

**SOUP AND SALVATION:
SOCIAL SERVICE AS AN EMERGING MOTIF FOR
THE BRITISH METHODIST RESPONSE
TO POVERTY IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY**

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This begins and ends as a tale of two cities. *Not Down and out in London and Paris* (pace Orwell) nor a Dickensian analysis of British Society, but a sketch of changing Methodist attitudes to poverty in two cities intimately connected with its ethos; Oxford, the city of its founder's formation of the Holy Club, and London, the later base for Methodism and at City Road, the place of his death. Through Wesley to William Booth and Hugh Price Hughes who will dominate this sketch, those places are woven into this study.

It was at the Oxford Institute in 1992 that I first engaged with the subject academically with a paper beginning to explore the importance of the Strangers' Friend Societies in the years after Wesley's death. I also encountered the street people on the pavements of the city I had imagined very differently from the familiar haunts of Bristol and London where I had seen the 'Hungry and Homeless' signs frequently. John and Charles Wesley knew and met the poor of their day in the city's prisons and workhouses.

The story of how William Temple with his concern for a Christian Social order and others like Harry Ward influenced in the USA by the Social Gospel Movement came to that point leads back to those in Britain who in the later 19th century took up the cause of social service and social responsibility. Hugh Price Hughes and the Central Hall or Forward Movement influenced people like Frank Mason North (author of the hymn "Where Cross The Crowded Ways of Life"), E. R. Zaring and Herbert Welch who visited Oxford and London and returned to found the Methodist Federation for Social Service, "to promote social service in the spirit of Jesus Christ" and formulate the significant Social Creed of 1908. This demonstrated the importance of a transatlantic awakening of concern.¹ Muelder has written of the latter that it sprang from a Wesleyan doctrine of grace which is "activist, personalistic, social and perfectionistic," seeking not merely to reform individuals but the whole of society.²

¹Donald K. Gorrell, *The Age of Responsibility: The Social Gospel in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 91-93.

²Theodore Runyon, editor, *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), xi.

This paper seeks to ask how this theme of social service came to be of such importance in late Victorian Britain and how it lay in relationship to the Wesleyan legacy of attitudes to the poor in society, particularly those of major urban centres.

I

Donald Dayton at the 1992 Oxford Institute spoke about the ambiguous legacy of John Wesley in a Methodism which recognized his work with and for the poor as part of his Arminian evangelicalism offering the optimism of grace to all with a gospel of egalitarianism. He wrote of “the war within the soul of Methodism in which the movement is drawn both toward the poor and away from the poor”—its embourgeoisement and adaptation to the prevailing culture.³ His thesis was that at earlier times in the history of Methodism the “preferential option for the poor” shown by John Wesley described in detail by Theodore Jennings was clearly demonstrated. He claimed that it was the “revivalistic campmeeting side of Methodism that has most faithfully preserved the Wesleyan ‘preferential option for the poor.’”⁴ I want to try to show that this view needs some more modification in the light of a re-reading of late Victorian Methodism and its context. The ‘more holistic social analysis as expressed in social gospel,’ I would assert, is just as significant an expression of the interpretation of that Wesleyan legacy. Long ago, E. C. Urwin (author of *John Wesley: Christian Citizen*) described the two opposing tendencies in Methodism: those who overstated the influence of the Methodist Revival on political, social and economic problems, and those who underestimated the difference it made to social wrongs, judging it a diversion of moral energy away from the concerns of this life to the task of assurance for the next.

The Wesleys believed in the moral transformation of individuals and communities as a result of conversions and the formation of micro-units of radical economic and social sharing, which changed the face of places like Cornwall and the Kingswood Forest, as described by Jennings. He warns us “not to dismiss Wesley’s undoubted emphasis on the transformation of the person as an essential dimension of social transformation.”⁵ Wesley preaches a gospel which saves and transforms. Holiness is not something that relates to the individual in isolation but to the person in community. “The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social: no holiness, but social holiness.” The danger has been that many have, like David Thompson and J. E. Rattenbury, been led to describe John Wesley as a great Social Reformer, speaking of the “deep religious spirit . . . born of that great second Reformation which

³M. Douglas Meeks, editor, *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992), 70.

⁴Meeks, 74.

⁵Meeks, 29

began with Wesley." He is, of course, a pale shadow of Jesus Christ whom Hughes later described as "the Greatest of Social reformers" in his seminal work "Social Christianity."⁶ For the Methodist writers of the early 20th century, Wesley became the precursor of the vibrant Social Christianity then in vogue. For Bready, "Wesley opened springs of human sympathy and understanding which in turn inspired and nourished a glorious succession of social reforms."⁷

But these are sometimes fanciful descriptions tending to distort Wesley's contribution, localized and limited in scope as it was, in his own time. They also ignore the development of a rather more traditional form of evangelicalism, owing much to its Puritan origins, which places more emphasis on the quest for individual salvation and the conquest of sin in the "Age of Atonement" described by Boyd Hilton in his study of evangelical social thought and theology.⁸ This was an age in which the social implications of primitive Methodism were imperfectly understood and applied. John Wesley anticipated many of the forms of social work of urban mission a century later in his philanthropic activities and human concern. But little corporate activity on behalf of the Methodist people resulted.

In my work on the Strangers' Friend Societies, I have discovered that this voluntarist work amongst the urban poor in the period 1780–1840 took up many of the Wesleyan features, of generosity of spirit towards human suffering, even those outside the immediate group, but applied to it a hardening evangelical attitude and emphasis on personal conversion, discriminatory giving to the deserving poor in the hope of moral transformation. In the process it was hoped that ignorance and vice might be eliminated. Brian Dickey has argued that such work does demonstrate that evangelicals did take up the social action of the previous generation of philanthropists and that some could make the connection between social action and spiritual religion, with some, albeit conservative, social theories and methods. But the charitable impulse of early Victorians was mostly conversionist in motivation with an emphasis on individuality and voluntary group action and a deep suspicion of the state. This was shown in antipathy towards the New Poor Law and centralized forms of poor relief deemed costly and indiscriminate, encouraging rather than discouraging pauperism. Theirs was a rurally-derived paternalist model of pre-industrial relations which had confidence in the rational workings of a laissez-faire economy and the associational efforts required to keep the poor happy and offer salvation through personal visitation and eventual conversion. Both charity and the gospel focused on the individual, to be led from sin to the salvation which was so earnestly desired.

⁶Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity: Sermons Delivered at St. James' Hall* (London, 1890), 54.

⁷R. E. O. White, *Christian Ethics* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1981), 277.

⁸Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

The Spirit of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus pervaded these Victorian Values—the spirit which was abroad again the Reagan–Thatcher years—of individual self-interest and a hostility to and fear of the poor, producing a pietistic sanctification focusing far “too much on the individual and too little on the consequences of man’s action for the neighbour’s good.”⁹ Gustafson sees this as a threat to holiness and distortion of the socially conversionist model of John Wesley, which seeks for humanity to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. By contrast, Victorian values are channelled into a narrower emphasis on the home and family, the church and chapel community, with its ecclesially-based philanthropy for moral improvement and inter-church competitiveness in building in the race to win the masses. Habermas sees this as one mode of transmission of social thought to society, the communicative mode by which religious people sought to create an uncompromising Christian culture dominated by the family and chapel. One important aspect of this was temperance. Both were rallying calls of Nonconformity against the establishment of the day.¹⁰

Joseph Entwisle, first College Principal in British Methodism, wrote that “My business in the pulpit is to win men’s souls and not with matters of state.” This reflected a Buntingite revulsion for political parsons, priests and pastors, an attitude which prevailed throughout most of the 19th century—an unofficial “no politics” rule for Methodism. Not until 1895 was a Primitive Methodist Conference able to declare that “we recognize social work as a part of Christian endeavour and service.” Not until 1918 was the Wesleyan Methodist Conference to legitimate its social work in the newly-created Temperance and Social Work Department.¹¹

II

Cities in the Victorian era, as Asa Briggs has described, exercised a power to shock and fascinate—the shock of those who discovered the appalling living conditions of most in an age of improvement and progress where technological advances were reflected in city building and expansion. “The industrial city,” he wrote, “was bound to be a place of problems. Economic individualism and common civic purpose were difficult to reconcile.”¹² The Churches struggled with the widening gulf between rich and poor, a gulf chronicled in the 1851 Ecclesiastical Census. This revealed the diminishing base of working class support. Horace Mann put this down to the lack of sympathy among Christians for the social burdens of the poor, the profes-

⁹James A. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 82

¹⁰Paul T. Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880–1940* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 118.

¹¹J. Scott Lidgett, *Methodism in the Modern World* (London: Epworth Press, 1929), 213.

¹²Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Penguin, 1963), 17–18.

sionalization of the clergy and the upward mobility of most congregations who paid their rents and sat in 'red and green baize pews' gazing at the "mahogany pulpit."¹³

Disraeli's Two Nations existed in most cities, side by side but socially segregated, villas and rookeries, two separate worlds in which the middle class influence prevailed in the suburbs to which it had taken flight from the grime and crime of urban deprivation. This left the way open for the growing influence of secularism, socialism and atheism. The renewed assault of the churches in the late 19th century was partly to combat such influences and irreligious forces, partly in competition between themselves for the hearts and minds of people in society, and partly for the prosecution of vice and prevention of civil disorder, two familiar evangelical hobby-horses. In 1854 the Wesleyan Methodist Conference established its Home Mission and Contingent Fund "to penetrate the neglected masses of the heathenish population of our large cities" and then struggled to build chapels it could afford in the right places which really needed them.¹⁴ Existing philanthropic efforts were centralized in the Charity Organisation Society, which edged away from personal reformation and towards social rejuvenation as more social investigation was undertaken to discover the needs of the poor.

The turning point came in the 1880s with a revival of Social Christianity, owing its origins to the so-called Christian Socialists—people like F. D. Maurice and J. M. Ludlow. New ideas moved some of the churches towards a more collectivist response to the challenges of urbanization and industrialization. A growing desire for churches to talk about industrial problems and social issues at their congresses and conferences, a willingness to engage in negotiation in labour disputes and to initiate social work was prevalent in that decade. As Bishop Walsham How, representing the Anglo-Catholic interest in such ideas and concerns, wrote in 1884,

"A Church which talks about another world, but does not seem to take much interest in this, is one which will embrace within its fold a limited number of the working class."

The publication in 1883 of *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, by Andrew Mearns a Congregationalist minister, stirred up the public conscience as no other work had. It was a devastating indictment of the failure of churches to respond to the needs of the poor in any way other than to build churches and chapels and offer limited aid. It "questioned whether mid-Victorian self-improvement was of any use in helping the destitute." The older evangelical church efforts that relied on self-help assisted by Christian philanthropy also appeared to be repudiated.¹⁵

¹³Lidgett, 178–179.

¹⁴Henry Rack, "Wesleyan Methodism 1849–1902" in Rupert Davies, et al., editors, *A History of Methodism in Great Britain*, Vol. 3 (London: Epworth, 1983), 132.

¹⁵Phillips, 137.

Peter Jones has described the period 1877–1914 as the “Christian Socialist Revival,” a movement of ideas and action in a number of different churches in its attack on individualism and the “morbid fear of personal sin.” It drew its inspiration from the earlier work of F. D. Maurice and his stress on the Fatherhood of God and the ethical imperatives of Christ’s teaching as the Incarnate God at work in humanity, providing a rationale for humanitarian activity but not providing a coherent and clear “political blueprint for establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.”¹⁶ With the work of T. H. Green and the Oxford Idealists and re-reading of the Old Testament in terms of the social justice proclaimed by the prophets, the New Theology of J. M. Campbell, R. W. Dale and others came to challenge the old-style evangelicalism, seeking to make nonconformity more relevant in a changing environment, physically and intellectually.

By the substitution of a theology dominated more by Incarnation than Atonement which was translated into assertive action able to accommodate modernist views of biblical criticism, the relationship of religion and science and secular prosperity, the pan-evangelical alliance so comfortably positioned in the middle years of the century was suddenly blown off course into two rival and often hostile camps. The New Evangelicalism alienated many traditional evangelicals who sought refuge in the Holiness Movement, fostered at Keswick, Southport and Brighton, increasingly antagonistic to expressions of social and political action in religion.¹⁷ Evangelicals were split into its pietist and activist streams in a way which clearly demonstrated the earlier tensions. Activists challenged the voluntary philanthropic stance of earlier evangelicals, focusing on the burning issue of urban poverty, in reaction to what Bishop Westcott called the “tyrannical individualism” which had characterised the Christian morality and political economy of evangelical social thought and action.¹⁸ It gave increased emphasis on environment as a contributory factor in the individual’s sinfulness which cut across the traditional emphasis on personal responsibility for sin which requires a personal encounter with Christ to set right.

For a generation until the “Great Reversal,” there was a shift of emphasis within many churches towards Social Christianity, until many, disillusioned by the failure of politics to deliver the religious agenda on social issues, retreated into an anti-Socialist camp which further heightened the inability of the churches to engage with the working classes.¹⁹ Some struggled to live with the tensions in conflicting theologies and ideologies, seeking to

¹⁶R. J. Helmstadter and P. T. Phillips, editors, *Religion in Victorian Society* (Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 27.

¹⁷J. Wolffe, editor, *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780–1980* (London, SPCK, 1995), 138–139.

¹⁸Wolffe, 156.

¹⁹David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism and Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

be faithful to their Wesleyan and evangelical heritage. Others found the lure of political power too great to see the churches' role as significant. Others horrified at the apparent compromising of the churches with society left to form sectarian groups in which holiness could be pursued.

I have chosen William Booth and Hugh Price Hughes as examples of the development of the Social Christian ideas within the Methodist movement. In sketching the influences on them I will try to demonstrate this creative tension between personal and social salvation which has been their legacy to us today.

III

Hugh Price Hughes, reflecting on the advent and growth of the Salvation Army, regarded this "colossal world-wide movement" as one of the most potent factors in human history along with the First Evangelical Revival. By 1894 it claimed over 2 million persons at services per week, 90% of them from the working class.²⁰ While Hughes regarded Booth as his hero, Booth looked back to Wesley as his; he once remarked: "there is one God and John Wesley was his prophert." While Booth continued to admire the founder of Methodism and his evangelistic imperative "you have nothing to do but save souls . . .," he found the Methodism of the 1840s and 1850s as stultifying, lacking the evangelical cutting edge of work among the poor and deprived.

Influenced by the revivalistic preaching of Isaac Marsden and James Caughey, he left the Methodist New Connexion to become a freelance evangelist, settling on the East End of London where lived those who needed him most. "The object of the army was to save souls," he wrote in May 1883, having set up a new military-style organization in 1878 to marshal the forces of this aggressive brand of Christianity, waging war on sin, and drunkenness, and degradation.²¹ Through the initial popular evangelism, using novel techniques such as brass bands and music hall entertainment propaganda which excited the admiration of the working class culture it reached but also the opprobrium of respectable Victorian religious people and the hostility of the brewing interest who stirred up a Skeleton Army to incite violence against the salvationists, the movement soon won considerable support from the poor and growing but grudging support from the rich.

By the 1880s Booth struggled to maintain the sectarian nature of the movement which he saw as essential to "promote general godliness and harmony, and to avoid as the very poison of hell all controverted questions." This he saw as the weakness of Wesley's Methodism which had compromised its evangelical stance on personal holiness.²² Nevertheless the Army found that it

²⁰Hughes, 1.

²¹Quoted in Helmstadter, 76.

²²Phillips, 179.

could not avoid the inevitability of the “bureaucratization of charisma” which marked Methodism after Wesley’s death and its fossilization as a denomination, nor could it resist the temptation to adapt the notion of Social Christianity as a necessary adjunct to its work amongst the poor. Booth was not a man to console empty bellies with mere promises of spiritual bliss. He followed Christ’s command “Give ye them to eat” with the establishment of “Food-for-the-Million” shops, providing cheap food (not free—that smacked of indiscriminate giving which encouraged pauperism) for the hungry masses in an experiment in the 1870s. Ostensibly sectarian, the movement claimed also to be apolitical. W. T. Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Times* and prominent campaigner, wrote in his *Life of Booth* in 1900: “it takes no part in party politics. It is indirectly a profoundly conservative force in the best sense of that term. But, in essence, it is an army of revolt . . . enlisted in a holy war against all that is opposed to God’s will in the existing order.” Nevertheless, the publication which Stead assisted Booth with in 1890, *In Darkest England And The Way Out*, challenged society to create alternative models, idealized rural communities and cooperatives, which smacked of Owenite utopian socialism and earned Booth the reputation of having “gone Socialist.” The shift to social service in the provision of work rather than charity, in the creation of hostels and homes for women and workers, of labor exchanges where they could seek employment, and legal aid centres where they could enquire about rights, these were not a denial of the efficacy of the earlier more traditional mode of district visitation evangelical outreach. Rather, they were an extension of it. Booth defended them by justifying them as “being in harmony with the teaching of Jesus Christ and the very essence of a great deal of the Bible. If a man had a brother who was hungry and homeless and naked, his first sense of duty would be to feed and house and clothe him, doing it in the spirit of love and talking to him about his soul all the time.”²³

This mixture of personal and social salvation based on faithfulness to the spirit of Matthew 25 is in direct line with the work of the Strangers’ Friend Societies and Wesley’s own initiatives among the poor. The Salvation Army, McLeod suggests, which had begun with a determination to preach the gospel and nothing else, was forced into the realization that poverty left its victims with “little energy for anything that did not relate to the struggle for survival.”²⁴ “We can’t go and talk to people about their souls while their bodies are starving,” one worker reflected in 1890. But there is evidence to suggest that, while Booth saw the extension into social work as a boost to the flagging attraction of the movement, he drew back in trepidation from the diversion from what he still saw as the primary tasks and preoccupations of his ministry—sin and salvation, hell and heaven, the devil and the Lord, features of

²³Phillips, 98–99.

²⁴Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850–1914* (New York: Macmillan, 1996), 143.

the older-style evangelism.²⁵ The Salvation Army came to that rich synthesis of personal and social salvation reluctantly, recognising the way it met the needs of the poor. As Worrall concludes in his analysis:

It was not that they turned to social concern instead of preaching the gospel, caring for men's bodies rather than their souls. Neither was it that the social concern was a kind of bribe intended to get a hearing for the gospel. It was rather the thoroughly biblical conviction that God is concerned for the total man, both body and soul.

IV

Hugh Price Hughes appears as one of the three characteristic figures McLeod in his recent book on *Religions And Society in England 1850–1914* cites as examples of late Victorian evangelicalism, along with Josephine Butler and C. T. Studd. Hughes' combination of the evangelical imperative and the social gospel in the context of aggressive missions and moral crusades makes him a key figure in the late flowering and revival of effort in Nonconformity. The mood of Wesleyan Methodists was changing in the 1880s with an increased awareness of urban poverty. Hughes was a man bursting with ideas who seized the opportunity in two brief decades in London to take new initiatives. As he wrote in 1885:

Methodism has reached the parting of ways. We must either go back into the obscurity of a class religion, and the impotence of a moribund sect; or we must go forward into the blessed opportunities and far reaching beneficences of a national religion which preaches the Gospel to the poor.

While Hughes was not the only figure in the so-called Forward Movement in Methodism, he was its leading exponent, using his weekly newspaper, the *Methodist Times*, to issue challenges and pose awkward questions: 'Methodists, Wake Up!' and "Is Methodism to be a dying sect or a living church?" were two of his articles in that year, the year of *Bitter Cry*, the turning point for evangelical Christianity in Britain. Rattenbury's judgment was that Hughes "shook Methodism out of her self complacency and bade her look out on the heathen masses" with the re-discovery of the evangelical Wesleyan imperative and priority for the poor.²⁶

Hughes was brought up in a South Wales Methodist environment in which he knew the old-style evangelism. One old minister advised him in his youth: "Hughes, preach Hell and its fire—that is the only way to impress and save people." A later generation were to hear rather less about hell (Hughes defended Agar Beet in his rejection of the doctrine of eternal torment) and rather more about heaven and the Kingdom of God on earth.

²⁵K. S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1963), 211.

²⁶Lidgett, 177–179.

For Hughes, humanity in its sacredness included all people, as souls to be saved but also “incarnate, souls to be attached to bodies.” This led him to the inevitable conclusion that following the Christ who sat the crowds down and gave them food to eat, “it will be impossible for us to evangelise the starving poor so long as they continue in a starving condition.”²⁷ He reached this point by the beginning of his great ministry at the West London Mission commencing in 1887. In its first annual report he wrote:

In evangelical circles, the recoil from the collectivism of the Latin Church has been so great that the teaching of orthodox pulpits has become excessively individualistic. We have been so absorbed by the interests of the individual soul as to neglect the woes of society, and so preoccupied with the delights of heaven as to overlook some of the most urgent duties of earth. As Mr. Ruskin has well said: “If our religion is good for anything, it is good for everything . . . the ethical teaching of Christ is applicable to business, pleasure, politics, as well as to prayer-meetings and sacraments.”²⁸

The influences upon Hughes which brought him to this understanding were many and various. From William Arthur (author of *The Tongue of Fire*) and the Holiness Movement he experienced at Brighton, came that deep conviction of the need to preach the gospel and to strive for personal holiness. By the 1880s, he felt that the latter was however too much bent on hymn-singing, splitting theological hairs and “too little recognition of the civic and virile qualities of Christians.”²⁹ From his Oxford days came the influence of Maurice’s Christian Socialism as it was taken up and developed by Fremantle in his Bampton Lecture “The World As The Subject For Redemption” (1883) and T. H. Green with his Christian idealism, stressing the need to make wealth more socially responsible in a regulated market economy. For Hughes and the New Liberal Evangelists this was a more satisfactory mix of mild collectivism and older ideas of personal freedom.³⁰ Hughes read and corresponded with fellow Social Christian nonconformists, like R. W. Dale, involved in the ‘Gospel of Civic Improvement’ in Birmingham, who argued that “all municipal laws . . . are truly part of that redemptive work of which the Church has to carry on in the name of Christ as the preaching of the remission of sins.”³¹ He also wrote to A. W. Fairbairn, Principal of Mansfield College Oxford, who wrote *The Place Of Christ In Modern Theology*. This Hughes used on retreat for his lay workers in 1894. In it Fairbairn said: “the Idea of the Kingdom then is primary . . . it is ethical in character; to seek it is to seek the righteousness of God.” Both these writers were featured in the *Contemporary Review*, edited by Percy Bunting, another Oxford man, with whom Hughes collaborated. Bunting was a leading member of the National Liberal

²⁷Hughes, 19–22.

²⁸D. P. Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes* (London, 1904), 329.

²⁹D. P. Hughes, 230.

³⁰Phillips, 195.

³¹David M. Thompson, “The Emergence of the Nonconformist Social Gospel in England,” in *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America c1750–c1950*, ed. Keith Robbins (Oxford, Blackwell, 1990), 265ff.

Federation and a leading figure in the social purity campaigns. His review, like Hughes' own *Methodist Times*, was described as "broad, evangelical, semi-socialistic Liberalism" by the *American Review of Reviews*. A great hero of Hughes was Mazzini, the Italian nationalist leader whose warning he heeded: he wrote "that Christianity taught men to be selfish; that taught them to be so wrapped up in the thoughts of the future, that they neglected their duty on earth."³²

Hughes picked up these ideas and applied them to his own understanding of his mission. Commenting on Harrison's Address to the Positivist Society in 1890, he wrote that "the social failure of Christianity is not the fault of Christianity but of Christians who have become selfishly individualistic." Evangelistic work had been too exclusively individualistic: "we must do our utmost to promote the social welfare of the people."³³ This led him to recognize the vulnerability of the dispossessed to the evils and worst excesses of the capitalist economy, which left no alternative but to support the pursuit of policies against the laissez-faire economy and abandon the old-style evangelical philanthropy which favored that "you cannot make men moral by Act of Parliament." He regarded the Statute Book as 'the national conscience' and saw that the "real character of every nation is determined by the character of its laws."³⁴

What came to be known as the Nonconformist Conscience with which Hughes was associated, most notoriously over the downfall of Parnell the Irish nationalist leader, was two-sided. It was a concern for the application of laws to social life which made conditions better for the poor but it was also a reinterpretation of the traditional evangelical warfare on sin, which demanded of its national leaders high standards of public morality as an example to all its citizens. Bebbington has defined three main characteristics of the "Conscience":

- that there should be no boundary between religion and politics
- that people in public office should be of the highest character
- that the State had a responsibility for the moral welfare of its citizens.

Whilst the first marked the abandonment of the 'no-politics' guidelines set by early Methodism, the latter meant that the moral agenda of Nonconformity became a national issue as Social Christians put pressure on the state to implement legislation, notably in the areas of sexual morality and temperance. The repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and legislation to limit drinking and gambling were successes in this campaign. John Kent regards such action as "poor and narrowly conceived," emphasizing evangelical pietism rather than the more radical implications of social Christianity, more concerned with personal sins rather than structural sins. For Hughes, the two

³²D. M. Thompson, "The Christian Socialist Revival in Britain: An Appraisal," in *Revival and Religion since 1700*, eds. Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew (London, Hambledon Press, 1993), 281–289.

³³Bebbington, 21–23.

³⁴H. P. Hughes, 135–138.

strands, of fighting for better working and housing and welfare conditions, as well as waging war on moral laxity, were of equal importance. "Let us not only save people's souls," he wrote, "but sanctify their circumstances." "Christ came to save the nation as well as the Individual . . . it is an essential feature of his mission to reconstruct human society on the basis of Justice and Love."

On this basis Hughes established the West London Mission which became the model for many others in the Central Hall movement of the late 19th and early 20th century, spreading to other parts of London and other urban centres on Britain. While social work was sometimes downplayed in other missions in favor of evangelism, only Hughes saw such work as an integral part of his mission with a full commitment to the implementation of "Social Christianity." As well as the evangelistic preaching in more congenial surroundings in a more populist style which appealed to the poor, with pastoral follow-up by an army of lay workers, there was a full range of social work, welfare and recreational facilities, rescue work and long term rehabilitation, educational and employment opportunities, which became a familiar feature of many early 20th century urban missions. While Hughes did not draw back from tackling social issues in a series of Sunday afternoon conferences he saw them in evangelistic terms too: "such a priceless opportunity for saving souls" as issues of temperance, social purity, just hours and conditions of work, the evils of war and the promotion of public health, the welfare of children and animals, all these were discussed.³⁵ For Hughes these belonged together. Saved men were the means not the end. "They are saved that they may save"; for the social nature of holiness was such that personal regeneration was part of the regeneration of society and the pursuit of social righteousness.

Hughes, although sympathetic to Liberalism, was not party political. He warned of the dangers of the church aligning itself with any one political ideology: "Woe to the Church that commits itself either to the Collectivist or to the Individualist side!" He saw that the proper application of Christianity could save the state from revolution, countering the effects of atheistic socialism, communism or nihilism, which he perceived to be dangers to social order. In this he felt that he stood in direct succession to John Wesley with his "passionate love of the masses of the people" and the need to save men and women and not just souls. By waging war on the social evils of "Slavery, Drunkenness, Lust, Gambling, Ignorance, Pauperism, Mammonism and War," the work of salvation was pursued. He urged the rich to understand and live with the poor so that "they might be taught to be unselfish and Christ-like." This was a familiar rationale used by the Settlement movement in the creation of mirco-units of Christian care and compassion in the slums of cities.

³⁵D. P. Hughes, 360-361.

Like Booth, Hughes was not fooled by the danger or delusion of socialism, though in sympathy with many of its aspirations for working people. The social environment was not the be-all and end-all. What was at the core of essential Christianity was its distinctive blessing of peace of conscience and personal fellowship with Jesus Christ, "bringing a new life not merely of the Spirit but of qualities of relationships in the social sphere. The question of the Risen Lord to Peter 'Do you love me?' is for Hughes the *sine qua non* both of personal Christianity and of Christian service.³⁶ Matthew 25 asserts the brotherhood of man which is realized in the love of neighbor as Christ lives in those who within the evangelical movement, between experience and expression, or personal and social holiness, a mix of evangelical zeal and radical social responsibility, which broke through the barriers erected between religion and politics, churches and society in 19th century evangelicalism.

V

The tensions which existed in Hughes' ministry became more apparent in 20th century Methodism. Three characters in British Methodism illustrate these in their ministries:

Samuel Keeble (author of *Industrial Day-Dreams* [1896] and *The Citizen of Tomorrow: A Handbook Of Social Questions* [1906]) took up his ideas and "enlarged on the Methodist commitment to collectivism imperfectly found in Hughes."³⁷ His drift towards full-blown socialism and finally communism lost him the editorship of the *Methodist Weekly* in 1903 and later support of many colleagues, though retaining the admiration of Henry Carter, Secretary of the Temperance and Social Welfare Department, who most keenly, though often unpopularity, aligned institutional Methodism with the Social Christian ideas. Keeble's was a lone and prophetic voice in Methodism.

J. E. Rattenbury a member of the Sigma Club led by Keeble, carried on Hughes' work in the West London Mission and propagated a Social Christianity which was fused with a high sacramentalism also unpopular among many rank-and-file Methodists. He advanced the view that evangelicalism and socialism were compatible in a sermon published in 1908. He maintained the view that the Forward Movement was Methodism's last great chance to win pagan England and convert society: "the great opportunity of the new evangelism . . . we must preach the whole gospel of personal salvation and social service," in a forthright message of the gospel of personal redemption and social reconstruction.³⁸

³⁶Hugh Price Hughes, *Essential Christianity: A Series of Explanatory Sermons* (London: 1894), 112-116.

³⁷Phillips, 179.

³⁸Lidgett, 190.

John Scott Lidgett was founder of the Bermondsey Settlement in London where he lived among the poor for over 50 years, taking up political issues and serving on local councils and government commissions in an attempt to civilize and Christianize the poor and the community. His theological contribution as the transmitter of Maurice's understanding of the Person of Christ and the Kingdom of God helped reshape Methodist theology for the 20th century. He wrote: "I could not be content with appeals that sought rather to palliate existing evils by charitable help than radically to reconstruct the existing organization of society on the basis of righteousness and the comradeship of brotherly love." In later days as President of the Uniting Conference in 1932, he became a respected elder statesman but an increasingly conservative figure out of his time.

Nevertheless, the Social Christian agenda did not win over the churches of Methodism entirely. Resistance to the new evangelicalism was fierce. Doctrinal issues emerged. An Anti-Socialist Union was formed in 1909. The publication of *Nonconformity And Politics* in 1910 was highly critical of the alleged abandonment of the ideals of evangelicalism in favor of political activity. While the Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service established in 1907 carried forward such ideas, others became disillusioned by the failure of the Liberal Party, at its height in 1906, to deliver the agenda of the churches or to listen fully to the advice of its Christian MPs. The *Church Times* wrote in 1908:

We know how Dissent has lost ground among its best members by the transformation of its pulpits into political platforms . . . people are harangued Sunday by Sunday on social questions.³⁹

The disagreement over the Boer War and the despair of the Great War deepened the divide between evangelicals on the role of church in society in the so-called "Great Reversal," a repudiation by many of the earlier engagement with social issues, heightened by the fear of Socialism in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1918. The division within Methodism drove many to suspect the 'social welfare' agenda of those who continued to press for church action, to play the role of midwife in the process of social regeneration and reconstruction in the "land fit for heroes."

VI

Paul Phillips in his perceptive analysis of Anglo-American Social Christianity 1880–1940, entitled *A Kingdom On Earth* has concluded that the Social Christians were not radicals or revolutionaries but those who, from the challenge of the dark side of urban life enabled the churches to make a "gradual shift away from almsgiving through organised philanthropy to sanction-

³⁹Phillips, 216.

ing support for State intervention.” In doing so, it mirrored a split in evangelical ranks, between fundamentalists and liberals which weakened the churches’ potential to provide a united front to the state in its claims to offer a Christian Social Order. A backlash to what some saw as the disastrous drift towards unbelief and the marginalization of the role of churches in society has been the return to an “emphasis on . . . charity and family values against State intervention and developed social policy.”⁴⁰ In terms of British Methodism, the uneasy synthesis which Booth and Hughes sought to pursue still holds, and the two strands of evangelicalism are intertwined. Apart from issues of sexual morality which continue to hold the potential for disaster, a mostly amicable dialogue on the relative emphases within the total mission of the church, of personal and social holiness, is carried on. Donald Lord Soper and the Alliance of Radical Methodists followed the Christian Socialist strand of Keeble while Cliff College and Headway look to Samuel Chadwick, Samuel Collier and the Joyful News tradition, emphasising the need for personal salvation. Donald English, at the Home Mission Division, represented the synthesis. In his report *Sharing In God’s Mission*, it is clear that British Methodism holds evangelism, social caring, and the struggle for justice as integral parts of that mission, complementary to the work of the Division of Social Responsibility and its reports in recent years on *Poverty and Citizenship (No Mean City)* and *Political Responsibility (Sects and Parties)*. In 1988, the British Methodist Conference declared its deep concern to the government of policies which were “increasing the wealth of the rich at the expense of the poor” and its challenge to the church to support its Mission Alongside The Poor Programme. Yet the debate about the future shape and role of the program in the 1990s once again highlighted the disparity of resources and the reluctance of many Methodists to make this a priority and get involved with what many see as ‘political’ issues.

Radical discipleship calls many to witness through social service in many urban centres today, some forced reluctantly to accept money from the Government’s Lottery. But the debate continues. Methodism in Britain wrestles with a desire to keep alive the evangelistic spirit of the Wesleys, Booth, and Hughes. But how is that legacy to be understood and transmitted? The New Room at Bristol exists as a heritage centre and museum of Methodist history. In the Preachers’ Stable they offer soup to the homeless at night. Westminster Central Hall, Methodism’s window on Government in Britain, struggles to find a new role in faithfulness to the spirit of Hughes and his social service in the West End as well as to the great preaching of Sangster and others there. The Wesley And Methodist Studies Centre at Westminster College at Oxford assists in the work of regaining insights into Methodist history, conscious that this must meet the needs of women and men hungry on the streets as well as those who flounder in the spiritual desert.

⁴⁰Phillips, 287–291.

Conferences can be turning points. The Lausanne Conference of 1927 issued the declaration that the “Christian Gospel is the prophetic call to sinful men to turn to God . . . and the sure source of power for social redemption.” The Oxford Institute of 1992 continued to wrestle with the social and religious issues raised. The relationship between personal piety and social transformation, the tension between denouncing sin and announcing grace, the rediscovery through Wesley that the work of the Holy Spirit is interdependently both personal and social, these are questions which we continue to address, as Methodists ask how scriptural holiness can inform our habits and relationships and ways of being human in the world global economy of today. Doug Meeks’ challenge meets us, as it has met every generation of Methodist since Wesley who face this evangelical challenge: How can we through the power of the Holy Spirit construct sanctified ways of living in the face of God and the poor.⁴¹

⁴¹Meeks, 16.