

The essay provided below, published in pamphlet format, written by Norman F. Webb and titled "Social Credit and the Christian Ethic," may cast some light on the Social Credit attitude toward work and "original sin" as this relates to the merits of Leisure.

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# **Social Credit and the Christian Ethic**

By NORMAN F. WEBB

Since the dawn of history the cry of reformers has always been for a "change of heart." Of the practical efficacy of that unqualified appeal we have no means of judging other than an examination of the actual condition of the world as it is today. Under that test it would appear to have failed. Nevertheless, the great majority of society, with, it must be admitted, considerable encouragement from the press and the pulpit, and the pronouncements of bank chairmen, still holds blindly to the belief that a change of heart is an essential preliminary to any change for the better in social conditions, and denies environment any claim as a means to a change of heart. In short, although we like to think of this world of aeroplanes and scientific wonders as very modern indeed, the truth is that the pre-Darwinian, pre-Baconian attitude of mind still rules. In support of this attitude Christ's words are often quoted: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," manifestly a searching truth; but it seems to me the weak point in the argument is always the fact that so few of those who hold the view appear themselves to have experienced the change they recommend.

Until the rise of the Social Credit movement, there has never been a constructive, co-ordinated opposition to the monopoly which this theory enjoys, and a challenge to it is long overdue. As Major Douglas very profoundly says in his book "Social Credit": "Virtue *may* flourish in the gutter, but if virtue can *only* flourish in the gutter, as some people would have us believe, then it is time that the nature of virtue received severe scrutiny." Social Crediters, applying the discoveries of Darwin, assert that if the conditions of life are changed, the heart will respond. That, shortly, is the Social Credit declaration of faith, and I believe it to be both sound and Christian. Christ fed the five thousand in the wilderness. He was not of the opinion that they would be more spiritually minded fasting than fed.

It is just here that the problem reaches a deadlock. It is a sort of spiritual stalemate, and in the ensuing check and pause an acute sense can plainly detect the premonitory tremors of a vast society breaking up. It can serve no purpose to become either impatient or "rattled," but it must be admitted that the matter is urgent, since it is quite possible that the future of an entire civilisation depends on its solution. If it were just a question of giving a decision on the side of one or the other school of thought--the change of heart or the change of environment--how simple it would be; but we must not forget that the core of the problem, our practical difficulty, is that both sides appear to lack the essential dynamic that is needed to stir up the public to a realistic sense of the present state of affairs.

My personal belief is that judgment cannot be given to either; that the truth of the matter lies somewhere between the two; as I firmly believe Truth itself to be a balance of forces. I suggest the two changes are interdependent. They must, so to speak, occur together; the job is to be tackled at both ends simultaneously, like a tunnelling of the Alps. In his book "Social Credit," contrasting the claims of what he calls the classical and modern spirit which, broadly speaking, correspond to the two schools of thought I am considering--Major Douglas says, "It is probable that, as in many controversies, there is a good deal to be said for both points of view, but it is even more probable that approximate Truth lies in an appreciation of the fact that neither conception is useful without the other." Or, as I wish to suggest, it may be just their combination that would produce the spiritual impulse for which we are searching. For since it is a fact that the nearest the human mind and language can get to a statement of Truth is a paradox--"For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it," and many others--it is quite probable that the approach to a practical

problem, even our very actions themselves, may require to be in a sense paradoxical in order to be sound.

It is, you see, a "live" problem, a spiritual problem, which is a conclusion that we Social Crediters have to some extent avoided, for the reason that, as a class, we possess that trained cast of mind that is intensely apprehensive of emotional excess. I believe that it is our destiny to live down that fear, as, indeed, in the near future many fears and prejudices will have to be overcome; and that the road by which it will be achieved is through a realisation of the fact that the scientific mind is the type of the modern religious mind, in fact the neo-Christian. Science is knowledge. In action it is the research and documentation of natural law. For that job there is only one essential, besides training and common intelligence, and that is integrity, singleness of purpose: the "single eye" that, as Christ said, is the only means to enlightenment. In that sense the scientist is truly religious in spirit. He knows that all personal bias and preconception must be eliminated from the mind; that facts as they come to light must be accepted, not for any moral reason, involving punishment, but simply because it is only in that obedient, impersonal, selfless spirit that Truth, his objective, can be attained.

To me Christianity is realistic in the highest degree; but it was not the Church, but two superficially mundane interests that brought me to an appreciation of the realistic and practical quality of Christ's teaching. In the first place it was the study of art, and later the study of that philosophy we call Social Credit. And the more I examine them the more do Christ's teaching and Social Credit identify themselves and fuse in my mind. I put down here my interpretation of the fundamental principles of Christianity, solely for the purposes of my analogy; not minding though I must be treading on ground already covered and recovered by commentators and theologians, whose books I have never read and never shall read. What I have found, then, in Christianity is a technique of living; and it is with me that, whatever adherence I may give to Social Credit or anything else, the technique of personal existence must be my primary concern. I cannot, I will not, let my interests be an escape from my personal problems. Rather, I must solve my personal problems for the sake of prosecuting my interests more effectively.

Christ was a realist, the greatest that ever lived by my definition of Realism, which is a concern with the immediate present, with facts as they are. "The Kingdom of God is within you," said Christ, and that to my mind is an eminently realistic statement. It was Idealism that

shoved Heaven up into the sky, and that has persistently postponed human blessedness to any time and place except here and now; when just here and now are all that we really possess to work on. It is surely a devil's trick to rob us of the present, the only possession we can really call ours. And it is surely a bedevilled world that displays all this passion for securing the future and leaves the present to shift for itself. It is because of the realism of their belief that Social Crediters find themselves so markedly opposed to a world that sees no hope other than in Plans--Four, Five, and Ten Year--and Boards and Leagues, and Conferences; all idealistic, all projecting themselves outward from an unsolved, immediate present, into an intellectual, Utopian dream of what might be, of what ought to be.

"Take care of the present and the future will take care of itself," is the lesson of both Christianity and Social Credit; and I say it is Realism as opposed to Idealism. It *may* be impious, it certainly is both unscientific and misguided, to try to see any distance into the future: acceptance of, and obedience to, facts is the creed of both Christianity and science. Newman's "One step enough for me" may be childishly simple; but it is profoundly and truly a summing-up of the Christian point of view and, I would add, the scientific also.

The Christian task, as I see it, is to attain the right attitude towards life, to understand and carry out its laws as disclosed. What follows, follows; and it is just here that faith comes into operation. It seems to me an astonishingly foolish mistake, and one very frequently made, to confuse faith with blind belief; they are in no way related. Faith might be defined as an unshakable understanding that obedience to a known law must produce correct results, even though, as Major Douglas puts it, "the end of Man is unknown"; in other words, even though the actual nature of the ultimate result is hidden from us. The Social Credit faith is of that nature, and so, too, is the truly Christian, and it is with that quality of faith that we need to inspire society. Lacking it, people dread any change, and demand to see the whole social programme complete with blue prints and a five-years unconditional guarantee. The best analogy I can think of is learning to ride a bicycle. The doubting, human intelligence wants to be assured that its owner will be held up before it can permit him to pedal off, whereas the truth is that *until* he pedals off he *cannot* be supported.

The individual soul, and the right understanding of its relation to its original source, was for Christ the beginning and end of existence, and nothing recorded that He did or said suggests even faintly that man exists for any other purpose. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things

that are Caesar's," as a pronouncement, gives stable government its proper place and emphasis, as a means to an end; but ". . . unto God the things that are God's," postulates, without defining, the end to which government is to be the means. The true, democratic, interpretation of the Sovereignty of the People, as defined by Social Credit, is exactly this attitude applied to the structure of the State and the place and the function of the individual, as that for which and by which the State exists. Christ's short life was spent in defence of the individual, and nearly two thousand years later Social Crediters find themselves waging the same battle. He clearly foresaw the danger of the elevation of means into ends, which has culminated in the Collectivist State and its suppression of the individual to the group. No dogmatic Church could have bound Christ in His lifetime. It was only after His death, and not until several centuries after, that it succeeded in shackling and dogmatising his troublesome dynamic philosophy; but in the eyes of Him Who had created the philosophy, "the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."

The identity of Christ's teaching and what we call Economic Democracy is, I believe, fundamental. The two are in contact at every point--even to this extent, that the primary obstacle to the realisation of both of them is the same. That obstacle is, literally, the very devil, and its name, for want of a better term, is Puritanism. To any that are hurt by that use of the word, I say, give me a better or as good, and I will gladly substitute it. But puritanism as I understand it (erroneously connected in many minds with purity) has, I affirm, nothing in common with Christ's teaching. Again we are in need of a definition; although, indeed, this quality is so diffuse, so universal, so "human," as to be almost indefinable in a phrase. The will-to-power perhaps comes nearest to the root of it, but that phrase itself requires defining. Let me put it negatively.

When Christ, One Who for all His countrified simplicity, understood more of life than anyone before or since, said to the young man who asked Him for a decision between his brother and himself, "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" He was demonstrating in the highest degree the opposite impulse to that which I designate Puritanism. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." There is a law of life; and I think that Christ has plainly demonstrated for us that the primary fact of existence is that we are here and conscious, for the purpose of learning to understand it. The puritanical misconception is that we are here *to administer the law*. Is it surprising, therefore, that the world presents the picture it does, when the individuals, who compose society, each of them to a greater or lesser degree, conceive

of themselves as administrators of their own interpretation of a law that has as yet been only faintly apprehended by a handful of choice spirits?

Puritanism, as I said, is of the devil, clothing the very deepest and darkest passion of the human mind--the impulse to dominate over one's fellow mortals--in a moral disguise. And can we wonder if the hedonist, who for all his shallowness, at least has sufficient love for his neighbour to allow him to work out his own salvation, gets away with so much of our sympathy? It is the Puritan who has always been ready to shed blood in the past (for there is no more terrible human phenomenon than the man who identifies God with his own abysmal will-to-power), and it will be the Puritan who will be ready to shed it in the future.

Christ's realistic mission was to free man, and the opposition He met is precisely the opposition presented to Social Credit. The truth is that the Puritan element in man does not wish to be free. Because its desire is to dominate over its fellows, it opposes the idea of their enfranchisement, which is its own. The Devil fears freedom above everything, and his own most of all. It is quite natural then that when applied science comes along offering material freedom and abundance, the Puritan--the Devil's advocate that lurks in each one of us--should be arrayed against it; or that when we espouse a movement calling for a realistic acceptance of the fact of economic freedom, we are met with deadly resistance from the vested interests of the Prince of Darkness.

The foundation of the Christian teaching is Love. It is a difficult matter to grasp, and very wide in its application, and the word itself has been so narrowly identified with sexual attraction that we can hardly employ it profitably. There are many definitions, but it will serve our purpose to take one; trust, in the sense of absence of fear--"perfect Love casteth out fear." That form of love Social Credit represents. Social Crediters affirm a belief in the fundamental decency--goodness, if you like--of human nature in the face of a world cowering abjectly before its own degraded picture of itself. Coercive legislation, and armaments, and leagues, are all the direct outcome of fear and hatred--distrust of human nature. Into that dark abyss our present civilisation seems to be descending; and constructively opposed to that world-wide tendency there are literally only two forces, the teaching of Christ, and the philosophy of Social Credit, which I say are one and the same. The actual clash that is to herald the social breakup cannot be very long delayed. In the interval still remaining, can these forces not

be brought together, and from their identification a real Christian democratic nucleus be created, round which the remnant of this present marvellous and tragic civilisation might re-form? It is conceivable that the actual break-up might even be averted, and the spirit of the age take that sudden renewal and swing upward with which an apparently dying piece of music sometimes starts off again on a fresh and finer flight. That, as we know, is the vision that Social Credit has opened up for some of us; but, so far, we have not been able to communicate it to the great mass of the people. In this combination I have suggested, may lie the secret of the dynamic we search for, when the change of heart and the change of environment become, as I believe they should, complementary to one another.

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Note:

Books which may be of interest to the student include: ***Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*** by R. H. Tawney (Penguin-Pelican, reprinted 1969), and "***The Jews and Modern Capitalism***" by Werner Sombart (New York: Collier Edition, 1962).