

FUNDAMENTALS OF SOCIAL CREDIT IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

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WOE unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy, and social credit: these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.”

The Greek word πίστις , which is here translated “social credit,” is generally and quite accurately rendered “faith” in the New Testament. In this saying of Jesus it is obviously used in another quite ordinary meaning it had in the Greek language, namely, “faithful dealing” between man and man. So it is translated by Weymouth in this passage. Again in Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians it is used in the same sense: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, . . . faithfulness” (R.V.). Here the word is translated “good faith” by Weymouth, “fidelity” by Moffat, and rightly. While it would be an anachronism to say that what is meant is “social credit” in any modern technical sense, it is certain that the fundamental idea is the same. Jesus is saying to the religious leaders of his day that man’s trust in the reliability of his neighbour should be the outcome of true piety, and, as such, should be the concern of religious leaders and teachers, if they are functioning properly.

Paying of tithes and burning of incense were only the phylacteries of religion, social justice and “credit” were weightier matters.

The word has an obvious message for religious leaders in our day or in any day, who say they (or “the Church”) are concerned only with “spiritual” matters. Economists and others are only too ready to take them at their word and say “We keep our moral categories in one compartment and our economic categories in another” (Sir Norman Angell). Prof. Tawney, an economist of no mean repute, describes the consequence: “The quality in modern societies which is most sharply opposed to the teaching ascribed to the Founder of the Christian . . . consists in the assumption that the attainment of material riches is the supreme object of human endeavour.”

The Founder of the Christian Faith would have saved both religion and human society from this error, and would save them today if we not merely said “Lord, Lord” to Him, but attended more closely to the things He said, and endeavoured more earnestly to act according to them . He did not divide human life into compartments, spiritual and material, religious and secular. God’s writ ran everywhere, and God’s love was nowhere more apparent than in the rain and in the sunshine. If men and women desired to appear on the right hand of the Great Judge, they must learn to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

That this was His prevailing attitude is shown by his favourite quotation from the Old Testament, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice,” which is the summing up of the prophetic message as opposed to the priestly. An even more striking illustration of His identifying

Himself with the prophets rather than with the priests is in the incident of the cleansing of the Temple. There He quotes from Jeremiah: "My House ... ye have made it a den of robbers ." Jeremiah said, "Will ye steal, murder, etc., and then come and stand before me in this House which is called by name, and say 'We are saved'? saved! to do all these abominations ? Is this House become a cave of robbers in your eyes?" Jesus repeats the warning of His great predecessor against making religion a cloak for injustice and oppression. It is noteworthy that it was the bankers whom He drove from the Temple precincts: "cutters," and "clippers," are the suggestive names the New Testament has for these gentlemen!

Only if we realise that this was our Lord's point of view can we interpret aright His conduct and His teaching. It was "seeing the multitudes" that He preached to them. He really saw them, not merely in synagogues and Temple, but as farmers, gardeners, builders, traders, kings, bankers, employers, fathers and mothers, and children. All human life had a material and a spiritual aspect, not separately, but whole. So we ought not to "spiritualise" away His parables into nothingness, but interpret them in terms of human life; the life of His own time certainly, but also the life of all time. If His thought, speech, and action had not supreme accuracy and rightness, the record of them had not survived the centuries.

"Render unto Caesar the things which belong to Caesar; unto God the things which belong to God." Matthew, the Inland Revenue officer, reports this incident with greater insight and accuracy than either Mark or Luke. When Jesus was asked, "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or no?" He said, "Show me the legal tender of the assessment." Put in this light, the question answers itself. It was Caesar's business to provide people with a just currency, as it was his to provide just weights and measures, and Caesar was entitled to the cost of government; but Caesar was not entitled to any more: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." What is GOD'S currency? What has GOD'S image and superscription stamped upon it? Why, MAN! "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

Caesar was entitled to payment for service rendered, but he was, like other people, only a steward of God's bounty. He was not entitled to issue currency and tax people as if the whole world belonged to him!

The parable of the unmerciful servant applies to modern history with an aptness, which is uncanny and almost fantastic. A debtor, owing the king £2,000,000 (ten thousand talents), is summoned, and, at his own request, is granted a moratorium: he goes out and takes by the throat a man owing him £5 (a hundred pence), saying, "Pay me that thou owest." He refuses to forgive his fellow-debtor. So his fellow servants tell the king, and the big debtor is re-arrested, and his moratorium is cancelled. "So like wise will My Heavenly Father do unto you if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his fellow." That is, it is necessary — Divine Justice requires — that the big debtor be severely dealt with and restrained in order to protect the small ones. Now notice the weird resemblance, even in detail, and the fatal difference in

our day: In August 1914, a moratorium was declared for all debts above £5! Again in 1931 the Bank of England came to Parliament with a request in the following terms: "It is, in our opinion, in the national interest that we should be relieved of our obligation." They could not pay; yet they were left with power to make other people pay, to make other people bankrupt, and to press for other nations, provinces, and municipalities to "pay me that thou owest"!

Divine Justice would not have forgiven the big debtor a second time: It would have declared his "debts" to be public "credits." One of the effects of our modern government's refusal to dispense divine justice (the justice of the parable) was that the unwise king (the British Government) had to go bankrupt himself; we defaulted to America. Our debt to America had been contracted in wartime, when the basis of our credit was the nation's currency, symbolised by the King's head on the Bradbury. This was not a false promise to pay gold, but "a sight draft for goods and services in Great Britain: a Government security is a long draft for precisely the same thing." We could pay our debts now on that basis. Then there is the parable of the wicked husbandmen, who refused the owner of the vineyard "the fruits in their season." They stoned and beat his messengers; and when "last of all he sent his son also, saying, 'They will reverence my son,' they said 'This is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'" Commentators agree that this parable requires very little interpretation. The "heir" is Jesus, Who by and by was crucified. And yet the real point is generally missed, just because we fail to see how close to life it is, and forget Matthew xxv. 40. Jesus is the Son of Man, the representative Man, Who comes for the fruits of God's vineyard in their season. No man or set of men are entitled to claim the earth and the fruits of it themselves. We are all "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ," as Paul says; as He Himself says, "I was hungry and ye gave Me meat." Give is the proper word: "Give us this day our daily bread"; "Give ye them to eat." Life and the means of life are all the gift of God. "Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." And if we seek first the kingdom of God, all these things (food and clothing) shall be added unto us.

In the Kingdom of God, as Jesus visualised it, there would be no need to worry about food and clothing. So Jesus thought possible even then! How much more today, when science and machinery can produce all things in such abundance! But the best our statesmen can do (even when they abandon the gold standard) is to raise the price level and to keep it raised. They still keep the issue of credit in central hands, still assume that the vineyard is theirs, and they continue to kill the heir; for nobody is to have any right to anything except he be a producer and work. How different is our Lord's teaching! Labourers in the vineyard are to be paid according to their human needs, whether they have worked one hour or twelve. The faithful ($\pi \iota \sigma \tau \acute{o} \varsigma$) steward is he who sees that his fellow servants get their portion of meat in due season. The unfaithful enjoy it themselves, and oppress their fellow-servants. And Jesus does not mince His words when He says what should befall the unfaithful steward and the wicked husbandmen.

In the face of all this the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. W. S. Morrison (who came from the Treasury), speaking at Shell Mex House on November 10, can say, “There is a profound economic aspect of unemployment... The only device which man has yet discovered by which the wealth of society can be distributed is by work for wages in field, factory or office.” Mr. Morrison might with advantage read Matthew xxiv. 45 *et seq* .

Two other fundamental ideas of Social Credit in Jesus’s teaching are better known, so that *causa brevitatis*, we merely mention them: His regard of Mammon, the god of wealth, as the deadly enemy; and His profound conception of democracy. “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: it is not the will of your Heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish.” The rich who scorned the invitation were left to themselves, and the marriage feast was thronged with the blind, the lame, etc. Perhaps the most significant gesture towards the democratic idea, God’s trust in every man, is the fact that our Lord chose twelve horny-handed sons of toil to be his disciples, and only one of them failed to justify His choice, and allowed himself to be corrupted by finance.

Ref: <https://alor.org/FigTree/4FigTreeMar1937.pdf>

New Saw

Humanity is a crazy bee
Which throws away its honey,
And clutters up its useless comb
With heaps of paper money.