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'SOCIAL JUSTICE' OR COMPASSION

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN MOTIVATION ?

D.B. KNOX

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

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Many Christian leaders are saying that the Christian mission contains a strand of campaigning for social justice. Some go so far as to say it is the main thrust of the Christian mission. Others, more evangelical, wish to add the crusade for social justice to the mission of making known the Christian Gospel. If however we turn to the New Testament we find that there is no support for the view that social justice is an objective of the Christian mission. We must remember that Jesus sends his followers into the world with the same objectives as He was sent into the world by His father, for He said "as the Father has sent me even so send I you". The teaching and actions of Jesus nowhere show a concern for 'social justice'. The reason is that the call for social justice springs from envy rather than from compassion. The notion of equality is not set before us by God in Holy Scriptures as something to be striven for. Equality was the catch cry of the French revolution, which was anti Christian in its motivation. The Christian life is very simple. It is to live in the circumstances God has put us in, in a Christian way, keeping the commandments of God, serving one another, and waiting for our Lord from heaven. In addition, some Christians will be sent by the Lord of the harvest to evangelise, to bring the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ to those who have not heard it, and other Christians will be sent as pastors and teachers in the Christian congregations. All Christians are expected to be ready to give a reason to those who ask about the grounds of their hope of Christ's coming, and we are to help those in need.

Compassion, not social justice, is the motivation for Christian social action. The Christian will find himself in many situations which call out compassion. Compassion is of the essence of God's character, and compassion characterised Christ's life. Christian history confirms what I am saying. It was compassion, not a sense of social justice, which sustained William Wilberforce in his

life-long campaign to bring slavery to an end. Of course he wasn't able to achieve his objective single-handed, but he formed societies of like-minded men and women to assist him in the cause to which compassion for the suffering of his fellow man urged him. A generation later Lord Shaftsbury was sustained in his parliamentary campaigns to alleviate the conditions of children in factories, mental defectives in asylums and chimney sweeps, by his Christian compassion. He saw their suffering and their deprivation and, being a member of parliament, he used his position to alleviate their conditions. Above all, it was compassion for the lost which prompted the formation of Christian missionary societies to bring the Gospel to our fellow men, of whom the word of God clearly teaches that they are under eternal wrath, unless saved through the blood of Christ.

Christians live their life waiting for the coming of Christ's kingdom, but as they wait they serve God by serving their fellow men as their circumstances indicate. Those in parliament serve through parliament, those in a more private station serve in their own spheres; and the motivation for service springs from the Holy Spirit's presence and reflects the compassion of God. "We love, because He first loved us" 1 John 4:19 "But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" 1 John 3:17. Genuine compassion will always show itself in action to alleviate distress as far as it is able when that distress comes within the orbit of our life.

Jesus was compassionate and his chief service was to preach the gospel and to lay down his life for us; and also, when the events of life brought people's sorrows within the orbit of His experience, compassion prompted the helping action, as when He healed the leper, or raised the widow's son at Nain. On the other hand he deliberately refused to act in matters of social injustice which were drawn to his attention. Thus when Martha complained about the unequal amount of housework she was shouldering, Jesus did nothing to set the

matter right but rather gently rebuked her for her wrong sense of values, and when a man complained that his brother had taken the whole of the inheritance, and asked for Jesus' help to obtain a fair share, He rebuked the man sharply for his covetousness. Calls for social justice spring from envy and anger, but compassion has a very different source, the Spirit of God himself. Christians should pray for compassion, and be willing to put themselves out in helping other people in need, indeed to devote their whole life to others if necessary like Wilberforce and Shaftsbury to alleviate sorrow and distress. Such alleviation of distress may call for social legislation, but the motivation is not to be so called social justice, the pulling down the one in order to equal up the other, but rather compassion and help to those who need it. Poverty calls for compassion. Poverty is painful; and action should be taken to make it a thing of the past, but a Christian is not called on to campaign for a closer equalisation of incomes either within our own society, or for that matter between nation and nation. Christ's gospel is not concerned with equality, but with relationships; God's forgiveness of us and our compassionate help towards our fellow man in need. It was unalloyed compassion that prompted the Saviour to die for us, and the Father to give His son that through faith in Him we might not perish but have eternal life.

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