of the poor and the state of the church were in serious disrepair. As to the church, there was no longer room in its graveyards to bury the dead. Education of the young now lay beyond the resources of the parish church. Indeed, as Owen Chadwick has written, "If there was no room for the dead in the cemeteries for the dead, there was no room for the living in the churches."[17]

To be sure, both church and chapel responded with a spate of new churches that did much to lessen the shortage of adequate places to worship. Nonetheless, there remained the problem of filling them and finding competent clergy to lead these congregations. The best efforts of the Church of England in the poorer areas of England's cities proved ineffective not in the first instance because of poor facilities and incompetent clergy but because of the extent of anticlericalism among the working classes. The clergy who served in these parishes found that their neighbors did not lack faith. What they lacked was trust in their pastors and the church they served.[18]

A lack of infrastructure, competent pastoral leadership and sympathy along with antichurch, anticlerical opinion were, however, neither the only nor the most formidable obstacles facing the Christian Socialists in their efforts to promote Christian ideals. There were three other factors all too infrequently noted. First, the people of England had an inadequate understanding of the nature and causes of poverty. Second, they were confronted with changing views of who was responsible for poor relief. Third, the intellectual project of the Christian Socialists, a project that resonated in a positive way with public opinion, nonetheless faced a critical, even hostile intellectual environment associated (sometimes inaccurately) with many of the century's leading intellects.

First, in respect to the nature and causes of poverty, a case can be made that the Christian Socialists, along with the British populace in general, had available to them a notion of poor people but little notion of a social condition called poverty. As Gertrude Himmelfarb points

17. Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, 128.

18. Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, 333.

out, until the latter part of the nineteenth century, members of English society tended to speak not of "poverty" as an identifiable social condition but of "the poor"—a term that referred to needy individuals—a class of people who were worthy or unworthy, deserving or undeserving, but nonetheless "poor."[19] The collective representations available to the British public (and the Church of England) that referred to those in dire economic straits (the poor) focused on their moral lives rather than on general social conditions (poverty) related to, even generated by, ambient social facts. It is no wonder then that the Christian Socialists, along with the Church of England and most of their fellow citizens, addressed the state of the poor in terms of moral praise or blame rather than in terms of social conditions and social policy. Their available vocabulary and social experience pressed them to think first of moral culpability or rectitude rather than social structure and circumstance. So it was that they referred to the "deserving and undeserving" poor, a term that did not go out of general use until the 1880s.[20] So it was also that Henry Mayhew, the most perceptive chronicler of London's poor, said that members of every community could be divided into the *energetic* and the *anergetic*. Of the latter he said that they were indisposed to work. This "indolent" class he divided between those who cannot work and those who will not work.[21] Poverty was always then a possible indicator of one's moral state. This view is not a thing of the past. It lives on and is a matter of fierce debate to this day.

Second, in respect to the location of responsibility for poor relief, the Christian Socialists (along with the British public) were confronted with changes in social thought and order that rendered obsolete prior practices and posed a difficult challenge for the Church of England. In a former time, the Church of England played a primary role in addressing the misery of the poor. Poor relief centered in the parish church. Further, there was a general understanding that those blessed with riches had a sacred duty to be charitable. Poverty and charity were penetrated with religious meaning. The church was understood to be the instrument both of social amelioration and of spiritual salvation. Nevertheless, by the time of the Wesleyan revival, the conception of poverty and its remedy were becoming more secularized. In prior common usage poverty was taken

19. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 102–22.
20. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 12.
21. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 330–31.

to refer to the voluntary or involuntary, ignoble poverty of the "lower orders." Now, however, poverty was coming to be seen by a growing number of people as a natural but unfortunate condition to be alleviated not by the church but by society. Alleviation of this sort on the part of the state became for a growing number the moral measure of a civilization.[22] Indeed, England alone among the nations of Europe, though faced with significant public resistance, passed laws that made government funds available for poor relief. For some, measures such as these came to be seen as a measure of civilization. However, this point of view seemed novel to a significant number of the leaders of the Church of England.

In sum, the Christian Socialists addressed the question of the responsibility of the Church of England for both the poor and the conscience of the nation in a time of social flux. They lived in a time when the focus of social attention was moving from the poor as a moral indicator to poverty understood as a social condition rather than a personal state. It was also a time in which responsibility for poor relief was shifting from private or ecclesial acts of charity to government policies seeking relief of a social condition. It is little wonder then that the Christian Socialists struggled over whether the focus of the church and its clergy should be upon the moral state of the poor and the nation or upon policies of government intended to give redress to a social condition. Further, given their institutional links to the role of the church in previous ages, it is little wonder that they were reluctant to enter the fray of public policy. They were, however, faced in a stark manner with what the role of the church in these changed circumstances ought to be.

It is important for readers in the twenty-first century to take these factors into account. If they are not, it will be difficult to give the Christian Socialists a fair reading. Why are they so concerned about the deserving and undeserving poor? Why are they so skittish about the role of government and issues of public policy? If one looks, it is easy to see that there are understandable reasons they thought as they thought and did as they did—reasons that if taken into account will make it possible to learn from them rather than disparage them.

There is also a third factor that if taken into account will lead to a more sympathetic reading of their work. The Christian Socialists undertook their labors in the midst of an intellectual climate that, from their perspective, seemed to exclude the introduction of moral considerations

22. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*.

into discussions of what then was called "political economy." As previously indicated, political economy, as understood (often unfairly) by the Christian Socialists, was thought to operate on the basis of internal laws that govern its operation. These laws, it was thought, left no space for the deployment of moral considerations and so also no room for the calling of the church as it was then understood.

The leading social thinkers of the age contributed, more often than not unintentionally, to this understanding of economic relations. This intellectual elite included Adam Smith, Charles Darwin, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, Bernard Mandeville, and John Stuart Mill. Particular blame is frequently laid at the feet of Adam Smith, whose notion of an "invisible hand" had been mistakenly understood to mean that the market had its own laws of adjustment—laws not to be tampered with by the likes of fallible humans. Study of his ethical writings reveals clearly that Adam Smith did not in fact envision a marketplace devoid of moral guidance.[23] The real culprits of the amoral market were Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, who broke the relation between the welfare of the nation and that of the lower classes. For them there was no link between individual interest and general interest.[24] Nonetheless, all the men listed above provided a set of observations and ideas that were understood to say that moral considerations in fact play little or no part in the way in which a political economy actually works. Smith wrote sparsely of "an invisible hand" that guided economies. Darwin suggested that life on Earth evolves through a process of natural selection wherein only the fittest survive. Malthus contended that population growth would outstrip the supply of food needed for its support and so, again, only the fit survive. Mandeville insisted that society is not based on friendship or the virtue of self-denial but upon natural and moral evil. Ricardo was convinced that the value and quantity of a commodity depends on the quantity of labor necessary for its production and not upon the compensation paid for that labor. Mill suggested that social policy ought to be determined by that course of action that produced the greatest happiness for the greatest number. In different ways, these ideas, often taken out of context, served to support the idea of a political economy, a system of production and consumption that operates not by moral constraint but by the law of self-interest.

23. For a very clear presentation of the many ways in which Smith has been misinterpreted, see Kidd, "Moral Sentiments," 24–25.

24. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 300–301.

So it was that a view of economic and political relations was born that had no place for moral concerns or guidance. It was this exclusion that most exorcised the Christian Socialists. An economic and political order that had no place for morals had as well no place for a national church commissioned to provide a moral foundation for national life. R. H. Tawney's well-known study *The Acquisitive Society* provides the most adequate account of the matters that sparked the Christian Socialists' concern and response to these formidable challenges. England, he claimed, had become an "acquisitive society," and by this he meant several things. Social institutions, he wrote, are the visible expression of a scale of moral values. He argued that sometime in the 1700s England had deserted the moral ideals upon which its society had been built. As a result, industry no longer served its proper "function" or purpose. That purpose is to provide services that are "necessary, useful or beautiful, and thus bring life to body and spirit."[25] However, the changes of the eighteenth century brought an end to the social ideal championed by the Christian Socialists, namely, social institutions and economic activities ought to be related to common moral ends that give them their significance.

By their account, these ideals provided the keystone of the arch of English society and if they were removed, the Christian Socialists feared, social relations would devolve into a jumble of individual rights claims and conflicting private interests. These rights, protected by government, would become the ultimate social reality. As Tawney writes, "The result of such ideas . . . was a society which was ruled by law, not by the caprice of Governments, but which recognized no moral limitation on the pursuit by individuals of their economic self-interest."[26] In such a society, the purpose of social organization is to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Now happiness, he noted, is individual, and to make happiness the object of society "is to resolve society itself into the ambitions of numberless individuals, each directed towards the satisfaction of some desire and the consequent attainment of some personal purpose."[27]

Societies such as these Tawney terms "acquisitive societies," because "their whole tendency and interest and preoccupation is to promote the acquisition of wealth."[28] Acquisitive societies are consequently sub-

25. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 8.
26. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 14.
27. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 29.
28. Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, 29.

ject first of all to "irrational" inequalities in wealth. They also become societies torn by "fierce antagonisms" and warlike competition. In such societies only the fit survive, and those who lose out in the competition are soon considered in some way morally reprobate. As Tawney notes in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, "The most curious feature in the whole discussion . . . was the resolute refusal to admit that society had any responsibility for the causes of distress."[29]

After reading Tawney's account of the social and economic climate of his time, it is impossible to miss parallels with the climate of our present day.[30] In our day, political economy has been replaced by neoliberalism, a term first coined by Milton Friedman in his 1951 essay "Neoliberalism and Its Prospects." As presently employed, "neoliberalism" is a term that takes *laissez-faire* economics and radicalizes them. The notion of freedom as freedom from constraint is interpreted solely in economic terms. The meaning of the common good is consequently changed beyond all recognition. For neoliberals the common good simply falls out from the free exercise of rational behavior and self-interest on the part of economic agents. The free exercise of rational choice within the market is sort of an invisible hand that works for the benefit of all.

Now, when the exercise of negative liberty crashes into capital markets, humanity receives a new definition. Human being is defined as a form of capital—by whether one is able to participate in the market either as a self-interested agent or as a speck of human capital. Anyone unable to participate either as a profit-seeking entrepreneur or as a speck of human capital is simply a nonperson. Indeed, all spheres of life are economized. All relations are measured by profit or loss. In all relations we are judged as market actors. Such persons are controlled by their desires and as such are politically manageable. Government can now act on the social environment so as to meet or create desires. In response to these social facts, a friend of mine has come up with a new way to start a conversation with someone you don't know: "Hello, my name is Philip. Buy anything interesting this week?"

This account of neoliberalism is remarkably close to Tawney's description of "the acquisitive society." Both are damning and both describe a view of the world against which Christian Socialists launched their

29. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, loc. 4105 of 6663, Kindle.

30. The following account of neoliberalism has been provided by Susan Lucas. See, e.g., Lucas, "The Temple Legacy Today," in Spencer, *Theology Reforming Society*, locs. 2009–52 of 3130, Kindle.

attack. Nevertheless, both descriptions are extreme. They simply go too far. The fact is that English society (like American society) was in conflict over how to meet the challenges—moral, social, economic, and political—brought about by the changes all faced. Nevertheless, it is not the case that England (or present-day America) has degenerated to the extent that it has become the mechanistic and morally vacuous amalgam that was the subject of the Christian Socialist attack. If Gertrude Himmelfarb is to be believed, despite all the talk of the amoral character of political economy, English society (like that of present-day America) remained at its root "benevolent." The English enlightenment did not focus on the sufficiency of reason, as did the French. Rather, "the 'moral sense' or 'moral sentiment,' the 'social virtues' or 'social affections,' the ideas of 'benevolence,' 'sympathy,' 'compassion,' 'fellow-feeling'—these were the defining terms of the moral philosophy that was at the heart of the British Enlightenment. It was this social ethos that was the common denominator of . . . secular philosophers and religious enthusiasts, of Church of England bishops and Wesleyan preachers and missionaries. And it was this ethos that found expression in the reform movements and philanthropic enterprises that flourished during the century."[31] It was this ethos that led to an age of benevolence and a new humanitarianism. Himmelfarb goes on to show how this spirit of benevolence found expression in literature, voluntary societies, philanthropic activity, education, and attempts on the part of poor people to help one another through their own voluntary societies.[32] Many have pointed out the inadequacies of these efforts, but, inadequate or not, they were real and they sprang from genuinely benevolent motives.

Facts force one to the conclusion that to some extent the Christian Socialists boxed against imagined foes who were neither as perverse nor as powerful as they feared. Nevertheless, they were not wrong to worry about the destructive force of a portrayal of economic relations that excluded moral considerations. They were certainly right to see that the problem could not be met adequately by the virtue of benevolence. They rightly believed that a renewed vision of the moral character of common life was needed if the nation was to meet in a morally satisfactory way the challenges it faced. Thus, in searching for a "Christian Sociology" they were not running in a direction diametrically opposed to that of English

31. Himmelfarb, *Roads to Modernity*, 131.

32. Himmelfarb, *Roads to Modernity*, 131–46.

society. They were, however, stressing the importance of a renewed moral vision for that society. They were not wrong to worry about a view of social life that portrayed it as a struggle in which only the fittest survive, and they were not wrong to be distressed by the destructive effects of poverty. In response, they were right to put forward a set of ideals that might provide an alternative to a political economy. This alternative claimed a stellar group of thinkers as its progenitors—an alternative that might provide relief to a destitute population and moral wisdom to the people of England.

As the collection of essays entitled *The Return of Christendom* so clearly displays, the Christian Socialists often looked to the Middle Ages to find a concrete example of a society organized around "function" in service to a common good rather than a quest for private wealth. In search of a social ideal upon which to restore a Christian society, as noted above, many sought "the return of Christendom." In this search they showed themselves to be naïve, ill informed in respect to basic economics, and impractical. Nevertheless, their primary aim was moral. It was to form the conscience of a nation, and this aim, no matter how adverse the circumstances, remains a necessary one for any Christian account of social ethics.