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ONLY within the last few years has any serious attempt been made to investigate the 'social' teaching of the New Testament in order to apply this teaching towards the solution of modern social problems. For this delay in the working of a field which may be expected to yield rich and useful fruit, at least three reasons may be given:—

(1) The widespread interest which we are witnessing in the many different 'problems,' which together form the one great 'Social Problem,' is itself of comparatively recent growth.

(2) The 'Gospel,' so far as it has been regarded as a 'power unto salvation' (in the widest sense of the words), has in the past been too generally regarded as containing primarily, if not exclusively, a message to, and for, the individual.

(3) Where there has been any examination of the New Testament in order to investigate the nature of the community-life of the first Christians, this examination has generally been made from some particular ecclesiastical point of view, and primarily with the object of fortifying and establishing some preconceived theory of the organisation of the Christian Community during its earliest years¹.

¹ Bigg, *The Church's Task under the Roman Empire*, pp. vii. ff.

To some extent it may for a long time have been realised that “according to the New Testament the Christian life is the true human life, and that Christians become true men in proportion as they live up to it”¹; but only lately have we begun to discover that the New Testament is full of ‘social’ ideals—themselves parts of the one social Ideal: in other words, that “the right relations between members of the Christian Society are simply the normal relations which should exist between members of the human race”². Or, as Professor Ramsay expresses the same thought, “St John always assumes that the Church is in a sense the city....The Church is all that is real in the city; the rest of the city has failed to reach its true self, and has been arrested in its development”³.*

Recently, however, one most important part of the Social Teaching of the New Testament has been carefully examined. I refer to the Social Teaching of our Lord Himself. With the advent of ‘the Social

¹ Hort, *Christian Ecclesia*, p. 228.

² *Ibid.*

³ *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 41.

* The following is probably an additional reason for the neglect of the Social Teaching of the New Testament. The Study of Sociology as a science has been much neglected, especially in England. Even now in England Sociology cannot be said to have won for itself an assured position among the exact sciences. Consequently it has not been noticed that much of the Social Teaching of the New Testament (if couched in old-world, and to some extent ‘unscientific,’ language) consists of fundamental Sociological Laws, and these expressed as guides to human conduct. [See Additional Note on ‘The Realism of St Paul,’ p. 142.]

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Question'—and that advent is due to a variety of causes—we have been compelled to learn how important a question it is; and how far-reaching in their consequences must inevitably be the answers which are given to it. This being so it is only natural that men are asking, "What answer, or answers does 'Christianity' give to the many problems with which we are being faced?" In order to meet this demand the Social Teaching of our Lord, both as a whole and in regard to various particular relations of social life, has been examined in a number of books devoted expressly to this purpose¹.

But if every word and action of our Lord which bears, however remotely, upon the social question were adequately examined—if the whole of His personal teaching on the subject were clearly set forth—we should not then be in possession of 'The Social Teaching of Christianity.' As Harnack has so clearly pointed out, a complete answer to the question, 'What is Christian?' must take into consideration at least the teaching of the first generation of our Lord's followers². Among these, in wide experience of very different social conditions, St Paul probably stands preeminent. He was the first of the New Testament writers to propagate Christianity upon the wide field of the Graeco-Roman world³, and he was the first called upon to apply the principles of Christianity to social conditions far more diversified and complex than those described for us in the Gospels. Thus, in any attempt

¹ e.g. Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*.

² *Das Wesen*, p. 6.

³ Wernle, *Die Anfänge*, p. 96.

to state the 'Social Teaching' of 'Christianity' that of St Paul must claim the most careful consideration. Yet, as far as I am aware, no attempt has been made to deal with this subject as a connected whole; though in multitudes of notes by commentators upon the Acts and his Epistles, and also in many passages of books upon St Paul's life and teaching, as well as upon the age in which he worked, there is a wealth of material helpful for this purpose.

The subject of St Paul's Social Teaching is a large one, and very soon after I entered upon an examination of it I found it would be necessary to impose upon myself certain definite limits. These will be clear when I state that all I have attempted is as follows:—

(i) I have tried to show that from our knowledge of St Paul's history previous to his conversion we may assume, first, that he had an intimate knowledge of the *actual* social conditions of both the Jewish and the Gentile world, as these existed in such cities as Tarsus and Jerusalem: secondly, that he must have been familiar (α) with social *ideals* which at that time inspired various sections¹ of the Jewish people; (β) with ideals which must have entered the mind of a native of a "city renowned for its educational advantages, and proud of its Greek culture and uncommon devotion to intellectual pursuits²," a city which also was one of the strongholds of the Stoic Philosophy; and (γ) with ideals which cannot have

¹ The forms of the Messianic hope conceived by the educated and uneducated Jews were apparently widely different.

² McGiffert, *History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, p. 113.

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failed to influence a Roman citizen who, with quite pardonable pride, was always ready to claim the privileges to which that citizenship entitled him.

(ii) I have tried to show that in St Paul's speeches and letters we have evidence of what may be termed a re-reading of the Old Testament in the light of the new knowledge and new convictions which produced his 'conversion'; and how in this light the social teaching of the Prophets of Israel became filled with (at any rate to him) a new significance¹.

(iii) I have tried to show how, as a result of this 're-reading' of the Old Testament, the Messianic teaching and hopes, both of his forefathers and contemporaries, not only as these referred to a Messianic *King* and a Messianic Age, but as they referred to a Messianic *Society* acquired for St Paul a higher and fuller meaning.

(iv) I have sought, by a brief study of some passages chosen from his Epistles, to explain a few of the leading ideas in St Paul's conception of the Social teaching and Social possibilities of Christianity.

Between St Paul's social teaching and the highest social aspirations and efforts of the present day there are, I believe, two strong affinities.

(1) In both we find a common note of *intense earnestness*. This was probably the dominant element in St Paul's character²; it was also the strongest link in that chain of personal piety which bound together his earlier and his later life. It makes us feel that,

¹ G. A. Smith, *Isaiah*, ii. 287 ff.

² Acts xxii. 3, Gal. i. 14, Philipp. iii. 6, 2 Cor. iv. 7 ff.

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however different were his attitudes towards Christ and Christianity before and after his conversion—that of the zealous persecuting Pharisee and of the equally zealous Christian Missionary—both were inspired by an intense ‘zeal for God.’ The earnestness in both periods was that of the same man, but the efforts towards which it drove him were directed towards different, and apparently opposite, purposes. But in both periods we have before us a man so convinced that he has a ‘mission’ that he is prepared to exercise the ‘totality of his powers’ towards its accomplishment. Then it probably was not simply on account of the strangeness of the theories (or doctrines) which they preached, but because of the earnestness or zeal with which they preached them, and strove to put them into effect, that St Paul and his companions were charged as enemies of the social order¹. In the First Epistle of St Peter²—which was addressed to the Christians of those districts where St Paul’s influence may be assumed to have been most strong—its readers are more than once warned to be specially careful of

¹ ἐκταράσσουσιν, Acts xvi. 20; οἰκουμένην ἀναστατώσαντες, Acts xvii. 6.

² e.g. iii. 16, iv. 15, 16 (vide Prof. Bigg’s note on ἀλλοτριοεπίσκοπος, who compares ἀλλότρια πολυπραγμονεῖ in Epictet. iii. 22, 97): and adds “a Christian might give great offence by ill-timed protests against common social customs.” Note also W. W. Capes, *The Age of the Antonines*, p. 137: “Much might seem dangerous in the mysterious influence of the new religion. Its talk of equality and brotherhood might sound like the watchword of a social revolution. ...The ties of sympathy between its scattered members were like the network of a widespread conspiracy, whose designs might be political.”

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their conduct lest this charge of being social revolutionaries be brought against them.

As the result of a similar earnestness, and of a zeal which, like that of the early Christians, is not always tempered by discretion, the same charge—of being ‘revolutionaries’—is to-day brought against numbers of men who by the study of the social question are being stirred to the very depths of their being. If we consider the changes wrought both in the ideas and constitution of society through Christian influences, from the first century to the present time, these changes amount to nothing less than a revolution. As to how much farther this revolution might with advantage still proceed opinions differ. Of the *earnestness* with which many social reformers to-day are pressing for drastic changes there can be no doubt. “The literature of the present age is saturated with the desire for social revolution¹.” “The party of revolution, with its millions of voters in many European countries, officially announces that all other issues are to be subordinated to the social question¹.” “Beneath all the tranquillizing arrangements of philanthropy or industry, which are being applied to social disorder, there is a vast and rising tide of discontent stirring to its very bottom the stream of social life^{1,2}.” Much of the social effort of to-day, especially on the Continent, is, of course, at least on the surface, frankly anti-Christian, though underlying it there is probably

¹ Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, p. 6.

² I give these quotations simply to show how intensely *earnest* are the men who have provoked, and who are still stirring up, this flood of discontent.

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more unconscious¹ Christianity than its promoters would admit. And there is not less earnestness among those social workers who are working on definite Christian lines, and who are inspired by definite Christian principles. The numerous 'Settlements' in the poorest parts of London and our other large towns, as well as the immense number of efforts and movements directed against particular social evils, bear witness to the same fact.

(2) The second great mark of similarity between St Paul's social teaching and the social movement of the present day is the strong *ethical* basis of both.

Equally with his earnestness, St Paul's intense 'zeal for righteousness' was common to the two great periods of his life. However different may have been his conceptions of the contents and aim of righteousness before and after his conversion, we may safely assert that the highest ethical ideal, in purpose and in conduct, was throughout his life the motive power of all his actions^{2,3}.

¹ Possibly in this particular the present social movement offers more than one interesting parallel to certain movements which were contemporaneous with, or which rather followed upon, the religious upheaval in Germany during the first half of the sixteenth century. (See *The Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. ii. pp. 184 ff.)

² Acts xxii. 3, Philipp. iii. 6.

³ "In every page of Paul's writings that restless, self-conceited, morbid, unhealthy society" (*i.e.* of the Graeco-Asiatic cities) "stands out in strong relief before the reader. He knew it so well because he was born and brought up in its midst. He conceived that his mission was to regenerate it, and the plan which he saw to be the only possible one was to save the Jew from sinking down to the pagan level, by elevating the pagan to the true (N.B. *true*, cf.

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When, as a member of the Cilician Synagogue he was among those who disputed with Stephen, the very charges which he assisted in bringing against Stephen (and it is incredible that he knew these to be false) were charges of being an enemy to 'righteousness'.¹ To speak lightly against Moses was, in St Paul's eyes, evidently tantamount to speaking lightly against God—the author of all righteousness; so 'to speak words against this holy place and the law' was to speak against the one place on earth whence a fountain of righteousness issued, and against the one standard by which righteousness could be safely estimated. To 'change the customs delivered by Moses' was to abolish the whole series of actions in personal and social life which to a Pharisee were the ultimate test of righteousness in conduct. Saul the Pharisee may have had an entirely false conception of 'righteousness,' but it is impossible, in the face of his own description of his 'former life,' to compare his motives in attacking Christ and His followers with those which actuated Annas and Caiaphas and the Sadducean hierarchy.

The same sense of a 'call' on behalf of righteousness inspires the thoughtful and earnest social worker at the present time. In two ways this may be seen.

Rom. ii. 17, 18, 28, 29) Jewish level." (Ramsay, *Seven Churches*, p. 135.)

"The salutary idea which was needed to keep the Empire sound and the cities healthy was what Paul preached; and that was the raising of the Gentiles to equality with the Jews in religion and morality." *Ibid.* p. 141.

¹ Acts vi. 11 ff.

(1) At the basis of all social movements there lies the idea of a wrong—an injustice¹, an ‘unrighteousness’—to be righted. There is a growing consciousness of contradiction between much which exists in the actual economic conditions of the present, and the spiritual ideals which inspire noble minds. This consciousness often utters itself in a passionate cry of indignation. (2) It is being more and more clearly realised by social leaders and workers that the problem which must be solved is rather an *ethical*², than a purely economic one. They see that it is to an improvement in character and aim of life, in other words, to an increase of righteousness, that effort must be directed, rather than, primarily, to improve economic resources or to give greater spending power.

The present ‘social’ situation seems to offer yet another interesting parallel to that in the midst of which St Paul laboured. The ‘social movement’ on the Continent, *e.g.* in Germany, France, Italy, contains it must be admitted certain strong ethical elements, yet it is generally regarded as distinctly anti-Christian³. [But would not ‘anti-clerical,’ or ‘anti-ecclesiastical’ be a truer definition of its spirit?] The more thoughtful observer may, however, see in it, not a necessarily

¹ “The power and pathos of the modern social movement reside in the passionate demand, now heard on every hand, for Justice...the chance for a human way of life.” [Peabody, p. 10.]

² “The Social Question of the present time is an ethical question.” [Peabody, p. 9.]

³ Peabody, pp. 15, 16.

⁴ See *The Brass-workers of Berlin and Birmingham*, p. 19.