

R.H. Tawney and Christian Social Teaching:

*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism Reconsidered**

By any measure, R.H. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926) is an extraordinary book.¹ Its chief subject was the secularisation of economic thought and policy which Tawney believed had taken place in England during the seventeenth century. As such, it was an inquiry into what he saw as the defining fact of modern capitalism – its lack of an ethical or religious justification; and it was a call to the Christian Church to lead the way to a moral economic order by repudiating this godless economic condition.² Clearly, this was not merely a work of history, but a contribution to religious and social thought.

Nor did it fall upon deaf ears. Its popularity was such that in 1938 it became one of the first Pelican Books, Penguin's series of cheap non-fiction works for the mass market.³ From 1943 to 1968 it sold 445,000 copies in this series, making it the eleventh best-selling Pelican,⁴ to say nothing of its popularity in the United States, the

* I would like to thank Peter Ghosh, Emily Jones, the anonymous referees and the editor of this journal for their comments upon this article in draft. My thanks also to Simon Skinner and Stuart Jones for encouraging me to develop my thoughts on Tawney into publishable form. All errors are my own.

¹ R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study (Holland Memorial Lectures, 1922)* (London, 1926). All subsequent references are to the more readily available Pelican edition: *R[eligion and the] R[ise of] C[apitalism: A Historical Study]* (London, 1938, repr. 1948), which includes a new preface but is otherwise virtually identical to the 1926 edition.

² *RRC*, pp. 280-81.

³ N. Joicey, 'A Paperback Guide to Progress: Penguin Books 1935-c.1951', *Twentieth Century British History*, iv (1993), p. 45. See also Joicey, 'The Intellectual, Political and Cultural Significance of Penguin Books 1935-c.1956' (Univ. of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1996), pp. 48, 53 (Pelican Books), 74-5 (*RRC*).

⁴ I am grateful to Peter Mandler for supplying me with these figures, which he informs me may be found in the Penguin Archive, Special Collections, University of Bristol Library, DM1294/4/2/7. It also appears to have sold well in its original edition: T.S. Ashton, 'Richard Henry Tawney, 1880-1962', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xlvi (1962), p. 470.

Commonwealth and in its seven translations.⁵ At an elite level, too, Tawney's work exerted influence over such thinkers as William Temple, F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot.⁶ Tawney himself has also been widely, and rightly, regarded as one of the leading ideologues of the British Labour party and British socialism, as well as a pre-eminent figure in the rise of economic history.⁷ Understanding his *chef d'oeuvre*, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, is therefore a task of obvious interest for many different kinds of historian today.

Given Tawney's undoubted influence and reputation, one might expect that he would already have attracted sufficient interest among historians – not least historians of ideas. Not so. The first full-scale⁸ biography of Tawney was only published in 2013, fifty-one years after his death. Nor should this work – Lawrence Goldman's *Life of R.H. Tawney* – be seen as the last word on its subject, but as a platform for further research. In particular, being a traditional biography rather than an intellectual biography,⁹ it leaves certain areas of Tawney's thought – especially history and religion – in need of further elucidation.¹⁰ The work which, oddly, has been most

⁵ For these translations, see R. Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and his Times: Socialism as Fellowship* (London, 1974), p. 288.

⁶ For Temple, see below, n. 201. For Leavis, see S. Collini, 'Where Did it All Go Wrong? Cultural Critics and "Modernity" in Inter-War Britain', in E.H.H. Green and D.M. Tanner, eds., *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 262-3. For Eliot, see his *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London, 1939), p. 67.

⁷ For his influence on the Left, see, for instance, B. Jackson, *Equality and the British Left: A Study in Progressive Political Thought, 1900-64* (Manchester, 2007), pp. 168-9. In historical thought his influence was not just intellectual, but institutional, through the London School of Economics (where he was Professor of Economic History), and forums such as the Economic History Society: L. Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), p. 226.

⁸ There were however two earlier biographical treatments. The first, Terrill's *R.H. Tawney and his Times*, mixes biography with a rather deferential commentary on Tawney's ideas. The second, A. Wright, *R.H. Tawney* (Manchester, 1987), is perceptive but slight.

⁹ Goldman, *Life*, p. 2.

¹⁰ His political thought has received more coverage: G. Armstrong and T. Gray, *The Authentic Tawney: A New Interpretation of the Political Thought of R.H. Tawney* (Exeter, 2011); J.M. Winter, 'R.H. Tawney's Early Political Thought', in *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-18* (London, 1974). Yet here too, a better understanding of Tawney's religious thought will pay dividends.

neglected in his oeuvre is perhaps *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*: Goldman, for instance, comments little upon it, giving three times as much space in his chapter on Tawney the historian to the rather barren controversy of his later career known as the ‘Storm over the Gentry’.¹¹

The most perplexing element of Tawney’s intellectual make-up has been his religion. The usual strategy of his interpreters has been to reduce the interaction of Tawney’s religious and political thought to a vague Christian or even ‘ethical’ socialism, blending into the liberal Christian idealism of T. H. Green (1836-82).¹² Ross Terrill’s early biographical study proceeded on the assumption that in Tawney’s day, ‘[i]ntellectually, religion was crumbling’, and so reached the untenable conclusion that Tawney ‘did not greatly dwell’ on ‘[w]hether Christianity can ... point the way to a better social order’.¹³ Even the sincerity of Tawney’s belief has been questioned: Stefan Collini has found Tawney’s religion ‘opaque’ and suggested that “‘social Christianity’” was more a convenient ‘language’ for him than the product of genuine conviction.¹⁴ This is Tawney as secular moralist: a construct understood more easily with reference to Collini’s work than Tawney’s.¹⁵ More recently, Goldman has even cast doubt on whether Tawney can be described as a ‘Christian Socialist’: this, we are told, is to violate ‘certain distinctions which [Tawney] wanted to maintain, with faith

¹¹ Goldman, *Life*, ch. 9 (‘History’), including pp. 228-33 (*RRC*), pp. 233-48 (the gentry controversy). This is in spite of the affair’s lengthy treatment by A. Sisman, *Hugh Trevor-Roper: The Biography* (London, 2010), pp. 202-8.

¹² N. Dennis and A.H. Halsey, *English Ethical Socialism: Thomas More to R.H. Tawney* (Oxford, 1988); M. Carter, *T.H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter, 2003), ch. 6.

¹³ Terrill, *R.H. Tawney*, pp. 264, 266. For a true estimate of the importance of religious discourse (and particularly the Church of England) in interwar politics, see M. Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 10-22.

¹⁴ Collini, ‘Moral Mind: R.H. Tawney’, in *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford, 1999), p. 182.

¹⁵ Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1991).

on one side and politics on the other'.¹⁶ Like Terrill, Goldman seems to have reached this view on an anachronistically secular assumption: in this case, that Tawney knew 'that to talk religion in modern British politics was to limit one's audience and reach'.¹⁷ Those who have probed the nature of Tawney's churchmanship have also been at odds with one another, with differences emerging over whether Tawney may be described as an Anglo-Catholic or not.¹⁸

Part of the problem here arises from an insufficient precision in language when talking about religion. There is no simple scale of religiosity (or secularity) by which one can measure the impact of Christian belief on a given individual. Instead, the subject must be broken down into terms such as personal faith, religious observance, churchmanship and religious thought. This last will be of particular concern to us here, since Tawney's articulate, considered expression of his ideas about Christianity was the aspect of his religion which had the most impact on his thought as a whole. Where possible, his religious thought will be related to his personal faith and observance, though this was a subject over which Tawney tended to draw a veil. Our glimpses through that veil suggest a Christian belief with an intensity that drove his reflections about the implications of Christianity for social and economic conduct: our case here, however, is not that his personal belief was the primary driver of his life and thought (whilst this seems likely, it is not an easy case to prove), but rather that

¹⁶ Goldman, *Life*, p. 182. It should however be said that Goldman recognizes in a passage just above this that 'the spirit of a social Christianity, whether defined as Anglo-Catholic or not, which he derived from Gore, was perhaps the most powerful of all the external influences on Tawney' (ibid. 181-2). There appears to be a tension between these positions, which I submit should be resolved in favour of the latter statement.

¹⁷ Ibid. 182.

¹⁸ Grimley aligns Tawney with Anglo-Catholicism, *Citizenship*, pp. 21, 39, 41, 115. David Ormrod appears to have been in two minds on the subject, describing Tawney (in a dubious distinction) as 'no Anglo-Catholic' but still a 'high Anglican': 'R.H. Tawney and the Origins of Capitalism', *History Workshop Journal*, xviii (1984), pp. 143, 145. Goldman avoids committing himself: *Life*, 179.

his religious thought (and the related matter of his churchmanship) is central to understanding his wider intellectual programme, not least as a historian.

Before proceeding further, we must set out some elementary data about Tawney's life and the key ideas of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Born in 1880, Tawney was educated at Rugby School and Balliol College, Oxford, where he read *Literae Humaniores*.¹⁹ Like many of his contemporaries, he then went to the East End to work on various social projects, including the famous Oxford 'settlement', Toynbee Hall, where graduates went to improve the lot of the working classes of the East End.²⁰ After a brief spell as an assistant teacher in Political Economy at Glasgow University, he became a pioneering adult education tutor for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), teaching classes in industrial Staffordshire and Lancashire, and writing his first major work, a learned yet politically charged study of *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912). He numbered among his friends two of the begetters of the post-war welfare state, the social reformer William Beveridge (1879-1963), whose sister Jeannette he married in 1909,²¹ and William Temple (1881-1944), who served as archbishop of Canterbury during the Second World War. In 1914, Tawney enlisted as a private; he was wounded at the Somme two years later. Between the wars he taught economic history at the London School of Economics and was heavily involved in Labour and trade union politics. He also wrote not only *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, but also two major works of social democratic thought, *The Acquisitive Society* and *Equality*.²² His later years are

¹⁹ For these and other details of Tawney's life, see Goldman, *Life*, *passim*.

²⁰ S. Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform 1880-1914: The Search for Community* (Yale, 1987), ch. 7.

²¹ Goldman, *Life*, pp. 35, 47.

²² Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London, 1921); *Equality* (London, 1931).

of less concern to this article, though we shall see in concluding that his intellectual development mainly continued along the tracks laid down by his early works.

Religion and the Rise of Capitalism began life as the 1922 Holland Lectures on ‘Religious Thought on Social Questions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’. These were published, probably more or less unchanged, in the *American Journal of Political Economy* the following year.²³ Illness – and, it is said, difficulties in finding a publisher – prevented their publication as a book until 1926.²⁴ The intervening years allowed Tawney to revise them and to incorporate quite a large amount of new material, though a comparison between the *Journal of Political Economy* articles and the final book suggests he made no great interpretative changes.²⁵ The text was not revised for the Pelican edition, beyond the inclusion of a new preface.

The thesis of the book, though simple in outline, was intricate in detail. The Christian Church, it suggests, had once provided authoritative teaching on social and economic questions, from prices and wages to money-lending and poor relief.²⁶ The Reformation did not immediately sweep this away: instead, the Reformers –

²³ Tawney, ‘Religious Thought on Social and Economic Questions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *Journal of Political Economy*, xxxi (1923): this was divided into three parts, viz. ‘The Medieval Background’, ‘The Collision of Standards’ and ‘The Social Ethics of Puritanism’ (Aug., Oct., Dec. 1923). A portion of the lectures also appeared in 1922: Tawney, ‘Religion and Business: A Forgotten Chapter of Social History’, *Hibbert Journal*, xxi (Oct. 1922), which is reproduced almost verbatim in ‘The Collision of Standards’, pp. 637-51, 652-3.

²⁴ For publishers, see Ashton, ‘Richard Henry Tawney’, p. 470. For his illness, see Goldman, *Life*, p. 131.

²⁵ Roughly speaking, the *Journal of Political Economy* articles (and thus presumably the lectures) correspond to *RRC* as follows: ‘The Medieval Background’ to ch. 1 (‘The Mediæval Background’); ‘The Collision of Standards’, pp. 637-50, to ch. 2 (‘The Continental Reformers’) (and to ‘Religion and Business’ in the *Hibbert Journal*); ‘The Collision of Standards’, pp. 651-74, to ch. 3 (‘The Church of England’); ‘The Social Ethics of Puritanism’ to ch. 4 (‘The Puritan Movement’). Chs. 2-3, and especially ch. 4, were subjected to greater revision and expansion than ch. 1. The conclusion (*RRC*, ch. 5) was written for the book itself, though this and parts of the final text of ch. 4 were also published in the American journal the *New Republic* in 1926. See also J.M. Winter, ‘Introduction: Tawney the Historian’, in *History and Society: Essays by R.H. Tawney* (London, 1978), p. 16.

²⁶ *RRC*, ch. 1, *passim*.

especially Luther on the Continent²⁷ and Hugh Latimer in England²⁸ – reaffirmed the social teaching of the Middle Ages. Yet in certain respects the Reformation undermined the old system: its individualistic theology provided a less firm basis for social teaching and economic regulation than the medieval church and its canon law,²⁹ and by fusing church and state, it weakened the independent spiritual authority of the church.³⁰ In the case of Calvin, there was also a tendency to accept, rather than condemn, certain features of commercial life.³¹ The consequences of all this were felt in the seventeenth century, especially in England, where the Puritans, by overthrowing the Stuart regime, destroyed the old mechanisms for regulating economic conduct and failed – because of their individualistic theology – to establish anything in their place.³² This paved the way for ‘the secularization of social and economic philosophy’,³³ the ascendancy of political economy and economic individualism,³⁴ and the systematic oppression of the poor,³⁵ all of which, Tawney believed, had marked English history from that point onwards. The work concluded by calling on the Christian Church to renew its ancient tradition of social teaching and to free itself from the worldly tendrils of capitalism.³⁶ His point was not that religious ideas had caused the rise of capitalism, but rather that the church had failed to respond adequately to the massive economic changes brought about at the end of the Middle Ages by the discovery of America and other developments.³⁷

²⁷ *RRC*, pp. 95-105.

²⁸ *RRC*, pp. 150, 153-4, 253, 260, 281.

²⁹ *RRC*, pp. 105-10.

³⁰ See n. 149, below.

³¹ *RRC*, pp. 111-20.

³² *RRC*, pp. 189-90, 218, and ch. 4 *passim*.

³³ *RRC*, p. 21. He compared this with ‘the secularization of political theory’ during the era of the Renaissance and Reformation described by J.N. Figgis: *ibid.* p. 19.

³⁴ *RRC*, pp. 248-9, 251-3.

³⁵ *RRC*, pp. 261-9.

³⁶ *RRC*, p. 280.

³⁷ *RRC*, pp. 76-89, 312-13.

Having set out the problem to be addressed and having sketched Tawney's life and the contents of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, we may now proceed to the substance of this article, which is divided into four sections. The first gives a brief account of the development of Tawney's religious thought up to the First World War. The next two set out the principal contexts in which *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* should be understood: Tawney's attempt c.1916-26 to revive (or invent) a tradition of Christian social teaching; and a historiographical tradition, stretching back to the nineteenth century, which sought to explain the relationship between Christianity and economic developments. The final section summarises our conclusions regarding Tawney's religious thought and presents some epilogic reflections on the fortunes of his ideas, in his own and others' hands, after 1926.

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To understand *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, we must first explain the development of Tawney's social and religious thought in his early years. The essential context here is the rising importance of social questions to Christian churches throughout the world at this time. For Roman Catholics, this process may be dated for convenience from the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), but most other denominations were undergoing similar shifts. In the Church of England, the key date is perhaps 1889 – the foundation of the Christian Social Union (CSU).³⁸ This body's aims were as follows:

³⁸ The most complete study of the CSU remains unpublished: A. Eckbert, 'The Social Thought of the Christian Social Union (1889-1914)' (Univ. of Oxford M.Litt. thesis, 1990). See also P. d'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton, 1968), ch. 6.

1. To claim for the Christian Law the ultimate authority to rule social practice.
2. To study in common how to apply the moral truths and principles of Christianity to the social and economic difficulties of the present time.
3. To present Christ in practical life as the Living Master and King, the enemy of wrong and selfishness, the power of righteousness and love.³⁹

It spread its ideas through pamphlets, journals and other publications; and it was successful, reaching an apogee in 1908, when the Lambeth Pan-Anglican Conference (a meeting of bishops from across the globe) devoted considerable time to the discussion of socialism and concluded that the church had a duty to try and solve social and economic problems.⁴⁰

Tawney joined the CSU as an undergraduate: a move which would have important consequences for his religious and intellectual development. The other institutions through which he passed in his early life – Rugby, Balliol, Toynbee Hall – were bastions of a liberal, socially-engaged Anglicanism indebted to the idealist philosophy of T. H. Green.⁴¹ The CSU, too, had its debts to Green’s idealism, but it drew more substantially on a sacramental, even Anglo-Catholic tradition of social Christianity.⁴² This is a much-misunderstood subject, so it is perhaps worth returning to first principles. Anglo-Catholicism was a movement within the Church of England which sought to affirm the ‘Catholic’ side of Anglican religious life: the church’s sacraments, its apostolic succession, its corporate authority in matters of doctrine, its continuity with the medieval English Church, its commonalities with the Roman

³⁹ Ibid. p. 177.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 181, 213-16; E.R. Norman, *Church and Society in England 1770-1970: A Historical Study* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 238-9.

⁴¹ Goldman, *Life*, pp. 16-22. See, more generally, M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and his Age* (London, 1964).

⁴² Meacham, *Toynbee Hall*, pp. 99-101.

Catholic and Orthodox churches.⁴³ It emerged as a force in the second half of the nineteenth century, building upon the Oxford Movement and a wider revival of interest in the Middle Ages and Catholic spirituality; and it enjoyed its heyday in the first half of the twentieth century. It is perhaps best-known for its attempt to realise its doctrines in elaborate ceremonial,⁴⁴ but it is a mistake to reduce Anglo-Catholicism to ‘Ritualism’ or ‘smells and bells’. It was a movement with a wide cultural and intellectual significance, not least thanks to its distinctive tradition of social thought. With its roots in the social criticism of the Oxford Movement,⁴⁵ this tradition held that the church’s duty was (in a later phrase) to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Poverty was holy; riches were deadly. Anglo-Catholics also placed great emphasis on the incarnation (the divine assumption of human form), which was held to instil all human life with dignity, equality and unity. The equal participation of all Christians in the church, and especially in the sacrament, was also a fundamental Anglo-Catholic tenet, further entrenching a commitment to equality.⁴⁶ These, in outline, were the tenets of Anglo-Catholic social thought; and they were put into practice by ‘slum priests’ who went out to evangelise poor urban parishes. There thus evolved a kind of ‘sacramental socialism’ which based social action on Anglo-Catholic doctrine.⁴⁷ This was quite different from T. H. Green’s liberal idealism, which based social thought and action on universal ethical duties – and we have seen that the CSU’s founding principles were not philosophical precepts, but rather Christian doctrine.

⁴³ The literature here is inadequate, but see J.S. Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville, TN, 1996); W.S.F. Pickering, *Anglo-Catholicism: A Study in Religious Ambiguity* (rev. edn., Cambridge, 2008).

⁴⁴ N. Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain 1830-1910* (Oxford, 1999).

⁴⁵ S. Skinner, *Tractarians and the ‘Condition of England’: The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford, 2004), chs. 4-6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 259-62; Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, pp. 89-94.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Part II, *passim*.

Tawney's membership of the CSU did not turn him into an Anglo-Catholic – indeed in his early years (until *c.*1910) his religious thought probably followed predictable liberal lines⁴⁸ – but it did open the channel through which he would come into contact with Anglo-Catholic social thought. Of crucial importance here is the theologian Charles Gore (1853-1932), whom we shall encounter throughout this article. Gore was the co-founder (with Henry Scott Holland) of the CSU; and he became the leading Anglo-Catholic theologian and church leader, especially whilst bishop (successively) of Worcester, Birmingham and Oxford (1902-19). He was an austere, even ascetic, figure who had a decisive influence over the development of social thought (and many other branches of theology) in the Church of England.⁴⁹ The nature of this influence is best understood by turning to his discussion of *The Social Doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount* (1892), which was widely circulated by the CSU.⁵⁰ In this work, Gore demanded that the church 'put social morality' rather than church attendance 'in the forefront of its effort' – a harbinger of the church's shifting priorities over subsequent decades.⁵¹ The first half of Gore's title – 'social doctrine' – is the more important half, since his concern was not primarily the New Testament, but rather – in characteristic Anglo-Catholic fashion – 'the authority of the Church', and specifically 'the authority which the Church ought to exercise in matters of social morality'.⁵² He believed that the church ought to exclude from its membership (i.e.

⁴⁸ This is hinted in the entries of 10 Jun. 1912 and 12 Jul. 1914 in *R. H. Tawney's Commonplace Book*, eds. J. M. Winter and D. M. Joslin (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 15, 77-8. Note also his disparaging reference to 'High Church' practices in the East End in an early article: R.H. T[awney], 'The Daily News Religious Census of London', *Toynbee Record*, xv (1904), p. 89. (For this and other lesser works by Tawney, see the invaluable bibliography appended to Terrill, *R.H. Tawney*).

⁴⁹ For his life, see G.L. Prestige, *The Life of Charles Gore: A Great Englishman* (London, 1935).

⁵⁰ As has been remarked, this work is the basis of 'practically all of his subsequent views' on the subject: J. Carpenter, *Gore: A Study in Liberal Catholic Thought* (Leighton Buzzard, 1960), pp. 252-3.

⁵¹ Charles Gore, *The Social Doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount* (1892; new edn., Oxford, 1904), p. 18.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 2.

participation in the sacraments) all those who would not submit to its moral discipline, not just on matters of private morality (such as adultery), but also on matters of social morality.⁵³ In so doing, the church would be guided by ‘a new Christian casuistry’ prescribing principles of conduct in social and economic matters, tailored to different professions.⁵⁴ We shall repeatedly see that it was exactly this belief in the need to revive Christian social teaching and moral discipline that animated Tawney’s socio-religious thought.

Though Tawney probably encountered Gore’s ideas as an undergraduate member of the CSU, the two were only drawn into close contact from 1905 when Tawney joined the WEA, the organisation founded by Albert Mansbridge (1876-1952) to bring higher education to adult workers. Mansbridge was a protégé of Gore’s who had been inspired to found the WEA by one of the latter’s sermons, and Gore himself was an active supporter of the group.⁵⁵ Tawney and Gore were then drawn closer by campaigning together for Oxford University to be truly open to working-class students (1906-8)⁵⁶ and, a few years later, by their shared interest in the chain-making industry, a sweated industry which attracted Tawney’s concern as a social investigator and Gore’s as bishop of Worcester, the city in which much of the industry was based.⁵⁷ By the outbreak of the First World War, therefore, Tawney and Gore had

⁵³ Ibid. pp. 2-3. Cf. Carpenter, *Gore*, pp. 264-5. For Anglo-Catholics and the exclusion of adulterers (including remarried divorcees) from the sacrament, see T.W. Jones, *Sexual Politics in the Church of England, 1857-1957* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 36-7.

⁵⁴ Gore, *Social Doctrine*, pp. 3-5, 16-17.

⁵⁵ For Tawney and the WEA, see Goldman, *Life*, ch. 3. For Mansbridge and Gore, see Bernard Jennings, *Albert Mansbridge: The Life and Work of the Founder of the WEA* (Leeds, 2002), pp. 4-5; Prestige, *Life of Charles Gore*, p. 282. Tawney later described Mansbridge as one of his ‘spiritual parents’: M.K. Rusoff, ‘R.H. Tawney and the WEA’, in S.K. Roberts, ed., *A Ministry of Enthusiasm: Centenary Essays on the Workers’ Educational Association* (London, 2003), p. 64.

⁵⁶ Goldman, *Life*, 56-61.

⁵⁷ See Gore, ‘Introductory Remarks’, in Tawney, *Poverty as an Industrial Problem* (London, 1913).

established a close working relationship on social questions – a relationship which would be reignited on Tawney’s return from the war in 1916.

As Tawney’s relationship with Gore was developing, there are signs that his churchmanship was shifting into a higher key. This was manifested outwardly by his membership (from 1912 if not before) of the Church Socialist League,⁵⁸ an organisation that was more definitely socialist, but also more stridently Anglo-Catholic, than the mainstream CSU.⁵⁹ Inwardly, he recorded his thoughts in his so-called *Commonplace Book* (1912-14). His reflections here show that he came to place great emphasis on incarnational theology:

The special new and characteristic contribution of Christianity – its differentia – is the statement that God became, or was fully expressed in, a particular historical individual as to whose life we possess records. The significance of this is immense. What it tells us is not merely that God exists – which we knew already – but that the God who exists is like Christ. ... One may be driven to “natural religion” as a *pis aller*. But no one but a fool would *choose* it in preference to Christianity. A man who *prefers* the absolute to the Trinity is like a man who would voluntarily abandon his house and wander in a desert.⁶⁰

This passage is highly revealing. It shows the centrality of the incarnation to Tawney’s theology and personal faith: this was something he shared with Gore. It also indicates a considerable degree of religious orthodoxy: the commitment to the Trinity, in preference to “natural religion” and ‘the absolute’ is a declaration of his

⁵⁸ Norman, *Church and Society*, p. 248.

⁵⁹ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, ch. 7, esp. p. 241. See also I. Goodfellow, ‘The Church Socialist League, 1906-1923: Origins, Development and Disintegration’ (Durham Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1983).

⁶⁰ Entry of 12 Jul. 1914, in *R.H. Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, p. 78-9.

distance from the diluted liberal Christianity of Greenian idealism, which rendered God in philosophical terms as ‘the absolute’, rather than relying on orthodox conceptions of the Trinity and the incarnation.⁶¹ Yet we should note at the same time that, believing himself in some sense unworthy, he did not take communion at this time,⁶² and even in later life his church attendance appears often to have been irregular.⁶³ Nonetheless, it is clear that by the outbreak of war, Tawney had abandoned the liberal Christianity of Rugby and Balliol in favour of something approaching the Anglo-Catholicism purveyed by his mentor Charles Gore. In so doing, he had adopted a religious position that – as his fellow members of the Church Socialist League showed – was very often combined with the radical socialist position which he had reached in his politics.⁶⁴

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Until the First World War, we have to piece together Tawney’s religious and social ideas from hints and fragments. After July 1916, when Tawney was invalided home from the Front, we can instead follow them more directly through his contributions to public discussion of these subjects. We therefore turn, now, to the crucial ten years in Tawney’s development between his return from the war and the publication of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. During these years, Tawney was a key thinker and policymaker for both the Labour Party and the Church of England. He also put

⁶¹ A. Vincent and R. Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford, 1984), ch. 1.

⁶² Goldman, *Life*, p. 93.

⁶³ It was reported in 1938 that he attended church irregularly and took the sacrament only at Christmas: Terrill, *R.H. Tawney*, p. 61. This, however, may be an unrepresentative snapshot: at another point in his life he was a lay reader (ibid. p. 58). When his wife became a Christian (and an Anglican) in the 1940s, he told a friend that this was what he had hoped for all his life (ibid. p. 62). In the years before his death he seems to have attended church daily, and he became close to Fr St John Groser, a late example of the Anglo-Catholic slum priest tradition: Goldman, *Life*, pp. 285, 292-3.

⁶⁴ For Tawney’s early socialism, see Winter, ‘R.H. Tawney’s Early Political Thought’.

forward his views in a political tract, *The Acquisitive Society*, and in a series of historical works which culminated in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. This was the period when he most energetically fused his religious, social, political and historical thought to produce a set of ideas about Christian social teaching which structured and united much of his output.

On returning from the war in 1916, Tawney was visited in hospital by Gore, then bishop of Oxford, before spending three months convalescing at Cuddesdon, the latter's episcopal residence.⁶⁵ Soon he was drawn into all kinds of social reform projects, from committees on adult education to coal mines,⁶⁶ but the project of greatest interest to us here was a committee set up by the archbishops of Canterbury and York to inquire into 'the ways in which the Church may best commend the teaching of Christ to those who are seeking to solve the problems of industrial life'.⁶⁷ This became known as the 'Fifth Committee', being the fifth of five panels established by the archbishops under the auspices of the Church of England's wartime 'National Mission of Repentance and Hope'.⁶⁸ Its report, *Christianity and Industrial Problems* (1918), was widely circulated, with 25,000 copies being printed in its first year.⁶⁹ It caused controversy by its apparent endorsement of many socialist ideas and policies; and it is a milestone in the spread of such ideas through the upper echelons of the established church in the early decades of the twentieth century. It was

⁶⁵ Terrill, *R.H. Tawney*, p. 51; British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London, Lansbury/7/289, Gore to George Lansbury, 23 Dec. 1916. Cf. BLPES, Tawney/27/8 (not foliated), R.H. to Jeannette Tawney [late 1916].

⁶⁶ Goldman, *Life*, pp. 109-19.

⁶⁷ *Christianity and Industrial Problems: Being the Report of the Archbishops' Fifth Committee of Inquiry. Part I* (1918; London, 1919), p. xii.

⁶⁸ For the National Mission and its committees, see *ibid.* p. iii and A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London, 1978), pp. 70-90. But note that Wilkinson's claim (p. 86) that the Fifth Committee's report was drafted by George Bell with the help of Tawney and E.S. Talbot is inaccurate.

⁶⁹ The 1919 impression cited here is marked 'Twenty-Fifth Thousand' on the title page.

rumoured at the time that Tawney was the main author of the report,⁷⁰ but it is only now, with access to the records of the committee's proceedings, that this can be verified.⁷¹

The committee was appointed in December 1916 and chaired by the bishop of Winchester, E. S. Talbot, a veteran of the CSU. Talbot was a busy man who accepted the chairmanship on the archbishop of Canterbury's breezy assurance that 'I do not think the work need be very onerous, and of course there is no sort of idea that it would mean trying to make proposals in the economic sense for solving the difficulties!'⁷² He therefore relied heavily on Albert Mansbridge,⁷³ who acted as the committee's secretary for many months and who proposed Tawney's appointment to the committee.⁷⁴ Other members included the Labour MP and sometime chairman of the Church Socialist League George Lansbury and, from August 1917, Gore himself.⁷⁵ The committee was soon divided into various subcommittees considering 'Christian Principles', the 'Historical Aspect', 'Urban Industrial Problems', 'Rural Industrial Problems' and 'Education'. Tawney sat on the first three of these and was

⁷⁰ For its reception and the ascription of the report to Tawney, see Norman, *Church and Society*, p. 242; M.B. Reckitt, *Maurice to Temple: A Century of the Social Movement in the Church of England* (London, 1947), p. 162.

⁷¹ The minutes, correspondence and other papers which passed through the hands of the committee secretaries (Albert Mansbridge, J.B. Seaton and D.W. Jones) may be found in the Mansbridge Papers at the British Library (BL), Add. MSS 65240-43. (These are not foliated, but the papers are mainly dated and arranged in chronological order). These are supplemented by the papers of George Bell (secretary of the Fifth Committee's Christian Principles subcommittee and later famous for his opposition to the civilian bombing of Germany), deposited at the Lambeth Palace Library (LPL), London, Davidson 362, fos. 1-128. My thanks to the librarians at Lambeth Palace for directing me to this latter collection.

⁷² LPL Davidson 362, fos. 1-2, Randall Davidson to Talbot, 20 Nov. 1916.

⁷³ Mansbridge's admiration for Talbot and Gore is shown by his devotional double biography, *Edward Stuart Talbot and Charles Gore: Witnesses to and Interpreters of the Christian Faith in Church and State* (London, 1935). (For sketches of the two prelates at a Fifth Committee meeting, see *ibid.* pp. 83, 85).

⁷⁴ LPL Davidson 362, fo. 5, Talbot to George Bell, 20 Dec. 1916.

⁷⁵ For a full list, see *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, p. ii.

convenor of the historical subcommittee, and from the outset he dominated the proceedings of the whole.⁷⁶

He was able to do this thanks to hard work and a gift for arresting prose. The industrialists on the committee were mainly sleeping members, who roused themselves fitfully and belatedly to protest against the socialist drift of the committee's work.⁷⁷ Tawney, on the other hand, assisted behind the scenes by Mansbridge and at meetings by the charismatic Gore, threw himself into the committee's business. His first move was to draft a mordant memorandum arguing that the committee should make it clear from the beginning that its aim was to judge industrial life not on the secular grounds of efficiency but on the ideals of the New Testament.⁷⁸ This document became the basis for the work of the Christian Principles subcommittee and set the tone for the work of the committee as a whole.⁷⁹ Next, Tawney threw down the gauntlet to Bishop Talbot, who had prepared a bland 'Draft Sketch' for the Christian Principles subcommittee to approve.⁸⁰ Tawney thought the sketch 'quite useless' and threatened to withdraw from the committee, remarking to Mansbridge that 'clearly I cannot tell him [Talbot] he does not understand his own trade'.⁸¹ Yet tell him he did. Shortly afterwards, he circulated a new memorandum with his own thoughts on the subject. This embodied the major themes which he would develop over the next few years: Christian social principles were upheld from the first century until 'the middle of the 17th century', but since then had fallen into

⁷⁶ BL Add. MS 65240, 'Minutes of Meeting of Committee Appointed to Select the Sub-Committees', 22 Mar. 1917.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, F.W. Gilbertson's ineffectual contributions in BL Add. MS 65242, 'Notes on Farnham Meeting', 6-7 Nov. 1917.

⁷⁸ LPL Davidson 362, fos. 17-23, 'Memorandum by R.H. Tawney', ?Apr. 1917.

⁷⁹ LPL Davidson 362, fos. 121-3, Bell to Tawney, 3 Jul. 1917.

⁸⁰ BL Add. MS 65241, 'Draft Sketch, to be Submitted to Sub-Committee on Christian Principles, of its Recommendations to the Committee'. Talbot's authorship is established by LPL Davidson 362, fo. 109, Bell to Tawney, 29 Jun. 1917.

⁸¹ BL Add. MS 65240, Tawney to Mansbridge, 5 Jul. 1917.

abeyance; just as the clergy visited the poor to warn against ‘intemperance’, so they ‘should visit the rich and warn them against luxury, undue keenness in business, or the other vices to which men are tempted by riches’; and he posed the stark dilemma of whether economic life was to be evaluated by the pagan standard of ‘efficiency’ (which had been so much in vogue in the Edwardian period) or whether it was at last to be judged by Christian principles.⁸² Talbot’s sketch was sidelined and much of Tawney’s critique of it was incorporated in the final report: from this point onwards, it was clear that Tawney, not Bishop Talbot, was really in the driving seat.⁸³ It was also Tawney who drew up the submission of the Urban Industrial Problems subcommittee to the plenary session, which was in turn incorporated, with amendments, in the final report.⁸⁴

In August 1917 Tawney returned to Cuddesdon to begin writing the report itself.⁸⁵ He was asked not only to draft the chapters on Urban Industrial Problems and Christian Principles (quite something for a layman when four bishops sat on the committee), but even the Education chapter, despite not having sat on that subcommittee.⁸⁶ Much of the historical chapter was also his handiwork, as we shall see. Thus, since the only

⁸² BL Add. MS 65241, ‘Christian Principles Sub-Committee. Memorandum by R.H. Tawney’, 18 Jul. 1917. See also LPL Davidson 362, fos. 112-17, Tawney to Bell, 30 Jun. 1917, with attached comments on Talbot’s memorandum.

⁸³ Compare Talbot’s ‘Draft Sketch’ with the second, longer document also entitled ‘Draft Sketch, to be Submitted to Sub-Committee on Christian Principles, of its Recommendations to the Committee’, in BL Add. MS 65241, which replaces Talbot’s text with that of ‘Christian Principles Sub-Committee. Memorandum by R.H. Tawney’. Cf. also *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, ch. 2, esp. pp. 9-21.

⁸⁴ BL Add. MS 65241, ‘Memorandum Accompanying Resolutions Submitted by the Urban Industrial Problems Sub-Committee of the National Mission Committee V – Industry, to the Parent Committee’. Cf. *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, pp. 104-8.

⁸⁵ BL Add. MS 65242, Talbot to Tawney, 6 Aug. 1917, and J.B. Seaton to Mansbridge, 7 Aug. 1917. He also stayed for some time with the bishop of Peterborough, Frank Woods, another member of the committee: Terrill, *R.H. Tawney*, p. 52.

⁸⁶ BL Add. MS 65242, Seaton to Mansbridge (18 Aug. 1917). The letter also mentions that the section on slavery in the Christian Principles chapter was to be drafted by Talbot.

other section ('Rural Industrial Problems') was dropped from the final text,⁸⁷ Tawney was responsible for drafting almost the whole report, the main exceptions being a few introductory and concluding pages written mainly by Gore.⁸⁸ In writing his drafts, Tawney would of course have been constrained by what he thought he could get through the committee, and some amendments were made before the report was printed. But it is nonetheless clear that he was the presiding genius of the Fifth Committee, leading its deliberations with his bold memoranda and drawing them to their conclusion by his fluent drafting skills.

The result was a striking statement of the advanced Christian socialist position. As his showdown with Talbot indicates, Tawney's work embodied the outlook of the Church Socialist League rather than the moderate CSU. Hence the report demanded not just CSU policies such as ethical consumption and a living wage, but 'more complete equality' and 'a greater abolition of privilege and social authority on the part of individuals or classes', with a view to 'government or management of all by all'.⁸⁹ It also anticipated Tawney's denunciation of the acquisitive society based on 'economic expediency'. 'Those who yield', he said, 'to its glittering allurements have their reward. It offers them power, affluence, material comfort, "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them."' ⁹⁰ The allusion is to the devil's temptation of Christ in the wilderness (Matthew iv. 8) – a piece of malicious irony typical of Tawney on the subject of wealth. The Church, meanwhile, should 'insist that Christian ethics are as binding upon economic conduct and industrial organisation as upon personal conduct

⁸⁷ BL Add. MS 65243, 'Unconfirmed Minutes of Meeting Held in the Bishops' Room, House of Lords', 29 Jul. 1918, p. 3. Hence the report was initially subtitled 'Part I': Part II was to be the rural counterpart, but this was instead published as *The Church and Rural Life: Being the Report of a Committee Appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1920).

⁸⁸ BL Add. MS 65242, 'Committee V – Industry. The Report', n.d.

⁸⁹ *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, p. 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 10.

and domestic life.’⁹¹ The ‘austere’ teaching of the New Testament on the temptations of wealth and the sin of avarice ought to be heeded.⁹² Those who were ‘living idly, whether on charity or on inherited wealth’ ought to be told that ‘they are committing a sin’.⁹³

It is the report’s third chapter, on ‘Some Historical Illustrations of Christian Thought on Social Relationships’, that merits our closest attention. This has been wholly overlooked by previous commentators on Tawney who, if they noticed *Christianity and Industrial Problems* at all, were no doubt deterred by the claim at the head of this chapter that it was ‘entrusted by the Committee to the Master of Balliol, who has associated with himself other members of the Committee in the work’.⁹⁴ The awkward syntax is a clue to the deceptiveness of the sentence. The Master of Balliol, A.L. Smith, had indeed chaired the subcommittee on the ‘Historical Aspect’ (of which Tawney was the convenor); and it seems likely that Smith wrote part of the chapter himself.⁹⁵ But the chapter as a whole was a joint production by Smith and Tawney, with the assistance of others; and there followed a protracted dispute between the two, each seeking to have the other’s name, rather than his own, placed at the head of the chapter. Tawney was the more insistent and so Smith’s name was allowed to stand, qualified by the mention of unspecified other members of the committee.⁹⁶ Yet it is clear from internal evidence that at least eight key pages of the chapter, those on

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 12.

⁹² Ibid. pp. 12-13.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 18.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

⁹⁵ Probably § 4, ‘The influence of the new Political Economy’ (pp. 40-48), which covers the territory which Smith had proposed as the full extent of the chapter’s remit: see his remarks recorded in BL Add. MS 65242, ‘Notes on Farnham Meeting’, 6-7 Nov. 1917.

⁹⁶ See BL Add. MS 65243, Tawney to D.W. Jones and J.B. Seaton, 27, 31 Aug., 6 Sep., 11 Oct. 1918, and G.B. Whitaker (Smith’s secretary) to Seaton, 8 Oct. 1918.

medieval and early modern social thought,⁹⁷ were penned by Tawney himself – and it seems likely that he wrote most of the rest of the chapter too.

The reason we may ascribe these pages so confidently to Tawney is that they are almost an abstract of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Both give an ambivalent account of the medieval church as an organisation that preached economic justice, especially in the doctrine of the just price and the prohibition of usury, whilst generally falling below its own ideals in practice.⁹⁸ Both state that modern economic ideas did not come in with the Reformation as such, but rather that the sixteenth century saw a reassertion of traditional social teaching.⁹⁹ Both claim that it was in fact in the mid-seventeenth century that the church abdicated its role as the guardian of economic ethics, handing over the regulation of economic conduct to the doctrines of individualism and political economy.¹⁰⁰ There are even some phrases carried over verbatim from one to the other: both, for instance, speak of ‘the economic iniquities of [Bunyan’s] Mr Badman’, before proceeding to discuss ‘economic rationalism’ in medieval Italy.¹⁰¹ The one missing feature in *Christianity and Industrial Problems* is the link that Tawney would later draw between Puritanism and capitalism, though whether he eschewed this for fear of offending Evangelical readers or whether he simply had not yet come to that conclusion is unclear. What is certain is that he was by this time aware of the German debate on that subject initiated by Max Weber’s 1904-5 essays on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: though the report’s bibliography did not cite this work itself, it did cite Ernst Troeltsch’s *Die*

⁹⁷ *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, pp. 32-40.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 32-8; *RRC*, pp. 68-73.

⁹⁹ *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, p. 38; *RRC*, pp. 140, 260.

¹⁰⁰ *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, p. 39; *RRC*, pp. 191-2, 197.

¹⁰¹ *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, pp. 39-40; *RRC*, p. 22.

Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen (1908-12) and Hermann Levy's *Economic Liberalism* (1913), both of which discussed Weber's essays at length.¹⁰²

To find Tawney expounding much of the thesis of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* in a work published four years before his Holland Lectures on 'Religious Thought on Social Questions' is itself striking. To find this buried in a Church of England report is still more so – and it supports the view that his great work was written as much by Tawney the Christian social thinker as Tawney the historian. This view is reinforced if we follow Tawney's progress in the years up to the Holland Lectures. During this period, he added two (related) elements to his argument for Christian social teaching: a belief in church autonomy; and a sympathy for guild socialism. Both were to inform his major political work of this period, *The Acquisitive Society* (1921), as well as the development of his historical thought.

Tawney's interest in church autonomy first came to prominence through his work for his friend William Temple's Life and Liberty Movement, a campaign initiated in 1917 to demand that the Church of England be granted substantial independence from state control.¹⁰³ This bore fruit in 1919 with the Enabling Act, which for the first time gave the Church of England the power to manage many of its internal affairs. This was welcomed by Tawney in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, signed 'an Anglican layman', which defended the idea of the church as a self-governing

¹⁰² *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, pp. 142-4. The report's bibliography was drawn up by Mansbridge and Tawney: BL Add. MS 65242, 'Unconfirmed Minutes of Meeting Held at Balliol College, Oxford', 7-9 Jan. 1918, p. 26.

¹⁰³ For church autonomy, see Norman, *Church and Society*, pp. 272-6 (for Tawney's membership of Life and Liberty, *ibid.* p. 275).

‘society’.¹⁰⁴ The intellectual basis for such demands lay principally in the work of the Anglo-Catholic priest J.N. Figgis (1866-1919), whose *Churches in the Modern State* (1913), a key text in English political pluralism, had called for a revival of the medieval ideal of the state: the state not as Leviathan but as *communitas communitatum*: a community not of individuals but of free, self-governing societies such as churches and guilds.¹⁰⁵ The new, autonomous church of Figgis’s vision would no longer be a national establishment seeking to encompass the whole population, but a smaller, purer church which made stringent demands on the moral conduct of its members.¹⁰⁶ This was a vision shared by Tawney and Gore, who believed that such a church would, unlike the existing Church of England, be able to promulgate and enforce a code of Christian discipline, covering economic and personal morality alike. They believed, as Gore wrote to Tawney, that disestablishment might kindle ‘cleansing fires’ to burn out the worldly, materialistic elements of the Church of England, bringing about ‘a Christianity truer to its origins’.¹⁰⁷ Once its connection with the state was severed, it would no longer need a comprehensive membership, but could instead expel those who failed to submit to its ethical, including economic, commands.¹⁰⁸

It is only with these ideas in mind that we can truly understand what Tawney was demanding in *The Acquisitive Society*. The final chapter of this work addressed the Church of England on the subject of social morality, urging it to promulgate a

¹⁰⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Jun. 1919, p. 10, [R.H.] T[awney], ‘The Enabling Bill. What it Seeks to Do and Why’. For the Act, see G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1869 to 1921* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 317-20.

¹⁰⁵ J.N. Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State* (London, 1913), esp. pp. 8, 12-14, 47, 99. For context, see Grimley, *Citizenship*, pp. 70-72, 76-7.

¹⁰⁶ Figgis, *Churches in the Modern State*, pp. 133-4.

¹⁰⁷ BLPES, Tawney/Vyvyan/41 (not foliated), Gore to Tawney, 23 Jul. 1917. For his views more generally, see Carpenter, *Gore*, pp. 261-3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 259, 264.

Christian ‘rule of life’ in economic matters for its members to follow.¹⁰⁹ Those who refused would be deemed to have left the church (by which he presumably meant that they could be denied communion).¹¹⁰ The recovery of ‘the authority to discipline its own members’, he went on, was vitally important for the reform of the church.¹¹¹ The church would have to be disestablished and would ‘probably ... lose the nominal support of a considerable number of those who regard themselves as its adherents’: but this would ‘be a blessing, not a misfortune’.¹¹² It should not compromise with the ‘Pagan Society’ of ‘materialism’ which surrounded it, but rather should ‘expect its adherents to face economic ruin for the sake of their principles’.¹¹³ In sum, a church reformed according to true social ideals

will define ... the lines of conduct and organization which approach most nearly to being the practical application of Christian ethics in the various branches of economic life, and, having defined them, will censure those of its members who depart from them without good reason. It will rebuke the open and notorious sin of the man who oppresses his fellows for the sake of gain as freely as that of the drunkard or adulterer.¹¹⁴

This was a powerful statement of the case that Gore had been making since *The Social Doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount*, buttressed by the political theology of J.N. Figgis, and it took the ideas of *Christianity and Industrial Problems* to a new level of radicalism.

¹⁰⁹ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p. 236.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 237.

¹¹² Ibid. pp. 237-8.

¹¹³ Ibid. pp. 238-9. Cf. Gore’s comparison of English ‘Established Christianity’ to the Paganism of the Roman Empire: Carpenter, *Gore*, p. 263. Alan Wilkinson noted Tawney’s debts to Gore on this point: *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London, 1998), p. 96.

¹¹⁴ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p. 239.

If we turn to the main body of *The Acquisitive Society*, we are confronted with the other element of Tawney's thought developed during this period: guild socialism.¹¹⁵ Guild socialists sought the control of industry by workers rather than the central state. This was a doctrine which appealed to the Anglo-Catholics of the Church Socialist League on two counts. Firstly, it had in its name a medieval resonance, conjuring up images of an economy governed on Christian principles, as the Middle Ages were supposed by many to have enjoyed.¹¹⁶ Secondly, it was agreeable to the preference in Anglo-Catholic socialism for voluntary or cooperative action over state compulsion: although the days of the Tractarians, who had sought not a welfare state but a 'welfare church',¹¹⁷ were gone, and state socialism was accepted by many Anglo-Catholics, they were less likely to enthuse about the state than were idealists such as Green or Bernard Bosanquet. In his dissatisfaction with the materialism and centralism of Fabian socialism in the 1910s,¹¹⁸ and in his decision to join the National Guilds League (established 1915),¹¹⁹ Tawney was in step with his fellow members of the Church Socialist League.¹²⁰ Indeed, guild socialism was closely related to the campaign for church autonomy: both drew inspiration from Figgis's defence of free communities against the depredations of the central state; and there were many, not least William Temple, who supported guild socialism and church liberty as two sides

¹¹⁵ For an overview of guild socialism, see W.H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition*, II: *The Ideological Heritage* (2nd edn., London, 2003), pp. 417-39.

¹¹⁶ The prime example was A.J. Penty, whose *A Guildsman's Interpretation of History* (London, 1920) drew on Tawney in its construction of the Reformation as a social revolution (pp. 184-5), and with whose work Tawney sympathised up to a point (Greenleaf, *British Political Tradition*, ii. 456). It should however be noted that most Anglo-Catholic guild socialists were largely reconciled to industrial society: Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p. 286.

¹¹⁷ S. Skinner, "'A Triumph of the Rich": Tractarians and the Reformation', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xc (2014), p. 84.

¹¹⁸ *R.H. Tawney's Commonplace Book*, pp. 46, 50-51, 61, 63. See also his book plan, 'The New Leviathan' (?1914), in BLPES, Tawney/10/10, pp. 1-2.

¹¹⁹ S. T. Glass, *The Responsible Society: The Ideas of the English Guild Socialists* (London, 1966), 39, 66; Wright, *R.H. Tawney*, 58, 69.

¹²⁰ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, 290-1.

of the same coin.¹²¹ Tawney himself drew up a lecture scheme on ‘the Principle of Association’ which considered state sovereignty over the church and industry as a conjoined issue.¹²²

At the time of writing *The Acquisitive Society*, Tawney considered himself to be ‘possibly an unorthodox guild socialist’ and commended guild socialism for its ‘attack on the theory of functionless property’.¹²³ It was this ‘functionless property’ – property detached from any social purpose or function – that was the main target of *The Acquisitive Society*, which sought a remedy in the conversion of industries into ‘Professions’ – organisations which would serve society as a whole rather than simply the interests of their owners.¹²⁴ *The Acquisitive Society* was therefore in many respects a guild socialist work, and its final chapter on Christian social teaching looks less out of place if the commonalities between guild socialism and the church liberty campaign are fully appreciated.¹²⁵

Having established Tawney’s trajectory over the years 1916-21, it becomes clear why Gore should have invited him to deliver a lecture series in 1922 on ‘the theology of the Incarnation and its bearing on the social and economic life of man’ – and why Tawney chose as his topic for this series ‘Religious Thought on Social Questions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’. These lectures were the first Holland Memorial Lectures, a triennial event established to commemorate the CSU founder

¹²¹ Grimley, *Citizenship*, pp. 68-9.

¹²² BLPES, Tawney/10/10, ‘Six Lectures on the Principle of Association’ (?1914), p. 2.

¹²³ Wright, *R.H. Tawney*, p. 69.

¹²⁴ Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, *passim*, esp. pp. 9, 106, 222. The admiring discussion of building guilds (*ibid.* pp. 119-23) is another hallmark of guild socialism.

¹²⁵ Pace Armstrong and Gray’s suggestion that the final chapter is an incongruous coda to the work: *The Authentic Tawney*, pp. 51, 85, 89. Goldman overlooks Tawney’s links to guild socialism, including in his discussion of *The Acquisitive Society: Life*, pp. 189-92.

Henry Scott Holland.¹²⁶ Tawney, with his incarnational faith and his concern for the relationship between theology and society, was the obvious choice to inaugurate this series, though his socialism was more radical than that of Scott Holland. The lectures were held at King's College, London, presumably in the Theology Faculty (where Gore was now a lecturer),¹²⁷ which remained, unusually, an exclusively Anglican department.¹²⁸ Each lecture was chaired by a leading Anglican thinker: Gore himself; Ernest Barker (Principal of King's and a prominent layman); Bishop Talbot of Winchester (who had chaired the Fifth Committee); and Canon Wilfrid Richmond (a Christian economist).¹²⁹ Of these, Gore, Talbot and Richmond had all been key figures, along with Scott Holland, in the founding of the CSU.¹³⁰ It is little surprise that when the lectures were published four years later Tawney dedicated the work to Gore 'with affection and gratitude' and asked him to supply a preface, which commended the work in the highest terms.¹³¹ The lectures – and by extension *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* – reflect this Anglican context by seeming to address themselves not so much to the general public as to the conscience of the Church of England,¹³² though of course this assumption did not prevent the work from being taken up by a wider audience.

Between the Holland Lectures and the publication of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Tawney further involved himself in schemes for the renewal of Christian social teaching. He had served from 1920 to 1922 on the executive committee of the

¹²⁶ 'The [Holland Trust] Deed', <<http://www.scotthollandtrust.org.uk/henry-scott-holland/the-deed/>>. (A copy of the deed may also be found in BLPES, Tawney/Vyvyan/13).

¹²⁷ Prestige, *Life of Charles Gore*, pp. 441-2.

¹²⁸ F.J.C. Hearnshaw, *The Centenary History of King's College London, 1828-1928* (London, 1929), pp. 411-12, 416, 437.

¹²⁹ See the advertisement for the lectures in *The Times*, 1 Mar. 1922, p. 8.

¹³⁰ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, pp. 167-77.

¹³¹ Dedication and 'Prefatory Note' in *RRC*.

¹³² This is especially clear in ch. 1, which most retains the text of the lectures ('I must begin these lectures with an apology ...': *RRC*, p. 17).

Church Socialist League, and in June 1922, soon after the Holland Lectures, he led a debate at its annual conference on the topic, ‘What are the elements of a Christian sociology?’¹³³ This idea of ‘Christian sociology’ – the study of society based upon Christian principles – was just coming into vogue among his associates in Christian and guild socialism, including A.J. Penty (1875-1937) and Maurice Reckitt (1888-1980), who were then forming what became known as the ‘Christendom Group’. This was a circle of mainly Anglo-Catholic thinkers of socialist proclivities who sought a renewal of the social and religious unity of medieval Christendom.¹³⁴ Their founding text was the co-authored study, *The Return of Christendom* (1922). Tawney himself did not contribute to this, but he hardly needed to, since it opened with an introduction by Gore denouncing the ‘Acquisitive Society’ and alluding to ‘the connection between the diffusion of the Reformation doctrines and the rise of Modern Industrialism’.¹³⁵ The group went on to develop their Christian sociology in various conferences and journals. Tawney supported them, joining their organisation the League of the Kingdom of God (which effectively succeeded the Church Socialist League when the latter dissolved in 1923)¹³⁶ and drawing attention to efforts towards ‘a Christian sociology’ in the *New Republic*.¹³⁷

Tawney’s most substantial contribution to Christian sociology came in 1924 when he was a leading figure among the 1,400 delegates at the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC), an interdenominational gathering in

¹³³ Goodfellow, ‘Church Socialist League’, pp. 137, 357.

¹³⁴ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, pp. 295-302; Norman, *Church and Society*, pp. 319-20.

¹³⁵ Gore, ‘Introduction’, in ‘A Group of Churchmen’, *The Return of Christendom* (London, 1922), pp. 1, 13. Cf. Reckitt’s acknowledgement of debts to *The Acquisitive Society* in ‘The Moralization of Property’, *ibid.* p. 175.

¹³⁶ Jones, *Christian Socialist Revival*, p. 296. For the creation of the new League, see J.S. Peart-Binns, *Maurice B. Reckitt: A Life* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 71-2.

¹³⁷ Tawney, ‘The Churches and Social Ethics’, *New Republic*, xxxviii (1924), p. 332.

Birmingham which produced a series of reports that developed the ideas of *Christianity and Industrial Problems*.¹³⁸ One of these reports, on *Historical Illustrations of the Social Effects of Christianity*, contained a chapter (evidently written by Tawney) on 'The Early Modern Period'. This was in effect a condensed version of the Holland Lectures, with a number of passages (in a standard Tawney practice) carried across verbatim.¹³⁹ After COPEC, he and others met a number of times at Maurice Reckitt's flat in London to discuss '[i]nterest and investment from a Christian standpoint'.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, he was preparing a learned dissertation on the history of interest and investment – and the church's attitude thereto – in the early modern era, which he published as an introduction to his edition of Thomas Wilson's *Discourse upon Usury* (1572).¹⁴¹ In the same year he supplied a shorter, unsigned introduction to his wife Jeannette's edition of selections from the Puritan Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory*. Gore was called upon to write the preface, which called for 'a New Casuistry' of economic life and commended in the meantime 'the moral teaching and maxims of primitive Christianity and of the Middle Ages, and of the later period', including Baxter's *Directory*.¹⁴² (Baxter, though a Puritan, was viewed by Tawney – and hence Gore – as one who, whatever his faults, had at least tried to

¹³⁸ For COPEC, see Norman, *Church and Society*, pp. 279-313.

¹³⁹ *COPEC Commission Reports* (12 vols., London, 1924), XII: *Historical Illustrations of the Social Effects of Christianity*, ch. 4. Compare, for instance, the passage on Baxter, *ibid.* pp. 107-8, with Tawney, 'Religion and Business', p. 70, and *RRC*, p. 22. Similar repetitions occurred between *Christianity and Industrial Problems* and COPEC's ninth report (on *Industry and Property*): Norman, *Church and Society*, p. 299.

¹⁴⁰ Peart-Binns, *Maurice B. Reckitt*, p. 85.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse upon Usury*, ed. Tawney (London, 1925, repr. 1962). Cf. BLPES, Tawney/II/24, 'Notes on Usury', a file which includes Tawney's notes on Luther and Wilson's views on usury, but also a COPEC paper by John Lee on 'The Possibility of a Christian Investment Society': that these notes are mixed up together indicates the continuum between past and present social teaching in Tawney's mind.

¹⁴² Gore, 'Preface', in Richard Baxter, *Chapters from A Christian Directory*, selected by Jeannette Tawney (London, 1925). Though unsigned, the introduction must be ascribed to Tawney, since it mainly comprises chunks lifted from the Holland Lectures (or *RRC*): cf. p. ix with *RRC*, p. 22, or p. x with *RRC*, p. 212. The same conclusion has been reached by Wright, *R.H. Tawney*, p. 48, and P. Ghosh, 'Max Weber's Idea of "Puritanism": A Case Study in the Empirical Construction of the Protestant ethic', *History of European Ideas*, xxix (2003), p. 201 n. 48.

uphold the tradition of Christian social teaching).¹⁴³ It also appears that Tawney around this time wanted to develop a new casuistry through a kind of church think-tank: he had called some years earlier for the Church of England to establish ‘a “thinking department”’ to supply its leaders with evidence for their social teaching, and, when reviewing the efforts of COPEC, he renewed this demand, suggesting that ‘a permanent department which may act as a continuous organ of research and centre of educational effort’ should be set up to consider social questions on behalf of all churches which agreed to support it.¹⁴⁴

This account of Tawney’s place in the Christian socialist movement throws new light on the text of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* itself. It explains his admiration for the ‘social theory’ of the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁵ It accounts for his delight in quoting the pamphlets and sermons of English divines, from Latimer to Laud, who ‘chastise[d] the rich and powerful’ by denouncing the economic sins of landowners and usurers.¹⁴⁶ This was the kind of message he wanted to hear issuing from twentieth-century Anglican pulpits to mine-owners and industrialists. His support for church social discipline also comes through in his criticism of the Reformation view that, since ‘the Christian has a sufficient guide in the Bible and in his own conscience’, ‘[d]etailed rules of conduct – a Christian casuistry – are needless or objectionable’.¹⁴⁷ On the contrary, argued Tawney, ‘the remedy for bad law is good law, not lawlessness; and casuistry is merely the application of general principles to particular cases’.¹⁴⁸ This

¹⁴³ [Tawney], ‘Introduction’, in Baxter, *Chapters*, pp. xii-xvi.

¹⁴⁴ Tawney, ‘The Church and Industry’, *New Republic*, xxvi (1921), p. 257; ‘The Churches and Social Ethics’, p. 333.

¹⁴⁵ *RRC*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶ *RRC*, pp. 175-6.

¹⁴⁷ *RRC*, p. 107.

¹⁴⁸ *RRC*, p. 109.

was the kind of casuistry which he was seeking to revive in a form adapted to modern economic conditions.

The ideas Tawney had been articulating in the decade leading up to 1926 were also important for the account of the decline of Christian social teaching in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Broadly speaking, he gave two reasons for this decline: the entanglement of the church with the world; and the individualism associated with Protestantism, especially Puritanism. This pair of arguments may be seen most clearly in the conclusions to *The Acquisitive Society* and *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, in both of which he criticised the failure first of the Church of England and second of the Nonconformist churches to maintain the tradition of social teaching. The first he blamed upon the Church of England's subordination to the state, and thus to the ruling classes, which deprived it of 'the independence which might have enabled it to maintain the peculiar and distinctive Christian standard of social conduct';¹⁴⁹ the second he ascribed to the 'individualis[m]' of radical Protestantism on matters such as salvation – an individualism which had spilled over into 'their interpretation of social morality'.¹⁵⁰ Here we see the two sides of Tawney's basic religious position: opposition to the secularity and materialism of the established church; and support for the church as a corporate institution with a distinctive body of social teaching.

These arguments were not of course confined to Tawney's conclusions, but rather recur throughout *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. We shall return to Protestant individualism in the next section, concentrating for the moment upon the Church of England, the subject of the book's third chapter. This repeatedly noted the limitations

¹⁴⁹ Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society*, p. 228. Cf. *RRC*, p. 275.

¹⁵⁰ Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society*, p. 229. Cf. *RRC*, p. 275.

imposed upon the church's teaching by its subordination to the state after the Reformation. The Elizabethan church, Tawney declared, had failed to prevent a growing tolerance of usury because of its condition of Erastian subjection.¹⁵¹ Similarly, for all his approval of the Tudor and Stuart use of executive power (especially under Laud) to restrain landowners by controlling food prices, wages, poor relief and enclosures,¹⁵² Tawney deplored the fact that the church had allowed its duty of maintaining 'public morality' to become associated with 'the spasmodic activities of an incompetent Government'. In doing so, 'the Church had built its house upon the sand' – and '[i]t did not require prophetic gifts to foresee that the fall of the City would be followed by the destruction of the Temple.'¹⁵³ For this reason, Tawney's admiration for Laud had its limits: he approved his social policy but regretted his too close association of church and state. This marks him out from conservative Anglo-Catholics, such as T.S. Eliot, whose devotion to Laud was unqualified.¹⁵⁴ Tawney was still less impressed by the church after the Restoration, and *a fortiori* after the Glorious Revolution, declaring that it had given up the attempt to define 'social ethics': 'the very conception of the Church as an independent moral authority, whose standards may be in sharp antithesis to social conventions, has been abandoned'.¹⁵⁵ The tying of the church to the state that had occurred at the Reformation was thus portrayed by Tawney as the ultimate reason for its failure as the guardian of social morality, since it had led to the church's downfall in the Civil War and to its post-Restoration worldly turpitude. This was an argument which flowed from his belief, shared with Gore and Figgis, that the church should be radically distinct from the

¹⁵¹ *RRC*, pp. 183-4.

¹⁵² *RRC*, pp. 173-7.

¹⁵³ *RRC*, p. 179.

¹⁵⁴ See T.S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (1928; 2nd edn., London, 1970).

¹⁵⁵ *RRC*, pp. 191-2.

world,¹⁵⁶ with a system of social ethics taken not from the state or the capitalist ruling classes, but rather from the New Testament and Christian tradition.

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This article seeks to highlight two main contexts for understanding *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*: the religious debate about social teaching in the early twentieth century; and the (related) historiographical debate about the relationship between the Reformation and economic life. To this we now turn. As Tawney himself noted, there was nothing new about suggesting a connection between Protestantism and wealth: the notion went back almost to the Reformation itself.¹⁵⁷ In nineteenth-century Britain, the idea of such a connection had been a historical commonplace, whether it was a subject for self-congratulation (as for Macaulay) or condemnation (as for Tractarians, Catholics and many social critics).¹⁵⁸ The latter camp included figures as diverse as the architect Augustus Pugin, the writer William Cobbett and the Catholic abbot and historian Aidan Gasquet, to say nothing of a bevy of High Church historians.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Cf. D. Newsome, 'The Assault on Mammon: Charles Gore and John Neville Figgis', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xvii (1966).

¹⁵⁷ *RRC*, p. 92. Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London, 1930), p. 280 n. 96.

¹⁵⁸ T.B. Macaulay, 'Von Ranke' [*Edinburgh Review*, 1840], in *Lord Macaulay's Essays and Lays of Ancient Rome* (London, 1888), pp. 558-9. For Tractarians, see Skinner, "'A Triumph of the Rich'".

¹⁵⁹ See, respectively, R. Hill, 'Reformation to Millennium: Pugin's "Contrasts" in the History of English Thought', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, lviii (1999); R.J. Smith, 'Cobbett, Catholic History, and the Middle Ages', in L.J. Workman, ed., *Medievalism in England* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 129-34; F.A. Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries: An Attempt to Illustrate the History of their Suppression* (2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1888-9); J. Kirby, 'Historians and the Church of England: Religion and Historical Scholarship, c.1870-1920' (Univ. of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 2014), ch. 5.

Tawney himself alighted upon the question in his first historical work, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912). This was an investigation into the massive economic changes – particularly the rise of competition and capitalist agriculture – which occurred in England ‘from the close of the Middle Ages to the beginning of the Civil War’ (c.1485-1642).¹⁶⁰ Tawney did not argue that these changes were solely or even primarily the result of the Reformation; but he did draw some links between religious and economic change, fixing in particular upon the dissolution of the monasteries, as had Cobbett and others before him. In terms which would have been familiar to generations of anti-Reformation polemicists, Tawney described the dissolution as the work of avaricious adventurers who attached themselves to Henry VIII’s court. These upstarts, having seized the property of the abbeys, proceeded to rack the rents and generally oppress their tenants, rather than following the customary ways of the monks. To this traditional account he added the suggestion that the dissolution threw large quantities of land onto the market, thereby quickening the growth of agrarian capitalism.¹⁶¹ He rejected Cobbett’s notion that ‘the economic evils of the sixteenth century’ sprang from religious changes; and he instead portrayed these evils and religious changes as ‘twin aspects of the individualism which seems inseparable from any swift increase in riches’.¹⁶² He also suggested (as had many before him) that ‘[t]he Reformation in England [was] as much a social as a religious revolution’: it was ‘the work of the commercial and middle classes’ and therefore served their material interests, most of all through the transfer of church and guild lands to private hands.¹⁶³ Thus a connection was made between the Reformation,

¹⁶⁰ Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1912), p. vii. This was very much the ‘long’ sixteenth century.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 109-10, 201, 380-84.

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 382.

¹⁶³ Ibid. pp. 383-4. For earlier examples of this, see Kirby, ‘Historians and the Church of England’, pp. 173-6.

individualism and economic change – a connection which *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* would expand upon.

Yet by the 1920s Tawney no longer believed that the sixteenth century was the crucial moment in the transition to modern economic life. In *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* he still described the dissolution in terms as damning as he had in *The Agrarian Problem*,¹⁶⁴ but his emphasis now lay elsewhere. It had shifted in chronology to the seventeenth century and in subject to economic thought.¹⁶⁵ As such, he was now able to draw extensively upon a literature which had developed over recent decades in both Germany and Britain about the history of social and economic ideas. According to his own account, he first became interested in the questions of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* when he read (probably in the 1900s) the economic historian W.J. Ashley's chapter on 'The Canonist Doctrine' in his *Introduction to English Economic History and Theory* (1893).¹⁶⁶ This might sound an unlikely, even arcane, starting-point for Tawney's investigation, yet this chapter was in fact a classic work in the history of economic thought. For Ashley, the teaching of late-medieval canon lawyers on economic questions constituted the first ever 'complete and systematic economic doctrine'.¹⁶⁷ Thus the canonist doctrine, which was based upon 'Christian ethics', was the antecedent to the tradition of political economy which had emerged in the seventeenth century; and Ashley, like Tawney, lamented the modern failure of theology to generate a system of social ethics in the

¹⁶⁴ *RRC*, pp. 143-8.

¹⁶⁵ Though neither of these had been neglected by *The Agrarian Problem*, which dealt in passing with Protestant attitudes to the canon law prohibition of usury, taking Thomas Wilson as a witness: p. 307.

¹⁶⁶ *RRC*, p. xv; W.J. Ashley, *An Introduction to English Economic History and Theory*, ii: *The End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1893), ch. 6.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 379.

tradition of the Middle Ages.¹⁶⁸ Here already we see a basic element of Tawney's later thesis: that there had been a seventeenth-century transition from a Christian to a secular way of thinking about socio-economic questions. It should be noted, too, that 'The Canonist Doctrine' stood on the shoulders of German giants who, over the previous decades, had exhumed medieval and early-modern canon law and theology and extracted from them the social teachings of former ages.¹⁶⁹

The other aspect of Ashley's work which particularly shaped Tawney's thinking was its idea that the prohibition of usury was the 'central point' in the canonists' social doctrine.¹⁷⁰ Usury in this context (as Tawney himself glossed) meant 'not merely exorbitant interest on a loan, but any oppressive bargain, including the raising of prices, the beating down of wages, and the rack-renting of land'.¹⁷¹ The toleration or prohibition of usury was therefore a subject of paramount importance to any history of the rise of capitalism, competition or *laissez-faire*, since it not only related fundamentally to the development of capitalist finance, but it acted as a shorthand for the general degree of restriction upon economic conduct in a given society.

For Tawney, usury restrictions were one of the main rivets between religious and economic change. In brief, his argument ran as follows. Usury had been prohibited by theologians from the early church councils to Luther.¹⁷² Calvin, whilst generally opposing usury, had introduced a note of uncertainty into Christian teaching by dealing with the question on pragmatic, rather than moral, grounds.¹⁷³ This

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 379, 388, 473.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. x.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 382-3.

¹⁷¹ Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, p. 147 n. 1.

¹⁷² *RRC*, pp. 48-55, 58, 103-5.

¹⁷³ *RRC*, pp. 113-16.

uncertainty was then exploited by those pressing for greater freedom in money-lending and other economic dealings.¹⁷⁴ Puritan teaching on the subject was mixed; and, whether tolerant or condemnatory, the Puritans of the Civil War had in practice swept away the restrictions on usury when they did away with the mechanisms in church and state for the regulation of social conduct in general – and these had not been revived at the Restoration.¹⁷⁵ Calvinism and Puritanism, therefore, had to bear much of the blame for the church's retreat from this crucial redoubt of social ethics: this was one of their main contributions to the rise of capitalism.

The idea that Calvin's teaching on usury was a watershed in Christian doctrine was not dreamt up by Tawney. Ashley had made the same point in 'The Canonist Doctrine',¹⁷⁶ and the notion went back to German historians such as Max Neumann and Heinrich Wiskemann, both of whose works were well-known to Tawney.¹⁷⁷ But Tawney's more important forerunner here was another pillar of economic history in Britain, William Cunningham (1849-1919). Cunningham was an Anglican archdeacon who had revolted against a Scottish Calvinist upbringing, and this gave him a particular interest in blaming modern economic ills on Calvinist theology.¹⁷⁸ It was he who extended the idea of the Calvinist tolerance of usury to the English Puritans; and to this he added the suggestion (informed by his contact with Weber's ideas) that the Puritans had promoted 'individualism' in social thought and adopted a

¹⁷⁴ *RRC*, pp. 133-4, 184.

¹⁷⁵ *RRC*, pp. 213-15, 218-19.

¹⁷⁶ Ashley, *Introduction*, ii. 458-60.

¹⁷⁷ H. Wiskemann, *Darstellung der in Deutschland zur Zeit der Reformation herrschenden nationalökonomischen Ansichten* (Leipzig, 1861); M. Neumann, *Geschichte des Wuchers in Deutschland: bis zur Begründung der heutigen Zinsengesetze (1654): aus handschriftlichen und gedruckten Quellen* (Halle, 1865). See *RRC*, pp. 283, 290. Cf. P. Ghosh, *Max Weber and 'The Protestant Ethic': Twin Histories* (Oxford, 2014), p. 23.

¹⁷⁸ A. Cunningham, *William Cunningham, Teacher and Priest* (London, 1950), pp. 13-15; Kirby, 'Historians and the Church of England', pp. 195-6.

harsh attitude to poverty.¹⁷⁹ He even argued that it was the Church of England's duty to perpetuate the tradition of Christian social teaching.¹⁸⁰ How far Tawney was indebted to Cunningham, and how far he came to similar conclusions independently, is hard to assess. He acknowledged Cunningham in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*,¹⁸¹ but it may be that, with their shared 'Catholic' sensibilities¹⁸² and antipathy to capitalism (an antipathy stronger in Tawney than in the Tory socialist Cunningham), the similarities sprang from affinity as much as influence. Indeed, there is also the wider context here of the assault on 'usury' made by a range of economic and cultural figures at around the same time. Many of these, from G.K. Chesterton to T.S. Eliot to Ezra Pound, admired medieval social teaching and moved in guild socialist or Christian sociology circles.¹⁸³ Where Tawney differed from others who railed against usury was that he rarely slipped into the anti-Semitism which was commonly associated with the position, though there are two points in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* where he imputes some kind of 'Jewishness' to Puritanism.¹⁸⁴

The final set of arguments upon which Tawney drew when contending for a connection between Protestantism and capitalism was, of course, Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic*. From this work he borrowed, with ample acknowledgement, the idea that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination had generated a form of economic conduct – hard work for its own sake, labour as a 'calling', abstinence – that had contributed to the development of capitalism, above all in the case of the English

¹⁷⁹ W. Cunningham, 'Calvinism and Capital', in his *Christianity and Economic Science* (London, 1914), pp. 58-9, 66-9.

¹⁸⁰ Cunningham, "'Die Soziallehren der christliche Kirchen und Gruppen'", *Economic Review*, xxiii (1913), p. 226.

¹⁸¹ *RRC*, pp. xv, 211, 283, 312-14.

¹⁸² For Cunningham's, see W.R. Scott, 'William Cunningham', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, ix (1919-20), p. 467.

¹⁸³ A. Trexler, 'Economics', in J. Harding, ed., *T. S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 279-80.

¹⁸⁴ *RRC*, pp. 139, 229.

Puritans.¹⁸⁵ Tawney's prompt to take up these ideas came as much from his religious position as from his scholarly interest in the history of capitalism. In this, he was typical of the early reception of Weber's ideas in Britain, where Christian social thinkers, rather than social scientists, tended to take the lead. One of the earliest British discussions of the debate provoked by Weber was Cunningham's 1913 lecture on 'Calvinism and Capital', which was as much the work of Cunningham the archdeacon as Cunningham the economic historian.¹⁸⁶ In the same year, the Nonconformist theologian H.G. Wood discussed Weber's ideas at length in an essay on 'The Influence of the Reformation on Ideas Concerning Wealth and Property' in a volume on *Property: Its Duties and Rights* edited by Gore.¹⁸⁷ Wood's filio-pietistic regard for his Puritan spiritual ancestors prevented him from linking Puritanism and capitalism too closely,¹⁸⁸ but the Anglo-Catholic Gore had no such scruples, suggesting in his introduction to the volume that 'Protestantism, in general, and not least our English Protestantism, embodied an excessive individualism'.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, when the most substantial German reflection upon Weber's work, Troeltsch's *Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*, was translated into English, it was Gore who supplied a laudatory preface: this was, after all, the most comprehensive treatment of Christian social teachings ever published.¹⁹⁰ Tawney's

¹⁸⁵ *RRC*, pp. xv, 114, 117-18, 211, 227-51, 269-70, 311-13.

¹⁸⁶ See n. 179, above.

¹⁸⁷ H.G. Wood, 'The Influence of the Reformation on Ideas Concerning Wealth and Property', in Charles Gore, ed., *Property: Its Duties and Rights, Historically, Philosophically and Religiously Regarded* (London, 1913), p. 136 and *passim*. Cf. the claim in another major work of Christian social thought to which Wood and William Temple were contributors that 'Max Weber is justified in tracing the spirit of capitalism to Protestant ethics': 'The Collegium', *Competition: A Study in Human Motive* (London, 1917), pp. 41-2.

¹⁸⁸ Wood, 'Influence of the Reformation', pp. 141, 144. For his regard for his seventeenth-century predecessors, see Richenda C. Scott, *Herbert G. Wood: A Memoir of his Life and Thought* (London, 1967), p. 105.

¹⁸⁹ Gore, 'Introduction', in *Property*, p. xv. Gore similarly blamed 'Puritanism' in a Fifth Committee discussion for the growth of slavery in the seventeenth century: BL Add. MS 65241, 'Fifth Session', Stoke Rochford, 29 Jul. 1917.

¹⁹⁰ Gore, 'Introductory Note', in Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (2 vols., London, 1931). Cf. Gore, *Christ and Society* (London, 1928), which is heavily

reception of Weber, therefore, was not so original as it might seem if we attended only to canonical works of secular scholarship: with a proper understanding of the richness of the intellectual ferment in Christian social thought, it becomes clear that Tawney was only one of many who turned to Weber (and Troeltsch) at around this time.

Finally, we should note the differences which existed between Weber and Tawney's ideas of the link between Protestantism and capitalism. Jay Winter's dismantling of the 'Tawney-Weber thesis' began this many years ago, but he focused on their differences in method and purpose (which were indeed substantial), rather than on the historical arguments themselves.¹⁹¹ Under this last heading, it is important above all to note that Tawney, in accounting for the rise of capitalism, placed at least as much emphasis on usury as he did upon Weberian ideas of the calling and predestination. One crude measure of this is the index of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*: whereas 'the calling' takes up just one line, 'usury' requires half a column. This reflects a deeper division between the two. Weber's idea of modern capitalism relied less on capital than upon rational economic conduct: hence he explicitly repudiated the idea that usury or speculation was the link between Calvinism and capitalism.¹⁹² Tawney, on the other hand, saw the growth of usury almost as the yardstick by which to measure the rise of capitalism: this reflected both the scholarly point that money-lending was integral to the capitalist economy, and his Christian belief that capitalism was some kind of perversion – the product of sins such as avarice and usury.¹⁹³

indebted to Tawney and Troeltsch (esp. ch. 5, 'The Renaissance, the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution').

¹⁹¹ Winter, 'Introduction: Tawney the Historian', pp. 21-4.

¹⁹² Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, pp. 200-203 (n. 29 on usury); Ghosh, *Max Weber*, pp. 14-15, 22-3.

¹⁹³ Cf. the differences between Weber and the German Christian-Socials regarding religion and the origins of capitalism: Ghosh, *Max Weber*, p. 97.

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It seems reasonable to summarise Tawney's religious position as follows: his religious thought, which had so much impact upon his social, political and historical ideas, was heavily influenced by Anglo-Catholic theology, whilst his personal faith, insofar as it may be discerned, rested on a simple, pious belief in the Christ of the New Testament. These two elements were not unrelated. It was Gore, after all, who looked to the Sermon on the Mount for a basis for social doctrine; and the austere, 'world-renouncing'¹⁹⁴ attitude shared by Gore and Tawney was both a way of life and an intellectual commitment. Altogether, it seems reasonable to describe Tawney as an Anglo-Catholic in a limited sense: his religious thought, with its emphasis on the corporate church and social teaching, derived primarily from the Anglo-Catholic tradition, but it seems he was not won over (at least until his last years) by high sacramental and ceremonial doctrines. Overall, therefore, we can view Tawney's work, especially *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, as a product of the 'Catholic' cultural and intellectual flourishing which occurred during the interwar years, a time which saw the apogee of Anglo-Catholicism within the Church of England,¹⁹⁵ as well as a surge in Roman Catholicism among the educated elite.¹⁹⁶ We might in this context compare Tawney's 1926 work with, for instance, T.S. Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism the following year;¹⁹⁷ and, given their sympathy for different

¹⁹⁴ Grimley, *Citizenship*, p. 115.

¹⁹⁵ Pickering, *Anglo-Catholicism*, pp. 46-7; B. Spurr, 'Anglo-Catholic in Religion': *T.S. Eliot and Christianity* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. xi-xii. As the sociologist Pickering notes in the 2008 preface to his work, it is to be regretted that no historian has yet tackled the subject of twentieth-century Anglo-Catholicism.

¹⁹⁶ S. Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (London, 1994), p. 227.

¹⁹⁷ L. Gordon, *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot* (rev. edn., London, 2012), ch. 6. Eliot moved in the same Anglo-Catholic circles as Tawney, their mutual associates including Father St John Groser and

aspects of the Laudian church, it is no coincidence that (as Stefan Collini notes) they both saw the seventeenth century as the lapsarian moment in English history.¹⁹⁸

There is also a wider case to be made here for the impact of Anglo-Catholic thought upon British politics and society. It is often assumed that the Labour party's religious roots lay solely in Nonconformity and Methodism; yet, given the centrality of Tawney to the development of Labour thought and politics in the twentieth century, it is arguable that the Anglo-Catholic tradition, with its contempt for material possessions, its veneration of poverty, its austere, self-denying ethos, and its preference for church and group action over state centralism, played a small but significant role. Here Tawney may be set alongside his coadjutor in the Church Socialist League and the Fifth Committee, the future Labour leader George Lansbury (1859-1940), whose religious roots lay in East End sacramental socialism.¹⁹⁹ Beyond Labour politics, this tradition flowed into the work of William Temple, who, whilst indebted equally to the distinct liberal Anglican tradition, was guided in his social thought by Tawney above all. His *Christianity and Social Order* (1942), published in the year he became archbishop of Canterbury, was a key text in the origin of the post-war settlement and the welfare state;²⁰⁰ and it relied heavily upon *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* for its argument that the church had a duty to 'interfere' in social questions. In a chain of ideas which is by now familiar, Temple called for a return to the social teaching of the

Maurice Reckitt: Spurr, *'Anglo-Catholic in Religion'*, pp. 177-9. For Tawney and Groser, see n. 63, above.

¹⁹⁸ Collini, 'Where Did it All Go Wrong?', pp. 249-50.

¹⁹⁹ R. Postgate, *The Life of George Lansbury* (London, 1951), pp. 13, 56-61.

²⁰⁰ For its popularity, see F.A. Iremonger, *William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters* (Oxford, 1948), p. 435.

Middle Ages and the time of Laud; for a renewal of restrictions on ‘usury’; and for a reversal of the Puritan retreat from economic ethics.²⁰¹

This reconsideration of Tawney also gives him a new significance in the history of twentieth-century European political thought, where he has previously been seen as a representative exponent of a non-Marxist British tradition of ethical or Christian socialism. This view is not wrong, but it is rather too bland and unspecific. In his closeness to guild socialism, his anti-centralism and his anti-materialism, he was following a path not unlike the Catholic social thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century who looked to ‘personalism’ (the fulfilment of the human person in community life) as a middle way between individualism and collectivism. Equally, in calling for a revival of Christian social teaching, Tawney was following an Anglican parallel to Catholic attempts, both lay and papal, to ground politics and society in church authority and Christian tradition. In his belief that the church in this task ought to draw upon the history of dogmatic theology and the canon law, not least in the medieval period, his ideas may loosely be compared, for instance, to the neo-Thomism of Jacques Maritain.²⁰² At the same time, this contextualisation indicates that Tawney was not a lone or eccentric voice in his call to base social (or socialist) thought upon Christian tradition. It was increasingly the rule, not the exception, for Catholic and Anglo-Catholic thought to engage with (rather than react against)

²⁰¹ William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (1942; 3rd edn., London, 1950), pp. 10-11, 31-45. For Temple and usury, see J. Fletcher, *William Temple: Twentieth-Century Christian* (New York, 1963), p. 204.

²⁰² For personalism, Catholic politics and Maritain, see Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (paperback edn., Yale, 2013), pp. 134-8. These points of comparison seem closer than any with Protestant social thought at the time, no doubt because Tawney and Catholic thinkers shared a belief in authoritative church teaching and pre-Reformation Christian tradition.

democratic politics and social thought, whilst retaining a belief that Christian history should provide the basis for any renewal of church teaching.

But what of Tawney himself after 1926? It has often been noted that Christianity became less central to Tawney's public profile as he became increasingly absorbed by his work in the London School of Economics, adult education and Labour politics. Yet there were also many continuities in his work. His 'debt to the thought of two great men, the late Bishop Gore and Archbishop Temple' remained 'both obvious and beyond acknowledgement'.²⁰³ His defining political work, *Equality*, remained concerned with Christian social teaching, having stemmed from the 1929 Halley Stewart Lectures, a series devoted to 'Research towards the Christian Ideal in all Social Life'.²⁰⁴ The content of *Equality* was less overtly Christian than his previous books, but its assault on 'The Religion of Inequality' as the true religion of modern society bore a close resemblance to the conclusion of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* that 'the idolatry of wealth' was 'the practical religion of capitalist societies' and that there could be no more '[c]ompromise' between this and Christianity than 'between the Church and the State idolatry of the Roman Empire'.²⁰⁵ His later historical writings, too, grew out of his earlier thought. His most important historical work of later years, a pair of essays on 'The Rise of the Gentry' and 'Harrington's Interpretation of his Age', were both based on the idea, put forward in the *Agrarian Problem*, that the massive transfer of wealth at the Reformation from the church and the peasantry to the landowning classes was itself a primary cause of the

²⁰³ Tawney, 'A Note on Christianity and the Social Order', in *The Attack and Other Papers* (London, 1953), p. 167 n. 1.

²⁰⁴ Tawney, *Equality*. The 1931 edition contains two pages of front matter on the Halley Stewart Trust and its purposes.

²⁰⁵ Compare *RRC*, p. 280, with Tawney, *Equality*, ch. 2 (esp. pp. 49-50).

ascent of Puritanism and the downfall of the Stuart regime.²⁰⁶ The socio-economic legacy of the Reformation therefore remained the central focus of his historical thought.

By offering a reconsideration of the ideas that went in to *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, and by bringing to light Tawney's contribution to *Christianity and Industrial Problems*, this article has sought to show that Tawney was not just a social, historical and political thinker, but a religious thinker of considerable force and influence. Indeed, he must surely stand, alongside his episcopal allies Gore and Temple, as one of the key figures in reorienting the Church of England (or at least its hierarchy) towards social thought – and indeed socialism. In both its origins and its outcomes, Tawney's work effortlessly spanned religion, scholarship and politics: thus to stress the religious component of Tawney's thought is not to detract from his status as a political and social thinker, but rather to underline it. The divergence of these realms – religion, scholarship, politics – in the second half of the twentieth century has refracted Tawney's thought into its constituent parts; but as historians, rather than as legatees of his social democratic ideas, we must reunite these if we are to see this extraordinary thinker in his true contemporary significance.

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²⁰⁶ Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry 1558-1640, and Postscript' [1941/54], in *History and Society*, pp. 103-105, 112-13; 'Harrington's Interpretation of his Age' [1941], in *History and Society*, *passim*. Cf. Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, p. 38.